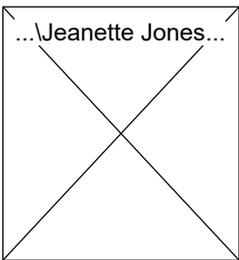


MEASURING THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE WORKING



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The Central Wales Infrastructure Collaboration is a partnership between Powys and Ceredigion County Councils. We currently have a shared Engineering Design Service, and a single Streetworks team which co-ordinates works on the highway for the region.

At an early stage of the collaborative project, it was decided that identifying the benefits early on would aid decision-making, and, provided effective monitoring was in place, would contribute to evaluating success.

When we first started to think about measuring and recording the benefits of our shared service activities, we had limited ideas about how to approach it and I spent many a fruitless hour trawling the internet looking for clues. Eventually, I came across some relevant and useful items, and posts on the KnowledgeHub Project and Programme Management Community of Practice that pointed me in the right direction.

In this article, I have consolidated and adapted some of the learning to help others who may be wondering ‘where on earth to start?’.

Starting at the beginning... What is a Benefit?

A benefit is “a measurable improvement resulting from the changes and outcomes introduced by the programme”. It “must be perceived as an advantage by one or more stakeholders”¹. Those changes and outcomes perceived as negative by one or more stakeholders are known as dis-benefits.

Outputs, Outcomes and Benefits?

- Outputs are **activities/tasks completed** as part of a project
- Outcomes are **what has happened** as a result of an output
- Benefits are **measurable improvements** which have occurred as a result of an outcome

¹ BIS (2010) *Guidelines for Managing Programmes, Understanding programmes and Programme Management*

Using an example of the purchase and implementation of a shared bridge management system, which was acquired for our two partner councils, we can identify the outputs, outcomes and anticipated benefits as follows:

The **Outputs** were:

- joint procurement
- joint licensing
- shared training

The **Outcomes** were:

- standardised data
- facilitates joint working on bridge inspections
- commonality of approach
- reduced duplication of duties
- shared purchase cost
- shared licensing cost
- up to date inventory
- comparability of data allows benchmarking
- feeds into maintenance programmes allowing a more targeted approach
- improved management information

The **Benefits** were:

- saving in staff time – procurement
- saving in staff time – bridge inspections
- saving in staff time – administration of database
- saving in staff time – administration of abnormal loads movements
- saving on cost of purchase
- saving on cost of licence fee
- better utilization of funds due to targeted maintenance programmes
- lifespan of assets improved due to targeted maintenance programmes
- improved highway infrastructure for public use.

We developed a benefits management process that would help us on all projects the partnership will develop. The process is set out on the next page to inspire your work.

Linking benefits to project or change programme objectives clearly demonstrates the value of the project to stakeholders. It helps answer the questions ‘Why are we doing this?’ and ‘Why are we still doing this?’.

The Benefits Management Process – step-by-step

1. Establish and agree a Benefits Management Strategy for your collaborative programme

At an early stage in your collaboration, it is important to establish and agree a benefits management strategy. It will contribute strongly to the development of trust and transparency of desires, between the partners.

A Benefits Management Strategy document will set out the intended approach to identifying, recording, measuring and monitoring expected benefits for the partners.

It will also indicate where the desired benefits are not identical for each partner (eg. one may desire benefits of cash savings, another resilience of service).

2. Draw up a Benefit Profile for each benefit and dis-benefit

Benefit Profiles need to record:

- attributes
- dependencies
- target values
- actual values
- measurement method
- review dates
- benefit owners

3. Create a Benefits Map

The map should illustrate:

- How benefits relate to, and depend upon, each other
- What project outputs and business changes are required in order to achieve the benefits

- How project outputs lead to achievement of strategic objectives

4. Produce a Benefits Realisation Plan

- Schedule the benefit measurement activities
- Schedule benefit Reviews
- Track realisation of benefits across the programme.

5. Undertake periodic Benefit Reviews

- Establish extent to which benefits have been realised to date
- Set targets for the future.

Linking benefits to project or change programme objectives, clearly demonstrates the value of the project to stakeholders.

It helps answer the questions ‘Why are we doing this?’ and ‘Why are we still doing this?’.

Measurements of benefits is Business As Usual

Business Change Managers must ensure that processes for tracking the realisation of benefits are embedded into business operations; the measurement of benefits must become ‘business as usual’.

The importance of establishing baseline measurements at an early stage cannot be overestimated.

A lot of changes occur gradually and, when we come to measure benefits, we can be left unclear about what we should be measuring against, or when we should be measuring from!