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Annotated Briefing

**MONITORING MANAGEMENT IN A
LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

by

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**MONITORING MANAGEMENT
IN A
LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

This annotated briefing was developed by J. Kathy Parker and Max W. McFadden of The Heron Group, LLC. It is one of the products of a contract with the Environment and Social Development Unit for the East Asia and Pacific region of The World Bank.

While monitoring for the achievement of results is a major function of a results-oriented organization, achievement of results is only one part of the equation to be monitored. Learning how to learn from the experiences of managing and learning what managing did to achieve those results is a useful function of any organization. Thus, it is also critical to monitor management efforts geared toward achievement of results, not just to monitor whether the results have been achieved.

The following provides some general guidance about the kinds of things you might want to monitor as you assess how successful your organization's management is in the areas of targeted planning, organization, resources, and performance.



MONITORING IN A LEARNING ORGANIZATION


Learning organizations must monitor management to achieve results, not just monitoring whether results have been achieved! Management must focus on and monitor among other things:

1. Open and continuous dialogue
2. Collective learning
3. Mutual reflection

The three points outlined above provide a sense of the approach that a learning organization must take. They come from Mark St. John. 1992. *A Design and Rationale for Evaluation: In the Service of a Learning Community*. Inverness, CA: Inverness Research Associates.

The context for this approach is articulated in Peter Senge's book (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*. NY: Doubleday. Senge writes that:

"It is no longer sufficient to have one person learning for the organization... It is just not possible anymore to 'figure it out' from the top and have everyone else following orders of the 'grand strategist'. The organizations that truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. ..."



MONITORING IN A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Managers must be "...proactive in explaining their work to external audiences. They must be clear about who they are, the assumptions upon which their work is based, and the priorities they are addressing. They must demonstrate to external audiences that they have a well-reasoned strategy, and that through this strategy they are likely to make significant contributions... They must also demonstrate that they are not fixed in one model, but rather they have the ability to learn from their experience, to draw upon other's research, and to alter their strategies and priorities appropriately.

We include this lengthy quote by Mark St. John (1992:10) because, from our way of thinking, it is one of the messages we want to leave with you. The portion of the second page of this two page quote emphasizes the linkage between management and monitoring management. Also, it highlights appropriately the need to develop criteria by which an organization believes it should be measured.

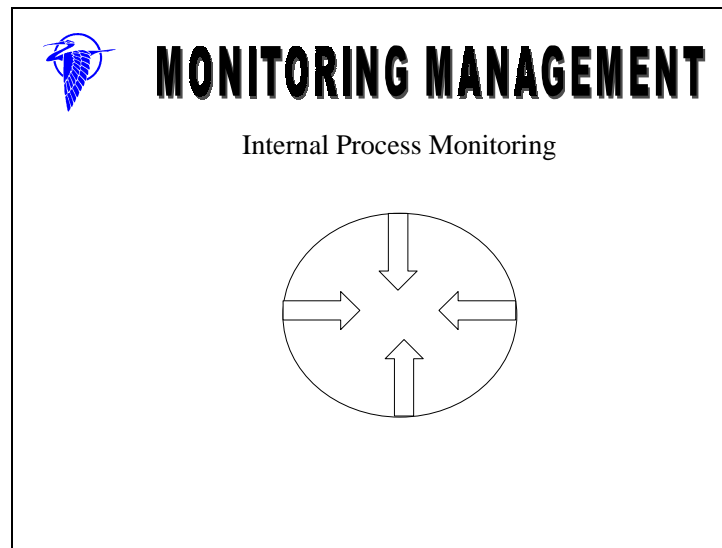


MONITORING IN A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

If [they] are not successful in explaining their mission, and the ways in which they are fulfilling their mission, they will fail to fill a vacuum--and they will be measured against external criteria which may not be congruent with their actual purposes.”

Some general characteristics of an organization that is managing to achieve results in what might be called an "adaptive" and learning approach would include, but not be limited to the following:


- flexibility, adjustability, and responsiveness to changing conditions
- resilience to rebound from the best laid plans that have gone astray
- redundancy when appropriate to reduce risk and overcome uncertainty
- ability to "translate" data and information into effective management action.



Managers can use Internal Process Monitoring to look at the processes and mechanisms they use for administration and operations, determine what inputs are being used for, assess what levels of efficiency are being achieved through doing an activity over time and with experience, track the timeliness with which actions are taken, etc.

The purposes of Internal Process Monitoring are to provide, among other things, an opportunity for understanding:

- (1) shifts in expected results, activities, and anticipated targets;
- (2) internal, on-going activities
- (3) mid-course corrections related to internal issues which might be affecting the achievement of results; or
- (4) implementation of new action plans.



MONITORING MANAGEMENT


The Kinds of Things You
Might Want to Monitor

- activities that can be undertaken for the same amount of money because learning builds on learning
- reallocation of resources to achieve a greater return on a given investment when we are going in the “right” direction
 - organizational structure that promotes most efficient and effective functioning

Some examples may be useful. Considering a project that supports community based organizations (CBOs) in design and implementation of environmental protection programs. It may be important to determine whether over time that we have learned about and responded to the needs for strengthening of these CBOs in such a way that over time we can actually undertake a greater number of activities for the same amount of money because of what we have learned.

Looking at the reallocation of resources, we might have data that suggest that we are close to achieving our targets and that a small addition of funding would actually allow us to achieve and perhaps exceed our targets. If we have the flexibility to make decisions to reallocate funds to make those things happen that we see are moving in the right direction, then we may have a greater return on our investment.

In looking at training, we might see that a more collective approach rather than an individualized approach to meeting training needs might provide the needed training and actually allow for more training because of efficiencies of scale that might not be achieved through an individualistic or uncoordinated training effort.



MONITORING MANAGEMENT

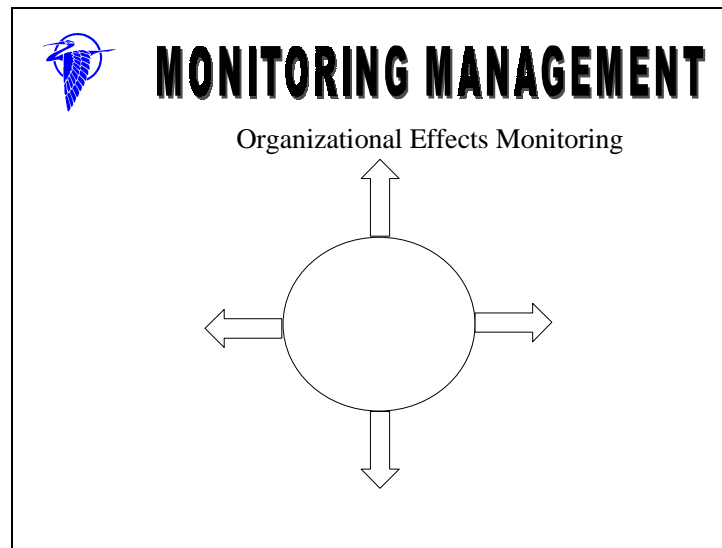
The Kinds of Things You
Might Want to Monitor

- quality, appropriateness and timeliness of technical assistance
- changes in policies and procedures to facilitate adaptability
- absorptive capacity to use funds and other resources

Looking at the quality, relevance, and timing of TA may be a critical determinant for the achievement of success. If it's not high quality, how can we improve it? If it's not relevant, why do it? If it isn't timely, how can we make a better "fit"?


Policies and procedures have a tremendous impact on internal operations and concomitantly on the nature and magnitude of impacts. Tracking and analyzing policies and procedures and how they affect operations and actions may lead to some of the greatest changes that can affect achievement of results in an organization.

Looking at the absorptive capacity (including the ability to use pipelines of funds appropriately, intellectual capacity, ability to translate information to serve as the basis for decisionmaking) will likely change over time and should be looked at as staff come and go, infrastructure changes, and abilities are improved.



Organizational Process Monitoring focuses on the ways organizational processes affect achievement of results. It looks from the inside outward to the broader social, economic, and political context in which the organization operates. Using Organizational Process Monitoring, managers can assess what makes sense for the organization to do in terms of this reality. Managers can track whether the organization's actions and interventions have made a difference or whether problems still remain that must be addressed. Managers can look at the organization's external relations with partners or competitors and determine what courses of action are most appropriate relative to any given relationship or set of relationships. Managers can assess or reassess the organization's vision and mission to determine whether they are appropriate guides for the times. Managers do not look at results per se in this kind of monitoring; they look at how the organization is achieving or not achieving the desired results.

This Organizational Process Monitoring is closely linked to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization's internal processes as well as to the responses and perspectives from outside entities.



MONITORING MANAGEMENT


The Kinds of Things You
Might Want to Monitor

- flows of information to communicate vision and mission
- synergies between partners to complement, supplement, and/or be redundant in actions when and where appropriate
- adoption of problem-solving techniques from this organization by other individuals or organizations

Flows of information are critical to achievement of results. This is a fundamental aspect of the communication structure of an organization which must be nurtured. But, its nature must be understood in order to fix what might be broken, keep good communication links functioning, and build new ones as appropriate.

As an organization focuses outward, it must look at opportunities to complement, supplement and/or duplicate what others are doing as appropriate. Monitoring for synergies that open doors rather than obstacles that close them is a key monitoring function.

Looking at how your organization learns, how it screens and filters new technologies that it might want to adopt, how it tests and applies new techniques or tools, and who are lead adopters in your organization or bridges to other organizations from which new ideas might be fruitfully incorporated--all of these must be looked at.

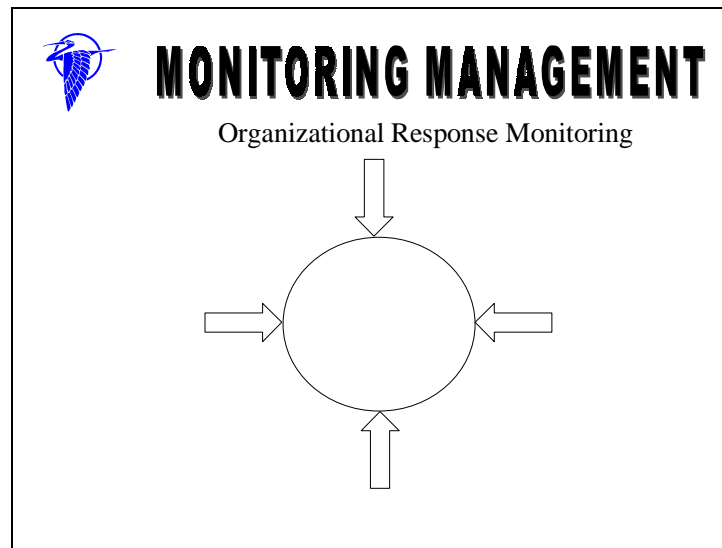


MONITORING MANAGEMENT

The Kinds of Things You
Might Want to Monitor

- provision of higher quality and more timely goods and services to customers


Looking at your customer base, understanding its needs and desires, and making sure you understand the best ways to meet these needs and desires can be done through a monitoring function. And, it is important to remember that the customer base may change and even if it doesn't, the needs and desires may change over time. Monitoring can keep up with or hopefully be on the cusp of any change.



Managers can use Organizational Response Monitoring to look at how the implementing organization responds internally to what has resulted from its actions or how it responds to feedback that it has gotten from the external environment during implementation. The response context may be at the most local level (e.g., community) or a broader context (e.g., regional, national, donor 'community', etc.).

The responses may include:

- redesign of programs that have now leveraged other funds
- policy changes
- organizational restructuring
- reallocation of resources
- design of new feedback mechanisms (e.g., customer surveys)
- training to increase staff competence



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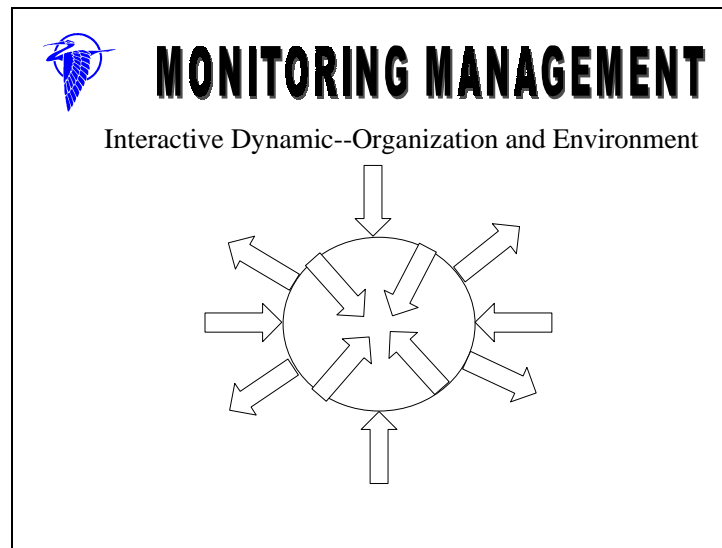
The Kinds of Things You
Might Want to Monitor

- new funds available because of accomplishments reported
 - customer satisfaction (kinds and magnitude)
- revision of plans based on new information and knowledge


New or additional external resources may become available as accomplishments or results are reported by the Unit. It is important to be prepared to absorb these new resources and use them effectively. Being able to be appropriately responsive in timely fashion can best be achieved if the "weathervane" of monitoring is tracking these opportunities and the organization is prepared to respond.

Focusing on customer satisfaction is a key function of monitoring response to actions and interventions by an organization. Determining the kind and magnitude of satisfaction can provide information about corrective action, continued effort along the same path, or entering a new niche market as it emerges with already satisfied customers.

Assessing the validity of revised plans is a monitoring functioning as well as a contribution that monitoring makes to the planning process.



These are typically multidirectional relationships between these internal process, organizational effects, and organizational response variables. For example, an effect can elicit a response, and with a response, there may be a need to implement a new or different set of internal processes. This is the interactive dynamic of an organization and its environment which must be monitored in order to enhance the probability that a given organization can understand and learn from the achievement of results that it articulates through a strategic planning process.



CONCLUSION

A Learning Organization can benefit from monitoring its:

- Internal Processes
 - Organizational Effects
 - Organizational Responses

While each of these aspects of organizational action can be monitored individually, there are important feedback loops and interactions. Much like an ecosystem, an organization is a human system. Its components and its complexity, its linkages and interactions must be understood in order to have a well-functioning, well-informed, and learning organization that can serve its clients and achieve the results it sets out for itself.