

THE HENLEY FORUM

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RESEARCH PROJECT 1: Meaningful measurement in a dynamic environment

When change never stops, it becomes hard to evaluate what difference KM, OL, and OD programmes make. So, in unpredictable and dynamic circumstances, the question becomes *how can any organization meaningfully assess the strategic importance and value from knowledge, learning and change activities?*

Why is this research needed?

Generic measurement approaches often neglect the effect of context, for example, specific local circumstances and/or resources that may have a significant influence on outcomes. Benchmarking against standards of good practice can provide some useful insights; yet, by its very nature, the process has limitations in dynamic environments, both because (1) benchmarks are an assessment of what has worked well historically but the past may not predict the future, and (2) of necessity the benchmarking process has to remain fairly static to provide a sensible comparison to standard.

How can measurement be meaningful?

Whilst there are no simple answers, a first step is to ask what is the purpose of any form of assessment? In other words what makes it sufficiently meaningful that you can use the results to make a difference? In a complex and dynamic environment, any objective that is about proving worth, success or performance can only deliver short term satisfaction. What might be more meaningful would be using a relatively straightforward and adaptable mechanism for long term strategic monitoring, so that the process produces feedback that helps the organization improve and become more able to absorb change.

The degree of disturbance that a system can absorb is a mark of resilience, which is broadly defined as “the capacity to experience massive change and yet still maintain the integrity of the original”¹. *Could one purpose for monitoring and evaluating the effect of knowledge, learning and change activities be to improve organizational resilience?*²

What is involved?

The Henley Forum invites you to join us in a project to explore different ways to evaluate knowledge learning and change programmes in dynamic environments and consider how forms of assessment might contribute to enhanced organizational resilience in that context.

To make the project as accessible as possible to all our members, the plan is to kick off the work with a one-day workshop **on 20th April at Henley**. This will allow anyone interested to learn more about alternative approaches to monitoring such as developmental evaluation, realistic evaluation, and the ‘vital signs’ of change. Then the research would continue virtually with each organization; we would help them experiment with the approaches in their own context to gauge the benefits. Together we can learn how assessing KM, OL and OD activities in dynamic environments can be more meaningful.

Potential benefits for you and your organisation

- New insights on alternative approaches will help you re-assess your measurement practices.
- Peer comparison with other participating organisations gives the chance to develop ideas.
- Virtual discussions with academic staff offer an external perspective on monitoring activities.

Project leads: *Professor Jane McKenzie, Ola Oladosu – Research Assistant*

¹ Westley, F., Zimmerman, B. & Patton, M. 2009. *Getting to maybe: How the world is changed*, Vintage Canada

² Resilience is a partner to agility: Holbeche, L. 2015. *The Agile Organization: How to Build an Innovative, Sustainable and Resilient Business*, Kogan Page.