Learning Agenda

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"The more extensive a man's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his power of knowing what to do."

Benjamin Disraeli, 1804 – 1881, British Prime Minister

Session Objectives

Establish what learning and learning agenda is

Discuss the various components and their characteristics

Develop organization learning agendas and action plans

Learning

- Learning is the process of **creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge** within a community to enhance the efficiency of both individual members and the community as a whole in the overall quest to **contribute to positive development outcomes**

Why is a learning agenda so important?

- Do you board a plane before deciding where to go?

Learning Agenda

- A learning agenda is a **set of questions**, assembled by an organization or team, that identifies **what needs to be learned before or during a project.**

- A learning agenda is a **strategic document** which helps organizations plan for evidence-building activities and can lead to organizational learning.

- It is a useful coordination tool for **identifying knowledge gaps** and answering a range of priority questions within the context of the overall learning goal

A learning agenda can help you:

- **Test and explore assumptions and hypotheses** throughout implementation and stay open to the possibility that your assumptions and hypotheses are not accurate;

- **Fill knowledge gaps** that remain during implementation start-up;

- **Make more informed decisions** and support making your work more effective and efficient.

Benefits of a learning Agenda

- A learning agenda can be a useful **coordination tool** for identifying knowledge gaps and answer a range of priority questions within budget and policy timeframes.

- Foster a **culture of learning and continuous improvement:** Learning agenda development and implementation includes frequent internal and possibly external stakeholder engagement.

- Learning agendas can **reinforce strategy and policy.**

Learning Agenda Components

- While there continues to be varied and nuanced language around learning agendas with terms such as "evidence-building roadmaps" and "learning projects", almost all these efforts have a number of commonalities in the process.

- Learning Agendas normally comprise **three main components: learning questions, learning activities and learning products.**

Learning Goal

- Your learning goal answers the question – **why?** **Why this project?**

- The **learning goal** refers to the **desired result** that your project aims to achieve.

Learning Question

"The usefulness of the knowledge we acquire and the effectiveness of the actions we take depend on the **quality of the questions we ask**."

• Eric Vogt

What is a Learning Question?

- These are questions that, when answered, have the biggest impact on **your agency's functioning and performance**.

- The number of questions that meet the criteria of **"biggest impact"** is up to your agency, and the number of questions may be influenced by agency size or capacity

Learning Questions Checklist

- Is the question **clear?**

- Is the question **focused?** Will the question, when answered, help us be more effective?

- Does the question test/explore our theory of change, build/explore our evidence base, and/or help us be more responsive to changes in context?

FOCUSED
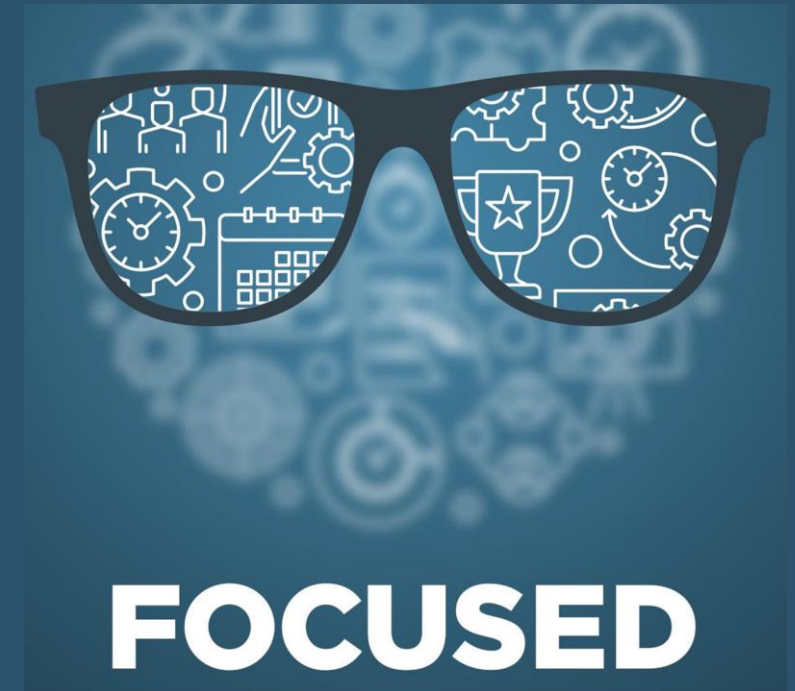
Learning Questions Checklist

- Has the question not yet been answered? (Always check first if your question has already been answered.)

- Does the question have clear **use/applicability** in our work?

- Does the question **inform programmatic decisions?**

- Will possible answers to the question help us identify **specific actions** that we should take or avoid?

Learning Questions Checklist

FEASIBLE

- Is the question **realistic** and **possible to answer?**

- Do the **anticipated benefits** of answering the question outweigh the effort required?

- Is it possible to answer the question in a **timely manner** so that answers inform our decision-making and management processes

FEASIBLE

Something that is possible! Feasible is possible and possible is feasible.

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Learning Questions Checklist

INNOVATIVE & INCLUSIVE

- Is the question likely to generate **fresh and innovative thinking?**

- Does the question leave room for that which we did not think to ask?

- Has the question been developed with or reviewed by **those who will be answering it?**

Learning Questions Checklist

SPECIFIC

- Useful learning agenda questions do not need to be narrow in scope. However, a question may be too broad to be answerable.

- **Overarching question:** "How can we reduce public nuisances?" This question could be included in a learning agenda, but it does not specify which of the many types of nuisances will be the focus for learning.

What types of questions go into a learning agenda?

- **Specific and answerable** questions can vary in specificity.

- Examples include:

  - Questions about multiple programs across organizations.

  - Questions focusing on the efficacy of a single new program.

  - Questions examining elements within the new program.

- **Evidence-building activities** can be described to answer each question.

- Has the policy setting a $300 fine for littering led to an increase or decrease in littering in the last 10 years?

- Does new signage emphasizing pride in our public places reduce the incidence of littering?

- Which message on the new signage, among the three versions, is most effective in encouraging people not to litter?

Learning Activities

- These are priority efforts which respond directly to the learning questions that have been agreed upon.

- It answers the questions – ***Does this contribute to the big picture? If so, how? Could this be replaced with something else? Is there a more cost-effective way of achieving the same result? (i.e. community's overall goal)***

Learning Product

- These are **learning outcomes** in formats that can be used and utilized by others.

- It is the **end product** of the community's specific activity or activities.

- The learning product(s) seeks to **build knowledge** around the community's learning questions which contributes to the attainment of the overall goal

- It answers the questions – what is the evidence we are generating that contributes to achieving our learning goal.

Learning Agenda & KM

- **Knowledge Management** takes the output from the community's learning (newly created or updated knowledge), *manages it and ensures that there is an appropriate environment to perpetuate the sustained generation and management of the knowledge capital.*

- Another way to view this relationship is that **Organizational learning** is the goal of Knowledge Management (William King, 2009)

If I have seen further than others,
it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.

Isaac Newton

Learning

Learning without reflection is a waste. Reflection without learning is dangerous.

Quote by Confucius

Let's reflect and create our learning agenda

Goals

Learning Questions

Learning activities

Learning Products

Dissemination