

You are listening to the Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Podcast - Episode 7 - on the difficulty of measuring inclusion efforts - and why it's worthwhile anyway

I'm glad you're listening in, because Evaluation is very often the piece of the Strategy process that gets forgotten or disappears into the valley of stressful periods. While most people agree on the importance of evaluation in general, the Evaluation phase is the stage that organisations often end up rushing through or even ignoring completely.

Of all the phases involved in strategy-making, the Evaluation phase is the most "cyclical" because in practice evaluation takes place at many different moments throughout the whole strategy-making process.

But before we dive deeper into what evaluation entails, let's take a moment to reflect on the challenges we're up against in this phase:

One year, we had a goal. We were trying to reach out disabled organisations. It really takes time. We didn't succeed in so well, but again, actually today I had one meeting with them, because they asked. It is weird, that it takes..at first you say something and it might take two years and they contact back. So, they need to think it really through if they want to do it. And I think that is the one thing that we just have to bear. That the reaction doesn't come right away. It comes quite late.

That's Jutta Kivimäki from the Finnish National Agency, sharing how the actions we take in a given moment might take a very long time to actually generate impact. And by then it can become quite difficult to create that causal link.

Let's explore this with an example. Imagine this: Armin participates in a training for project promoters offered by a National Agency. Armin soon after changes jobs. He joins a small organisation that runs a youth center. There, together with his colleague Aisha, Armin applies for Erasmus+ funding to bring more young people with disabilities to the youth center. They succeed thanks to the understanding of inclusion and diversity matters that Armin gained in the training. However, since it's Aisha who submits the application, the National Agency never finds out that their training had helped a new organisation accessing Erasmus+ funding and promoting more inclusion in their work.

To explore the challenges of evaluating inclusion and diversity efforts, we talked to [Hanna Schüßler](#) from the National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps in Germany. Here's the challenges she sees:

We used more or less the monitoring in place for the programs as well, which was about participation of young persons with fewer opportunities. And in my opinion that is definitely not sufficient to measure inclusion in the programs. Because this would be about so many other aspects relevant for inclusion, like sensibilizing organisations already active on the programs on

the topic, helping them to maybe evolve their work becoming more inclusive, but also reaching out to new organisations from these relevant fields. And seeing if there is a development if you can, for example, foster networking between both organisations, so that they can work together. And this is of course, much more difficult to measure and evaluate than the percentage of persons with few opportunities participating in projects.

Similarly, there are also challenges when it comes to project promoters reporting their inclusion and diversity efforts. We asked Barbara Eglitis from the Austrian National Agency about that:

We question a lot the numbers and how to get the information - and we didn't find a solution, of course. I think many NAs struggle with that. And also when you collect numbers you have to label people. And if you are an applicant, that is always connected to funding. For instance in the middle of the program the inclusion support started to take place with the tick that this is a young person with fewer opportunities and automatically you get the grant, of course. After you have the grant you don't want to pay it back, so, you know, you can always find some kind of inclusion reasons in every person. So, you know, that is really difficult.

Now, should we give up on evaluation altogether because of that? Of course not. There is always things we can and should measure.

What you can measure, for example, is also how many dedicated information, networking, training, offers, do we as NAs organise for that. How many tca net activities, for example, what kind of services do we offer. This is something you can, of course, measure.

We just heard [Hanna Schüßler](#) again. And Anne Molloy from the National Agency in Ireland agrees:

We always recorded how many, and this is something we do within our department, they would look for this information, it's the number of inclusion applications and the stats at the end of the year. That is our ultimate, kind of, monitor, I supposed.

And consider this: indicators and evaluation are not just important to help us evaluate our work and our strategy. It's also an important way of raising awareness about inclusion and diversity among those who are out there in the field. Here's how [Marko Banković](#) from the Serbian National Agency puts it:

When you have some indicators, you can also communicate them. Because as you know, we aren't the ones implementing the activities. We are the NA and we have various types of organisations applying for projects. And those projects should be inclusive. And if we can't communicate it easily to schools, to universities, to NGOs, to youth organisations what are the targets, what are the ideas they can make their programs more inclusive. It's better to have a clear communication point than just to say: you should make your project more inclusive. And they say "we tried to make it more inclusive". Nobody knows what has been done or whether anything has been done. Because, you know, they might have tried but maybe they do not

understand what that would be in their context. And on the other hand we might not understand what it means in their context. But if we have some sort of, you know, indicators that we can talk about, then we can communicate this more easily between the various stakeholders.

Now, back to how you actually do evaluation. While this is an ongoing and cyclical process throughout the implementation of our strategy, it's definitely also a crucial step once we reach the end of a strategy cycle. Aaaaand... it can be a starting point for the Analysis phase of the next strategy.

That's exactly what the Romanian National Agency did:

We hired a company to evaluate where we are. The measures we took in terms of inclusion, if and how we reached our goals, and, in addition to that, to give us suggestions that come out of the interviews, the questionnaires, the surveys they sent. So, this is how we did it, this is how we evaluated. We evaluated after 4 years, but of course, every year we did have some indicators that were also in our internal documents and the documents that we have for the european commission. That's Miruna Covaci speaking.

Are you curious how you feel when you get to the end of your strategy process and hold your evaluation in your hands? We asked Miruna about that. Here's what she said:

I had this feeling, that when the company that we hired to evaluate our strategy came with the final version of the report and it does give you a little bit of a scent, a feeling of confidence. A feeling of like you are controlling, you are over the situation and you are controlling things. And you know how to allocate resources. And it is also a matter of responsibility how you allocate your resources, how you spend your time, how you create your actions. If you do it in a more strategic way and you can evaluate, it makes more sense.

This is where we leave you to the important, challenging yet also rewarding task of creating, implementing and evaluating your national Inclusion and Diversity strategy. Thanks for listening and good luck!