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Shared Measurement of Outcomes in the Social Sector: Literature Review and Conceptual Development

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Supported by the Rothschild Caesarea Foundation



RESEARCH REPORT

RR-646-13

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In the Social Sector: Literature Review and
Conceptual Development**

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September 2013

Jerusalem

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Executive Summary

Outcome-oriented thinking and outcome measurement are increasingly becoming a part of the implementation of social services in Israel and internationally.

This development reflects the increasing demands of policy makers, private funders, managers, practitioners, and the general public for better evaluation of the effectiveness of these organizations and for more evidence-based policies and practices. This shift also reflects the growing demand for transparency and accountability in public services.

Most commonly, outcome measurement is carried out independently by each organization and for each program. Each organization defines its own goals and methods of measurement and examines separately the extent to which its outcomes are achieved. Thus, a plethora of separate measurements are created.

The current study describes an important development in social service measurement that is gaining interest in many countries, namely, the growing efforts of groups of organizations to develop common measures and to employ shared measurement. This trend has been significantly stimulated by the growing attempts to advance collaboration in the social services (including inter-sectorial collaboration for collective impact).

Common Measures

Common measures are an infrastructure that supports measurement efforts. This infrastructure includes a menu of outcomes, outcome measures, and measurement tools relating to a given social domain.

This infrastructure may be used as an “open menu” from which an organization chooses outcomes and measures in which they have a particular interest. In other instances, a "core set" of outcomes and measures may be defined for uniform use by all organizations, alongside an "extended optional set" that may be used according to the particular interests and needs of the various organizations.

Common measures may be used by organizations collaborating on a project, or by organizations working independently but wishing to link up a recognized and frequently used set of measures. They are made available in several possible ways: through a handbook, software, or online platform.

Shared Measurement

Shared measurement is a collaborative measurement process conducted among a number of organizations engaged in a defined social area and working to achieve similar or shared goals. Shared measurement can also relate to measurement that is implemented among different units of the same complex organization.

Shared measurement includes the joint definition of common goals and measures, an agreed measurement process, the sharing of measurement findings, and may also include engagement in collaborative learning and joint drawing of conclusions.

Shared measurement makes it possible to strengthen shared learning among organizations, and allows them to look beyond the actions and impact of the individual organizations and towards the bigger picture.

When shared measurement is carried out by organizations that are also collaborating programmatically, it can serve as a powerful lever to strengthen the collaborative process: it helps to develop a shared language, to sustain the collaboration and to guide its development.

Indeed, in the developing literature on collective impact initiatives that deal with wide-scale inter-sectoral collaborations, shared measurement is defined as one of the key factors in maintaining a successful collaboration.

It should be noted that there are significant and documented efforts to undertake shared measurement in different forms, and in different contexts. In addition, the efforts to develop a conceptual framework that can help to analyze and compare these efforts have gained momentum.

Yet, limited attempts to develop common measures and to employ shared measurement have been made in Israel. This review makes a first attempt to introduce the Israeli reader to the concepts and practice of common measures and shared measurement. It describes the development of the concepts, the central advantages and challenges and presents a number of real-world examples.

As a compliment to this review, a handbook for implementing shared measurement in the context of inter-organizational collaboration will be published separately. It will include a guide to the steps in developing and implementing shared measurement, and lessons from previous experiences as documented in the international literature.

An article based on this review (Almog & Habib, 2013) was presented in international conference of APPAM (Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management), held in Shanghai, China in May 2013. The conference addressed the development and promotion of inter-sectorial cooperation, including measurement related to this type of cooperation. We thank all those who responded to the lecture and the article; their comments have helped refine aspects of this review.

This review was supported by the Rothschild Caesarea Foundation.