How can the impact of cultural development work in local government be measured? Towards more effective planning and evaluation strategies

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Abstract

The field of cultural development in local government is relatively new, with most councils only having dedicated staff or teams within the last ten to fifteen years. Challenges are associated with that newness in the areas of planning, goal setting and formal evaluation of achievements in relation to goals. How can the best decisions be made about what is needed? How can the outcomes of that work be evaluated? What should be measured and how? This paper explores these challenges and presents some solutions. Program Logic is introduced as a methodology for effective planning and evaluation of cultural development work in local government. The need for both performance and outcome evaluation of cultural development work is discussed, as are the levels of evaluation required; considering the contribution of individual workers, departments, whole of council and the overall community outcomes. Factors beyond the influence of local government, which impact the outcomes of arts initiatives, are also considered in arguing that more sophisticated evaluation processes are required.

Keywords: cultural development, local government, monitoring, evaluation, Program Logic, arts indicators.

Introduction

The field of cultural development within local government in Australia is relatively new, with many councils only establishing dedicated teams within the last ten to fifteen years.[1] Cultural planning in local government is, therefore, a relatively recent practice, corresponding with the increasing scope of local government responsibility for provisions of services and opportunities for its citizens beyond the traditional 'roads, rates and rubbish'. Some councils have only developed and implemented one or two

versions of an arts or 'cultural' plan. There are as yet no specific training courses in cultural development for local or other forms of government and many workers come to this field with little specialised training. While these staff often bring valuable expertise in related disciplines— including arts practice, event management, community development, museum and curatorial studies and arts entrepreneurship— the variations in their professional backgrounds leads to many challenges, including a lack of shared values and practices. This is unlike other sectors of local government—such as urban planning—where council staff mostly have sector- or context-specific training, leading to more easily agreed values, standards and frames of reference.

At the same time, the fields of evaluation and indicators related to culture and the arts are also emerging; with almost all of the literature produced over the same ten to fifteen year period. The lack of common backgrounds and the newness of work on evaluation create challenges for the establishment of planning, evaluation and indicator frameworks for cultural development in local government. Without a set of shared values from which the field operates, it is very difficult to establish a universal planning framework that has a cogent theory of the link between goals, activities and outcomes; an evaluation framework that can measure the outcomes of activities and an appropriate set of indicators that can allow comparison between different Local Government Areas and an evaluation of work over time.

This paper proposes some solutions to these challenges. Suggestions for more effective cultural development planning are made, along with information about evaluation in the local government context, considering both performance and outcome evaluation. The importance of evidence-based decision-making is discussed, as is the value of data in decision-making. The contribution that local governments can make to communities is presented within a framework that considers a range of other influences; state and federal government, civil society, individual and global factors. Program Logic is recommended as a useful planning and evaluation methodology for cultural development in local government in Australia. Some Program Logic tools, suitable for use by cultural development practitioners, are presented. Although the focus in the present paper is on local government, the proposed evaluation techniques can be applied to other forms of local development and planning.

Terminology

Of course, it is important to be clear about terms being used. In this paper, 'arts' is defined as any form of visual, performing, media, literary or interdisciplinary arts, made by or for any members of any community at any level of skill and intention. There are many, and contested, definitions of the word 'culture'. Cultural researcher John Holden, for example, defines culture as, 'the arts, museums, libraries and heritage that receive public

funding'.[2] This definition corresponds with the major concerns of arts bodies of state and national governments in Australia and in some countries internationally, particularly England. In the wider government context, and also in local government in Australia, the terms 'arts' and 'culture' are often used interchangeably.

Australian cultural analyst Jon Hawkes—in his seminal work the *Fourth pillar of sustainability*[3] – discusses the many meanings of the word *culture* and has offered a much broader definition. For Hawkes, culture is

> … the social production and transmission of identities, knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and understanding; as well as, the way of life, including customs, codes and manners, dress, cuisine, language, arts, technology, religion and rituals; norms and regulations of behaviour, traditions and institutions. Therefore, culture is both the medium and the message–the inherent values, means and the results of social expression.[4]

This paper applies Hawkes' broad definition of culture—which includes the arts as one dimension—to the work that cultural development workers in local government are primarily concerned with. However, the terminology used by other authors and practitioners is respected, even when the definitions used contradict this perspective. Local government departments, for example, are often named 'Arts and Culture', when, in fact, they are primarily concerned with the arts, and the other aspects of culture— particularly cultural diversity, sport and religion—are the responsibility of different areas.

It should also be noted that a framework of arts indicators for local government is being developed by the organisation I work for, the Cultural Development Network. This framework is currently being discussed by councils across several Australian states and will be trialled in some areas before a recommended framework is presented publicly. For this reason, indicators will not be discussed in detail in this paper and those interested should refer to another paper I have written.[5]

Monitoring, evaluation and indicators

Over the last decade there have been significant developments in evaluation of arts practice, including within the work of local government. Currently, most Arts and Culture departments undertake some kind of monitoring process, checking regularly that activities outlined in council plans are being implemented as intended. Often they also undertake performance evaluation of their own work, examining their inputs and outputs against the goals of their Arts or Cultural plans. At the end of a period of activity or the life of the plan—often three to five years—a process of reflection or evaluation about progress towards goals is undertaken. Did we do what we set out to do? Did we reach our targets and our goals? This is the easiest kind of evaluation, where measurement of what was expended or done (inputs) and what happened (outputs**)** is made. However, for this level of evaluation

to be achieved, plans need to have targets named and quantified. How much of what was planned occurred, by when, to or with whom, and for what purpose? Rigorous measures of success can only be achieved if quantifiable and time-related targets are applied.

In an effective planning process, the following well accepted SMART planning principles are applied. According to this, program plans and goals need to be:

Specific

- Well defined
- Clear to anyone who has a basic knowledge of the project

Measurable

- Know if the goal is obtainable and how far away completion is
- Know when it has been achieved

Agreed upon

- Agreement with all the stakeholders what the goals should be

Realistic

- Within the availability of resources, knowledge and time

Time based

- Enough time to achieve the goal
- Not too much time, which can affect project performance .[6]

It is important to draw a distinction between 'monitoring', 'evaluation' and 'indicators' as follows:

- **Monitoring** is on ongoing process of collecting data and watching over project progress, primarily focused on activities and outputs.
- **Evaluation** is a systematic analytical assessment addressing important aspects of a program or policy and its value, and seeking reliability and usability of findings. Evaluation is carried out to improve decision making by providing better information. The purpose is not to replace judgements or politics in decision making but to make them more informed, taking into account past experiences.
- **Indicators** are measures used to determine amount of change.

It is also important to be clear about what we mean by 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'outcomes' in relation to local government. In this context *inputs* are the resources used to produce outputs; *outputs* are the goods or services (usually the latter) that government agencies provide for citizens, while *outcomes* are the effects on society of outputs from governmental entities.[7]

A particular form of evaluation is 'outcome evaluation', in which the outcome of an activity on an intended community is considered. This type

of evaluation asks, how is the community changed as a result of the activity? Outcome evaluation requires a fully thought-out and logical relationship between actions and goals, and a clear understanding of causal relationships between these. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office specifies that performance measures for local government need to include both 'technical efficiency'—including measures of inputs, process and outputs—and also 'outcome effectiveness', which includes outcome measures. In commenting on this, the office notes that, 'the output/outcomes model lends itself readily to measures for time, cost, quantity and quality of services provision … Outcomes are harder to measure … this is not a reason to ignore outcomes or not attempt to define measures for outcomes'.[8]

Outcome evaluation occurs less frequently within the cultural development sector, because, as noted by the Auditor-General and confirmed by local government staff [9], outcomes of arts activity are often considered more difficult to measure. Consequently, the task of evaluation can be seen as too onerous. However, as the Community Indicators Victoria project advises, councils must focus attention on outcomes for communities rather than on the means to those outcomes: 'The tool used to deliver improvement— whether services, programs, capital projects, advocacy, grant funding etc—is far less relevant than the outcome, or real difference, experienced by the community'.[10]

For this reason, evaluating only what has been done—that is, performance evaluation—rather than the outcome this has had for the targeted community, is not enough.

To illustrate the difference between performance and outcome evaluation, let us consider a particular scenario. In this scenario, the staff in an arts department of a particular council want to increase the participation of people from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds in community cultural activities. The arts staff decide on strategies to address this goal; the removal of entry fees to the art gallery and a new question in grants for the community gallery about applicants' strategies for including people from CALD communities. The team achieves its performance goals; they remove the gallery's entry fee, thus making events ostensibly financially accessible to the target group, and change funding guidelines so that applicants must describe strategies for inclusion of people from CALD communities and report implementation of these in acquittals. However, these strategies may not actually work if people from CALD communities do not respond, or if they do not address the barriers experienced by people from CALD communities in arts participation. The strategy may not make any difference to the original problem. If this were the case, arts staff would need to rethink their ideas and develop new strategies that are more likely to lead to desired outcomes. A completely different approach may be needed; perhaps arts programming that is more relevant to local CALD communities or the establishment of a new venue in a different area.

Evidence-based decision-making

To choose effective strategies, councils should research relevant literature to inform their planning decisions. Plans that use evidence as a basis for decision-making are much more likely to be effective than those made for other reasons, such as business as usual, staff preferences or political objectives. Evidence-based decision-making and reflective practice is increasingly common in other areas of local government and other fields, including health[11], education[12] and international development.[13] As yet this is not a well-established practice within the cultural development field.

In the scenario mentioned above, evidence-based decision-making would have required research about strategies that have previously been effective in increasing gallery attendance of people from CALD communities. Some of the literature about venue entry fees indicates that overall attendance numbers do increase when fees are reduced, but the demographics of audiences often does not change.[14] Other barriers are at least as significant as price, to people from CALD communities, and, therefore, changing the price will not necessarily remove such barriers. Research of the literature would have alerted council that removing entry fees to the gallery was not likely to have a strong impact on the identified issue, and therefore it may not be a very good investment, given the amount of revenue likely to be lost. Research on the impact of changes in community group's attitudes to participation of people from diverse communities might have encouraged the council to think of a different strategy.

A recent research project instigated by the Victorian Government's Office of Disability, and undertaken by the Cultural Development Network[15], sought to encourage the use of evidence in strategies for increasing participation in the arts for people with a disability. A search of the relevant literature suggested that while financial barriers are significant, as are access barriers (physical and interpretive), the aspect of people's experience that most restricts their participation in the arts is the attitude of arts providers towards people with a disability. This finding indicates that a strategy likely to improve participation in the arts for people with a disability is disability awareness training of arts providers, especially if the training is undertaken by all staff involved, including artist leaders and teachers, venue staff and management. However, for such disability awareness training to have a positive outcome, it must effectively change behaviour and attitudes towards people with a disability to those more conducive of arts participation. To prove its effectiveness, a training program would need to be able to demonstrate that participants generally had a different view of people with a disability and possibilities for changes they could implement in their own workplace, after the training. Implementation of effective training should result in policies, programs and venues that are more accessible and, even better, they could ensure that the relevant staff are proactive about participation by people with a disability.

Using data in planning and evaluation

The extent and quality of data used in planning and evaluation is important. To determine whether strategies have been effective, it is important to know what the situation was before their implementation (pre-test) and afterwards (post-test**).** If it were responding to the issues raised in the arts and disability research project discussed above, a council might want to know how many people with disabilities currently participate in the arts. What data could be found about this in the municipality? How does this figure compare with rates of arts participation of others in the community? If new strategies are implemented, how could it be determined that change has occurred? If there is change, has this been in the direction intended (increased participation)? If so, how could it be determined if this is a result of anything council has done rather than being due to other factors?

Furthermore, an additional level of evaluation could be undertaken by those wishing to find out more about the outcomes of arts programs for participants with a disability. For example, how are people's lives changed as a result of their access to arts opportunities? Is their quality of life enhanced? Do they feel happier, more socially included or healthier? Does their participation lead to new recreational, educational or employment opportunities?

There is a growing emphasis on the use of data in decision-making for government and non-government organisations all around the world. This change is promoted and supported by organisations such as the US-based Root Cause which has developed a suite of tools to assist those wishing to better understand the outcomes of their work.[16] This use of data is also changing within the cultural development sector in Australia, as recent studies by the state government authority Arts Victoria, and statewide network Regional Arts Victoria, attest.

A joint project between the Victorian Department Planning and Community Development (DPCD and Arts Victoria examined the impacts of the funding initiative Arts Development for Communities and Arts Residencies.[17] Data was collected through focus groups with artists, community participants and partner organisations. Findings indicated a range of positive outcomes of funded projects such as community strengthening through engagement of hard-to-reach populations including youth, ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Cultural outcomes included creative opportunities for the exploration of community issues and aspirations and the creation of new and diverse artistic work and cultural experiences.

Similarly, Regional Arts Victoria instigated an evaluation of the Regional Arts Development Officer Scheme, in which research was conducted by Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith from RMIT University.[18] A series of qualitative interviews with RAV staff, RADOs and partner organisation representatives, and quantitative information about the scheme provided

the data on which the evaluation was based. Findings indicated that the program was effective in a number of ways; participating regions were more successful in obtaining arts funding, government arts initiatives were better co-ordinated, regional networks were stronger, links to statewide networks and resources were better and there was new thinking about the strategic importance of investment in local arts development.

Unlike other areas in local or state government, cultural development departments at the local government level often do not have staff with expertise or responsibility for research and evaluation. However, even with modest resources and expertise, it is possible to undertake informative evaluation. Some kind of evaluation should be a component of every activity, in order to understand impacts of the work and inform future decisions.

To illustrate this, let us consider a scenario in which a council seeks to raise community awareness of local Indigenous culture by holding an event during the NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration) Week. In the first place, relevant staff could consult relevant literature and reflect on previous experience about the types of events that have been successful in contributing to community awareness about Indigenous culture. Then, once an event has been planned and implemented it would be easy to conduct a simple survey of participants, using just two questions and a Likert scale for subsequent analysis, as follows:

Survey questions

How much did you know about local Indigenous culture BEFORE you attended this event?

Nothing at all	Not much	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

How much did you know about local Indigenous culture AFTER you attended this event?

Nothing at all	Not much	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

Responses to this simple survey could provide much useful information to council. For example, it would reveal whether or not the event reached people who did not have previous knowledge or awareness of Indigenous culture, and whether or not the event offered a new perspective, both for those who had and did not have previous awareness. If it were discovered

that only people who were already well aware of Indigenous culture attended the NAIDOC Week event, then efforts would need to be made to attract people who were not already aware, to future events. If audience members did not report new awareness as a result of their attendance, then the content or presentation style of the event would need to be reconsidered. Additional questions about aspects of the event that might have increased awareness would help to inform council to build on the experience. This would lead to the best results in terms of both effective community change and the most efficient use of council resources.

Why evaluate?

While there is progress towards data-based evaluation, a lack of information about the outcomes of arts initiatives still provides a challenge for the cultural development sector. For example, the absence of evaluative studies impacted the above-mentioned art and disability research project. While the burgeoning international interest in arts participation for people with a disability was evident—as the lengthy bibliography attests—many of the citations were of research projects that were working to identify barriers to participation. Others were based on statistical data about rates and types of participation. However, the majority were policy documents that recommended action, yet very few provided any real evidence regarding the effectiveness of the proposed action strategies. The absence of evidence-based studies means that recommendations for action could only be speculative.

As discussed above, undertaking evaluation is important for a council's own processes, to understand what has occurred, why and how, and whether resources have been well spent. However, evaluation can also be important for attracting other resources, especially when funding allocation is being made by decision-makers who use evidence-based research as a basis for their decisions. This is illustrated in the following example.

Prevention scientists at the University of Washington conducted a US-wide evaluation of programs for young people to determine their effectiveness in achieving particular positive outcomes.[19] Although a number of arts initiatives were originally included in the study, none made it through to the final list of recommended programs. The researchers found that arts program were being implemented all around the country, many with the ostensible goal of contributing to positive outcomes for young people, but only some were being evaluated. Of those that were evaluated, none were evaluated with sufficient methodological rigour for the researchers to determine whether or not they made any real difference. It was therefore considered not possible to undertake cost-benefit analyses of the arts programs to find out how much change in outcomes for young people was made per dollar spent on programs, in the way that it was for other, more rigorously evaluated, programs. This study was intended to assist funders and policy leaders make evidence-based decisions about programs that are

effective in achieving change for young people, and, sadly, none of the arts programs examined could be recommended.

Research findings of this nature may lead to a devaluing, or perhaps even defunding, of existing arts programs, and, possibly, reduced interest in future programs. At the same time, this challenge also points to opportunities. The research data from the US study did not necessarily indicate ineffectiveness of arts programs. Rather, it was the lack of evaluation or ineffective evaluation that led to the discounting of possible benefits of the arts programs. Therefore, the challenge is to produce evidence-based evaluation that will be considered to be rigorous by researchers from other fields of research. This suggests the need for improvement in both the amount and quality of arts program evaluation.

At the same time, the sector can learn from evaluation practices in other fields and so we turn to Program Logic, a planning methodology used increasingly in government and service delivery contexts for goal setting and evaluation of progress towards those goals.
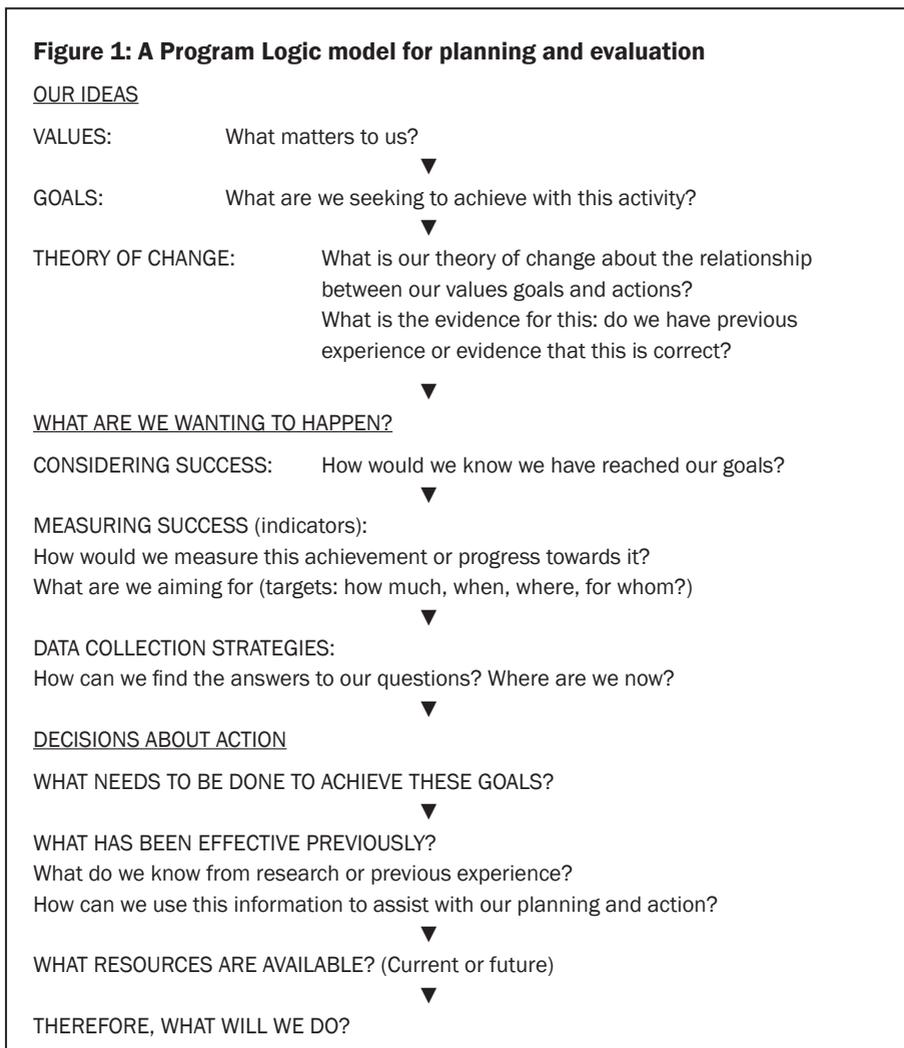
Program Logic approach to planning and evaluation in local government

The Program Logic approach helps create a shared understanding of program goals and methodology between stakeholders, relating activities to projected outcomes.[20] It demands systematic thinking and planning to better describe programs. Effective evaluation and program success rely on the fundamentals of clear stakeholder assumptions and expectations about how and why a program will address a particular issue, generate new possibilities, and make the most of valuable assets. The US-based Kellogg Foundation advocates the use of Program Logic because it can improve both planning and evaluation processes and allow for increased community participation;

> Developing and using logic models is an important step in building community capacity and strengthening community voice. The ability to identify outcomes and anticipate ways to measure them provides all program participants with a clear map of the road ahead. Because it is particularly amenable to visual depictions, program logic modelling can be a strong tool in communicating with diverse audiences — those who have varying world views and different levels of experience with program development and evaluation.[21]

A backwards planning process is used in Program Logic. The first step is not a decision about what action to take but rather a reflection on the bigger question of what is valued and what could be done to realise those values. The process moves incrementally backwards, from ideas (values, desired goals and theory of change about the relationship between proposed actions and goals), to what we are wanting to happen (conceptions and measures of success, targets: how many, how much, for whom, when and why, potential data collection strategies and an analysis of the current situation), then to

possibilities for action (what could be done, what has previously proved effective and available resources). It is only at the end of this exhaustive process that a decision is made as to what should be done. These steps are pictured below.

Figure 1: A Program Logic model for planning and evaluation

<u>OUR IDEAS</u>

VALUES: What matters to us?
▼
GOALS: What are we seeking to achieve with this activity?
▼
THEORY OF CHANGE: What is our theory of change about the relationship between our values goals and actions?
What is the evidence for this: do we have previous experience or evidence that this is correct?

▼

<u>WHAT ARE WE WANTING TO HAPPEN?</u>

CONSIDERING SUCCESS: How would we know we have reached our goals?
▼
MEASURING SUCCESS (indicators):
How would we measure this achievement or progress towards it?
What are we aiming for (targets: how much, when, where, for whom?)
▼
DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES:
How can we find the answers to our questions? Where are we now?
▼

<u>DECISIONS ABOUT ACTION</u>

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS?
▼
WHAT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE PREVIOUSLY?
What do we know from research or previous experience?
How can we use this information to assist with our planning and action?
▼
WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE? (Current or future)
▼
THEREFORE, WHAT WILL WE DO?

Within this broad planning and evaluation framework, program evaluation experts have developed some excellent tools to assist others to plan and evaluate their work more efficiently. Four of these suitable for use in cultural development contexts are introduced in the box below. All four are easy to use and they reduce the need for councils to create their own evaluation tools. All are available freely, downloadable from the internet.

Recommended evaluation tools

1. Logic Model Development Guide, Kellogg Foundation, USA[22]

This comprehensive tool provides clear advice and directions for the whole planning process, from conceptualisation, through to implementation, evaluation and dissemination of results.

2. Guide to Evaluation, Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Victoria[23]

This resource is ideal for councils and arts organisations that seek to evaluate their overall strategic processes and outcomes. It uses Program Logic to provide a very comprehensive explanation of evaluation processes, broken down into the following steps:

Thinking

- Decisions about the purpose of the evaluation
- Decisions about who the evaluation is aimed at
- Consideration of budget and timeline

Planning

- Definition of objectives
- Establishment of evaluation questions
- Identification of information required
- Identification or creation of data sources

Collecting data

- Collection of information needed
- Development of budget and timelines
- Consideration of ethical issues

Communicating

- Utilisation of findings

3. Guide to Evaluation, Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria[24]

This tool is less comprehensive than DPCD's, but more policy focussed and may therefore be more useful in a local government context.

4. Guide for Evaluating Community Arts and Community Well-Being, VicHealth[25]

This guide provides a logic model for the evaluation of community arts projects. It includes comprehensive detail, in worksheets and tools, so is simple to use even for novice evaluators. It has been used successfully for some years by arts organisations and councils who seek to plan and evaluate arts projects more strategically.

Measuring progress

There are four levels of evaluation that need to be considered when councils measure progress in quality of life of communities (see Figure 2 below). These are:
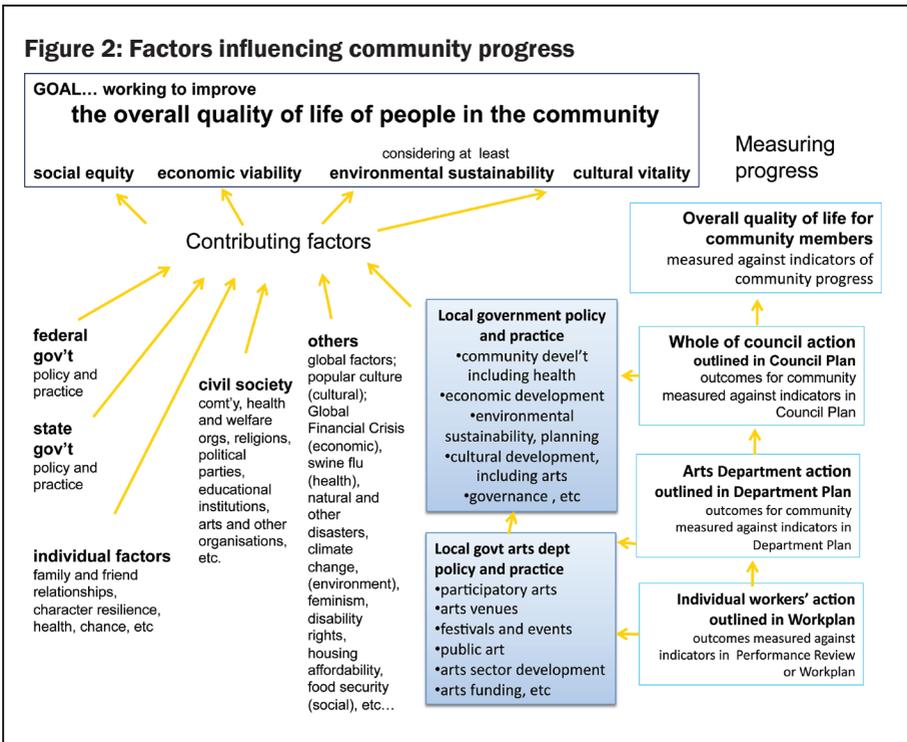
- An evaluation of individual staff contributions, most often measured through work plan and performance review processes. How did this person deliver what they were hired to deliver (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)?

- An evaluation regarding the achievement of goals of a specific department or section against their plan. In the case of the arts, how did the work of the arts department deliver against the Arts Plan (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)?

- An evaluation with an even wider scope, asking how successful the whole council was in achieving its goals (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)? What contribution did the arts department make towards achievement of these goals?

- An evaluation focusing on whether or not the quality of life of people in the municipality changed during any specific period. What contribution did the arts make to residents' quality of life? What factors contributed to an improvement in quality of life?

Program Logic should be applied to planning and decision-making at the first three levels of evaluation in order to increase the likelihood of initiatives leading to desired changes. The combination of well considered evaluation strategies with reflective practice is likely to result in

- plans that are based on goals representative of the values of the council and their communities,

- programs that most effectively and efficiently reach their goals,

- judicious use of resources, and

- best outcomes for communities.

As Figure 2 suggests, the fourth level of progress measurement relates to aspects of a community's experience both within and outside of the influence of local government. Outcomes at this level of focus are best considered through the application of community-wide indicators. At such a broad and diffuse level, it may be difficult to determine specific causal factors. As mentioned earlier, Community Indicators Victoria has developed a set of indicators to measure all aspects of community progress[26] and the Cultural Development Network is creating a framework of indicators more specifically to consider the contribution of the arts[27] to the wellbeing of communities.

Figure 2: Factors influencing community progress

GOAL... working to improve
the overall quality of life of people in the community

considering at least
social equity   economic viability   environmental sustainability   cultural vitality

Contributing factors

Measuring progress

Overall quality of life for community members
measured against indicators of community progress

Whole of council action outlined in Council Plan
outcomes for community measured against indicators in Council Plan

Arts Department action outlined in Department Plan
outcomes for community measured against indicators in Department Plan

Individual workers' action outlined in Workplan
outcomes measured against indicators in Performance Review or Workplan

federal gov't policy and practice

state gov't policy and practice

individual factors family and friend relationships, character resilience, health, chance, etc

civil society comt'y, health and welfare orgs, religions, political parties, educational institutions, arts and other organisations, etc.

others global factors; popular culture (cultural); Global Financial Crisis (economic), swine flu (health), natural and other disasters, climate change, (environment), feminism, disability rights, housing affordability, food security (social), etc...

Local government policy and practice
•community devel't including health
•economic development
•environmental sustainability, planning
•cultural development, including arts
•governance , etc

Local govt arts dept policy and practice
•participatory arts
•arts venues
•festivals and events
•public art
•arts sector development
•arts funding, etc

Factors influencing community progress

Even when SMART principles are applied in planning processes, when relationships between goals and activities are clear and logical, and when decisions are evidence-based and proper evaluations using data are undertaken, there are still many other factors that influence the quality of life of communities. These include federal and state government policies and actions, activity of civil society—including religious, political, health, and welfare sectors—and a wide range of other factors, ranging from the personal to the global.

Cultural development workers need to be cognisant of all of these factors contributing to change, even though most of them are outside the influence of local government. While these factors are not able to be considered when councils evaluate their own work, they need to be considered in indicators of community progress. Again, let us consider a set of scenarios to illustrate this point. In this case we will focus on a participatory arts program aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of young people living on a public housing estate.

In the first scenario, a council arts team decides to address the health and wellbeing of young people on the estate by running a community dance

project. This idea is based on strong evidence that participation in creative physical activity in a community setting is likely to contribute to increased well-being for people in a target group. Resources are invested in the project; good plans developed, a venue organised, a skilled leader hired and promotion undertaken, yet the project does not attract the targeted group. Instead young people from a neighbouring area who do not face the same wellbeing issues are the only participants. Thus, even though the council made good plans and executed them well, the project did not create desired changes for the target group. A performance evaluation may suggest that council achieved its goals in terms of running a participatory dance project for young people in the targeted area, but an outcome evaluation would indicate that desired outcomes of change in the wellbeing of the targeted young people was not achieved.

Let us imagine that six months later, the same program is organised with a different outcome. This time, a popular TV show has increased the community's interest in dance, and the program is well attended by young people from the housing estate. The same resources are invested in the program and a better outcome for the target group is expected. This time, however, the well-skilled leader is suddenly not available and a replacement is recruited at short notice. The new leader does not adhere to council's policy of a smoke- and drug-free environment for young people, and the dance program is run in an atmosphere that condones smoking and drug use. Some young people who were previously not engaging in these behaviours are introduced to them. Consequently, the benefits of the young people's dance participation may be outweighed by the harm of smoking and drug use.

In this second scenario, the council's opportunity to provide a wellbeing-enhancing opportunity for the target group has been aided by external factors (indirect promotion via TV). However, because of a faulty internal process (staff training and management), the result is a negative health outcome for the targeted young people. A performance evaluation of this project might indicate success; council ran a suitable program and attracted the target group who participated with enthusiasm. However, an outcome evaluation would indicate that the desired health improvements were not achieved. Indeed, the project may have produced negative health outcomes, by creating a detrimental peer environment.

The third time this project is attempted, the dance program occurs at a time when the local high school has been running an effective drug education program. As a result, dance participants perceive that the behaviour of the program leader in condoning drugs and smoking is not appropriate and they feel empowered to discuss their concerns with council officers. These council staff respond quickly and skilfully, leading to a resolution of the problem and changes to the dance program that make it appropriate to the needs of the young people. Ultimately, the health outcomes for participants are even better than expected because they see that their own advocacy for

their health needs has created a positive outcome. Along the way, there has been lively discussion among the young people involved and this, in turn, strengthens the drug education program in the high school. In this case, the dance program manages to create a healthy peer environment and this has been influenced by factors that are both within and outside the council's sphere of direct influence. We can imagine that the success of the program has led to important learning for the program leader on how to be an effective mentor, and it has informed council on ways to enhance youth training and leadership. In this case, both performance and outcome evaluations would indicate the success of this program.

These different scenarios indicate that change may occur:

- as a result of what council does (either in or away from the intended direction)
- regardless of what council does (change occurs, but it was not council's initiative that made the difference)
- in spite of what council does (the desired change does occur, even though council's initiative does not make a positive contribution), or
- perhaps most likely, as a result of a confluence of these factors.

It is challenging to evaluate initiatives when factors at play can be so complex. Expert evaluators, like those involved in the large US study mentioned earlier, undertake randomised controlled trials to determine which particular factors are influential. This is a level of evaluation unlikely to be considered by cultural development workers in local government. However, more effective evaluation can be achieved through the application of ideas and tools outlined above. Every step towards a more sophisticated process is likely to result in significant benefits for councils and their communities.

Conclusion

Clearly, the local government cultural development sector faces significant challenges in improving its planning and evaluation processes. The concepts of performance and outcome evaluation help to highlight the purpose of effective evaluation and link evaluation to program goals. Furthermore, this paper has demonstrated that effective evaluation needs to be based on real evidence and quality data. Program Logic has been introduced here as a useful planning and evaluation methodology for cultural development in local government in Australia, and some associated planning and evaluation tools have been described in order to make the point that relevant resources are already available.

Scenarios discussed in this paper highlight the fact that many different factors—some of them beyond the influence of councils—come into play when considering what can bring about positive change for local communities. While this makes effective evaluation of particular programs and initiatives even more difficult, it highlights the need for more

sophisticated approaches to evaluation. Unless the local government cultural development sector can meet the challenge of producing convincing evidence for success, it stands to lose funding and support from both government and private sector organisations.

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