

REFRAMING THE FUTURE

EVALUATING

workbased

learning

A MODEL



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Reframing the Future is a major national staff development initiative funded through the Australian National Training Authority. Its primary objective is to provide a structure for people in the Vocational Education and Training sector to develop the skills and knowledge they need to implement the National Training Framework. Since inception in 1997 over 250 workbased learning project teams have been funded and supported through Reframing the Future.

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Introduction

In recent years, a number of initiatives have used workbased learning as a mechanism for staff development in the VET sector. These include Reframing the Future and Learnscope, as well as earlier programs such as CBT in Action, the Management Enhancement Team Approach, and workbased learning initiatives in the language and literacy areas.

In each case, an individual or small group of people apply for government funding to conduct a staff development project. Because external funding is provided, there is an expectation that projects will be evaluated. In most cases, this evaluation has been undertaken by an external person, drawing on data from a variety of sources, including project groups themselves.

One of the lessons of the last few years is that this evaluation process is a valuable learning opportunity. Rather than conceiving of evaluation as something done by an external expert, and resulting in a formal report, it would be far better to put more effort into encouraging individual project groups to evaluate and report on their own achievements.

This booklet is designed to help with this task. It presents a view of evaluation that is consistent with workbased learning, drawing on the author's experience as external evaluator for a variety of workplace initiatives, including Reframing the Future.

The nature of evaluation

In its simplest form, evaluation is a natural part of everyday life. We have to do some form of evaluation to get anything done.

Take driving, for example. When you drive somewhere, an internal voice is constantly asking questions like 'Am I going too fast?'; 'Can I get across this intersection before the lights go red?'

This a simple form of evaluation because it involves:

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

However, when it comes to evaluating more complex activities, such as workbased learning, evaluation usually implies three other things as well:

- the focus is on the value of something (after all, the word 'value' is embedded in 'evaluation'), which may be assessed by looking at any of a range of variables, including cost effectiveness, impact, quality, and so on
- evaluation deals with activities which have involved planning and effort – a structure, program, or some other initiative
- evaluation is conducted in a systematic, careful way

When to evaluate

It is common to think of evaluation as something that occurs after an activity – ‘we did it, then we evaluated it’. While post program evaluation is important, it is certainly not the only time that you should be thinking about this area.

Instead, think of evaluation as an ongoing dimension of any workplace initiative. Applied to workbased learning, evaluation is the process by which you systematically collect evidence and make judgements about any or all of the following:

- the way that the activity is conceived – its objectives, planned activities, and associated documentation
- the context in which the activity is being undertaken
- the effectiveness of draft materials and initial efforts (sometimes referred to as ‘formative’ or ‘process’ evaluation)
- what you have achieved in relation to initial objectives (sometimes termed ‘summative’ or ‘product’ evaluation)

Understandably, initiatives such as Reframing the Future place considerable emphasis on the evaluation of end of project outcomes. Nevertheless, discovering that a project failed to live up to its expectations after it is completed can only be of limited value. It is far better to begin collecting and systematically thinking about evaluation data from the start, and to treat end of project evaluations as only one of many indicators of progress.

Timing the evaluation

Evaluation at the beginning of a project

The focus at this stage is both on the current situation and its context (including the results of previous efforts). In that way, you have a basis for tailoring your initial efforts, and for measuring progress.

Evaluation during the project

Use these to make adjustments so that the project stays on track. Interim evaluations give your project team a chance to stand back from the project, and see whether the initial thinking needs to be revised. There is also an opportunity to check whether things which may be outside your direct control – including distribution of packaged materials, administrative support, internet access, publicity – are happening as anticipated.

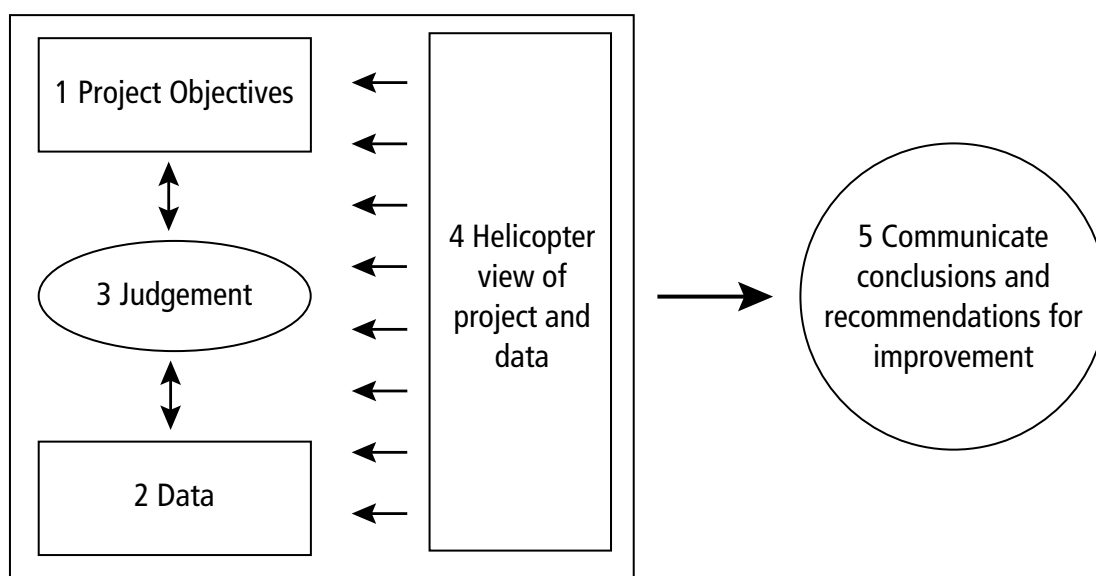
Evaluation at the end of a project

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

The process of evaluating workbased learning

Five basic components should be present every time you formally evaluate workbased learning. These are shown below.

A model of the evaluation process



Bear in mind, as we work through this diagram, that:

- human activity is never as neat and tidy as process diagrams like this, and when you're doing the evaluation, there are sure to be many overlaps between the five areas.
- the diagram is not meant to imply a five step sequence, but rather, a set of parallel activities that are numbered for easy reference (this particularly applies to trying to keep a helicopter view, which should be happening throughout the evaluation).
- the process shown is basically intellectual, but the backdrop (and often the key to making worthwhile improvements) includes both political and personal issues.

Maximising learning during program evaluation

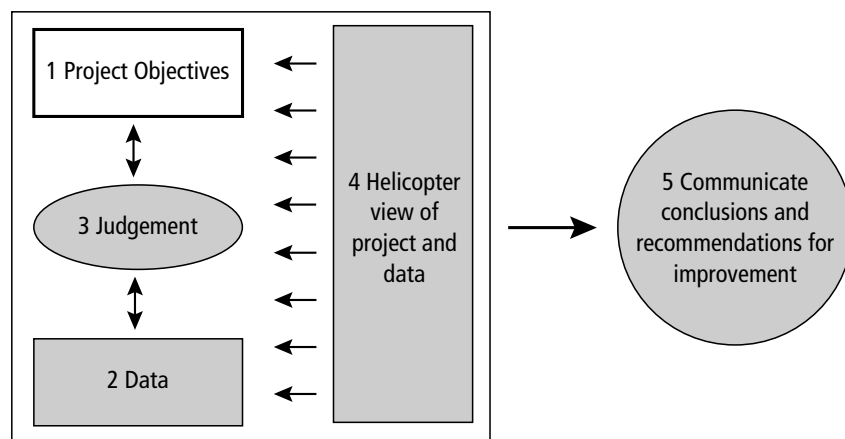
The evaluation process outlined in this booklet is designed to help you maximise learning when you evaluate workbased projects. Being a member of a project group is an opportunity to have your thinking challenged by other group members, and to learn in the process.

Two different types of learning are important.

Firstly, the process outlined helps you learn about how successful your efforts are. You'll gain insight into factors which contribute to successful projects ('If we do X, then it is likely to result in Y').

Secondly, you'll also learn about learning itself. For example, what are the things you, as a group, do that seem to result in new insights? How open are different people to learning, and what seems to contribute to this? How good are you, as a group, at capturing and then applying lessons learnt (or do you keep making the same mistakes over and over?)

Project objectives



The best starting point for evaluating a workbased learning project is to sort out what you want the project to achieve. Doing so doesn't commit you in the long term – your objectives may well change as you learn more about the challenges that you face. But at any point in time, the project group should have agreement about what it is that they are aiming to do.

Getting project objectives down in writing can be quite a challenge. You need to be clear about three areas in particular:

- how general the objectives should be
- the difference between what you want to achieve, and what you aim to do
- the meaning of the words used to express the project objectives

5.1 THE LEVEL OF GENERALITY

Sometimes in project proposals, it is desirable to provide very general project goals like:

‘To help staff work more confidently with the National Training Framework, in order to be more responsive to the community, industry and individual needs.’

While fine as a general statement of intent, an objective like this is too general to be of much use in a project evaluation. It needs to be converted into something more specific. For evaluations mid way through a project, and at project completion, a good way to approach this is to think in terms of indicators of success – what specific outcomes would indicate that your project was on track and successful?

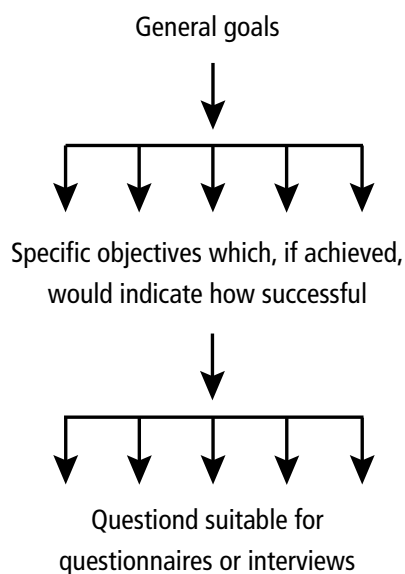
For example:

‘By July, participants will have a working knowledge of how to use Training Package XXX at local level within our Department’

However, don't go to the other extreme and start writing down specific questions that you might ask in an interview or questionnaire. Thus, questions like the following, while suitable for an interview, are too specific to be project objectives.

‘How much use has been made of Training Packages? What are the difficulties, and how have they been approached?’

To summarise, general goals have to be broken down into specific objectives, which is what we're most interested in during project evaluations. At some point, however, these specific objectives might be translated into questions suitable for questionnaires or interviews.



5.2 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU ‘PLAN TO DO’, AND WHAT YOU ‘AIM TO ACHIEVE’

Here are some statements that have been put forward as ‘project objectives’:

‘Conduct workshops within the Institute on the National Training Framework’

‘Develop a mentoring program to help staff at local level’

‘Hold seminars with industry bodies to generate better understanding of Training Packages’

‘Promote our activities widely within the Institute, and in particular food industry companies in our region’

It is understandable why these were thought of as objectives. After all, in starting out, the project group is aiming to undertake activities like these. However, each of these so called ‘objectives’ is really only a statement of project activities – what those associated with each project intend to *do* – rather than what the project is seeking to *accomplish*. While it is necessary to agree on the activities you plan to undertake, that isn’t the same as agreeing on objectives.

So, as well as thinking about activities, spend time thinking about what you want these activities to achieve. It may also be useful to use a goal setting technique, such as **SMART** when writing your objectives. This suggests that the best project objectives are:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Timed

Here are some project objectives that detail outcomes:

‘Components A,B, and C of the XYZ Training Package are fully implemented by August’

‘To establish a network, which involves at least 10 local businesses and Institute staff, by the end of the year. This network will be actively supporting the introduction of traineeships.’

‘Project team members have developed expertise in the customisation of learning resources for specific learning situations and requirements.’

‘Prototype learning materials have been developed that enable the new qualifications to be offered either on or off the job, and at least two groups have worked through these learning materials and provided feedback.’

5.3 THE MEANING OF KEY WORDS

The objectives cited in the last two sections contain many general words with specific meanings in the context of the project – for example:

- network
- local level

Terms like these have different meanings for different people, and can easily be misunderstood. Even if project team members share a common understanding, there is still the possibility of misunderstandings when you report your data.

So, as part of your initial project planning, mark terms like these, and try to agree on (and write down) what they mean. (If you're familiar with the way that 'range statements' flesh out the meaning of competency statements, you could think of this suggestion as providing a kind of 'range statement' for your evaluation questions.)

Here is how a project team might define these terms:

Effective

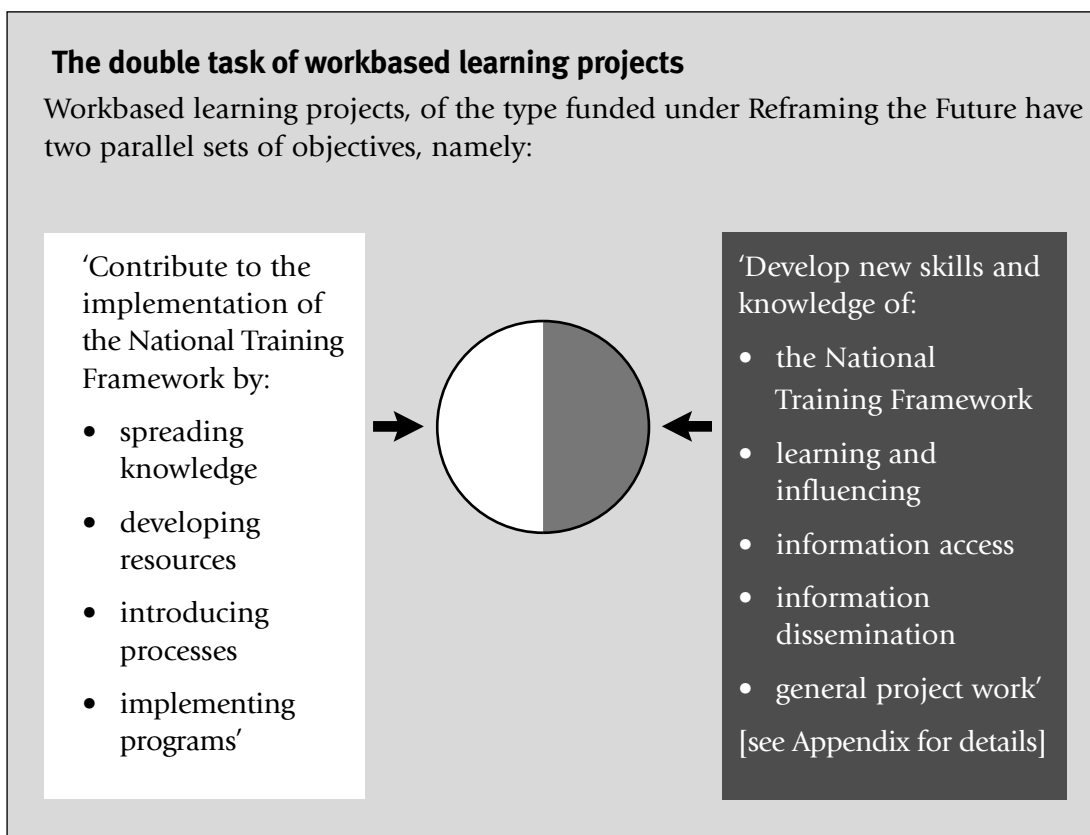
'Able to use the Training Package structure to supplement day to day teaching. Using the Training Package as a guide to outcomes for classroom preparation, not as a lesson plan.'

Network

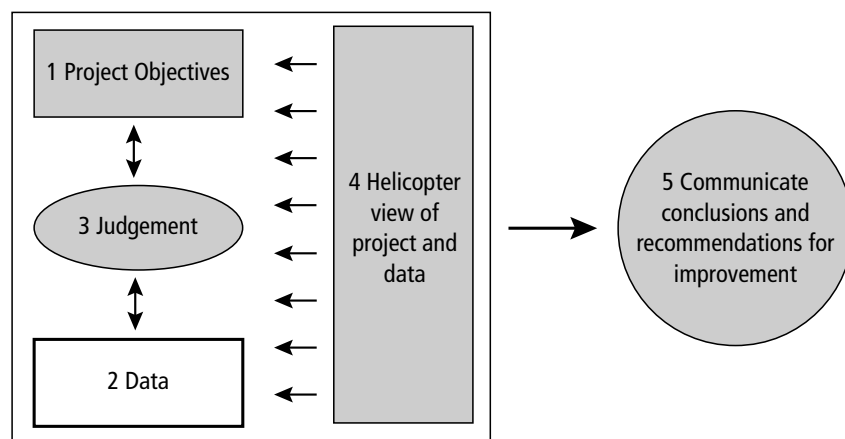
'An informal arrangement that ensures people know each other well enough to phone or email, and also understand each other's expertise and the challenges that they face.'

Local level

'Other colleagues involved in face-to-face teaching at campuses A and B of Institute XXX.'



Data



6.1 WHAT IS DATA?

When you conduct a workbased learning project, or for that matter, any workplace activity involving groups of people, a mass of data is generated. However, we're only going to consider one particular type of data, namely data which provides insight into the results of project team efforts. This kind of data is called 'feedback'.

There are four types of feedback that you can draw on – numbers, responses, categories and descriptions. Examples are provided in the box below.

Types of feedback		
Type of feedback	Characteristics	Example
Numbers	Can be ordered meaningfully, and are exact	Numbers attending a series of seminars: 16, 23, 19 ...
Responses	Can be ordered meaningfully, but are not exact	Degree of satisfaction with newsletter: Very satisfied, quite satisfied ...
Categories	Cannot be put into order	Locations where a program was conducted: Armidale, Perth, ...
Descriptions	These relate to whole scenes or situations	Observers' record of what happened at a meeting involving Institute and industry representatives

6.2 LEGITIMATE DATA

The issue of how one goes about collecting and interpreting data has attracted a lot of debate amongst scholars in recent years. At the heart of much of this debate is the issue of how one knows anything. I may feel that I 'know' a seminar went well, but am I correct? Moreover, what do I have to do so that others (eg the agency that provided the funding) share this 'knowledge'?

Applied to program evaluation, the literatures surrounding this area suggest that two broad options exist. One is to concentrate on the kind of so called 'factual' evaluation data which would be difficult to dispute – numbers of people attending, numbers of newsletters sent out, and so on.

You might also report attitudes and trends, based on tick the box style questionnaires. All of these types of data can be presented numerically, and therefore lend themselves to being reported in graphical form and looking respectable.

The disadvantage of restricting yourself to 'factual' data like this is that you'll end up leaving out a lot of things that influence your efforts, including:

- the details of particular incidents, and the sequence in which they occur over time
- political manoeuvrings and developments in the context of the project you're involved in
- people's feelings – frustration, excitement, insecurity, and so on
- situations that you have heard of second hand, or where you may have incomplete information

All of which raises the second option – record and report any of the types of data listed, as long as it is relevant to your project and its outcomes. After all, people's comments often provide valuable insights, so why shouldn't they be treated as data. Similarly, observations, anecdotes and feelings may also be valuable and relevant data.

The downside here is that, in presenting the data like this, you leave yourself open to the traditionalist's claim that people's feelings and observations about personal and political matters are subjective, and therefore have no place in a respectable evaluation study.

In Universities and the VET sector, there is strong pressure to concentrate on 'factual' data, and to leave out the personal and political dimensions unless they can be converted into numbers (eg via behavioural checklists). You only have to think about how many evaluation reports you've seen which give an adequate account of the political and personal dimensions of training and workplace change to realise that a pressure to exclude these areas exists.

In my view, however, to present a full picture of your project and its outcomes, it is perfectly legitimate to give equal prominence to both 'factual', quantitative data, and more descriptive and anecdotal personal and political data.

The only caution here is that your aim as evaluator should be to maximise validity and reliability:

- to maximise 'validity', the data you collect should reflect the real situation you're examining (which, of course, may be more difficult to demonstrate if the data is of a personal or political nature)
- to maximise 'reliability', the data you collect should not depend on who does the interviews or conducts the discussions, or when they occur.

6.3 STRATEGIES FOR MAXIMISING VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

How do you maximise validity and reliability when evaluating workbased learning? The following strategies will help.

Strategy 1:

Where possible, get a second opinion about everything

Here are some ways of doing so:

- check the wording of a questionnaire, by trying it out with a few people before you use it more widely (this is called 'piloting')
- when you are asking people for their opinions, unless you can get their comments verbatim (eg by using a tape recorder), check your understanding of what is said either during the interview ('I'm not sure that I understood this, but I think you said ...') or afterwards, by sending a summary of your record of interview
- don't rely solely on your perception of events – check your understanding by asking other members of your project team what they think

Strategy 2:

Don't believe data just because it is numerical

Check numerical data (eg from questionnaire results or attendance figures) against your own understanding of the situation. If a result is unexpected, try to get an explanation for it, by discussing with colleagues or with the group from which you collected the data. It may be that you really have discovered something surprising, but on the other hand, the way you have collected the data may have distorted the results.

Strategy 3:**Take care with generalising**

When working with more subjective data – eg descriptions of a particular group, workplace or situation – take care not to generalise to other situations. It is quite acceptable to speculate (eg ‘it seems likely that the other companies faced the same issue’), but not to imply that you’ve proved anything about what happens elsewhere. In particular, when quoting people’s comments or specific anecdotes, don’t just pick out the most colourful ones, and then imply that these are typical.

Strategy 4:**Report difficulties and gaps alongside achievements**

Given that government funding is likely to have been provided for the projects we’re considering, there is always a temptation to put a positive gloss on one’s results. However, in the interests of reporting valid and reliable data, it is important to report things that went wrong as well as successes.

Similarly, your project may not accomplish all that it set out to do. Given the short timeframe of many workbased learning projects, it is likely that you will take initiatives which are only starting to have an affect when the project comes to an end. The best advice here is to acknowledge these gaps, as well as marshalling any evidence which suggests what the outcomes might be. For example:

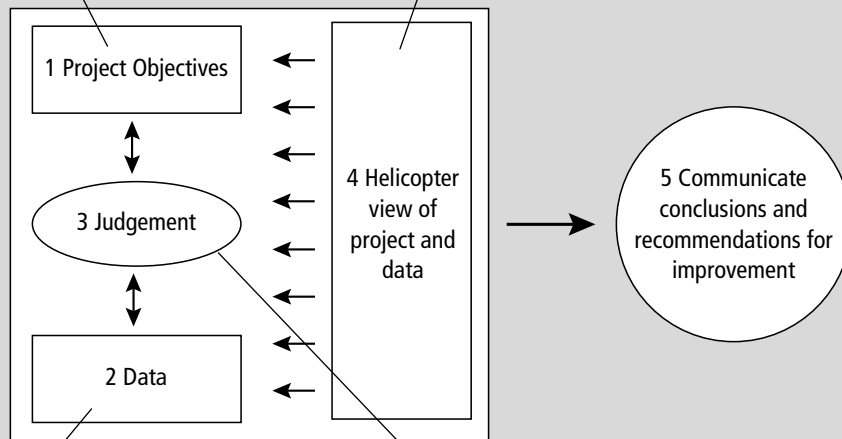
‘While it is too early to say with certainty what the outcomes of these strategies will be, a range of evidence suggests that they are working. This evidence includes ...’

Achieving validity and reliability when evaluating workbased learning projects

The evaluation model presented in this booklet is designed to maximise validity and reliability:

By working from projects objectives which define ambiguous terms, you are more likely to have a good basis for both validity and reliability.

By encouraging people to think outside the square, and by presenting your findings in a way that allows for dialogue, you are more likely to take into account extraneous factors that could distort your conclusions.



Appropriate data collection methods and sampling maximise the validity and reliability of data, and increase the likelihood that the conclusions you draw are appropriate.

Robust judgement activities, such as a group discussion of findings, will also help validity and reliability. They ensure that your interpretations of the data are checked with the others.

6.4 SOURCES OF DATA ('SAMPLING')

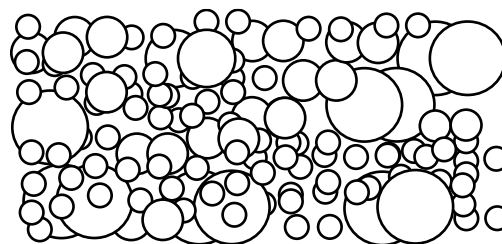
One way of evaluating a project would be to get data from each individual or site involved. Often, however, that is too difficult to do, and one has to settle for a sample.

There are three main types of samples that you're likely to use:

- sample to find out about an unknown problem
- sample to find out about a population with some known differentiating characteristics
- sample to find out about a particular idea

Sample to find about an unknown population

Suppose that 100 people attended a seminar conducted by your group, and you want to use interviews to get a feel for the way they applied the information presented. Here, the challenge is to get a representative cross section of what the 100 people think. Despite popular opinion to the contrary, there isn't any way of calculating the 'right' sample size for this sort of task – the appropriate sample size depends on the diversity of people's answers.

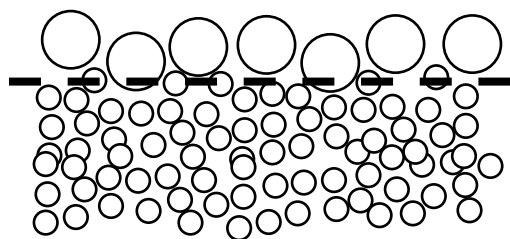


It is easy enough to understand why. Suppose you want to collect data on the effectiveness of some industry briefing sessions. If everyone in the audience had exactly the same reaction, you would only need to interview one person. On the other hand, if everyone had totally different responses, you may need to interview a much larger sample.

Most situations fall somewhere between these extremes, but the catch is that in most workbased learning projects, you don't know enough about people's responses to decide.

Given this, the best advice is to pick people at random, and get information from as many as you can manage (allowing for availability and the time it will take to analyse the data).

Sample to find out about a population with known differentiating characteristics



On some occasions, you'll be aware of some important characteristic which separates the individuals or groups you want to survey, and are most likely to affect their answers. For example, you may be:

- conducting a project across three regions (the differentiating characteristic here is 'region')
- providing information targeted at TAFE teachers and VET sector managers (the differentiating characteristic here is 'level within the organisation')

In situations like these, it is best to separate out each group, and then sample from within it. Thus, for example, if you have lists of people who've been contacted for a project, divide these up according to region, and then sample randomly from within each regional list. Doing so ensures that your results adequately pick up the responses of people in each region.

Sample to find out about a particular idea

The sampling methods discussed so far relate to getting a balanced picture of what groups of people think. Sometimes, however, you'll be more interested in getting a comprehensive picture of a particular idea. For example, suppose your project group is interested in using computers to disseminate ideas about tailoring Training Packages. Random sampling won't help much here, because most people wouldn't have thought about this issue. Instead, you would need to locate people who have thought about this or related challenges.

Once you've located a few people with knowledge of the area, the best approach is to ask them 'can you suggest anyone else who might have some ideas about this?' If you do that each time, you'll eventually track down a range of people who can comment on your proposal. As you do so, your understanding will snowball, and hence the name of this type of sampling, 'snowball sampling'.

6.5 Methods for collecting data

Workbased evaluations can make use of any of the research methods of the social sciences. The most useful methods are summarised below.

Keep records

Although systematic record keeping is desirable in any project, it is worth pointing out that the records you keep are also a source of evaluation data. Some simple practices will help you keep track of the data you need:

- include the date of each document you produce in its footer, so you know which versions are current
- keep track of the numbers of people involved with your project, and keep a record of the basic characteristics of each group which may be of interest to the funding body (eg position, employing organisation, gender, ethnic background, and so on)
- where appropriate, use software such as Access or Excel to store data systematically

Keep a diary

Either you individually, or your project group, can keep a diary. Summarise significant discussions and decisions, but also use the diary to record your thoughts about the project as it evolves. A diary can help you get a helicopter view of the project, and of the implications of your data.

Group discussion

From an evaluator's perspective, the good thing about group discussions is that people spark off each other, and may disclose things that they wouldn't in a one-to-one interview.

In some cases, group discussions will be fairly informal. For example, you might structure a short period at the end of a seminar, where people divide into groups and discuss (and record on butchers paper) what they've learnt.

Group discussions can also be structured in a more formal way. Each member of your project group could, for example, facilitate a group discussion in a different faculty, and tape record the results. Bear in mind that many people feel inhibited about talking openly if people of different status are present, so aim for groups made up of similar status individuals.

Use a questionnaire

Questionnaires make it easy to collect data from a variety of people, and tabulating and reporting findings is fairly straightforward. They're flexible, too – busy people in Institutes or industry can fill them in when they get time.

Questionnaires can be used in a variety of ways. The most simple form is the one or two page document handed out at the end of a seminar, which asks people what they liked and didn't like. Questionnaires can also be distributed by internal or external mail.

Questionnaires can also ask people about their skills, knowledge or attitudes. For example, you might ask people to rate how much they agree with statements such as:

'I feel very up-to-date in my knowledge of National Training Framework developments and future directions' (eg Training Packages; new apprenticeships; etc)

'I am able to apply workbased learning approaches when I work with other groups'

'I am committed to using workbased learning approaches where applicable in the VET related activities that I'm involved in'

[A list of other skills and knowledge associated with National Training Framework is included as an Appendix]

While they're easy to use, it is common for only a limited number of people to return questionnaires, and one never knows how similar the respondents are to the whole group. Another disadvantage is that you can't easily probe ('what do you mean by ...?')

If you do decide to collect data by questionnaire, it is always advisable to try a draft out with a few potential respondents first. Doing so will alert you to any parts that may be irrelevant or misunderstood.

Wording questionnaire items

- Avoid 'yes'/'no' answers by asking questions involving judgements. Examples:

Rather than asking 'Is the brochure effective', ask 'How effective is the brochure'

Follow branching questions up with a request for details:

Do you have a system for ...?

Yes

No

If 'Yes', what type of system

- Avoid biasing results with the scales you use. Examples of a biased scale:

Is this applicable?

Somewhat Quite Very Extremely

- A 5 point scale allows a mid point. Is this desirable, or do you want to force people to make a choice? Example of a 5 point scale, showing neutral mid point:

Not at all Not very 50/50 Quite Extremely

Face-to-face interviews

One-to-one interviews are useful for exploring complex issues in detail. You are not restricted by a fixed sequence of questions, as you are with questionnaires. In addition, it may also be possible to judge whether or not someone is telling the truth, or evading parts of an issue, by seeing them in person.

However, bear in mind that interviews are very time consuming. They require you to either write rapidly, or to use a tape recorder and face the expense of having the interview transcribed. It may also be difficult to generalise from your data, depending on the number of people that you interview and your sampling methods.

Phone interviews

Telephone interviews are a quick and direct way of getting feedback from key stakeholders. They are often candid, and, as with face-to-face interviewing, you have the advantage of being able to clarify any misunderstandings.

On the other hand, telephone interviews can be too time consuming to tease out complex issues. Also, if your project cuts across several regions, STD charges can make it too expensive to interview a large sample. As with face-to-face interviews, interviews by phone require rapid writing, or the expense involved with transcribing tapes.

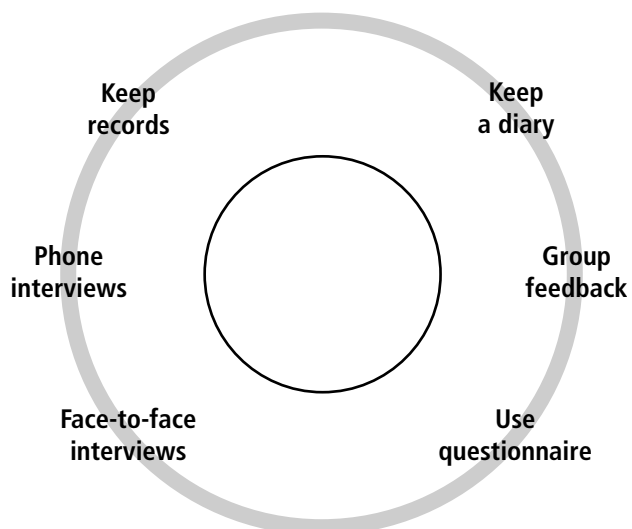
6.6 APPLYING THE METHODS

The data collection methods which have just been discussed can be used in a variety of combinations to evaluate a project. The diagram on the next page is designed to help you plan the combination of methods that you'll use.

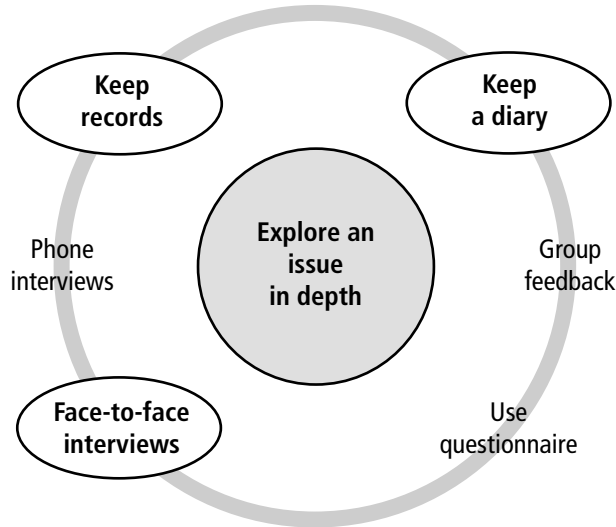
In this section, we examine ways in which the various methods can be combined in order to:

- explore an issue in depth
- measure impacts
- gauge reactions

Tool for planning the evaluation approach



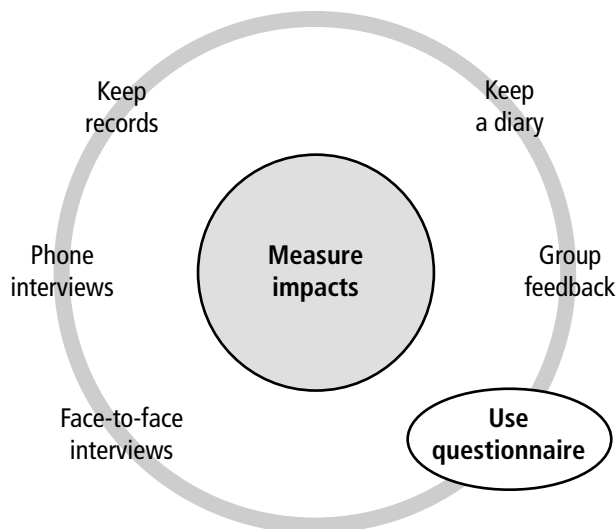
**Example 1:
Explore an issue in depth**



As your project unfolds, your group may want to explore an issue in depth. For example, suppose that you have identified a particular issue that seems to be impeding the introduction of flexible learning materials across a range of course areas.

Face-to-face interviews will help you to explore the issue, but scrutiny of records may also help you gauge the significance of the issue. As you come to understand the issue more fully, keeping a diary may be a useful way of retaining your (and your groups’) insights.

**Example 2:
Measure impacts**

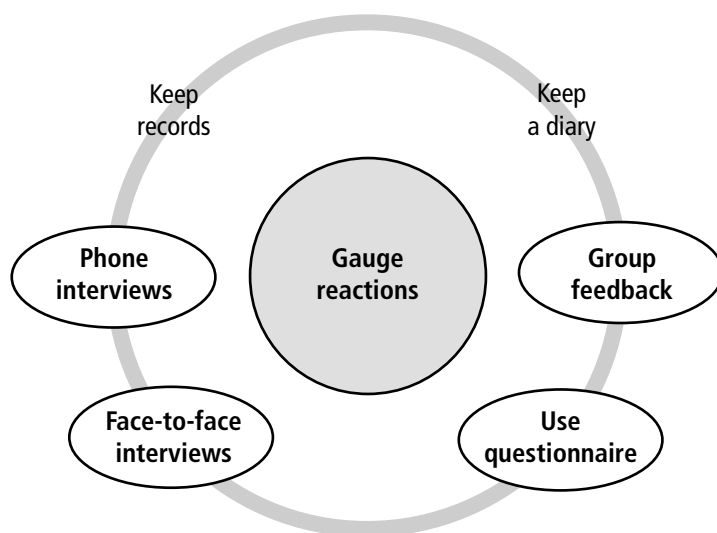


While there is no doubt that project groups associated with Reframing the Future are generally very active, they still face the challenge of showing that all of this activity actually has any positive impact.

Having specific objectives is a good starting point for measuring impact, because they state what you are trying to do. Once objectives are established, you'll need to collect some data that indicates the situation before and after your interventions.

The difference between the two sets of data can provide valuable insight into the progress that has been made, and will help you identify problem areas. As indicated in the diagram, in the sorts of projects that we are considering, the data used to measure impact typically comes from records (eg of attendance, website use, take up of materials, etc) and questionnaires.

**Example 3:
Gauge reactions**



Often, a project group is interested in how people reacted to particular materials and programs. If this is your focus, avoid the temptation to seek compliments via questions such as 'how much did you enjoy ...', or to explore a range of nice to know but inessential issues such as 'what did you think were the (a) advantages and (b) disadvantages of having a facilitator.'

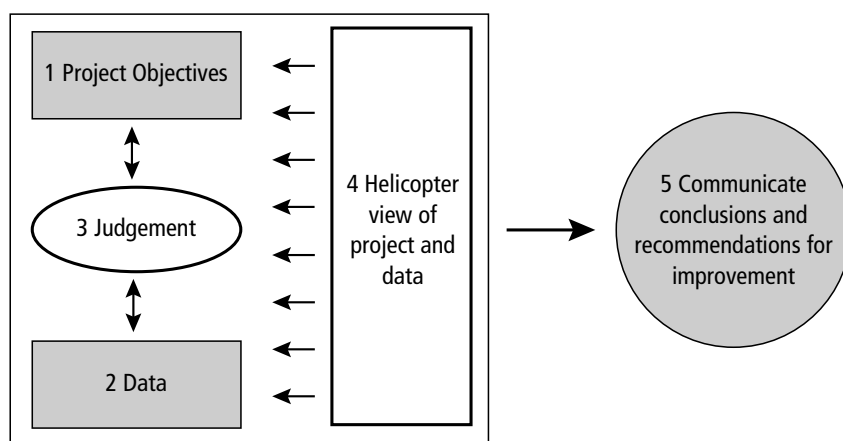
In terms of methodology, there are a variety of ways of gauging people's reactions, including group discussions, face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, and phone interviews. In large scale evaluations, these methods may be used in a sequence, like this:

Group discussion and face-to-face interviews to get a feel of the issues, followed by ...

... use of a questionnaire to quantify the issues, followed by ...

... phone interviews to examine gaps and anomalies in the data

Making judgements and adopting a helicopter view



As soon as you've begun to collect data, you will also want to start thinking about what the data says about how your project is progressing. There are two related aspects of doing so, making judgements and adopting a helicopter view.

The more narrow of these is 'making judgements'. Here, you are looking back to your project objectives and using the data to assess your achievements. Does it look like you will accomplish what you set out to do? What are your main achievements so far? Are there any objectives which may not be accomplished? If so, why is that?

As you use the data to examine issues like these, you should also try to adopt a helicopter view. After all, just because you are not on track to achieve your objectives doesn't mean that anything is going wrong. Perhaps the objectives themselves now seem inappropriate, and other priorities may have emerged.

It is also possible that things beyond your control have delayed what you can achieve. Political or personal factors that you only partly understand may be creating resistance to the changes that you are trying to introduce. 'Adopting

a helicopter view' is meant to remind you to keep in mind this bigger picture as you set about examining the data.

As you overview the data, gaps in your understanding may become evident. This kind of reflective review may also raise other issues that your project group wants to examine. In terms of our diagram, you may need to go back to components 1 ('Objectives'), 2 ('Data') or 3 ('Judgement') to do further work.

SPACE TO REFLECT OPENLY ON THE DATA

Reflecting openly on data needs space, both physical and mental. It is worth the effort to get away from normal work settings and interruptions. When people relax outside their normal work roles, there is a greater chance of being able to adopt a helicopter view. Basic equipment such as a whiteboard and overhead projector helps, as does access to a computer, fax and email.

But mental space is important as well. Project team members should be encouraged to stay open to new possibilities, and to think creatively. Here, the skills of project facilitator are crucial. He or she should help group members to tolerate uncertainty and confusion (see box).

After all, if everyone feels completely comfortable when looking at feedback about project accomplishments, it is unlikely there'll be much learning going on. Anxiety may simply indicate that assumptions are being challenged. While this experience is not particularly pleasant, it may preface new ways of approaching the task.

Facilitating an open approach

One of the most facilitative things you can do is to tune in to, and comment on, the atmosphere in the group. For example:

'We all seem a bit disheartened that the evaluation results are not what we hoped for.'

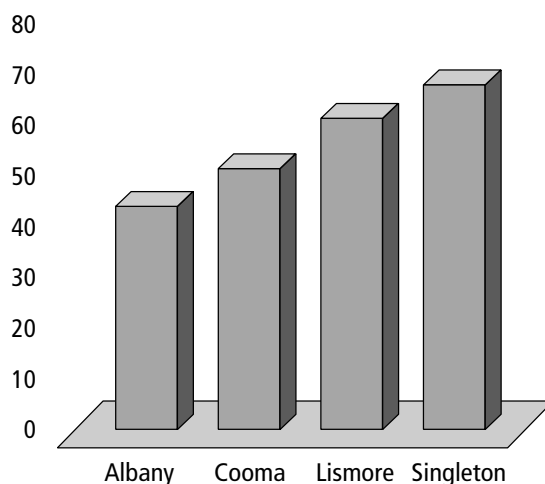
'Perhaps other people are also concerned that what we've taken on is too ambitious in this timeframe.'

Comments like these help to draw out people's anxieties and concerns, and will add energy and strength to efforts to work through the data. They also help make it acceptable to be uncertain or discouraged, and free up people to take risks, as they interpret the data and make decisions about future directions.

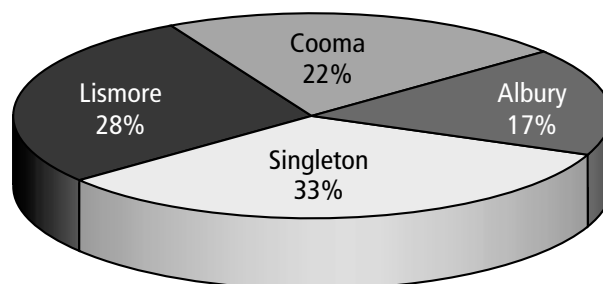
REPRESENTING DATA

Take care with the way you show data.

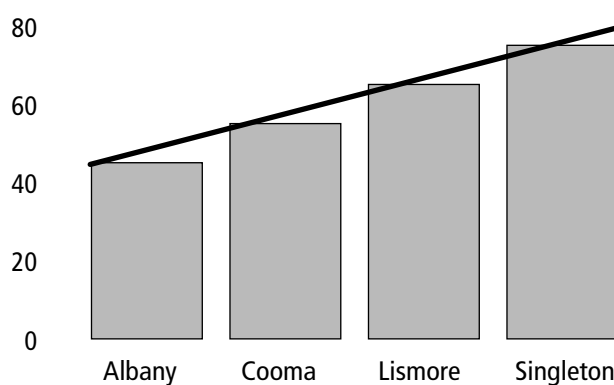
Graphs can be very useful as long as they don't distort results. Sometimes, fancy graphics (such as three dimensional histograms) are difficult to read.



Pie charts are a poor way of showing proportions, and are best avoided.



Take care also not to suggest trends when they don't exist:



Putting data into tables may also be helpful, but try to group the data in such a way that it deals with the issues of interest to the project group. In particular, look for interrelationships between data. Often, single variables will be less interesting than relationships between variables.

For example, suppose you collect data about:

- (a) people's teaching area, and
- (b) how advanced people are with adapting and introducing Training Packages

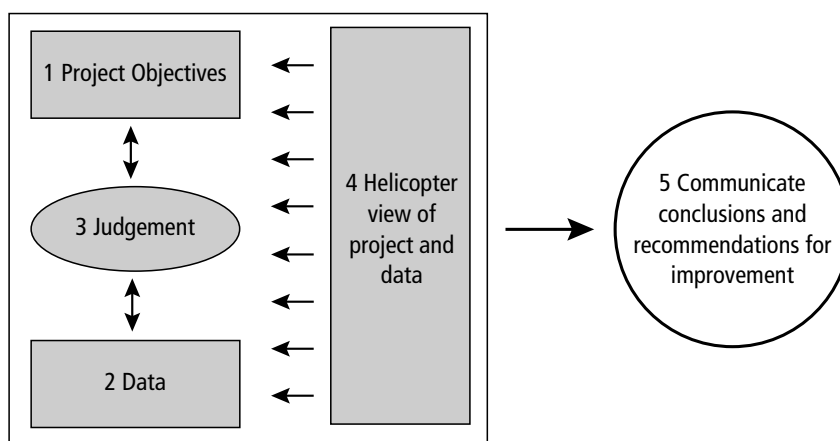
In this case, it is likely that (a) on its own is of little interest, and (b) is only partly interesting. The really interesting data comes when you combine (a) and (b), to show how use of Training Packages varies across the various teaching areas.

Learning during data analysis

There are a number of ways that you can encourage learning during the analysis of evaluation data:

- During and at the end of meetings, when evaluation data is being considered, ask questions like 'what have we learnt from this?' and 'how can we apply what we've learnt?'
- Encourage different perspectives and interpretations of the data
- Context is important – don't just ask 'is this effective?', but 'under what circumstances is this effective?' Take into account specifics such as the industry, particular events, relationships and politics, timing issues, and work pressures
- Involve the whole project group. You're more likely to get a range of views, and to come up with robust conclusions, if you involve other members of your project group in examining the data
- Play with the data. Just as children can use play with toys to learn about real dilemmas and issues, your project group can play with the evaluation data – that is, experiment, group it, compare parts of it, extrapolate from it, check out your hunches – to achieve valuable insights.
- Draw on your feelings as well as your intellect. People's words are only part of the data collected. It's OK to ask yourself and your group – 'What are the feelings here?' 'Are people angry? excited? bored? comfortable? nervous?'

Communicate conclusions and recommend improvements



You can report the findings of your evaluation in a variety of ways

- a presentation to colleagues, using overhead transparencies and handouts
- an article in a VET magazine
- a report to a government agency, justifying the way funds have been used
- an outline of accomplishments that is forwarded to participating companies
- completion of a proforma dealing with what was accomplished
- a summary report posted on a website
- a case study included in a volume about workbased learning

Needless to say, conclusions are not only communicated at project completion, but periodically through the life of the project as well. Your communication effort should not only be looking backwards ('we did X and achieved Y'), but forward looking as well.

The forward component of the evaluation report typically deals with areas such as:

Outcomes

'One of the difficulties we faced was ... It is therefore urgent that this area is addressed by ...'

The project group

'Our group agreed that a better way to manage this phase of the project would be to ...'

Administration and support of projects

'This aspect of project support didn't work for us, both because of our location, and because of ... In future, we recommend that ...'

PRESENTING FINDINGS TO COLLEAGUES

In some initiatives such as Reframing the Future, there are opportunities to present your interim findings to colleagues. These presentations are not time fillers, but opportunities to learn, as well as being a valuable contribution to the learning of others in your audience.

Here are some suggestions for preparing for these presentations:

- Suggestion 1** Use PowerPoint or similar software for overhead transparencies. If you don't know how to use PowerPoint, this is an ideal opportunity to learn.
- Suggestion 2** The saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' applies very much to using overhead transparencies. Don't cram lots of words on each overhead. For example, don't have more than 5 items in a list of brief dot points. Stick to at least 14 pt font, and use diagrams and graphs where appropriate.
- Suggestion 3** Keep presentation short – perhaps 10 minutes formal presentation time, and another 5 minutes for discussion. This is only enough time to show up to 5 overheads, and you should rehearse your presentation beforehand so you don't go over time.
- Suggestion 4** If your group is well into the project, there may not be time to discuss every aspect of what you have done. Try to concentrate on interesting issues, lessons, and challenges that those in the audience will be able to relate to. Aim for a high professional standard of presentation. This should be clear, well timed and organised, and challenging for listeners. Taking the trouble to develop a good presentation shows your concern and respect for the learning time of others.

PRESENTING A FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Here are some of the issues that should be covered in a formal report on a workbased learning project in the VET sector:

The general nature of the project

Typically, this section will include:

- an overview of the context in which the project occurred
- a summary of the factors which made the project necessary
- an outline of the project objectives
- what you actually did and achieved

Draw attention to any focus shifts, including outcomes that you were unable to complete. Mention any activities which will continue on after project funding ceases.

Evidence of staff development for project team members

Summarise any evidence that people acquired new skills and knowledge as a result of your project. In other words, try to answer the questions: 'What did project team members learn (what new knowledge? what new skills?) How do you know?' To answer these questions, you might cite a range of both quantitative and qualitative data, of the kinds outlined in this booklet.

Evidence of staff development for other people

As for the previous section, but this time focus on others who may have benefited from your project – people in the industry, in other agencies or Institutes, people who will be using Training Packages, etc. Where possible, go beyond general statements (such as 'Industry has increased its understanding of the training area') to specific evidence of achievements.

Examples of any worthwhile products that emerged from your project

Briefly describe any products that emerged from your project. Examples of 'products' include a revised or validated set of training materials; a staff development kit; a video; a website; or a set of assessment procedures. What evidence do you have that the products you produced were a valuable contribution to vocational education and training in your area?

 Ways of improving support for project groups

This section of the report is an opportunity to reflect on the initiative as a whole – how well was it administered? how well were project groups supported? was networking used to good advantage?

Appendix:

Some skill and knowledge changes

1 SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE RELATING TO NATIONAL TRAINING FRAMEWORK

- I feel very up-to-date in my knowledge of National Training developments and future directions (eg Training Packages; new apprenticeships; etc)
- I understand how all the different parts of the National Training Framework fit together
- When I listen to, or read, details of how the National Training Framework operates, I understand most of the jargon and acronyms

2 LEARNING AND INFLUENCING SKILLS

- I am able to apply workbased learning approaches when I work with other groups
- I am committed to using workbased learning approaches where applicable in the VET related activities that I'm involved in
- I feel able to influence the success of initiatives like Training Packages and new apprenticeships within my areas of expertise

3 INFORMATION ACCESS SKILLS

- I can quickly locate and get copies of information from the Internet
- I can use Internet features such as 'links' and 'bookmarks'
- I have a good network of people from whom I can get information about National Training Framework developments
- If something comes up about training approaches for VET, I have a good idea where to go to find out more
- I am confident at using email, including features such as 'attaching documents' and 'sending replies'
- I sometimes participate in dialogues via the Internet

4 INFORMATION DISSEMINATION SKILLS

- I have helped a number of other people get a better understanding of what is happening on the National Training scene
- I feel well equipped to help others understand the National Training Framework and how it applies in specific areas
- I can speak clearly and confidently to my colleagues/clients about the benefits of structured training initiatives

5 GENERAL PROJECT WORK SKILLS

- I am confident of my ability to work with a group of others on a VET project
- I feel well equipped to provide verbal and written reports about the progress of a VET project.

Notes

Notes

Reframing the Future contact details:

Reframing the Future

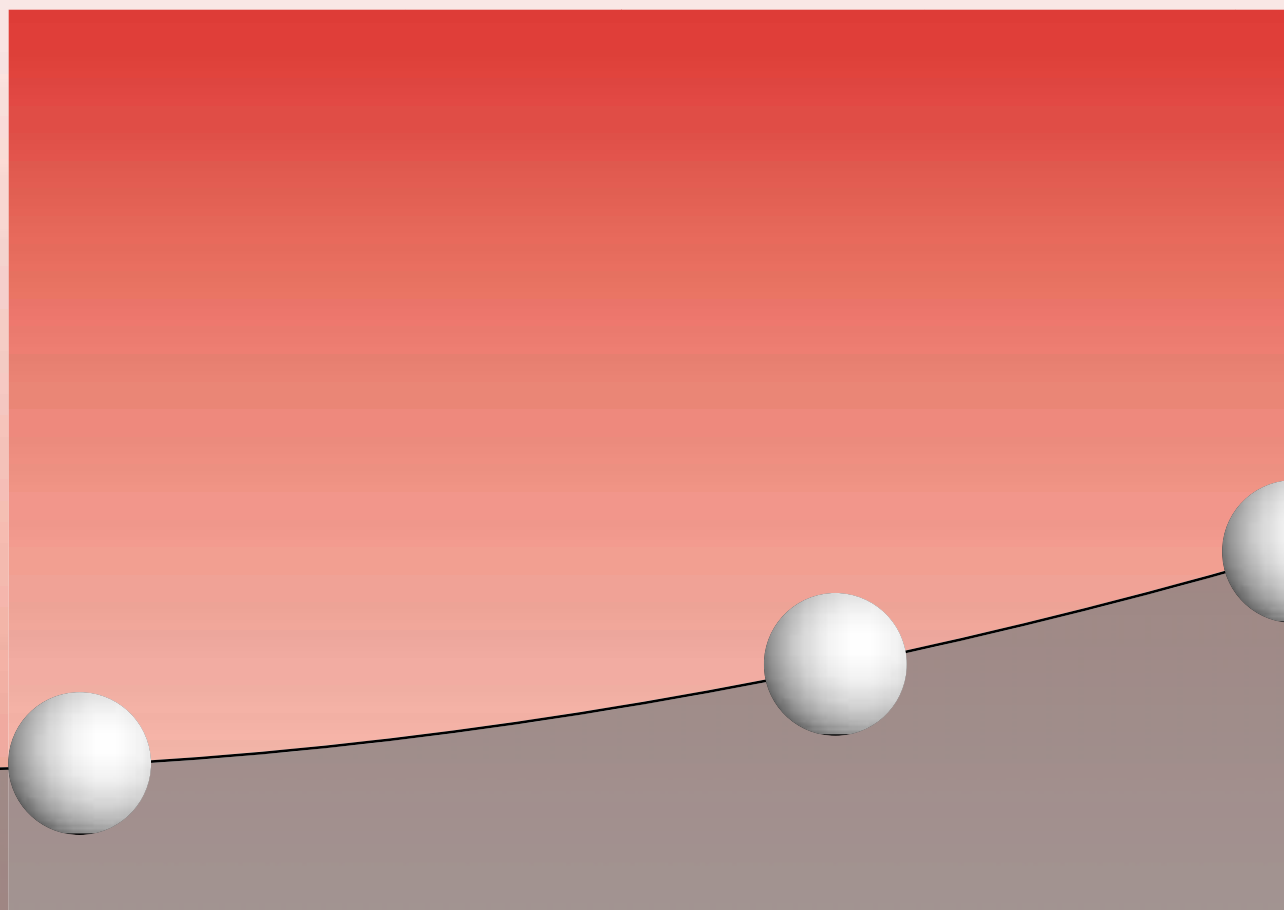
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Evaluation resources are available from Reframing the Future website

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