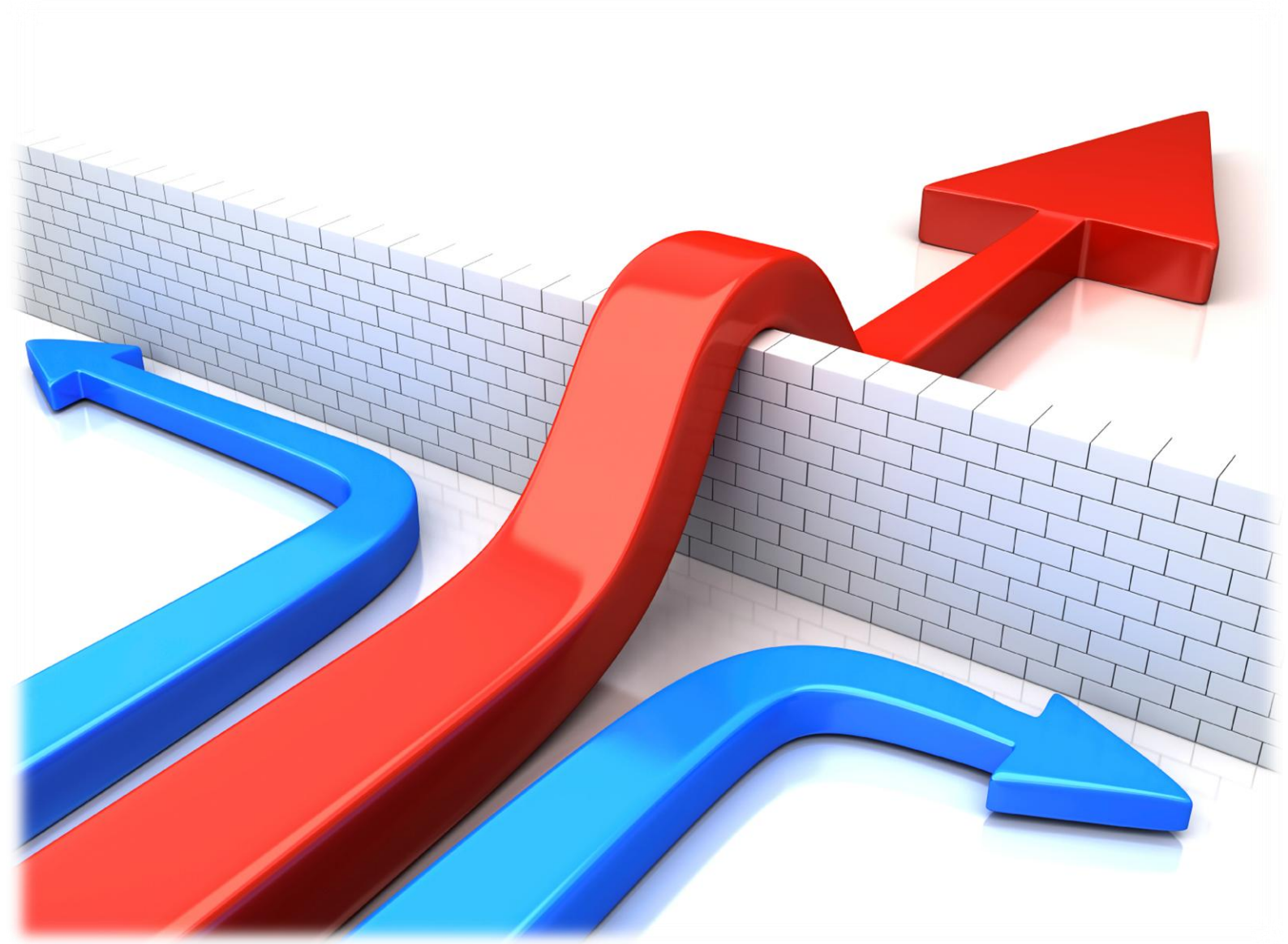


Barriers and Enablers of Road Safety Evaluation



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Introduction

Part of RoSPA's road safety programme includes providing advice and support to road safety practitioners on road safety evaluation. One element of the evaluation support is provided through www.RoadSafetyEvaluation.com. The website includes information on how practitioners can conduct their own road safety evaluations. It also hosts the E-valu-it toolkit. The tool reviews answers to a set of questions and produces recommendations on how best to conduct that evaluation. The toolkit also incorporates the answers into a report template for when the evaluation is complete and is ready for write up.

Results from a recent survey of toolkit users demonstrated that there was a motivation to evaluate amongst practitioners¹. This is not surprising as they had signed up to the website. Many of the projects in the toolkit, however, are in progress, with only a small proportion being completed or published. The user survey also demonstrated that confidence and ability to evaluate was not as strong as user's willingness to evaluate.

It was, therefore, proposed that an in-depth study would be conducted, to gain more understanding into the barriers and enablers of evaluating road safety projects. This will then inform how RoSPA continues to support road safety professionals to evaluate.

Methods

Qualitative methods were used to gain an in-depth insight into the barriers and enablers of evaluation. A focus group was conducted, as well as individual telephone interviews with those who were unable to attend the focus group. The format was semi-structured.

The focus group and interviews were conducted with those who had signed up to the E-valu-it website. Five respondents took part in the focus group and four completed telephone interviews. It was a small scale investigation as it used in-depth qualitative methods.

The majority of those who took part worked for a Local Authority (seven respondents), with the exception of two practitioners who worked for the Fire and Rescue Service. All worked in some capacity within road safety education, training and/or publicity.

¹ RoSPA. (2015). *E-valu-it User Survey 2015*. Retrieved from www.roadsafetyevaluation.com

Results

Respondents who took part had different levels of experience with evaluation. Some were evaluating all of their projects, some did not evaluate any of their projects, and others were evaluating a select few interventions.

Time and Resources

One of the core themes of the discussion was that of time and resources. Many road safety teams have seen a decrease in their budgets; some have also seen a reduction in the size of their teams. In that context staff time and resources have been focused on intervention delivery, resulting in evaluation being less of a priority.

“We’ve been asked to deliver the same service, with fewer people, and to keep up the service we’ve always delivered. And the thing that has slid has been evaluation” ID 1010, Local Authority

Additionally, those that are delivering interventions are not necessarily budget holders. Often there is not a separate pot of money designated for evaluation, making it difficult to justify it within the intervention spend.

Alternatively, in other teams, limited resources have driven the need for evaluation. Funders may require that certain criteria are met and evaluation can demonstrate if these have been achieved. Some have also been able to save money on intervention delivery through evaluation. For example, one authority assessed different methods of advertising road safety messages. The method which was most memorable was one of the cheaper methods, showing that advertising could be reduced in more expensive areas:

“And that’s been a massive saving to me and actually kept the awareness up.” ID 819, Local Authority

Evidence Based Practice

The majority of respondents used some form of evidence based practice, even if they did not evaluate, or evaluated very few projects. In the main, this was through the use of collision data. The reason for doing so was often also linked to resources. Interventions were targeted on the basis of collision data, for example, and only visited schools in high risk areas.

“We tend to be stats led because we’re such a small team and we’re obviously on a finite resource. So if we do find there are particular [collision] hot spots then we will focus on those particular hot spots.” ID 1240, Local Authority

The use of behaviour change theory, or scientific evidence, to help design an intervention was less well utilised. One respondent had attended a behaviour change

course, another actively looked for evaluation reports on similar interventions but these were exceptions to the rule.

Confidence and Experience with Evaluation

Those who had no experience with evaluation found it difficult to know where to start.

“It is a slight lack of confidence because it’s not something we’ve really done before, and it’s knowing how to approach it” ID 915, Local Authority

For those who had tried to do some evaluation, it did not always go to plan and this was sometimes off-putting. For example, not being able to recruit enough people to take part in the evaluation or finding that an external evaluation did not live up to their expectations.

“They spent tons of time [on the evaluation], and then they didn’t deliver. They just had loads of stuff which they didn’t use. They didn’t come up with a decent report.” ID 819, Local Authority

Others were more confident with doing evaluation projects. This was usually because they had come from a scientific background such as engineering or academia. One respondent did not have this type of background, however, RoSPA’s E-valu-it training workshop started them on the path to evaluating all of their projects.

“We then did the intervention and then carried out the evaluation as a result of the E-valu-it course. And then I did the report after. [...] I was then asked if I could do it for everything that we do, I thought ‘yeah’.” ID 841, Local Authority

Public Perception

For most respondents, it was their responsibility to deliver road safety interventions. As such, evaluation would ultimately take time and resources away from intervention delivery. This would not always be popular with management, or the community who receive those interventions; making it difficult for the practitioner to translate their motivation to evaluate into action.

“And now we’re being asked to justify what we’re doing. If you say ‘well then to do that we’ve got to draw back from some of the service delivery’, that’s not popular either.” 1010, Local Authority

When evaluation was conducted, the community may bias their answers. For example, when an intervention was popular they would choose answers which reflected well on the intervention, as they were concerned it would get cut if the evaluation results were not positive. This can act as a barrier to evaluation as practitioners do not get the information required to improve the intervention.

Type of Intervention

The type of intervention also had an influence on whether the project was evaluated. For example, one-off interventions were less likely to be evaluated, as it was felt that the lessons learned would be redundant.

The size of the intervention also played a role. Small projects were less likely to be evaluated as the time it took to conduct the evaluation was disproportionate to the intervention delivery. Furthermore, there was less pressure from management to evaluate interventions which required fewer resources. Similarly, larger projects were more likely to be evaluated as there was a greater need to justify the resources allocated to them.

“Management are keen on things like that to be evaluated due to the high cost. So because it’s a [large] expenditure, it is useful to have some form of evaluation to back up what you’ve done. Which would suggest that the long term, small cost work that we do, there’s less pressure to evaluate that” 915, Local Authority

The relationship between evaluation and intervention size, however, was not always straight forward. There may be some nervousness around evaluating large scale projects because the evaluation may not reflect the intervention positively. This raised concerns about what would happen to the funding for that intervention. Could it be used for other interventions or would it be lost entirely?

Reasons for not Completing E-valu-it Toolkit Projects

The size of the intervention also played a role in whether projects were only part completed in the E-valu-it toolkit. For example, some had started to go through the toolkit in relation to a small-scale intervention, and had decided the process was too lengthy in relation to the size of the project.

Another reason for not completing projects was that the toolkit was used as a way to check their thinking, rather than to do a full evaluation. The evaluation itself was then completed outside of the toolkit.

“I’ve used it as a picking board, just to bounce my ideas off” 819, Local Authority

Help and Assistance

Those who were doing evaluation offered some advice to those who are not well practised at evaluation. Tips included:

- Start with what you need to find out for the evaluation report and work backwards.
- Students from a local university can be a cheaper source of an independent evaluation.
- Evaluation questions can be built into the intervention to increase response rates and so it does not take time away from the intervention itself.
- Evaluation does not always have to be question and answer. Sometimes observation can work well, especially for interventions such as skills training.

Those not doing as much evaluation as they would like, made the following suggestions to help enable them to evaluate:

- Evaluation training
- A road safety evaluation expert to be available for advice and support throughout an evaluation project
- Some downloadable generic questionnaires

Conclusions

We spoke with a group of people who are signed up to the E-valu-it toolkit about their experiences with evaluation. The group are keen to evaluate, as would be expected from those who are signed up to an evaluation website. The motivation to evaluate, however, is not always translated into practice.

There is a complex interplay of factors involved in whether road safety interventions are evaluated. Limited time, resources, confidence, and experience in evaluation are all barriers to evaluation. It can be a struggle to evaluate for those whose main role, and skill-set, is to deliver road safety interventions.

There are, however, examples of where a lot of evaluation is taking place. Evaluation is more likely to be conducted when practitioners have some previous experience which aligns with the scientific process of evaluation. Those from a background in engineering or academia are typically more confident and more likely to do evaluation.

For those who are doing some evaluation, restrictions on budgets are still a factor in evaluation practice. More costly interventions, for instance, may have a greater need for evaluation to justify the project spend. Furthermore, evaluation projects may not

be the type that are conducted in an ideal world, but can be managed within the resources available.

Those who evaluate are more likely to have managerial support to do so. This includes the ability to use some intervention resource for evaluation materials and some staff time. Additionally, once the process of evaluation has been incorporated into the intervention it is more likely to be continued.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to encourage more evaluation to take place, and for projects to go on to be completed.

Improve Confidence and Experience

Evaluation training can help improve the confidence to evaluate and initiate evaluation practice within road safety teams. To ease the transition from theory to practice, ideally this should be based on an intervention that is currently being planned or undertaken. Assistance should be provided so that users choose an intervention that lends itself to evaluation for their first project.

Further help and support then needs to be provided to ensure that the evaluation project is carried through to completion. Once one project has been completed the skills can be transferred to other interventions.

Additional help and support should be provided via email or over the phone, especially at times of making key project decisions. Where possible, this support should be proactively offered to new users of the toolkit and should be followed up regularly. RoadSafetyEvaluation.com has also improved its help and guidance pages so users can now find advice relevant to the stage of the project they are at.

Other forms of more topic based advice should be made available to build on the original training. Topic based webinars, for example, could be used to provide a summary of a particular stage in the evaluation process. These could be accessed as and when users reach that stage.

Tailor Advice to Account for Limited Time and Resources

Whilst practitioners are new to evaluation, initial projects should be manageable in relation to their current experience and resources available. Evaluation projects that are easier to complete are less likely to be strong and robust, but can be used as a stepping stone to more complex evaluation techniques.

Users who are already conducting evaluation projects should be encouraged to strengthen their evaluations to ensure greater confidence can be placed in their findings. More ad hoc requests for advice may be more suitable for this group.

A set of generic questions for use in questionnaires should also be developed. Users suggested this would enable them to save time in the evaluation process and give them the confidence that they are using well written questions.