

Monitoring and Evaluation in the early years

Assessing the effectiveness of what we do

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Chapter 1: The basis of effective monitoring systems and processes

This book aims to provide the roadmap for any setting to become really great at what they do. I have chosen not to use Ofsted's terminology of 'Outstanding' because that tends to focus the mind on what is written in the Early Years Inspection Handbook, whereas I want to give you the time and space to focus on good business strategy and effective management practices that will ensure that what you do, day in, day out, is of a consistently high standard. With those systems in place, outstanding judgements will come and, more importantly, will be sustained.

Business strategy hasn't really featured on the radar of many leaders, managers and quality improvement consultants because early years courses and qualifications have heavily focused on pedagogy and practice. This is as it should be because tuning into children to meet their individual needs and supporting them to flourish is our core business.

It requires a high level of skill and an in-depth knowledge of child development and how children learn, but when we move into a management role, there is also a need for us to have a wider view of what we do and how we do it. We need to be able to look beyond pedagogy and practice. This resource has been designed so that you can follow a process that will enable you and your team to reflect on

what is currently in place and to identify changes that will increase the effectiveness of what you do, and the quality of what children receive.

Why we need a business strategy

We need a business strategy because it is the only way to ensure that we are clear about our setting's purpose and that what we do at every level of our provision contributes to that purpose.

There is a huge amount of research about the development of effective monitoring systems both in education and out in the wider world of industry, but that isn't a helpful place for us to start as the vast majority of that work assumes that we already know what needs to be in place before we can start to focus on what is working well and what isn't. So, to ensure that we have a solid foundation for our monitoring and evaluation activities, we are going back to basics to make sure that we haven't left anything fundamental out.

In this first chapter, we are going to spend time unpicking how to put a business strategy together; our journey, therefore, needs to start with our purpose or, as motivational speaker and organisation consultant Simon Sinek puts it, 'our WHY'.

In his numerous YouTube video clips, books and interviews, Simon has been able to identify the root cause of so many of the problems that we face in our daily work as leaders and managers. He describes it as losing our WHY or core purpose.

Simon's research would lead him to believe that staff in a huge number of organisations know what they do, and how they do it, but very few of those staff members will know specifically why they do it. When he talks about the WHY, he's not talking about what motivates individuals in particular, for example, being able to pay the bills or to pay the mortgage. He's talking about our setting's WHY, which is the reason our pre-school or nursery exists...our purpose or our ultimate goal.

(Sinek, S. 2009.)

Finding your WHY

In early years, a setting's purpose is often developed around the themes of providing children with solid foundations for later learning, helping children to fulfil their potential and the need to keep our youngest and, in some cases, most vulnerable children safe.

These types of phrases can often be found in the publicity materials that we provide for parents, but it is rare to find a setting that has invested time in constructing what they do around these statements, and, more often than not, most of the settings and the staff that I work with will have some differing views as to why their setting exists.

As I go around the room, staff members will make an educated guess as to what their setting's core purpose is or will share their own thoughts on why the setting exists, however, very few of them will be able to share their WHY with accuracy.

Our WHY is a critical part of our business strategy; it gives staff a greater insight into their role and enables them to connect what they do on a daily basis with the overall goals of our setting. It, therefore, isn't enough for staff to think that they know our setting's WHY. They need to know AND internalise it. That connection must not be underestimated as it creates a shared sense of purpose and responsibility that ties us all together, and that is the very basis of teamwork.

What might your WHY look like?

Our purpose should be meaningful. It needs to mean something to our staff, to those who use our services and to our children. However, it isn't always easy to communicate it. How can we explain what we're here to do and what is important to us?

If you feel that your WHY is missing and are unsure of where to start, there are some examples of WHYS below. At the very least you will be able to use these statements to open a conversation about what you do and don't like and what you believe is right for your setting with your team.

- To provide children with high quality environments and highly-skilled staff that can support them to explore and learn about the world around them.
- To create meaningful relationships with families ensuring that we work together to meet the individual needs of their child so that they may flourish.
- To provide children with inspiring learning environments and highly-skilled staff who can help each child to develop their unique skills and talents.
- To provide a learning community in which children and adults learn together, and where children can explore and investigate the world around them in a safe environment that enables them to develop their knowledge, skills, confidence and resilience.

The most important thing is that our WHY clearly communicates the reasons for our existence and that it then drives what we do.



Task 1. - Your WHY

Do you have a WHY? If not, why does your setting exist? What is it there to do?
If you have a WHY, does it still fit and make sense, or does it need to change?
If it needs to change, who should be involved to ensure that your WHY has meaning for staff, parents and children?

When highly effective leadership teams start with their setting's WHY, it becomes far easier to develop a framework that enables them to think about how they are going to get there and what that **should** look like in practice. This framework is important because our monitoring and evaluation systems will flow from the WHY, HOW and WHAT we do.

First, we need to be clear that vision, mission statements and values are not the same as our WHY. If we do not define our WHY first, we'll not know whether our vision is taking us in the right direction, our mission statement is right for our setting or if our values uphold our purpose.

Our WHY should also be shaped by our pedagogy or the how and what we believe children should learn or have experience of during their time with us.

Our WHY will be much stronger if staff members have been involved in its development. It creates a sense of ownership and deepens each person's understanding of it and its importance. If staff members are not able to be part of the creation of the WHY, dedicated time will need to be spent developing a shared understanding across our staff team.

THINK ABOUT...

If you believe that your WHY is firmly in place, how do you know that staff have internalised it? Just having it in your staff handbook or in induction materials will not help staff to connect their roles and responsibilities with your setting's purpose. It needs some dedicated talk time so that you can make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Task 2. - Do staff know your WHY?

Check out the understanding of your staff team. Ask them 'Why does our setting exist? What are we here to do?'

It is best not to do this activity as a group as you want to understand each member of staff's understanding. Ask everyone to take those two questions away and to think about their answers, then collect everyone's thoughts and compare them with your own.

Are you all on the same page? Does everyone even understand the question, or have they given you their own personal WHY? You may find that you need to spend time discussing what your WHY/purpose means with your staff team.

Until we all have the same level of understanding, our WHY will just be words on a piece of paper. It is worth remembering that a team cannot truly be effective if they do not understand their purpose.

Making your WHY happen

With our WHY firmly established, the next logical question is HOW are we going to make this happen?

This is a critical step in developing our business strategy as it helps us to identify important areas of work that contribute overall to the running of a successful early years setting.

Using one of the WHYs from the earlier examples, we can unpick this process in more detail.

Why do we exist? (WHY)

Our purpose is to provide children with high quality environments and highly skilled staff that can support them to explore and learn about the world around them.

To understand our HOW, we need to analyse or take apart our WHY. We need to ask ourselves what key areas of work will help us to make our WHY a reality.

Let's just take the first part of our WHY and start to understand the key areas of work needed to successfully implement this part of the statement.

"Our purpose is to provide children with high quality environments..."

Below are the types of responses that we could expect from our team.

How are we going to make this happen? (HOW)
We need to understand what research is telling us about effective learning environments for the different age groups of children that we support.
We need to adopt a rationale for our environments based on what we want children to learn and experience (our pedagogy).
We need to provide well-resourced environments both inside and outside which enable us to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.
We need to provide environments that are safe for children to explore and investigate.
We need to identify the on-going needs of the communities that we serve so that our activities, experiences and environments provide appropriate support and opportunities.
We need to provide environments that motivate children to investigate, explore and question.
We need to provide environments where children can lead their own learning by making choices about where they want to learn in the environment, what they need to use and who they need to help them.

This is not an exhaustive list, but by putting some thought into how we are going to make our WHY happen, we will start to generate a list of statements that will reflect our knowledge of pedagogy and the principles that underpin effective early years practice.

Again, going through this process with our team will help to create a deeper level of understanding and ownership, but it also brings other benefits. Having several people sitting around the table means that we have a greater range of knowledge and experience to draw on. The more

of our team members we involve, the less likely we are to miss out something important (although you may just want to involve senior leaders in larger settings as too many people can be counterproductive!)

Being realistic, there are going to be many leadership teams who simply cannot afford to pull all staff members together to go through this process. In this situation, the leadership team will need to find ways of including staff members in the development of the WHY and HOW. Maybe you could put together an initial draft and then take it to your team for consultation or use some initial thoughts as a development item during a team meeting.

The 'how we're going to make it happen' isn't just about the things that we need to do and provide for our children. There are also a number of hidden elements that contribute to achieving our purpose and the smooth running of our setting. We will, therefore, be required to consider the need for or implications of:

- legislation and local guidance on the safeguarding,
- employment law and safer recruitment practices,
- data handling (GDPR),
- Health & Safety legislation,
- financial law,
- financial planning,
- marketing.

There are likely to be other things that we will add to this list, but the examples above provide a good starting point.



Annex C - Mapping inspections actions and recommendations against the National Professional Qualification Content and Assessment Framework

Inspection Actions and Recommendations from Requires Improvement and Inadequate Inspection Reports	
<p>Monitoring & Self-Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitor and evaluate the impact of teaching and practice, identify inconsistencies and provide staff with professional development opportunities to help raise the quality of teaching to a consistently good level. ■ Ensure that children's needs are met effectively through accurate assessment and planning. ■ Improve staff's skills and knowledge further across all areas of learning to ensure that children receive a broad and balanced curriculum. (Many recommendations on the development of communication skills and the extension of vocabulary.) ■ Develop effective systems for self-evaluation, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and putting plans in place to swiftly and continually improve provision. ■ Enhance arrangement to monitor the quality of the provision to ensure that all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. ■ Further develop the self-evaluation process to include the views of children and parents. ■ Improve procedures to ensure that the impact of additional funding is monitored. (Early Years Pupil Premium) ■ Use self-evaluation effectively to identify any breaches of the welfare requirements. 	<p>Monitoring Progress & Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop systems to effectively monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups. ■ Monitor the progress of groups so that teaching can be more effectively targeted to gaps in learning. ■ Monitor educational programmes to ensure that all children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. ■ Use monitoring and tracking systems consistently to ensure that all children are making good progress.
<p>National Professional Qualification Content and Assessment Framework teaches participants how to:</p> <p>Design a sustainable business development strategy, whether for growth, stabilisation or specialisation (pg.30)</p> <p>Identify and anticipate changes in the external or strategic environment and understand their impact on different organisations (pg.30)</p> <p>Analyse performance data to identify the causes of variation within a school and against comparative schools (for example, in relation to national benchmarks, historical performance or between different groups) (pg.17)</p> <p>Ensure data collected is necessary, proportionate and manageable for staff (pg.17)</p> <p>Work with the governing board effectively to identify and agree approaches to school priorities (pg.17)</p> <p>Design and implement sustainable change across a school (pg.17)</p> <p>Identify a range of local and national partners that can support school improvement (pg.19)</p>	