



‘Measuring the Unmeasurable: Dealing with Complex and Complicated Evaluations’

Abstract

This presentation will offer a critique of the kinds of indicators used to evaluate outcomes of different types of programs and asks the question: ‘Are these indicators a true reflection of outcomes?’ The critique is based on a number of evaluations carried out by research and consultancy, Cat Conatus over recent years. These evaluations have included a range of social programs funded by several government and non-government organizations. Many of the programs were designed to address health and well being, community safety, family function, education and community capacity issues.

What we sometimes found is that because of the complexity of the programs, the achievement of commonly reported aims (for example in terms of increased school attendance, reduced violent offences, fewer domestic violence reports and fewer child protection notifications) was nigh on impossible. When this became apparent, we looked for other indicators that more closely reflected the outcomes of the programs. These included measures of changed community perceptions, increased family functioning and improved parent-child engagement. The refrain we frequently hear in relation to these indicators is ‘yeah, but you can’t measure that’.

This presentation will respond to this criticism with some practical examples of tools that we have tried out to measure the unmeasurable. The examples will include references to evaluations conducted in Tasmania.

Who this workshop is for:

This workshop will be beneficial for Human Service Workers, Evaluators, Researchers, Managers, Teachers, and Policy Makers.

About the Presenter

Dr John Guenther operates as a sole trader under the business name: Cat Conatus. He specialises in research and evaluation consultancies and works with organization – typically a mix of universities, government and non-government agencies – across Australia. His research and evaluation interests include adult and vocational learning and community capacity building with a particular focus on children’s services and domestic violence. Further details about recent projects and publications can be obtained from <http://www.catconatus.com.au/res.html>. Dr Guenther is a member of the Australasian Evaluation Society.

When: 11:30am - 1:00pm Friday 16th July 2010

Where: Lecture Theatre 1 Commerce Building, Faculty of Business, UTAS

