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Title of Paper: **Best Practice, Outcome Management and Service User Participation in the Voluntary Sector**

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Introduction

This paper will primarily be of interest to practitioners and service users in the voluntary sector who themselves are interested in service user participation and in developing outcomes management.

The paper will briefly examine the wider concept and history of Quality, and discuss how the voluntary sector is currently under unprecedented pressure to demonstrate quality and value for money and examines this specifically in relation to the homeless sector in Ireland. The use of specific tools and resources in the UK and Ireland to monitor practice and manage outcomes is then examined. The paper goes on to discuss service user participation, again mainly in the UK, and argues that managing outcomes is of little value without the full participation of service users. The paper concludes by stating that now, within the voluntary sector there is an ideal opportunity to grasp both managing outcomes and service user participation as they develop and as they are, or should, be interconnected.

Most of the information in this paper was gathered from a search of the literature and some drawn from the writer's own experience both as a practitioner and as working for the Simon Communities of Ireland as the Best Practice and Training Co-ordinator.

Terminology Used

Service user is used throughout this paper to describe anyone receiving a service from a specific organisation. It is recognised that not everyone is comfortable with this term and may use resident or client or another word.

Voluntary Sector in this paper refers to organisations that are not for profit, have a volunteer Board of Management and generally have charitable status although will receive some statutory funding.

Quality, Outcome Management and Impact Analysis

Outcome Management and Impact Analysis are concepts currently in focus within the voluntary sector as it faces increasing pressure to professionalize, to be accountable and to add value.

Outcome Management and Impact Analysis can be seen as part of the larger Quality and Best Practice movement emerging within the sector in Ireland.

Searching for the roots of the Quality movement where it began in the profit sector, generally leads back to post World War 2 Japan where what is regarded as a renaissance of Japanese industry was occurring. However according to *A History of Managing Quality* (J. M. Juran)¹ China had instituted quality control in its production of handicrafts as early as the eleventh century B.C. and the Romans had standards for almost everything between 300B.C. and 300 A.D.

Whatever the beginnings, the concept of quality has developed and evolved and, certainly in the last 50 years or so, a huge amount of terminology, tools and techniques have been developed. This has not only happened in the profit sector but also in the voluntary, as voluntary organisations have borrowed from the business world and also developed some of their own quality and best practice procedures.

There is a need now however to develop further tools and measurements as there is an unprecedented amount of external pressure on voluntary organisations, both at home and internationally, to demonstrate their worth and accountability.

The need to demonstrate value

From a financial standpoint, the accounting scandals of Enron and Arthur Anderson in the United States have sent shock waves not just through the profit sector, but also the

¹ Juran J.M. (ed. in Chief) 1995 *A History of Managing for Quality* [Online] Available from <http://www.asq.org/info/library/faq/history> [Accessed 9 September 2004]

public and voluntary. Ireland specifically has been rocked by financial corruption and impropriety in political, charitable and financial institutions in the recent past.

In a paper published by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)² earlier this year the point is made that -

“Public trust and confidence in all social institutions is declining. Although this has not yet reached critical levels in the voluntary sector, it certainly could be higher than it is”

This is echoed in Brain Harvey’s Rights and Justice work in Ireland³

“Ireland is now considered one of the more corrupt European states”

Certainly in Ireland, after the fall from grace of the Catholic Church as the abuse suffered by so many was at last spoken about, there was a massive loss of trust in social institutions.

The paper also describes a less reverential public in Britain, who generally demand more from services than previously. This can also be said of Ireland.

Also, as the voluntary and community sector play a bigger role as service providers with more responsibility and have a bigger profile they can become a bigger target and one that can quickly attract the gaze of the media.

Inextricably linked with the need to demonstrate trustworthiness and accountability in a voluntary organisation though, there is a dilemma. Organisations are under pressure to professionalize and at the same time are risking criticism from and often alienating some stakeholders because of the very act of becoming more professional. They are losing, or at least being perceived of losing, those very qualities that distinguished them as a voluntary organisation.

² *Accountability and Transparency* [Online] Available from <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk.asp/search/ncvo/main.aspx> [Accessed 13 September 2004]

³ Harvey, B. 2001. *Rights and justice work in Ireland: a new base line*. York: The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Successful organisations however are and will be those that recognise and can demonstrate that ‘voluntary’ and ‘professional’ are two very compatible concepts. Respect, passion, commitment does not exclude good practice. Paid staff are no less likely to be respectful passionate or committed than volunteers, they just eat better.

Homeless Services

Homeless services too then, as part of the wider voluntary sector are now under more scrutiny than in the past.

The Irish Government’s White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity⁴ stated

“Monitoring and evaluation should be carried out regularly in order to ensure effectiveness and value for money. Reports should be made available to the funders on the extent to which the programme or project is achieving its objectives and the difficulties, if any, which are experienced”

also

“There should be openness, accountability and transparency in the work of the sector”

The Government's Integrated Strategy on Homelessness (May 2000)⁵ made it clear that Local Authorities and the Health Boards are regarded as jointly responsible in providing for people who are homeless. Local authorities have responsibility for the provision of accommodation for people who are homeless and the Health Boards have responsibility for their care and welfare needs, including the provision of in house care. This clarification of the statutory funders’ responsibilities has led them to seek more accountability from those homeless organisations that they fund.

⁴ Ireland, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2000. *White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity* Dublin: Stationary Office

⁵ Ireland, Department of the Environment and Local Government. 2000 *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy*. Dublin: Stationary Office

The Health Board have recently developed service agreements in some regions and are currently developing them in others. Service agreements are the contract between the health board as a funding body, and the homeless organisation as the service provider. The service agreement states, generally in quite broad terms, the commitments made by the service and expectations on the service, and also the commitments made by the Health Board. The development and use of service agreements is in its infancy in Ireland and the expectation amongst service providers is that the process will become more vigorous as they become more accountable.

The funding of projects by the Department of Environment / Local authorities has led, in some regions, to those projects being externally audited on their behalf. These audits are generally due to be repeated every three years.

The situation in Dublin is slightly different with all funding to homeless organisations being administered through the Homeless Agency. They, in partnership with Dublin based homeless agencies are drawing up service agreements and organising the audits of all the individual projects.

Although there are external pressures to demonstrate accountability it would be unfair to suggest that the motivation to improve, to offer an excellent service to clients is only motivated by external pressures. As noted above, the voluntary sector has been looking at quality and good practice issues for a long time.

Quality and Monitoring Tools

The emphasis on quality and improvement has resulted in a variety and an even an abundance of tools and approaches having been developed, both in the wider arena of quality and specifically within the voluntary sector.

Research conducted by the NCVO in the U.K.⁶ stated

“many VCO’s are confused about the choice of performance improvement approaches and tools on offer, and the benefits they can bring”

Undeniably, anyone who has embarked on introducing quality systems into an organisation will agree that there are so many resources to sift through, so many web sites with yet more links to other websites, it can be totally bewildering.

For example on a microsite provided by the NCVO – Quality Standards and Quality Systems⁷, lists some of the tools, which are currently being used in the sector.

- *European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM Excellence Model)*
- *Investors in People*
- *Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations (PQASSO)*
- *ISO9000*
- *Social Audit*
- *Charter Mark*
- *Quality Mark*
- *Quality First*
- *The Big Picture*

Some other relevant tools include *QuADS* (Quality in Alcohol and Drugs Services-organisational standards)⁸, *Emergency Accommodation For Homeless People* published by Homeless Link⁹, *Homeless Link Quality Toolkit - a quality standards manual* again published by Homeless Link¹⁰ and the *Resettlement Handbook* published by National Homeless Alliance¹¹.

⁶ *Improving our Performance: a strategy for the voluntary and community sector* [Online] Available from <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/uploads/uploadedfiles/3/324/improvingourperformancereport.pdf>

⁷ *Quality Standards and Quality Systems* [Online] Available from <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/Asp/search/microsites/main.aspx?siteID=38&SID=29>

⁸ *Quality in Alcohol and Drug Services* 1999. Alcohol Concern & SCODA. London

⁹ *Emergency Accommodation for Homeless People*. 2001. Homeless Link. London

¹⁰ *Homeless Link Quality Toolkit*. 2002. London. Homeless Link

¹¹ Bevan, P.1998 *Resettlement Handbook*. London. Homeless Link

This is not, by any means an exhaustive list, there are many other methods and tools and approaches. What is evident is the emphasis and commitment that there is towards quality and improvement within the voluntary sector.

In Ireland *Putting People First – A good practice handbook for homeless services*¹², was published by the Homeless Initiative in 1999, this is a tool for carrying out audits in various projects working with people who are homeless, e.g. hostels, resettlement projects, outreach etc. Also in Ireland the Daisyhouse Housing Association acquired Excellence Ireland's Q Mark in 2003, in recognition of their commitment to quality and improvement.

Outcomes and Impact

Best practice tools, monitoring tools, improvement systems etc are however all quite irrelevant without also focusing on outcomes and impact.

The term impact is becoming widely used but is rarely defined in evaluation literature. Blankenburg¹³ describes it as:

“...changes introduced by a given intervention in the lives of beneficiaries. Impact can be related either to the specific objectives of an intervention or to unanticipated changes caused by an intervention; such unanticipated changes may also occur in the lives of people not belonging to the beneficiary group. Impact can be positive or negative”

Basically impact is any change resulting from an activity, project or organisation. It includes intended and unintended effects, negative and positive, and long-term as well as short term. In this paper impact is viewed as the broader changes brought about by activity, project or organisation, for example reducing overall homelessness by 50%, whereas outcomes are seen as the benefits or changes for intended *individual* beneficiaries.

¹² Courtney, R. 1999. *Putting People First A Good Practice Handbook for Homeless Services*. Dublin. Homeless Initiative

¹³ Blakenburg, F. 1995 *Methods of Impact Assessment research Programme: Resource pack and discussion*. The Huage. Oxfam UK/I and Novib

As described, in the voluntary sector emphasis is being put on transparency, accountability and also now on value. Voluntary organisations cannot demonstrate their value or measure their performance in terms of, for example, share prices or profits, yet by measuring outcomes and impact they can demonstrate their worth. Also, and at least as importantly, understanding the outcomes for individuals and the impact generally of a service is crucial for that service. It exposes what doesn't work and demonstrates what does. And even before outcomes can be measured, desired outcomes have to be identified in order to be measured.

It is clear that outcomes and impact measurements are not straightforward concepts and added to this are the numerous challenges inherent in measuring outcome and impact in areas in which cause and effect are difficult to determine. However outcome measurement work has been pioneered by some voluntary organisations in the UK and some valuable learning has been identified.

The Charities Evaluation Services' *Managing Outcomes - A Guide for Homeless Organisations*¹⁴ has been singled out for its excellence and below is a summary of the recommendations it gives for beginning the process of outcome management.

Someone to lead

Identify one person responsible for developing outcome management at the outset. The person identified will need:

- clarity about the task
- appropriate training and information
- time to do the job
- support from colleagues

Set a programme for consultation and development

It is essential to allow enough time to develop, test and implement a

¹⁴ Burns, S. and Cupitt, S. 2003. *Managing Outcomes A Guide for Homelessness Organisations*. London . Charities Evaluation Service

system, including allowing enough time to get the support of workers and management. Deadlines can help provide a focus and momentum.

Timetable in different dates to cover:

- presenting the reasons for an outcomes/impact approach, and a discussion of concerns
- work on developing outcomes
- discussing proposed outcomes and assessment tools
- training or sessions to present and explain the draft system
- testing of the draft system
- reviewing
- final implementation

Using consultants

Homeless organisations using outcome management have found that external consultants can be helpful in maintaining momentum and to carry out specific tasks. Using consultants is unlikely to shorten the time needed, consultation and testing will still need to be carried out, however consultants can bring in a number of skills, help with planning and reduce the number of staff days dedicated to the development of a system.

Resource implications

Outcome management can have resource implications, and this should be part of the early planning. Resource implications can include the cost of:

- staff time
- external training
- external consultancy
- alterations to existing IT systems

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations conducted its own research into impact analysis and has developed methodologies to assess the impact of voluntary organisations based on the following principles¹⁵:

- Defining ‘impact’ as the difference made by a voluntary organisation, which may or may not have been predetermined (anticipated impact)
- Analysing impact as part of a system of interrelated activities – the ‘no organisation is an island’ approach to gauge the level of impact that is both direct and indirect, through ‘collective’ activity with other organisations or influences
- Basing the research on the views of multiple stakeholders; partner organisations and funders, management committee and paid project coordinators, paid front line staff, service users and front line volunteers. This allows for the possibility for identifying types of impact that could be construed as negative, by one or more of the stakeholders
- Using primary qualitative tools such as one to one interviews and focus groups to gauge the underlying dynamics of impact, rather than putting a number on it

The conclusions drawn include:

- Conventional questionnaire and hard indicator based approaches do not lend themselves to the assessment of impact that can not be predetermined or readily quantified (unanticipated impact)
- Short timescales are not conducive to the measurement of long-term impact
- Collective impact requires the co-operation of a number of organisations or projects. Organisations may be unwilling to take part in an evaluation of collective impact over and above an interest in their own impact

¹⁵ The UK Voluntary Sector Research Group 2003 *Measuring Impact case studies of impact assessment in small and medium- sized organisations*. [Online] Available from http://www.swo.org.uk/research/reports/Measuring_Impact_report.pdf [Accessed 12 July 2004]

- There are also likely to be attitude or resource related barriers to measuring these particular types of impact. Organisations typically lack resources to measure the long term impact of their activities
- Unanticipated impacts, if not central to an organisation's mission or objectives, are unlikely to be top priority for staff or funders. This may also apply to negative impact.

Service User Participation in Outcomes and Impact

Although in much of the writing about outcomes and impact there is some mention made of involving service users, a nod in their direction - most of the writing does not stress how vital it is. How, without service user participation the process is negated. Over the last 30 years however the broad concept of service user participation has been growing in prominence, scope and sophistication amongst policy makers, researchers, practitioners and service users themselves. It is understood in the UK that the emergence of participatory approaches can be traced back to two main influences. The civil rights movements organised primarily by disabled people and people with mental health problems and the growing popularity of consumerism in the 1980's and 1990's.

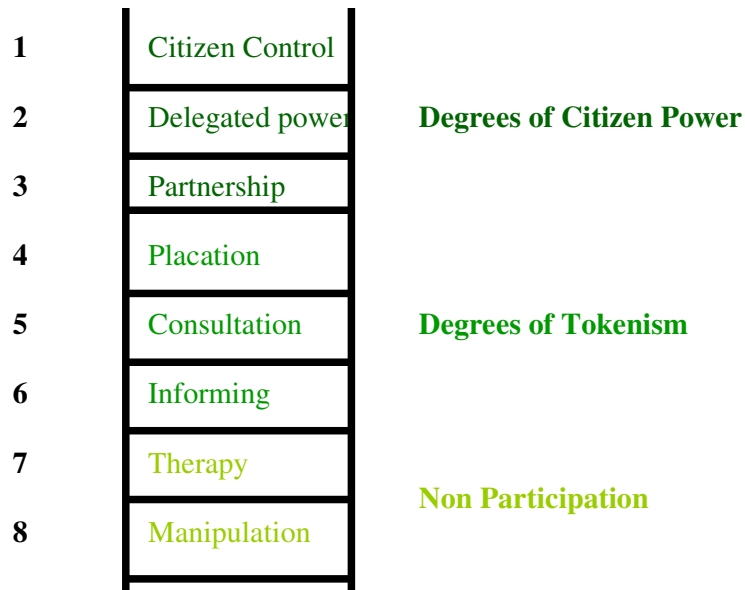
An exact definition of participation cannot be made, as the concept of user participation itself is not clear-cut. The Scottish Council for Single Homeless in a research report define it as

*'A generic term...suggesting that users are taking part in some aspect of the organisations work and therefore have some influence in decision making'*¹⁶

The current literature would define the empowerment model of participation as one which emphasises transfers of power as the measure of user participation and the consumerist model of participation as where empowerment is not the prime objective a welcome side but where consultation and participatory initiatives are used for 'decision support' not for decision making.

¹⁶ Velesco, I. 2001. *Service User Participation* Edinburgh. Scottish Council for Single Homeless

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation¹⁷ below, designed to be provocative certainly gives food for thought.



Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation

Residents and service users have in general, been passive recipients of services within many areas of the voluntary sector. This is not to say that participation does not happen but participation is not widely established and procedures for participation are not yet established and integrated into the management of most voluntary organisations.

Where participation systems and methods have been established these have also sometimes included involving service users in the process of outcome management. The Shaping Our Lives project in the UK looked at the application in practice of ongoing work about what service users meant by ‘user – defined outcomes’¹⁸ and reached the following conclusions:

¹⁷ Velesco, I. 2001. *Service User Participation* Edinburgh. Scottish Council for Single Homeless

¹⁸ 2003. *Improving Quality/Increasing Involvement: Making it Real* [Online]. Available from <http://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/Downloads/launchreport> {Accessed 12 July 2004}

- *It was impossible to separate ideas of user-defined outcomes from action to define and achieve them*
- *Involvement to support user-defined outcomes takes more time and resources than usually envisaged*
- *Users felt that services continued to show a lack of respect. The value of their own outcomes was not acknowledged nor valued*
- *Users valued the ordinary things in life – cleaning, shopping, support at home. They found it very difficult to get services to prioritise support in these areas*
- *It was important for users to meet together to strengthen their own voice in achieving*
- *Although the initial research had highlighted the value of direct payments¹⁹ many users were still not aware of this option*

The fourth point above is echoed in an article in the British Journal of Psychiatry²⁰ concerning carers and users expectations of services. A result of a survey discussed in the paper showed

“People who use mental health services often emphasise and value different aspects of their health and social function than do mental health professionals. They appear to place less emphasis on symptom reduction than they do on improvements in other areas of their lives. These include: work, or rather meaningful daytime activity, financial security, suitable and comfortable accommodation, choice and control over where they live, and the establishment and maintenance of relationships.”

Basically before deciding how outcomes and impact are going to be measured, a decision has to be made about *which* specific outcomes are going to be measured. This decision has to be made in full partnership with the service users. How can

¹⁹ A direct payment is money paid by a local authority (in the UK) directly to a person who has been assessed as needing community care or housing support services. The local authority makes the payment instead of arranging services. The person uses the payment to purchase the relevant services (for example help in the house, to go to work or social activities).

²⁰ Perkins, R. 2001. What constitutes success? The relative priority of service users’ and clinicians’ views of mental health services. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 179, pp 9-10

services be delivered successfully without first understanding the requirements of the service users?

The profit sector long ago came up with ‘the customer is always right’. Books written by successful business people include titles such as ‘Delighting Customers’, ‘Crowning the Customer’ and ‘Raving Fans!’, A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service’. Many users of voluntary services are probably grateful and often satisfied with the service they receive, but are they raving fans? Involving service users fully in the running and evaluation of services provided, would no doubt go some way to making this happen.

For a list of resources and tools on managing outcomes and measuring impact see Appendix 1.²¹

Conclusion

A win win situation

The voluntary sector in general has recognised the need to look at quality and begun to emphasis best practice in recent years. It is also beginning to recognise the need to follow this through by measuring outcomes and impact. Service user participation is too, slowly beginning to be discussed and hopefully implemented.

There is an ideal opportunity then, at this moment, as systems for outcome management are being established, to fully involve service users in this process. This can lead to organisations providing the service service users value, the impact of the service can be measured, informing changes and evolution and service users will become empowered, not passive recipients but equal partners recognised for their expertise.

²¹ Appendix drawn from the Appendix 1 in *Strategy for performance Improvement in English Voluntary and Community Sector* <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/uploads/uploadedfiled/3/254/strategyperfimp.pdf> and *Outcome Management – Further sources of information*. <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/search/microsites/main.aspx?siteID=3&subSID=319..>

Appendix 1 – Tools for assessing outcomes and impact

Charities Evaluation Service produce several guides, and workbooks on outcome management and monitoring and evaluation. They are clearly written and provide the best starting point for research into the subject. See www.ces.org.uk and look under bookshop.

‘**Measuring Impact – a guide to resources**’ is published by NCVO and includes an overview of certain methodologies and toolkits, and signposts to relevant resources. If you would like a free copy contact Jayne Blackborow on 020 77036161 or e-mail jayne.blackborow@ncvo-vol.org.uk.

‘**Measuring impact: Case studies of impact assessment** in small and medium-sized voluntary organisations’, is a report created in partnership between NCVO, NICVA , SCVO and WCVA . It was funded by the Community Fund and provides very useful recommendations for the more qualitative aspects of impact assessment. If you would like a free copy contact Jayne Blackborow on 020 77036161 or e-mail jayne.blackborow@ncvo-vol.org.uk.

A guide produced by the Community Fund & Charities Evaluation Services, called “**Your Project and Its Outcomes**” aims to explain the concepts of outputs and outcomes. Download the guide from <http://www.c-f.org.uk/funding-your-project/forms-and-guidance/outcomes/your-project-and-its-outcomes.html>.

‘Measuring the Outcomes of Voluntary Activity’ is a good free introduction to outcomes from **Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Activity** see www.nicva.org/article.asp?ArticleID=535&searchTerm=outcomes.

‘**Managing outcomes: a guide for homelessness organisations**’. Helps to contextualise the ideas by thinking about them in relation to a certain type of project. www.lhf.org.uk/Publications/HomelessnessOutcomesGuide.pdf.

On-line resources on outcome measurement are available at <http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>. They are designed for American voluntary organisations, but are still relevant and useful.

A Research paper called ‘The Impact of Impact Assessment’ looks at the experience of rural organisations. It is published by NCVO, and available free from holly.yates@ncvo-vol.org.uk.

For information on Quality Standards and Performance Improvement see the Quality Standards Task Group webpages at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/qstg.

The **Balanced Scorecard** <http://www.bscol.com/bscol/mission> was introduced by academics Kaplan and norton in 1992 and is a management tool that supports the measurement of four perspectives of organizational performance: financial,

customer, internal business processes, learning and growth. Social Firms UK <http://www.ermis.co.uk> is presently designing a balanced scorecard specifically aimed at Social Firms

The Urban Institute is a non partisan economic and social policy research organisation in the U.S. They have published a research paper entitled 'Developing Community Wide Indicators for Specific Sevces' (Non-profit sector). This can be downl loaded at <http://www.urban.org>

Social Auditing & Accounting

A number of other tools have been developed by the New Economics Foundation in partnership with others. These include:

- **Ethical Explorer** aims to take an organisation through the processes needed to engage with stakeholders and to understand and report on social impact. It builds on existing information systems and includes software to generate a social report.
- **Look Back Move Forward** is a project evaluation and learning tool. Participants are guided through a series of stages, reflect on a project they have worked on together and compare and learn from each other's experiences.
- **Prove It!** developed in partnership with Groundwork and Barclays plc, is a tool to evaluate community regeneration projects. It is built on the principle that data collection is itself part of the regeneration process and that many project aims are achieved by involving local people in evaluation as well as its delivery.
- **LM3** is an impact measurement tool that aims to enable organisations measure how their spending in the local economy has a multiplier effect and helps to regenerate it.
- **Social Returns on Investment (SROI)**. Narrow approaches to SROI aim to calculate an organisation's contribution to a reduction in welfare spend. Broader SROI considers the use of wider, non-monetary measures, for example user satisfaction or wider quality of life indicators. Social Return on Investment (SROI) approaches have been developed and pioneered in the USA, mainly for use by Philanthropic or Socially Responsible Investment organisations.

Achieving Better Community Development (ABCD), developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre (www.scdc.org.uk) is a programme of training and support material that offers a framework for planning and learning from community development. It encourages those involved in community development – to be clear about what they are trying to achieve, how they should go about it, and how they can change things in the light of experience. It includes a tool aimed at helping local people set the agenda for change.

Systems/Network approach

The systems/network approach at its simplest suggests that impact can be more easily understood by thinking about the role of an organisation within a system or network. Through mapping it is believed voluntary organisations can gain a clearer sense of their operating context, and relationship with other agencies. Guides include: Checkland, P (1990) *Soft Systems Methodology in Action*

Participatory Learning and Action Methods

This method combines interviewing and group work to allow participants to express themselves. It originates in developing countries (referred to as Participatory Appraisal) and was designed to give the most marginalised sections of the community a voice. It is used as an evaluation tool and is a means of engaging people in planning.