

Evaluating digital transformation projects

What this means

Those working on short-term pilot projects that result in the development of a scalable digital product or service often lack the time to see the direct impact of their work within the course of the funding period. This does not mean that the outcomes of the project should not or cannot be measured. On the contrary, it makes it even more important to monitor and evaluate the work, documenting financial, non-financial and projected outcomes in order to learn during the course of the project development. In addition, this can provide valuable evidence to develop the project further, gaining the confidence of funders and senior staff.

What we've learnt

The challenge of monitoring

Several projects found monitoring their outcomes challenging and most struggled to capture the benefits realised within the funded period. For some this was due to not having a clear baseline to compare outcomes to. Others had difficulty understanding the benefit of documenting potential learning, even if their project did not meet its original aims. Others found collecting relevant data quite hard, especially those which relied on multiple parties and community groups to submit information.

There is as much to be learnt from projects that 'fail'

While some projects were not able to realise their initial project aims, due to challenges that were insurmountable during the project timeframe, this is an excellent opportunity to learn how to avoid this issue in future. Equally, sharing these lessons can be of great benefit for other projects seeking similar outcomes, and to evidence the need for support from senior colleagues, elected members and other stakeholders.

User views count as data

Some projects were better than others at understanding how projects did (or could) impact service users and staff. Qualitative information can be powerful in determining the potential impacts of an intervention, especially where quantitative outputs are difficult to define.

Essex interviewed service users twice during the pilot to understand the change in their views of the video call technology. In **Norfolk** the project leads surveyed staff, service users and organisations receiving referrals. Most other projects did little or no user engagement.

Unexpected outcomes are just as important as anticipated ones

Often projects are focused on evidencing what they set out to achieve, but projects, especially in the development stage, naturally change and occasionally so does the need case. Additionally, sometimes projects have important unexpected outcomes (good and bad) that are important to capture but require working flexibly and self reflectively to do so successfully. For example, in **Bracknell Forest**, through speaking to users of the technology they uncovered a more appropriate use-case than the one originally defined.

Recommendations

- Design an evaluation plan that will set out how you measure project outcomes. This can be flexible and change as the project unfolds.
- Set a clear benchmark to compare findings against and to track the journey of the project.
- Document learning throughout the project – even if the learning comes from failures.
- Capture both quantitative and qualitative data about the project, outcomes and impacts.
- Engage those required for capturing data from an early stage in the project and ensure that they understand why the data collected is not only valuable to the project but also to them. For example, where Bracknell Forest struggled to engage community groups to track where recommendations were coming from, they may have failed to understand that they could benefit from the data to develop their own service recruitment strategies.