

REFRAMING THE FUTURE

# EVALUATING PROJECTS

*Reframing*  
*the*  
**future**



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## WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Evaluation is the process by which you systematically collect evidence about any or all of the following:

- ▶▶ The context in which you are undertaking an activity
- ▶▶ Your progress part-way through the activity
- ▶▶ The effectiveness of draft materials and initial efforts (sometimes referred to as 'formative' or 'process' evaluation)
- ▶▶ What you have achieved in relation to your initial objectives (sometimes termed 'summative' or 'product' evaluation).

## WHY EVALUATE?

Evaluation is a natural way of monitoring and refining any human activity. Take driving. If I'm driving to work, I'm constantly asking questions like 'Am I going too fast?'; 'Can I get across this intersection before the lights turn red?' This is evaluation because it involves:

- ▶▶ Goals (not driving too fast; getting to work safely)
- ▶▶ Feedback (the speedo, the traffic lights)
- ▶▶ Thinking about one in relation to the other.

However the downside of evaluative activities like these is that they are done alone, and may not be very systematic. The model of workbased evaluation outlined uses goals and feedback, but also builds in group insight and a more systematic approach.

## WHEN TO EVALUATE

Evaluations can be undertaken at any time during a workbased learning project - at the beginning, mid-way through, or at the end.

### EVALUATIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF A PROJECT

The focus here is on the current situation, so that you have a benchmark for measuring progress.

### EVALUATIONS MID-WAY THROUGH A PROJECT

Use these to make adjustments so that the project stays on track. A mid-way evaluation also gives your project team a chance to stand back from the project, and see whether the initial thinking needs to be revised.

### EVALUATIONS AT THE END OF A PROJECT

Formal data collection and analysis at this stage provides a good basis for judging how well your project went, and for making plans about future projects.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

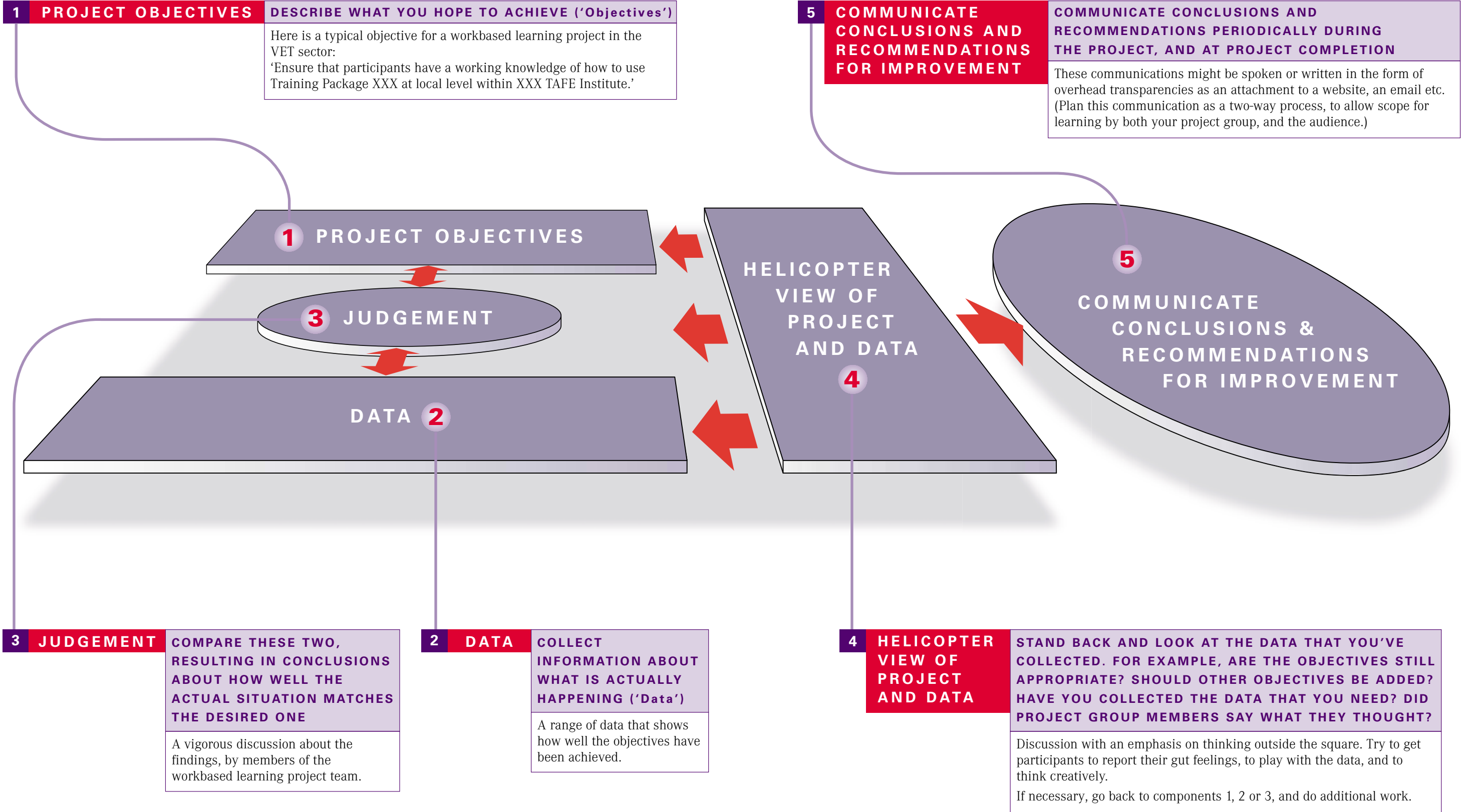
The best starting point for an evaluation is to sort out what you want to know. Write out the questions that you want answered by the evaluation. Here are some suggestions for improving evaluation questions:

<b>QUESTION</b>	'How effective have the sessions been?'
<b>SUGGESTION</b>	Discuss and agree on what you mean by 'effective' because this will have a lot of influence on how you go about the evaluation
<b>QUESTION</b>	'Is the new brochure on Training Packages useful?'
<b>SUGGESTION</b>	Avoid questions like this that have only 'yes/no' answers. A better question would be: 'How useful is the brochure?' (Which provides a good basis for asking 'How can we improve it?')

# EVALUATION FOR WORKBASED LEARNING

**FIVE BASIC COMPONENTS SHOULD BE PRESENT EVERY TIME YOU EVALUATE WORKBASED LEARNING:**

This five part evaluation model can help achieve these characteristics. By working from explicit project objectives, you are more likely to have a good basis for both validity and reliability. Robust judgement activities, such as a group discussion of data, will also help validity and reliability.



## DATA COLLECTION METHODS

There are a variety of approaches that you can use to collect evaluation data. Some of the main ones are listed below, but remember, each of these can be applied in different ways. Also, bear in mind that most evaluations use more than one data collection method.

<b>PHONE INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	Quick and direct Can instantly clarify misunderstandings about questions
	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>	Too time consuming for complex issues For projects in many regions, STD can get expensive Requires rapid writing, or taping and transcribing (expensive)
<b>QUESTIONNAIRES</b>	<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	Easy to tabulate and report data Gets to a wide cross-section of people Busy people in institutes or industry can fill in when they get time
	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>	If mailed, may be poor response rate If used to evaluate workshops, timing may be a problem Can't easily probe ('what do you mean by...?')
<b>TAPE RECORDED GROUP DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	People's ideas spark off each other Can have focused discussion at the end of a seminar
	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>	In some groups, a few people will dominate discussion
<b>DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS</b>	<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	Data already available at start of workbased learning project
	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>	May be questions about accuracy May need to go through a lot of documents to find relevant data

## BASIC IDEAS ABOUT EVALUATING WORKBASED ACTIVITIES

Context is important - don't just ask 'is this effective?' Take into account specifics such as the industry, particularly events, relationships and politics, timing issues, and work pressures.
Judgements need space - not only physical space, but mental space as well. Encourage project team members to be open to new possibilities, and to think creatively, when you examine evaluation data.
Time is also important - time free from interruptions, to examine the data and make judgements about it.
Involve a group. You're more likely to get a range of views, and come up with robust conclusions, if you involve members of your project group in examining the data.
Play with the data. Just as children can use play with toys to gain insight into real dilemmas and issues, your project group can play with the evaluation data - i.e. experiment, group it, compare parts of it, extrapolate from it, check out your hunches, etc. - to achieve valuable insights.
Draw on your feelings as well as your intellect. People's words are only part of the data that you'll collect. It's OK to ask yourself and your group - 'What are the feelings here?' 'Are people angry, excited, bored, comfortable, nervous, etc.?'

## ACHIEVING WORTHWHILE RESULTS

Three main characteristics contribute to the worth of any evaluation results:

### VALIDITY

The data you collect should reflect the real situation you're examining.

### RELIABILITY

The data you collect should not depend on who does the interviews or conducts the discussions, or on when they occur.

### USEFULNESS

There is little point in getting valid, reliable data about issues that no-one cares about.

Evaluation resources are available from the **Reframing the Future** website

### Reframing the Future contact details

Reframing the Future  
PO Box 425  
Elizabeth SA 5112  
Telephone 08 8207 9655  
Fax 08 8207 9708  
<http://reframingthefuture.net>

