Working Hard
Working WELL &

Web-Based Tools for Assessing Organizations

by David E. K. Hunter

An excerpt from the book *Working Hard & Working Well*, which is available in full at leapofreason.org/workingwellbook

Web-Based Tools for Assessing Organizations

Many people who work in the social sector have suggested that it would be good to have some easy-to-apply tools that organizations and other interested parties could use to assess their strengths and capacities for managing performance—and also chart those areas that need further development. Similarly, there is also great interest in learning how to determine when an organization is ready to undertake either a formative or a summative evaluation. Recently I developed such tools. They are available on my website: www.dekh-consulting.com.

OMSAT: A Tool for Organizations to Assess Their Capacity for Managing to Outcomes[65] © 2012 Hunter Consulting

This tool yields valuable information to guide social service providers in their ongoing efforts to improve program quality and effectiveness. The tool is web-based, consisting of a thirty-question survey designed to enable leaders of social service organizations evaluate how likely it is that their own organization is "managing to outcomes"[66]—that is, whether its clients are apt to benefit as intended from the programming and services the agency offers. It looks at four domains of organizational performance that are essential to managing to outcomes successfully, each of which is defined by indicators as shown in the following table.

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65. Produced by David Hunter to replace his Social Investment Risk Assessment Self-Assessment Tool (SIRASA) © 2011 Hunter Consulting, LLC—with the generous support of the Tauck Family Foundation.
66. A concept discussed in Mario Morino's inspiring book, *Leap of Reason: Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity* (2011).

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE DOMAINS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
1. Strategic Leadership	**Clarity of Organizational Purpose (Mission)**—the organization's mission is specific regarding its purpose for existing, whom it serves, where it works, and what it expects to accomplish **Consistency in Holding to a Mission-Driven Course**—the organization has a history of keeping its focus on its mission, goals, and objectives and avoiding "mission creep"—especially in response to funder pressures
2. Outcomes-Focused Management	**Accountability for Outcomes**—the organization has clear performance standards and agreed-upon outcome measurements that it monitors and uses to understand and improve staff performance **Budgeting for Performance**—the organization deploys its resources with a focus on supporting areas that drive client outcomes (rather than, e.g., rigidly mimic categorical funding streams)
3. Performance-Management Capacities	**Data Integrity**—performance data are entered into the performance-management system accurately, completely, and on time **Outcomes Focus**—the organization tracks not only internal processes and outputs such as number of people served but also what results it achieves **Making Data-Informed Adjustments**—evidence that the organization has used performance data to make significant changes in its structure, capacities, staff competencies, systems and processes, programs, or other features in order to improve results **Relating Staff Activities to Client Outcomes**—evidence that the organization systematically reviews staff activities and the time spent in delivering them in relation to the results it is achieving
4. Program Effectiveness	**Delivering Programming with Fidelity**—the organization's core programming is codified and has both implementation and performance standards. Further, the organization monitors implementation and performance, making adjustments as indicated; hence it can be relied on to deliver its services at high levels of quality and in conformance with the design features of the program model—all of which suggests very strongly that the organization can deliver the outcomes that its programming is designed to create. **Evidence for Program Impact**—there is credible information to support the organization's belief that the kinds of programming or services provided actually produce client outcomes as intended

The tool's questions produce ratings in these five performance domains and the ten indicators that define them. It will immediately generate the following Reports once all thirty questions have been answered.

OMSAT Level 1

Contains an overall or global assessment of the organization's capacity to manage performance, an assessment of the four domains, and an in-depth look at the ten key indicators that define the Domains of Organizational Capacity to manage to outcomes—with a summary paragraph and a set of scores (scaled on a 100-point scale for each Indicator representing the level of organizational capacity to manage to outcomes).

OMSAT Level 2

Contains all the information of Level 1 plus an analysis of the responses to each of the thirty items, providing qualitative detail that deepens the understanding of the organization's capacities.

The numerical ratings make this tool very useful for leaders and managers of social service organizations to monitor incremental enhancements in their implementation of performance management, and improvement of the elements necessary for managing to outcomes.

Instructions for Using This Tool

To use this tool the executive director of the organization should assemble a team of key leaders, managers, and front-line staff to develop answers to the thirty questions. It is best if the questions are answered based on a group consensus. Where consensus is not achievable, the executive director (or a designated individual) should weigh the group discussion and decide how the particular item in question is to be answered.

All questions are multiple-choice and must be answered (the tool cannot be submitted with unanswered items; however, it can

be "saved" as many times as necessary until all questions have been answered). Where the meaning of a question is not clear, the organization should make the best effort it can to interpret it and select a response.

A few questions should not be answered by the whole group, but only by those who have special knowledge that will let them to do so most accurately. These are specified in each case.

Some questions may require pulling together some information. If this requires interrupting the session, the tool will allow the organization to save what it has done and pause, then resume responding to its items.

Many of the questions focus on "core programming." This term refers to all programs and services the organization provides to members of its target population whom it has enrolled as clients and whom it expects to benefit by achieving specific outcomes. **Other programs or services should not be considered in answering these questions.**

Organizations with no core programming—that is, organizations with programs and services that are supportive or enriching in nature but are not meant to produce outcomes—should not use this tool. (Examples might include a drop-in center meant only to provide support or recreation, a creative/expressive program with no "teaching or skills-building agenda," or a soup kitchen that serves meals but does not link the people it serves to other services.)

OMET: Organizational Management Capacity Assessment Tool for External Analysts © 2012 Hunter Consulting LLC

Ideal for funders undertaking due diligence. Designed for an external evaluator, this tool consists of the same thirty questions as the OMSAT tool, but with judgments based on a detailed review of documents and performance data, as well as interviews of key leaders, managers, and staff. Instructions are provided regarding what to review and whom to interview before answering the questions.

The analyst receives the entire, detailed analysis—as well as numerical ratings—of key aspects of the organization's capacity to manage to outcomes.

A Quick, Nine-Item Assessment: Is My Nonprofit Organization Ready for Evaluation? © 2011 Hunter Consulting LLC

This tool is designed to help leaders (executive teams, boards of directors) of social service nonprofits—and interested stakeholders such as funders—assess an organization's evaluation readiness. **It is designed for organizations that wish to be accountable for client outcomes**, not just for activities and products (outputs).

When is an organization ready for evaluation?

It is ready when it can state clearly:

1. What groups or populations it is working to help

2. What results it is trying to help them achieve

3. What it is doing to help them achieve the targeted results

4. Whether the program participants or service recipients (clients) actually match the groups or populations it wants to be helping and how many are being served annually

5. What program or service utilization patterns are

6. Who fails to complete programming or use services as intended

7. What client outcomes are (both quantitatively and qualitatively)

8. That the answers to these questions have held steady for several years

9. That its performance data are complete, accurate, and entered in a timely manner

This tool consists of nine simple assessment items based on this list. **To answer these questions, an organization's leadership team should assemble and develop a consensus regarding the**

rating that best describes the organization as it is currently. The ratings and their scores will, when aggregated, result in a rating of a nonprofit's readiness for evaluation, and a suggestion for the kind of evaluation that would be most appropriate at this time—a **formative evaluation** that clarifies basic questions regarding the organization's implementation of programs or services and its capacities for delivering them reliably and in a sustainable manner, or a **summative evaluation** that clarifies the organization's social value and the impact of its work on targeted individuals, groups, families, or populations.