Using the Trident in Programme Evaluation

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Roger Ellis has given the context for this paper in setting out the relationships between Policy, Evaluation and Programmes and commending Programme Evaluation as a way of establishing links between University and Community. My paper is about the nuts and bolts of programme evaluation and a particular approach that we have developed and found useful in carrying out more than a hundred contracted programme evaluations in the areas of regional development, health, social services, education and community safety.

We call our method The Trident because it focuses an evaluation on three main areas: Outcome, Process and Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives. We invented this method in the year 2000 when we undertook our first evaluation contract. This was to evaluate a category of staff called clinical facilitators who were a key part of the Nurse Education programme in our university.

The clinical facilitators were experienced nurses whose job was to supervise the nursing students' clinical placement and to link this practice with the university-based curriculum. They were intended to provide a bridge between theory and practice. The scheme was an innovation and a condition of its funding was there should be an external evaluation of its success. We were given the contract because we were in the same university as the nursing department but separate from it and able, in principle, to be objective in our assessment.

The contract was very broad in its specification so we had to go back to first principles in deciding how we should do it. We came to the conclusion, after reading widely in the area which, at that point was new to us, that evaluations could ask three main questions:

> Has the programme achieved its stated outcomes?
> What was the process through which the programme was delivered?
> What did everyone involved in the programme think of it?

While these questions are obviously related and overlapping we felt that they suggested three different data streams and, indeed, social science approaches. The outcomes we felt had to be expressed in objective measurable terms amenable to valid and reliable psychometrics. The process needed some way of reconstructing a complex social process which, ideally, would have involved prolonged participant observation. The multiple stakeholders' perspectives were more phenomenological and depended on the perceptions of individuals and groups including students, nurses, managers and the clinical facilitators themselves.

In the end we decided that the key outcome was the enhanced competence and confidence of the students, which we decided could be measured using Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) where students had to practise such skills as blood pressure measurement and clinical hand washing in carefully controlled situations where they were assessed by trained examiners.

While it would have been ideal to observe the interaction between student and clinical facilitators over a period this was neither practical nor permissible so we used a version of a social anthropological method called reconstitutive ethnography whereby clinical facilitators were interviewed to tap their recollections of process. These recollections

were structured and modeled and the facilitators then validated the constructions. This led to a model of clinical facilitation which influenced the nursing curriculum.

Finally stakeholder perspectives were explored through group interviews and survey questionnaires with common questions.

This evaluation was the test bed for the Trident and it proved functional in giving a structure to the evaluation and its research questions and data gathering. It was also intelligible to contractors and participants which helped to make the evaluation meaningful and acceptable. It encouraged participation and gave a structure to the final report and recommendations.

So the Trident offers a Comprehensive Systematic Programme Evaluation Framework. Unlike many educational programme evaluations, it is not just concerned with consumer (student) views, important though they are, but gathers the perspectives of all stakeholders. It focuses on actual outcomes and impact. It looks separately at the process of delivery and can then link these findings with outcomes and the views of participants.

The Trident offers a framework which permeates the evaluation and structures:
- Evaluation Questions
- Data Gathering
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

Roger Ellis has emphasised the value of programme evaluation and the justifications that can be given for it. In our work we have often gained contracts through a competitive bidding process where the need for an evaluation is not in question. But for other evaluations we have had to persuade agencies that evaluation is worth doing and I am sure this is more like your situation here. In making bids and in persuading the reluctant we have used six arguments, as already mentioned by Roger but worth repeating. They are as follows.
- Accountability
- Feedback for Practice
- Record of Achievement
- Data for Research
- Dissemination and Publications
- Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In addition to these justifications we find it helpful in a bid to apply the Trident provisionally to indicate the kinds of questions we will be asking and gathering data to answer. Once we have the contract we ask the programme providers to complete a brief questionnaire to help us to apply the Trident more thoroughly. In this questionnaire they have to identify the main outcomes by which the programme's success might be judged and, vitally, the evidence which will be available for this. They have to tell us where the best records of process might be found. Finally they have to identify the key stakeholders whose views we might sample. I can send a copy of this questionnaire to anyone interested in this part of the process.

Returning to the Trident, it poses three main questions.
Is the programme meeting its objectives and achieving the intended outcomes?
How is the programme working; what is the process of delivery?
What do all the people involved: recipients, providers, associates, and managers, think of the programme?

You might like to think of a programme, however modest, that you would like to evaluate. The Trident could, for example, be applied to this conference.

What were the intended outcomes of the conference and how will these be measured? Remember we are not talking about the activities of the conference here but the outcomes these activities were intended to achieve.

What was the process and activities that made up the conference? How might these be described and analysed? How might these be linked with outcomes?

What did all the participants think of the conference?

We claim that the Trident is tried and tested and this can be assessed from the published reports of our evaluations all of which have ISBNs and from the journal articles which have emerged from our work. The arguments for using the Trident can be summarised as follows.
- It is tried and tested in more than 100 programme evaluations
- It structures evaluation through focus on three main questions
- It integrates quantitative and qualitative data
- It ensures comprehensive data gathering
- It facilitates hypothesis testing linking two or three data streams
- It intelligible to contractors, deliverers and recipients

I will conclude by focusing more closely on each prong of the Trident

Outcomes may be described as programme objectives or aims but they must be distinguished from the process of delivery. We often find that providers tend to focus on the delivery of their programme rather than look at the outcomes that are supposed to be the results of the programme. These outcomes must be measurable in some way and not just impressionistic.

The so-called Logic Model may be helpful in distinguishing between Short Term; Medium Term; and Long Term Outcomes. The further the outcomes are from the point of delivery, the harder they are to measure. For example one programme we evaluated was an educational programme to encourage student teachers' global awareness. The short-term outcome was an assignment, fairly easily assessed. The medium term outcome was the use of material on their teaching practice which was measurable but rather more difficult to access. The long-term outcome was the impact on their future teaching career which was impossible to measure within the time frame of the evaluation.

Process evaluation is concerned with the actual way the programme is delivered. Data for process description may come from programme plans and specifications and from records that have to be kept of what has actually happened. Data may depend on interviews with participants to reconstruct what happened. If there is time, structured observation can be helpful as can 'shadowing of key individuals delivering the programme.

Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives depend on a thorough analysis to decide who is involved and affected by the programme. In management jargon, a 360degree analysis is required. Typically stakeholders include:
- Programme recipients
- Programme deliverers
- Professionals
- Volunteers
- Managers
- 'Experts by Experience'

The latter term is a recent notion that those who are recipients of a programme are experts, comparable with those who deliver the programme. Their expertise is based on their experience. The notion has proved potent in, for example, involving service users with learning difficulties in the inspection of facilities where they often see things the other experts may miss.

To give some examples of the Trident in Action here are some recent programme evaluations where we (SHEU) have used it.

- Training & Education of Nurses
- Sure Start Early Education
- Safer Homes
- Early Language Development
- Shaping the Future through Health Knowledge
- Personality Disorder Network
- Personalization for Learning Disability
- Dementia Support Program
- Tourism & Gardens
- Village Halls and Carbon Footprint

Of course, you won't be surprised to hear that all is not plain sailing! Some of the problems we have faced in our programme evaluations include outcomes being poorly defined and process being confused with outcomes; process descriptions that are superficial or nonexistent; stakeholders who are conceived as recipients only. Data gathering can prove difficult in practice although straightforward in principle. Evaluations can lose momentum and have a low priority for those delivering the programme. To overcome these difficulties we have found it helpful to establish, from the start, a Steering Group consisting of those who have contracted the programme; those who are delivering or, if possible, receiving, the programme and the evaluators. The Steering Group has to approve the design and methods for the evaluation; facilitate access to data, and receive interim and final reports.

However, the satisfying parts of the job, facilitated, we believe, by the Trident, have included having an Impact on practice and policy; providing a record of achievement which helps with future funding; and achieving the dissemination of best practice through reports and publications. More broadly, we feel our social science skills are really making a difference!

The following references will give you the flavour of our work.

Sines, D., Hogard, E. & Ellis, R. (2012). Evaluating Quality of Life in Adults with Profound Learning Difficulties Resettled from Hospital to Supported Living in the Community. The *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities* 16 (4): 247-263.

Hogard, E. & Ellis, R. (2010). An Evaluation of a Managed Clinical Network for Personality Disorder: Breaking New Ground or Top Dressing?. *Evaluation in Clinical Practice* 16 (6): 1147-1156.

Hogard, E. (2007). "Using Consultative Methods to Investigate Professional-Client Interaction as an Aspect of Process Evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation* 28 (3): 304-317.

Ellis, R. & Hogard, E. (2006). The Trident: A Three-Pronged Method for Evaluating Clinical, Social and Educational Innovations. *Evaluation* 12 (3): 372-383.

Thank you for the opportunity to describe our Trident. Please keep in touch: I would love to help with your work.