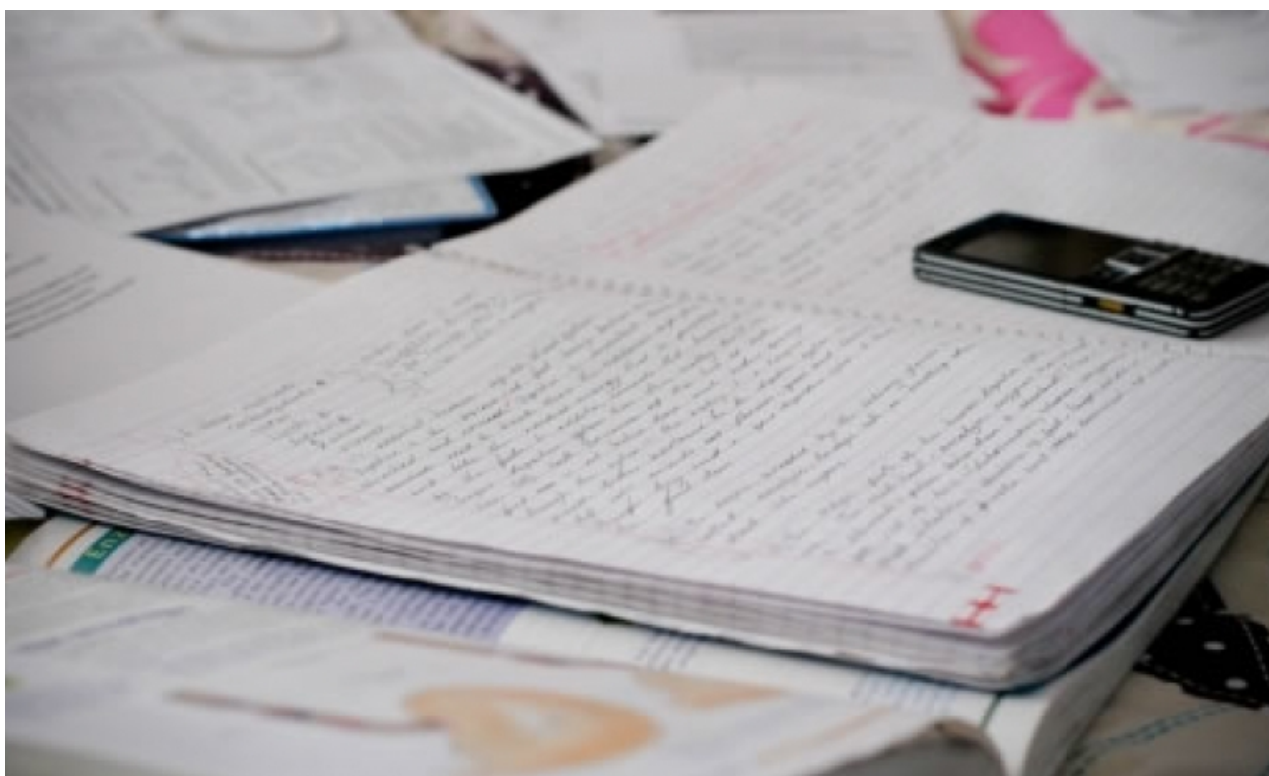


Non-profit organisation assessment and the collectivisation of knowledge



11/03/2017 - 13:24



Generating knowledge based on assessing the direct actions of an organisation will allow it to gain capacity in terms of its actions and influence, and move forwards from a limited scope of action to a broader field.

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Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Fri, 11/03/2017 - 12:29

Description:

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In recent years, several drivers have pushed non-profit organisations to carry out assessments of their programmes. One of these drivers has to do with the pressing requirements of accountability (with respect to financiers, the social bases of an organisation, or society in general). The other driver is the growing awareness that assessments are a useful tool to learn, with the aim of improving interventions carried out by organisations.

However, very often, we ignore that the lessons learnt from these assessments have an impact that goes beyond the organisation's most immediate environment. Everyone knows that non-profit organisations are spaces where extremely valuable **innovation** takes place; for the proximity of the users, the expertise in their field of action, and the relative flexibility they display. If this innovation is conceptualised taking into account an accurate assessment, this will generate a framework based on which highly valuable lessons can be made, to come up with answers that will generally contribute to tackle specific problems.

From the perspective of social organisations, this is extremely relevant because it clearly taps into their mission. Usually, an organisation's **mission** is closely linked to fighting a certain problem with a broad spectrum; for instance, a factor leading to vulnerability or inequality for a certain group. Nevertheless, most organisations' scope of action is limited. Let's take an organisation, for instance, that fights against loneliness in the elderly. In practice, it is very likely that this organisation will have a limited number of people and its actions will be limited to a specific territory, maybe a neighbourhood, or one or a couple of towns.

Generating knowledge based on assessing the direct actions of an organisation will allow it to gain capacity in terms of its actions and influence, and move forwards from a limited scope of action to a broader field: giving it the possibility of contributing in finding an answer to a certain problem in a more global way, if these lessons are incorporated into the debate on how to shape **evidence-based public policies**. Assessment is the tool that we have to know if an action is working or not, and for what reasons, and also provide us with a **language and a framework to collectivise experience and knowledge** within organisations.

Large non-profit organisations that finance and support research, such as [Asthma UK](#) and [Partner for Economic Policy](#) are asking themselves what the impact is of the assessments they promote at this level. One of the lessons we can take from these organisations is that, in order for the lessons made from an assessment to be effectively incorporated by the public administrations or other third sector organisations, it becomes necessary to undertake an important advocacy work, which must be planned from the beginning. All in all, it can be a very burdensome task for a small non-profit organisation, but the role of second-level organisations and foundations and others promoting research may prove extremely useful in getting the experiences of organisations to reach solutions of a broader scope thanks to the assessments.

Ultimately, the non-profit sector still has a huge potential to explore when it comes to help shaping public programmes and policies, and assessments must be an essential tool in this process.

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