

Self-assessments as a quality assurance tool

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Looking to evaluate the quality of your work and identify areas for further development? A self-assessment will ensure that your organisation reflects on what they've been doing and how effective these actions are.

Setting a framework

First, you need to make a rough multi-year assessment plan. This is so you can achieve a sustainable impact through lots of small assessment goals spread over several years. Then you need to appoint a steering group. The steering group is responsible for planning and undertaking the first assessment and communicating the results. It will clarify the conditions for the assessment or make a corresponding suggestion with the help of the executive committee.

Relevant questions

The steering group and the executive committee will establish a few relevant questions for the first assessment. Four areas need to be covered here:

- Which results are we aiming for?
- Which resources are we working with?
- How are we achieving our results?
- Does what we are offering meet a need?

Perhaps your most important objectives and tasks are already set out in the (performance) mandate, mission statement or annual plan. Ideally, you'll have already set out the indicators against which you want to measure whether you have achieved your objectives. You can now use these indicators to check whether this is the case and determine areas for improvement.

Meaningful data

Next, the control group will consider which quantitative and qualitative data are absolutely necessary for answering the questions. The ways in which you gather your data and the conclusions you draw from them must be understandable to third parties. Interesting data may be found in written documents such as annual reports and accounts, balance sheets, contacts, budgets, concepts and minutes. Can you acquire any additional data needed through oral or written surveys within the desired period? Or do you need to collect statistics on a regular basis? Give individual employees specific tasks relating to parts of the data collection process. You can also look at how other organisations go about this.

Reflecting on performance together

At the heart of the self-assessment is an event in which a group of people jointly reflect on work performance and effectiveness. This may take the form of a half-day workshop or multi-day retreat. To achieve as diverse and complete an overview as possible, include everyone involved in the success of your organisation's missions.

Inside and outside views

The executive committee members and employees with different functions provide an insider's view. For an outsider's view, people who are key to your work come into play: experts from other organisations, customers/users of your services, and lenders. These people may take part in the event or be taken into account in the data collection phase. The event location should be conducive to achieving a relaxed, lively work environment.

Learning together

Now that the assessment event has been organised, you can turn your attention to the most important aspect: learning together. The key is facilitating mutual discussions and treating one another with respect. There must be room for uncertainty, as this is more important than knowing everything right now. There should be a balance between pride in one's achievements and the will to improve.

Drawing and implementing conclusions

Summarise the results of the data collection process and the outcomes of the event in writing. Managers will then have to implement the conclusions in their respective units. Don't forget to note down who is responsible for checking whether these conclusions have been implemented. Lastly, the steering group will share the results with everyone involved in the self-assessment. This marks the end of your task, which is sent back to the executive committee. For the next assessment project the (new) steering group can draw on this experience.