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Significant policy improvement (SPI)

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In a nutshell

SPI is a new technique that is a mash-up of two different tools:

- Outcome harvesting
- Most Significant Change Technique (MSC)

It is specifically designed for capturing, measuring and reporting on *emergent* instances of policy improvement and understand your *contribution* to this.

Definitions

Significant: means that the result will make or has potential to make a substantial difference, it should be a **newsworthy** result. (SPI provides a rubric for scoring significance).

Instance: means a specific result, it should be distinguishable from other instances that have been already reported.

Policy change: infers that the policy in question is improved in some manner, or new policy taken up that is in alignment with your agenda.

Context of tool development

- Tool was developed for the Australian Indonesian aid program

- ... a need to produce a numerical target – for an ambitious program with intangible and emergent outcomes

- .. Where there had been a shift from focusing on service delivery (and having things to count!) to policy/systems influence

- ,,, systemic changes can take years to achieve and cannot be easily predicted.

- ,,, began using outcome harvesting, but needed to modify it in order to **count and verify** instances of significant policy change.

Harvest	• Identify candidate systemic impacts
Narrate	• Collect evidence of the instance and its significance • Collect evidence and analysis how/if your program contributed to this instance
Verify	• Submit all narratives to a verification panel to assess their significance and count up the instances were deemed significance
Cross-case analysis	• Conduct cross-case analysis if desired
Communicate	• Share significant instances • Count and summarise number operating at portfolio level

Before you start – check the scope and purpose

- Who are the key audience of the SPIs?

- What will the SPI narratives be used for?

- How will it fit in with the rest of your measurement system?

- Is it the right tool for you?

Case study

- Audience: In the Indonesia example the audience was the executives of the Department.
- Purpose was to provide a suitable target for the annual performance reporting system – as well as to illustrate key achievements

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1. Harvest

Finding candidate systemic impacts

SPI requires some process for tracking/knowing about potentially significant changes in policy that you have influenced – there are different ways to do this:

- Using outcomes harvesting methodology – involves a comprehensive study using participatory methodology

- Using an impact log eg. impact@clearhorizon.com

- Using an "eyes and ears" approach.

SPI does not require a full outcomes harvest – it can work with a simple "eyes and ears" approach.

Case study

- Used eyes and ears
- Came from implementing partners who all had their own systems for collection

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Narrate

The narrative

1) Summary Statement

2) A description of the impact

3) The significance of the impact (and what more is needed)

4) The contribution of your agency

5) Annex – evidence -- method and some details

Summary statement

This is a one-paragraph long version of all the rest of the narrative.

- The impact, the significance, the contribution.

It must be super clear, short and directly related to the rest of the narrative

Example narrative

- Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Justice support contributed to a new Disability Law through supporting a network of DPOs in advocacy, the drafting of the Law and providing core funding.

1. Description of the impact

- Is about the instance of policy and/or systems improvement itself

- Could include a wide range of different types of results that imply policy improvement.

- Needs to have actually happened

- Evidence-based

- It pitched beyond the direct influence of your organisation – is not necessarily attributa*ble*

Case study

- In March 2016, Indonesia's parliament passed a revised Disability Law - creating a legal basis for people with disability to realise their rights equitable and fairly. This law requires public and private sector to provide employment opportunities for people with disability

2) The significance of the outcome

Explains why this change is important eg:

- **Constraints,** how it addresses a bottleneck/problem
- **Reach,** how many women/men could potentially benefit if this policy is implemented
- **leverage,** how much of the government spend could this policy change influence.
- **Alignment to Goals:** how it has potential to make a difference to outcomes and goals of your organisation or mission.

Case study

- Nearly 25% of people with disabilities live in extreme poverty. If implemented effectively, the Law will have an impact on poverty reduction through improving access to services and employment opportunities for people with disabilities

3) The contribution of your agency

- This is where you draw the link between your investment eg outputs, and the outcome described in section 1.
- The most technical part of the narrative – as you need to make a case for contribution and provide evidence of that

- Can involve conducting interviews and participatory exercises with a variety of stakeholders, drawing on grey/published literature and carrying out analysis on the raw data

Making a case for contribution

- Note who/what else was also contributing eg other agencies

- Examine alternative plausible explanations for the outcomes and try to rule them out.

- Ideally you apply a defensible methodology to determine contribution. Examples of methods include:
  - Contribution analysis (Mayne) – based around a results chain
  - RAPID workshop technique (ODI - Jones, 2011, pp 6) – based around a workshop process examining chronology and influence
  - Process tracing
  - General elimination m

Case study

DFAT provided support at multiple stages of the policy cycle, from early advocacy, to the drafting of the revised law and the process towards final endorsement. Throughout the process, DAFT provided core funding to key DPOs to strengthen their organisational and advocacy skills. No other donor was involved. It is therefore plausible to assume that that DFAT contributed to a major degree. (Evidence is from M&E and staff reports)

Verification process

A panel of people will read each narrative and use a set of criteria to agree whether these narratives should be counted as an instance because they are:

- Significant/ newsworthy & sufficiently evidence-based

- Sufficient contribution & sufficiently – evidence based account for contribution

Case study

- A panel of five people reviewed the narratives and scored them for both significance and contribution.

Ranking the narratives

High -- transformational change

- Highly ranked narratives constitute transformation change that has huge impacts for your beneficiary group

Medium/High -- A solid and important change

- High for significance + medium for contribution OR
- Medium for significance + high attribution to your agency

Medium – an important step

- Medium for significance + medium for attribution to your agency

Low

- Low for either significance or contribution.

Lower ranked outcomes are placed on a watch-list for potential reporting for other communication purposes.

Case study

- Out of about 20 submissions, 15 passed as significant and 5 as highly significant

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Reporting and targets

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The cross-case analysis

Report

At a portfolio level - can target the likely number of instances

Don't actually predict which will bear fruit.

Works well for a large program spinning off a lot of emergent changes. NB performance bonus payments.

Case study

- The Indonesia program contributed to 15 significant policy improvements, of these five were rated as being highly significant.

Cross-case analysis

Cross-case analysis can help organisations learn which types of interventions are most likely to lead to significant change.

One such method is QCA – quantitative qualitative analysis. This requires:

- A outcome rating score✓

- an agreed set of attributes to be collected alongside the narratives.

Value of Significant Policy Improvement tool

- Value of the evidence-based narratives themselves far outstrip the quantitative target!

- Panel can engage executives -- understanding program + providing views on strategic alignment

- Narratives can be used to communicate at a whole range of different levels – verification adds credibility.

Quantification and economic analysis?

Quantification can happen at several levels:

At a portfolio level:

- A crude count of number of significant instances of policy/systems change

Within the narrative :

- The amount of spending that has been leveraged 'leverage ratio'

- The potential reach of the policy change– eg the number of women/ men who could potentially benefit

- Could be taken further - form of economic analysis of potential return

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Resources

Outcome harvesting:
http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting

Process tracing:
http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/processtracing

MSC guide: Clear Horizon.com.au