

Focusing on spirit

The journey mapping approach

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Barry Kibel has designed and implemented evaluations for complex programmes. Here he explains journey mapping, its use in monitoring and evaluation, and how it can contribute to capacity development.

Journey mapping is an online design platform and evaluation tool featuring journaling that was specifically developed to capture both the spirit as well as the data of programmes and initiatives.

Why this focus on spirit? First, the data don't tell the whole story. Particularly for programmes that aim to be transformative, the data extracted from these programmes do a poor job of revealing and illuminating the human qualities and critical relationships at play. Second, insights leading to programme enhancements rarely emerge from scanning or even intensely analysing the data alone. However, as the spirit underlying the programme becomes apparent and affinity forms for what the programme is doing at deep levels, insights naturally arise that the data can then help clarify. Third, to capture fully the spirit of a programme, key participants need to be engaged in sharing their experiences and recounting their journeys. This sharing is itself far more meaningful for participants (staff and beneficiaries alike) than filling out data collection instruments. It adds value to the transformation processes in ways that data alone can not. In addition to being a rich source of data, the sharing and accompanying self-reflection process can serve as a complementary intervention.

From a capacity building perspective, truly understanding the human dimension underlying programmes and initiatives is of central importance. That understanding is as evocative as it is evidential. In other words, to spark insights regarding areas for programme improvements and increased capacity building, particularly imaginative ones, the human dimension of a programme has to be intuitively grasped rather than merely depicted as a set of measurable variables that feed the intellect.

Journey mapping is a second-generation application. It was preceded by a computer-based (not online), structured story-capturing framework called results mapping (see Kibel, 1999). The thinking that drove this earlier work was sound, and remains so even now. However, the methodology being forwarded was flawed. Stated simply, it was too hard to implement (too many rules and conventions for capturing the stories in a systematic manner) and was not sufficiently evocative (i.e. the stories, as told in structured format, did not allow the spirit of the programme fully to emerge). A reworking of the approach was initiated during a two-week consultation in Senegal in 1999, with a team from the West African Rural Foundation (WARF; FRAO in French). That reinvention process continued for another four months, and resulted in the transformed methodology christened journey mapping. In reframing the approach, the author also drew on work recently completed in partnership with the evaluation unit of Canada's International

Development Research Centre (IDRC). That work with IDRC had resulted in the creation of 'outcome mapping', a 12-step exploration process for characterising and assessing the contributions development programmes make to the achievement of outcomes.

Journey mapping differed from results mapping in four significant ways. First, instead of collecting stories (after the fact), the focus shifted to capturing developmental and transformative journeys as these unfolded (in real time) via journal entries. Second, by providing participants with a small set of directed questions to respond to (rather than simply having them tell their story), it was found that they benefited personally from the self-reflection and also generated more useful evaluation materials as they completed their journal entries. These probes encouraged self-reflection on journey highlights, peak experiences, and new learning. Third, to satisfy the need for quantitative and qualitative data, those sharing their journeys (or writing about the journeys of others) were also invited to score progress and capture milestones on these journeys. This was accomplished through the introduction of sets of markers and milestones that the journey-sharer could check off as they were reached. Fourth, an Internet platform was created for use by these journey-sharers. It also doubled as a design tool for shaping the evaluation questions and markers.

Journey mapping was probably the first attempt to create a comprehensive evaluation system online – previously, the Internet was used to share data files but not to invite reflection and programme tracking at the levels that journey mapping promoted. It emerged at roughly the same time as independent developments in evaluation, such as the use of appreciative inquiry and the focus on studying success cases, were taking shape. These approaches share with journey mapping a similar belief that the most useful evaluations are often those that devote substantial amount of evaluation resources to deepening understanding regarding the very best of what programmes promote or are capable of promoting. They are normative in spirit rather than descriptive or prescriptive.

Since early 2000 when journey mapping was first made available, hundreds of programmes in the United States (and a handful in Canada and Australia) have opted to use journey mapping either as their principal evaluation method or as a complementary tool to accompany more traditional data collection methods. The programmes that have benefited most from the approach have been those that have rich transformative results to share. Programmes that claim to be transformative but which, in practice, are limited largely to delivering short-term services, training or technical support (i.e. producing episodic rather than developmental results), simply do not produce or encourage the types of transformative results to warrant the use of this or other comparable tools.

Journey mapping is an empowerment model in the truest sense of that term. The methodology is totally handed over to the programmes online in an incredibly user-friendly format that is very quickly mastered. There is no 'expert' standing between programmes and their evaluation. This allows for a more intimate and responsible relationship between the evaluation and the programme. Customised applications can be set up in a few hours (or a few days, for a very complicated, multi-component application) and are then immediately available for use. Design changes can be made in minutes. No programming skills are needed. The future of evaluation may well lie in this direction.

Links

[Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation \(PIRE\)](#)

[IDRC Outcome Mapping](#)

[West African Rural Foundation \(WARF/FRAO\)](#)

Reference

B. Kibel (1999)

[Success Stories As Hard Data: An Introduction to Results Mapping. Plenum.](#)