

M&E Skills: Planning, Communication, & Leadership

Marya Plotkin, DrPH, MPH; United States

My name is Marya Plotkin. I'm a Senior Technical Advisor for strategic information which is another name for a monitoring, evaluation and I work for FHI360.

One thing I think is very important about setting up M&E systems and teams in country is M&E planning, as we've just discussed is laying out everything from your theory of change. So how do you expect your planning or your program to get a program from point A, where immunization coverage is very low to point B, where immunization coverage and systems for immunizations are increasing, to point C, which would be immunization coverage is high and systems for continuing immunization are also well established. So planning, whether it's the work planning or whether it's creating a comprehensive overview of your the logic and the, the timing of your intervention, is a critical part.

In addition to that, on the more personal and human side, I found two other very important parts of M&E and that's communication. So being able to communicate well with the technical experts in the field with senior leadership. Being able to not just document your vision and do your work well, but also be able to communicate well up to ministries, up to donors. So planning, communication.

And a third important aspect is specialization. And I found that when people are working on this the type of work that really excites them, then they do a much better job. So when I was the director of a monitoring and evaluation research unit in Tanzania, I allowed the people in my team to specialize into three groups. So, we had a monitoring, evaluation group who did more of that M&E planning that I was describing. We had a research group who did more of the specialized IRB approved research studies. And then we had a health informatics group who really enjoyed doing mapping and had all the background skills for programming, coding, mapping creating data management systems.

So, in many organizations all three of those skills are combined into one job description and an M&E person is expected to be a data manager, a monitoring and evaluation planner and a research researcher. But I think the it's really important when when possible with the resources to allow for specialization within monitoring and evaluation. To allow those people with a background and interest in research to really pursue research. Those people with that data heavy quantitative mindset to delve into statistics and into data management and data systems.

So I think that it's also in that vein is also really good to know yourself, what it is that you enjoy in your work, your work. Because sometimes that opportunity to specialize and to really focus on what you're good at and what you enjoy sometimes that opportunity is given to you. But sometimes you have to create it. So the starting point for creating the kind of work that excites you, is understanding what you like to do. And understanding what you're good at. That doesn't mean that you won't have to do the things that you're not good at, that you don't like to do. We all have to do those parts of our jobs, but it's really good to start within m M&E, looking carefully at what what you enjoy doing and and starting to recognize that and other people as well. And that's what a good leader does, is they recognize other people's skills and they try to create avenues for people to be able to practice what they're really good at and what they enjoy most in their work.