

## What results? Whose results?

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A few months ago, I made a short essay on the value of understanding the results that mission-based organization has been producing. This is to support the thesis on building management's capacity to manage their results effectively.

What kind of results are your organization producing on a regular basis? Is this adding to your performance story? How can you solidify and have a firm grasp of your results from the interventions that you do with your communities, beneficiaries, and intended audience?

Regardless of the kind of performance the organization is bringing to the table, there is some sort of results/outcomes that get reported to donors, stakeholders, and funders. In this essay, I interchange results with outcomes and vice-versa. This could be:

- project-based results – results from project interventions and activities
- strategic outcomes- which come from corporate strategies
- performance outcomes- results that come from the individual performance of employees, performance of departments, or performance on specific task or function
- development results- outcomes that come from identified broad strategic development goals that organizations have set from the beginning, usually aligned to sectoral or national benchmarks

These results form part of the narrative of how the organization has been effective in its mission, how it has articulated its reason for being and how it is using its resources effectively to optimize its relevance for its target audience. And lastly but not the least, how a results mindset increases success for the organization.

Most non-profits and mission-based organizations these days have some sort of a results-based management system.

According to [Treasury Board of Canada](#), results-based management is a comprehensive, lifecycle approach to management that integrates strategy, people, resources, processes and measurements to improve decision-making and drive change. The approach focuses on getting

the right design early in a process, focussing on outcomes, implementing performance measurement, learning and changing, and reporting performance. Other organizations in a more regulated industry have come up with their own results-driven management systems in place.

For small organizations with tiny budgets, few staff and programs running, or a volunteer-run board/committee working on specific activities only, what can the results-based management offer?

1. It offers a solid framework to wrap strategy, resources, people, processes, and measurement together. While most RBMs have been used in program and project interventions, it can also be used at the organizational level where no resources, inputs, people can leave unintegrated or fall off the cracks of management.

For example, what can a group of volunteer moms supporting a local daycare or after-school programming think for results? Increased student engagement in after-school programs versus just counting the number of students that attend on a monthly basis.

2. It strengthens the performance story in a seemingly tightening regulatory and accountability demand from donors, funders, and the general public. The intensity, complexity, and stronger (sometimes irrational) demand for evidence puts organization under pressure- to perform, to evaluate their work with rigor, to engage and learn from their innovations. Without an RBM as a framework to set and start this process, organizations will be caught unprepared, ill-equipped and will be scrambling all the time for the next “shiny” object to understand and communicate their results.

No.1 and No.2 have clear implications for management to respond to the call for understanding and organizing their decisions based on results not on outputs. E.g. Number of training conducted; number of wells built, number of school nutrition program started, number of basketball coaching provided, etc. These are outputs from activities -the trees not the forest.

### **Whose results?**

The ship has left decades ago. It is definitely difficult to retrofit the organization to think strategically and see the forests from the trees. Even small organizations can adapt to understanding the effects (including unintended, unexpected, and negative impacts) they have on their audience, their costs, methods, and implementation strategies aligned to their theory of change, the lessons learned, and major achievements.

Whose results are we talking about? Is it the organization conducting the project- their self-reports or the results from the ground-the target users, partners, and recipients of services? The answer to the question is clear: it is the results that are evident, consistent, clear, and compelling in the lives of the people that services/programs/projects purportedly serve.

Mere internal reflection exercises will not be optimally beneficial if these areas were not formally integrated into the program and strategic management of the organization. It is a mere lip service to continuous improvement if there is no prior brainwork on what constitutes results on a short-term, mid-term, and long-term to the population they are trying to provide service.

This is not just an app software to buy or a tool, template to check and tick the boxes. It is also not about hiring an external evaluator to look at your work. A results-based mindset in the organization increases their ability to mitigate risks, overcome challenges, and equipped management to make good decisions based on real evidence any time of the day. It is an industry norm, a way of doing things, a shift from busyness to real effectiveness. Results oriented programming will point to more evidence-based interventions and reflective practice in the long run.

### **What does it take to build a results mindset?**

It starts with the leadership of the organization. The need for results-based should never be compartmentalized with the project managers and directors who are supervising the projects, initiatives, and tasks. It is the Executive Director and the Board that should have an eagle's eye view of the clear results agenda in each of the projects and operations of the organization.

Here are some of the suggested steps:



Training the Board and the Senior Management Team is important to have a full buy-in into the program and invest their time, energy, commitment, and financial resources to its success.



It is also important to streamline their current system of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning that is unique and tailor-fit to their capacities, needs, assets, and future growth potential.

- ❖ Training the staff, program partners, and stakeholders about the processes of monitoring and evaluation, with an agreement as to what constitutes progress to outcomes at the short term, mid-range and long-range horizons, a possible division of tasks, and accountability measures.

If the RBM is left to volunteer (unless you are all volunteers in the organization), you are going to get a volunteer quality. If you are going to delegate to staff that is not trained and has things already on her plate, it will end up being swept under the rug and not seriously implemented. If they take things on, then they should be able to remove some functions from their mandate. These knee-jerk reactions to public scrutiny and results demand do not stand the test. These band-aid solutions will fall under their own weight.

Postponing investing in this area will also increase the risk of not being able to manage the demand for credible and systematized collection of information, data, and knowledge needed in bringing new partners and actors into the organization as supporters. Or just plain managing the day-to-day requests for evidence of performance.

The lack of commitment to results will lead over time to the erosion of support that is currently enjoyed by the organization due to perceptions of being “not professional” enough, not “transparent” enough, and not “accountable” enough. It is akin to one rotten tomato in a basket of good ones. It smells, it infects the others, and it is insidious.

## **Conclusion**

Internally, a robust system will save thousands of dollars down the road from being forced to get on to the program by hiring external consultants who will conduct an audit, review, or evaluation of projects, catching the organization unprepared and ill-equipped. Being anticipatory and forward-looking is more cost-effective than being reactive. It is smart business.

Delighting the donors and financial supporters is one thing. But the real work is not in the sweet talk but the actual evidence that those dollars were well spent for lives improved.