



# THE PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

LEARN. IMPROVE. REPEAT.

## PRINCIPLES & PROOF POINTS

### PILLAR 7

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LEAP OF REASON  
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**Principle 7.1:** Leaders **complement internal monitoring with external evaluations conducted by highly skilled, independent experts.**

**7.1.1:** To help drive improvements in our organization, we periodically arrange for external evaluations conducted by experts with credibility in the field.

**Principle 7.2:** Leaders commission external assessments to **learn more about how well their programs are being run, what these programs are or are not accomplishing, who is or is not benefiting, and how the programs can be strengthened.** Leaders do not use external assessments as a one-time, up-or-down verdict on the organization's effectiveness.

**7.2.1:** My organization's external evaluations are designed to assess the reliability and validity of our internal performance data; the quality of our implementation; and the overall effectiveness of our efforts.

**Principle 7.3:** Leaders recognize that there are many different types of external assessments, and **no one type is right for every organization or for every stage of an organization's development.** Independent evaluators who understand how different methodologies fit different contexts can help leaders **match the tool to the task.**

**7.3.1:** My organization has adopted a formal external evaluation plan that spells out the different types of evaluations that will be relevant for us at different stages of our development. We update the plan periodically.

**7.3.2:** My organization's plan includes *formative* (implementation) evaluation to help us determine:

- the quality of our internal data and program implementation
- whether we are delivering programs with fidelity to our model
- how well we are doing at recruiting and enrolling the population for which our programs are designed
- our program utilization, program completion, and participant engagement
- which clients achieve the intended outcomes, which do not, and which exit the program prematurely.

**7.3.3:** My organization's evaluation plan includes *summative* (impact) evaluation of programs that have been running as intended for several years, to help us determine whether we're making a difference beyond what would have happened anyway.

**Principle 7.4:** Leaders draw a clear distinction between outputs (e.g., meals delivered, youth tutored) and outcomes (meaningful changes in knowledge, skills, behavior, or status). Those who are working to improve outcomes **commission evaluations to assess whether they are having a positive net impact.** In other words, they want to know to what extent, and for whom, they're making a meaningful difference *beyond what would have happened anyway.*

7.4.1: My organization's internal performance data clearly distinguish between outputs and outcomes—and have been validated by independent experts.

7.4.2: My organization's external evaluators use *output* data to help us learn about program quality and fidelity.

7.4.3: My organization's external evaluators use *outcome* data to help us determine whether we're making a difference beyond what would have happened anyway. This requires using a reliable research design to compare data from our participants with data from similar people who did not receive our services.

**Principle 7.5:** Leaders who plan to expand significantly any programs aimed at improving outcomes have a **special obligation to commission a rigorous evaluation that can assess net impact**.

7.5.1: If my organization plans to grow significantly, we are conducting (or have conducted) both rigorous formative (implementation) and summative (impact) evaluations—with enough lead time to allow us to make critical adjustments and ensure that expanded programs will have the best chance of achieving net impact for those we serve.

7.5.2: My organization has or would put growth plans on hold—and look to redesign them before resuming growth—if/when evaluation findings show that we're having significant trouble with implementation or our clients are not benefiting in the ways we had expected.

**Principle 7.6:** Even those leaders who commission the most rigorous of impact evaluations do not stop there. They **commission additional assessments to gauge their impact in new settings** (or for new populations) and achieve greater positive impact for the money they spend.

7.6.1: My organization conducts new external evaluations (formative or summative) whenever we make significant program changes, operate programs in new contexts, and/or enroll different target populations.

7.6.2: My organization periodically conducts new summative evaluations, because the societal context in which our organization and programs operate constantly changes.

**Principle 7.7:** Leaders **share the methodology and results of their external assessments** to help others learn and avoid mistakes.

7.7.1: My organization shares our evaluation *plans* throughout the organization and with interested stakeholders.

7.7.2: My organization shares our evaluation *findings* throughout the organization as the basis for strengthening our programs and with external stakeholders who can benefit from the knowledge.

Now that you've had a chance to carefully work your way through each proof point, we encourage you to take a **step back and reflect** on your organization's overall progress on **Pillar 7**.

Where are you excelling? Where are you falling short of your own expectations? What two or three actions could you take in the next 12 months to lead to the biggest improvement on your Pillar 7 self-assessment the next time around?

Given the importance of human capital for making progress on Pillar 7 do you have the "right people in the right seats" in the words of *Good to Great* author Jim Collins? What more could you do to develop the talent you have and find the additional talent you need? What talent actions would likely lead to the greatest improvements on your Pillar 7 self-assessment the next time around?

What additional resources or support do you need?

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# GLOSSARY

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This glossary provides explanations of terms we used in this pillar. While not exhaustive, it includes terms that may have multiple meanings, due to different perspectives.

**Evaluation** – The systematic assessment, usually conducted by outside experts, of an organization’s attempt to produce significant change through intentional actions. For information on the two key types of evaluations, see “Formative evaluation” and “Summative evaluation” below.<sup>1</sup>

**Evaluation plan** – A document intended to help an organization map out and prepare for different types of evaluations that will become relevant at different stages of its learning journey.

**Fidelity** – The extent to which a program is implemented as designed.<sup>2</sup>

**Formative evaluation** – An evaluation organizations commission to help them improve the performance of a program while it is underway. Also called *process evaluation*. Formative evaluations can be designed to assess any of the following aspects of program delivery: the quality of internal data; the fidelity of a program to its model; how well a program is recruiting and enrolling the population for which it is designed; program utilization, program completion, and participant engagement; and which clients achieve the intended outcomes, which do not, and which exit the program prematurely.

**Impact (also referred to as Net Impact)** – Meaningful, measurable results beyond what would have happened anyway. Achieving impact requires not only that good things happen, but also that those things are a *direct result of the organization’s efforts*. Assessing whether an organization has achieved impact almost always requires external evaluations that are capable of factoring out (at a high level of statistical probability) other explanations for how the results came to be.<sup>3</sup>

**Net Impact** – See *Impact*

**Program utilization** – The degree to which program participants access services during a specific time period.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Hunter, David E. K. (2013). *Working Hard and Working Well: A Practical Guide to Performance Management for Leaders Serving Children, Adults, and Families*. Hartford CT: Hunter Consulting.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from National Implementation Research Network. (Undated). *Glossary*. Retrieved from <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation/glossary>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Morino, M. (2011). *Leap of Reason: Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity*. L. Weiss & Collins, C. (Eds.). Washington, DC: Venture Philanthropy Partners, in partnership with McKinsey & Company.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Urban Reproductive Health. (2016). *Glossary of Selected Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Terms*. Retrieved from <https://www.urbanreproductivehealth.org/toolkits/measuring-success/glossary-selected-planning-monitoring-and-evaluation-terms#goal>