

MANAGING SOFT OUTCOMES

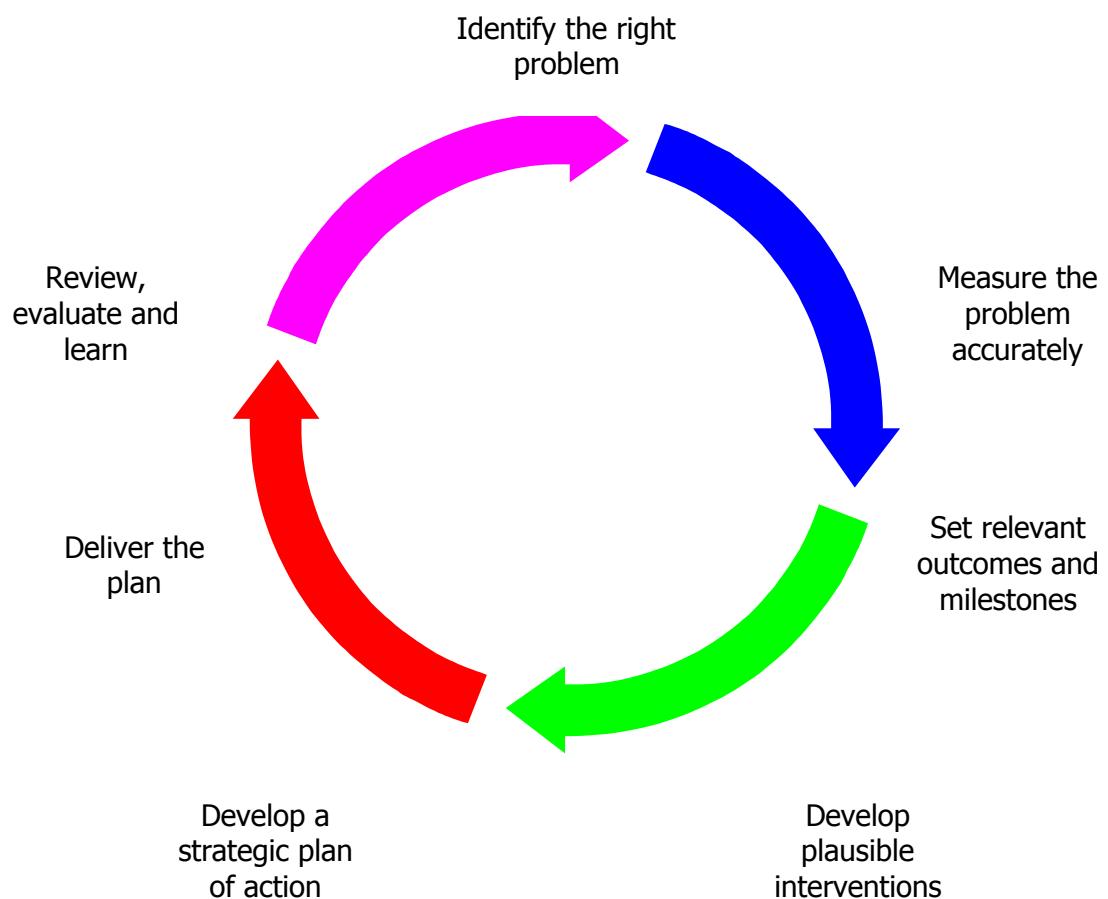
A Resource and Training Package for
helping organisations to Develop an
Evidence Based Approach to Managing
Outcomes

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The aim of this package is to enable organisations or projects to work through a process towards developing a custom tool for managing soft outcomes.
The resources contained in this package lay the foundations for creating a system to develop, manage and evidence outcomes. These materials have been compiled and developed from a 2-day training programme. The material was compiled from research into the different ways that outcomes, and particularly 'soft' outcomes, are surfaced, developed and evidenced and used to guide the process of change and development in working with people and communities

How to adopt an evidence based approach (Adapted from Renewal.net)



1. WHAT IS OUR SHARED UNDERSTANDING?

The aim of this exercise is to ensure that all members of the organisation/project have a shared understanding, and use, of the terminology involved with managing outcomes. We need to make sure we are speaking the same language to develop a better system.

Look at the terms:

Barrier, Bias, Hard Outcomes, Hard Skills, Indicators, Inputs, Norms, Outcomes, Outputs, Skills, SMART, Soft Indicators, Soft Outcomes, Soft Skills

In 3s or 4s discuss and match the term to its descriptor. Follow up with discussion to confirm meanings and alleviate any misconception. Refer to completed table.

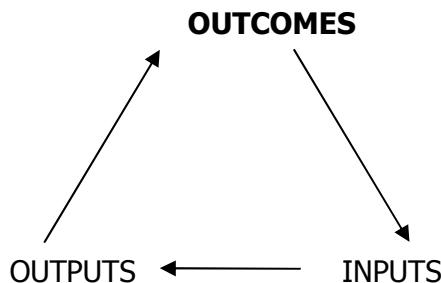
TERM	DESCRIPTOR
	A judgement that leans in a particular direction
	Abilities and competencies associated with performing technical and tangible tasks
	Abilities and competencies usually associated with people (social and personal)
	Abilities or competencies that can be consistently performed
	Achievements which may indicate acquisition or progress towards an outcome
	Activities, services or 'finished goods'
	Broadly accepted standards, patterns or types
	Changes or benefits that have taken place usually associated with something physical, technical or intellectual
	Changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity
	Changes or benefits that occur that are usually associated with people, relationships and groups
	Evidence of progress (steps) towards or achievement of an outcome
	Keeping outcomes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
	Something which prevents or limits a person's access
	The resources required to deliver an activity

TERM	DESCRIPTOR
Barrier	Something which prevents or limits a person's access
Bias	A judgement that leans in a particular direction
Hard outcomes	Changes or benefits that have taken place usually associated with something physical, technical or intellectual
Hard skills	Abilities and competencies associated with performing technical and tangible tasks
Indicators	Evidence of progress (steps) towards or achievement of an outcome
Inputs	The resources required to deliver an activity
Norms	Broadly accepted standards, patterns or types
Outcomes	Changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity
Outputs	Activities, services or 'finished goods'
Skills	Abilities or competencies that can be consistently performed
SMART Outcomes	Keeping outcomes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
Soft Indicators	Achievements which may indicate acquisition or progress towards an outcome
Soft outcomes	Changes or benefits that occur that are usually associated with people, relationships and groups
Soft Skills	Abilities and competencies usually associated with people (social and personal)

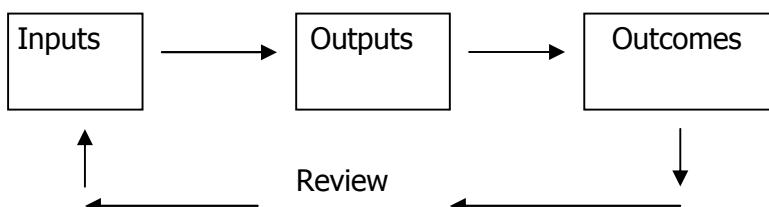
2. HOW DO WE START THINKING ABOUT OUTCOMES?

Read the information below. What are your organisation's/project's inputs, outputs and outcomes? How are they linked? How do you plan for these outcomes? How could you plan differently to attain better outcomes?

There is a constant relationship between **inputs** (what resources, people, technology or good will that goes into a project); **outputs** (what your project does with its resources and what is 'produces'); and **outcomes** (what is changed or improved – the effect that the outputs have on the things you are trying to achieve).



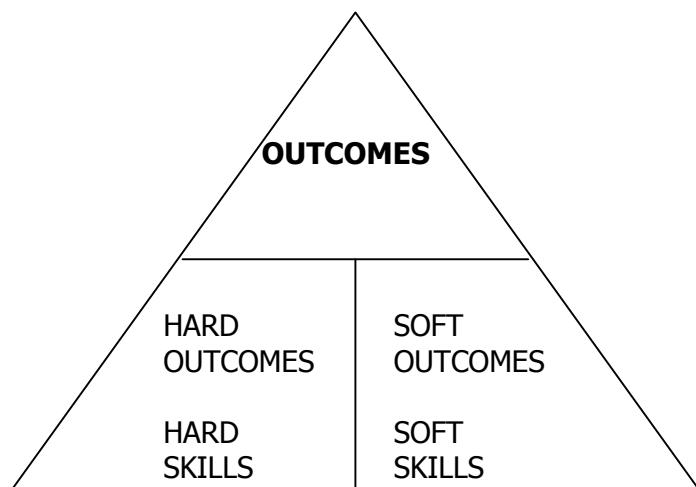
So often project planning starts with inputs and trying to get hold of resources to do things. This is the wrong way round. Planning a good project requires you to start with the outcome and ask yourself what you are trying to achieve. Then, in turn, plan the resources you need (inputs) and the way that you will deploy these resources (the outputs). Of course you do not start with a blank sheet of paper in real life, but it is necessary to always be focussed on what you are trying change and improve not just what services you are trying to deliver. Outputs are about 'doing the things right' and using your resources properly. Outcomes are about making sure you are 'doing the right things'.



For instance over many decades we institutionalised thousands of people with learning disabilities and mental health problems. Huge resources were put into maintaining people for a lifetime in these 'homes'. Many of them were nice places and well run – they 'did things right'. However institutionalisation on such a large scale did not 'do the right things'. It did not provide the best, most effective (or for that matter efficient) way of supporting and nourishing the people involved. Eventually alternative ways were found of supporting people in community settings.

3. WHAT ARE OUTCOMES?

Outcomes are changes or benefits that occur as a result of an activity. They can be hard measures or soft measures and can include hard skills or soft skills.



Often the attainment of positive outcomes for people involves both a 'soft' and 'hard' element. For instance enabling someone to complete a course or therapeutic programme might involve the hard outcome of completing a course and learning skills. But as important, if not far more important for many, is the development of soft skills such as communications, personal presentation or personal organisation and reaching soft outcomes like feeling more confident or capable.

Read the following project example below and brainstorm what you think are the hard and soft outcomes for the project : -

Training and employment project for homeless people

Outcomes Homeless people gain in self-confidence and acquire new skills/qualifications or secure a job..

Inputs Outreach workers provided in order to recruit people to the scheme; skilled trainers required for delivering one-to-one support and group training sessions; and premises needed for providing the service.

Outputs A specific number of one-to-one support sessions, and group training sessions provided over a one year time frame; and a specific number of homeless people participate and benefit.

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4. WHICH SKILLS ARE "SOFT"SKILLS?

The idea of this exercise is to identify what are soft skills and what are something else. The learning strategies that need to be deployed in order to develop these skills are many and various.

The list was compiled of skills commonly referred to as "soft", and was taken from a wide range of sources including the NOCN, QCA, DWP, IES, DfEE, DfES, various papers, reports, and websites (thanks to Simon Simpson for his research in compiling this list).

- Communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Oral Communication
- Application of Number
- IT/ICT
- Working With Others
- Improving Own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving
- Verbal Communication
- Motivation
- Confidence / Self-confidence
- Time Management
- Self Management
- Team Work
- Planning and Organising
- Problem Solving
- Learning
- Time Keeping / Punctuality
- Listening
- Responding
- Assertiveness
- Negotiation
- Anger Management
- Thinking Rationally
- Setting Goals
- Personal Development
- Confronting and Managing Fear
- Managing Stress
- Initiative and Enterprise
- Caring for myself (psychologically)
- Managing Relationships
- Appearance
- Recognising Prior Skills
- Responsibility
- Personal and Career Aspirations
- Attendance and Punctuality
- Personal Hygiene
- Self Awareness
- Health and Fitness
- Concentration and Engagement
- Abilities to complete forms, write a CV, and manage money
- Awareness of rights and responsibilities
- Respect
- Self Respect
- Literacy
- Numeracy

Note down on the list some answers to the following, two questions:

1) Which are soft skills and which are not soft skills?

2) If they are not soft skills then what are they?

5. KEEPING OUTCOMES SMART

Often voluntary organisations, community projects and public services are asked to produce what are called SMART targets. The idea is a checking device for determining whether your outputs and outcomes are workable.

The target should be:

S	Specific
M	Measureable
A	Achievable
R	Relevant
T	Timely

- specific: clear, unambiguous and easy to understand by those who are required to achieve them
- measurable: setting a target for which success can be gauged by referring to a specific measure or measures – these can be qualitative or quantitative in nature
- achievable: expressing specific aims that staff feel can realistically be achieved, with some effort: 'out of reach, but not out of sight'
- relevant: to those who will be required to meet them and relevant to the problem; they must have enough control over their work to be able to meet their targets, or their motivation will suffer plus relevant to the problem you are trying to solve
- timely: there should be a set time-scale for achieving a target; open-ended targets may not encourage focused effort on improving performance.

This exercise is designed to help you locate what kind of outcomes (SMART outcomes or otherwise) your organisation or project is currently working towards by asking the question 'What do you do now?'. Identify in the left column what you are doing now and then in the right column note down what your organisation or project could be doing to meet attain outcomes that are SMART.

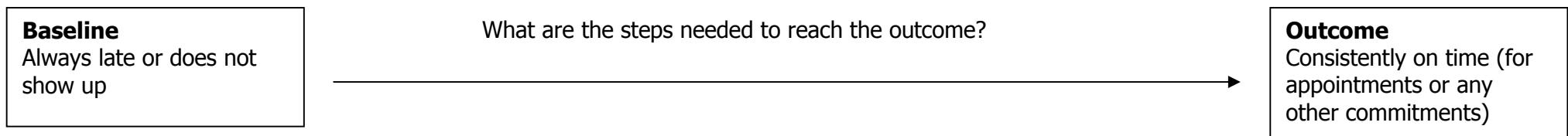
Specific **M**easurable **A**chievable **R**elevant **T**imebound

What do you do now?	What could you do?

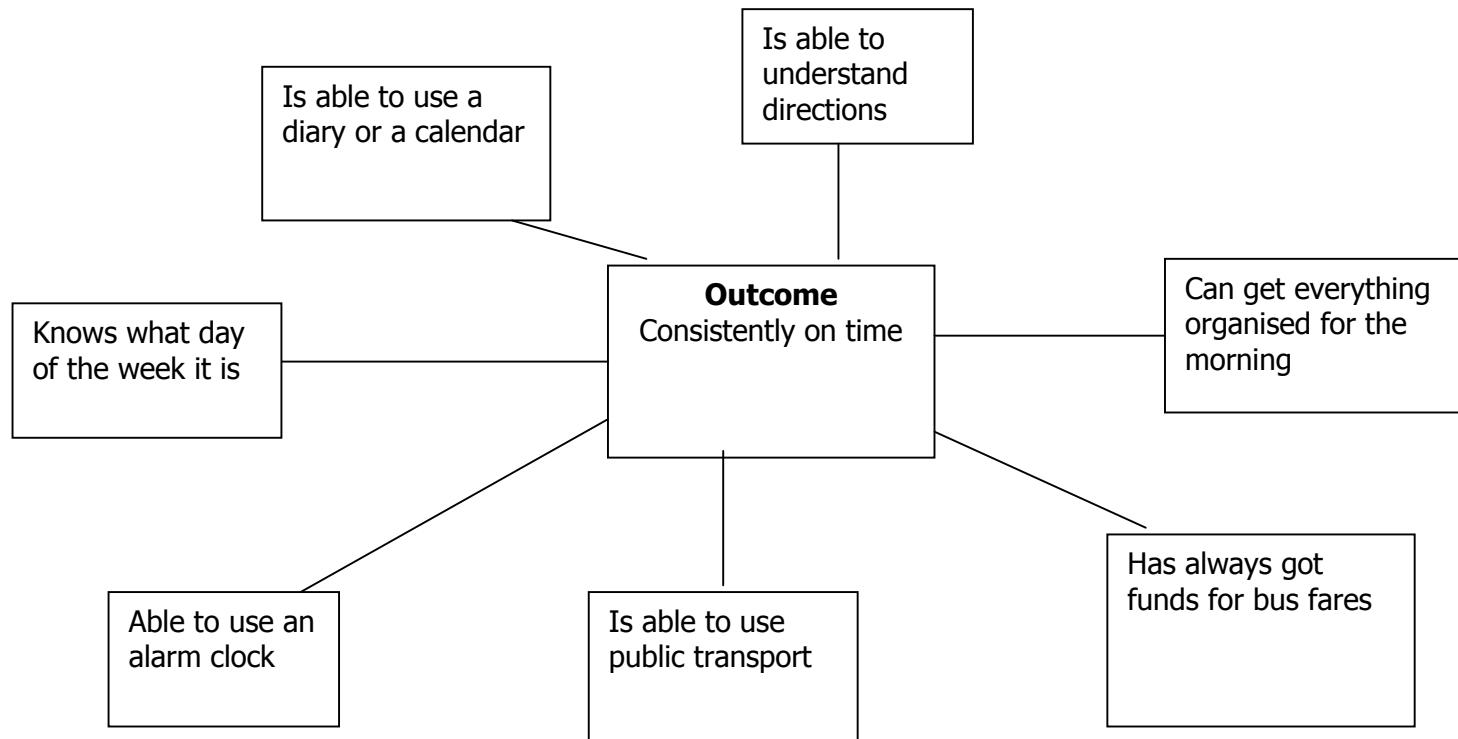
6. HOW DO WE IDENTIFY INDICATORS?

From your project identify an outcome that you are aiming at and a baseline position. Then identify the steps needed to reach the outcome from the baseline. Try using a mind-map to present the information as below. The steps that are needed to reach the outcome from the baseline form indicators and demonstrate 'distance travelled'. Look at the example below:-

Time Keeping Example



Mind-map



6. HOW DO WE RECORD INFORMATION?

We've been through a process to identify baselines, indicators and outcomes. How could you go about collecting and recording evidence systematically? What methods could you use? The links below takes you to one web-based resource on outcomes management that includes a discussion of methods of collecting evidence

Go to the link below.

On p.13 is a list describing different methods of collecting evidence. Consider the best method for your organisation/project.

www.esf.gov.uk/_docs/distance%5B1%5D.pdf

7. EXAMPLES OF TOOLS FOR MEASURING OUTCOMES

Below are three examples of systems others have used for managing, developing and evidencing outcomes. They include various forms, tools, grids and recording methods. The Outcomes Star is particularly good for using as a development tool with people in terms of developing confidence, motivation and communications.

The SOUL Record

<http://www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/soul/Documents/The%20SOUL%20Record%20-%20A%20New%20Tool%20For%20Measuring%20Soft%20Outcomes.pdf>

Catching Confidence

<http://www.niace.org.uk/funds/ACLF/Catching-Confidence-Final-Report.pdf>

Grids and how to use them are on pages 62 onwards

The Outcomes Star

<http://www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk/resources/1/OutcomesStar/OutcomesStar.pdf>

8. Mapping outcomes

This exercise draws together outcomes management and development holistically. First identify the main aim of your project as briefly as possible. Second note down the outcomes that are being worked towards at the three different levels of project worker, project or department and the organisation. Some of the outcomes will be the same at different levels. Third identify for which stakeholder is the outcome being worked on. This will affect how you go about reporting the evidence and how you design and develop your service or project.

Is there clarity between the different levels of the organisation? Are all the stakeholders getting their needs for positive outcomes attended to and are their needs and wants compatible? Are outcomes driven by the needs of your people, clients or communities?

In groups or pairs evaluate the extent to which the full picture of outcomes is appropriate to the aims and goals of the organisation and where new or changed outcomes need to be developed.

What outcomes are we working towards?			
Main Aim of the Project Is:			
Level	Baseline and outcome descriptors	For which stakeholders (tick)	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project worker Level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project or Department Level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Thanks to Linden Ferrer from the Equal Team who has worked with a portfolio of over 20 projects in developing outcomes based approaches to working with disadvantaged groups

Thanks to Simon Simpson who's research on soft skills and soft outcomes assisted this resource pack