MEL 101.

(Un)Learning Lab Session

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Introductions.

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Our Path Today.

- Simplifying **MEL Terminology**
- **A Logical Process** to the MEL Cycle
- Strategies for integrating MEL **without a MEL Specialist**
- **Unlearning** and **Relearning** MEL
- **Wrap-Up**

Intended Outcomes.

1. **Build comfort** around MEL Process and Terminology
2. **Understand** the Underlying Logic
3. **Impart Confidence** in the Attainability of MEL Strategy

Simplifying MEL Terms.

JARG - GON

Noun. special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others to understand

(Source: Cambridge Dictionary)

MEL Terms (The Essentials).

Monitoring
Evaluation
Learning
Baseline Data
Indicator
Output
Outcome
Impact
Qualitative Data
Quantitative Data
Theory of Change

Pictured Above: Eliud Kipchoge, Greatest Marathon Runner Ever

Monitoring.

In Simple Terms: Think of monitoring as regularly checking on something. In MEL, monitoring involves routinely collecting information to track progress towards goals and objectives.

Marathon Training: In terms of our training program, this could be a run log we keep in a journal or tracked via a running app. The run log keeps a record of the number of runs, as well as other metrics potentially to help understand implementation of our plan.

Pictured Above: Example of a Run Log

Evaluation.

In Simple Terms: It's a structured way of assessing how well something is working, why it's working well (or not), and how it can be improved. It's about stepping back, looking at the big picture, and making informed judgments.

Marathon Training: Evaluation would be like reviewing your training data after a few months to assess whether your routine is effective in preparing you for the marathon. You're trying to understand the outcomes (physical fitness level, preparedness for the marathon) and impacts (overall health, confidence level) of your efforts.

Learning.

In Simple Terms: Learning in MEL refers to the process of *understanding* and *applying* insights from monitoring and evaluation data to improve future work. It's about using past successes and failures to drive continuous improvement and make more informed decisions.

Marathon Training: 'Learning' would be akin to your reflection on the patterns and outcomes of your training so far. For example, you may find that certain types of exercises lead to better endurance, or that you run faster in cooler weather. This learning then informs future training schedules, allowing you to optimize your regimen for better results.

Baseline/Midline/ Endline Data.

In Simple Terms: It's the information you collect about the situation at the start, middle and end of a project or intervention, so that you can see how much change has occurred.

Marathon Training: This would be like taking measurements of your fitness level throughout your marathon training program. It could include things like your running speed and distance, heart rate, and weight. Comparing the "starting point" to other check-ins will indicate changes as you continue to train.

Pictured Above: Comparisons of Run Logs via App

MEL Terms (The Essentials).

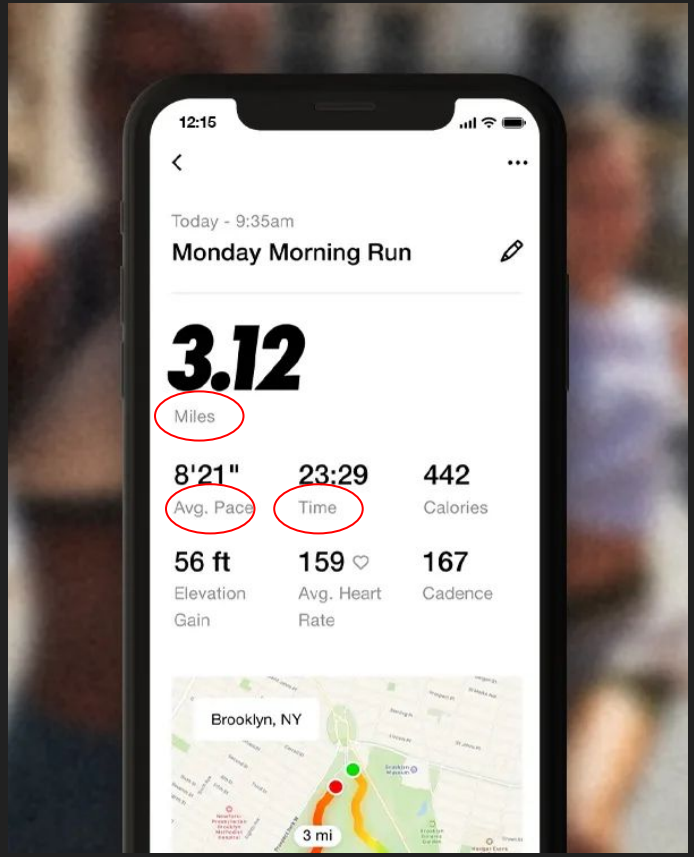
Monitoring
Evaluation
Learning
Baseline Data
Indicator (Your definition?)
Output
Outcome
Impact
Qualitative Data
Quantitative Data
Theory of Change

Pictured Above: Eliud Kipchoge, Greatest Marathon Runner Ever

Indicator.

In Simple Terms: An indicator is a sign or clue that shows us if change is happening. For example, if you're trying to get healthier, an indicator might be how much you can run without getting tired.

Marathon Training: It's a specific piece of data that gives you an idea of how well you're doing towards your goal of preparing for the marathon. If your running speed consistently increases over time, that's a good indicator that your training is effective.

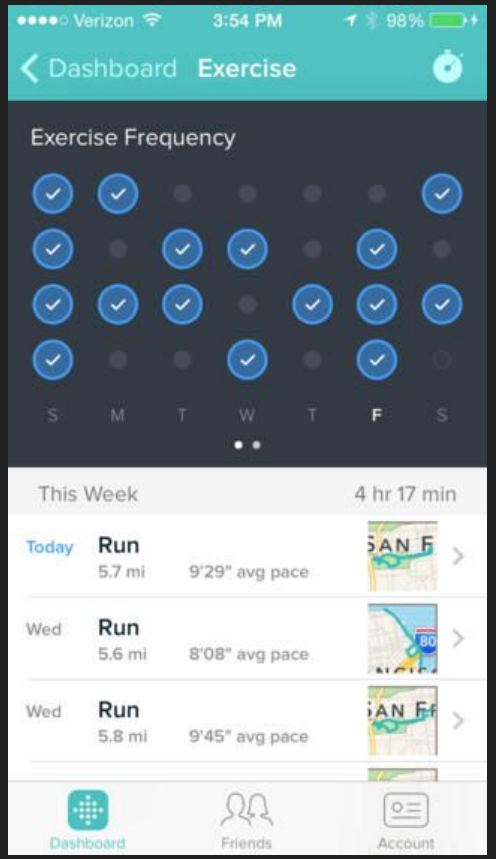


Pictured Above: Run App Indicator Dashboard

Output.

In Simple Terms: Outputs are the immediate, tangible products or services delivered as a result of your activities. They are the direct and measurable results of the tasks you've completed.

Marathon Training: Outputs could be the completion of weekly training runs as per your schedule. Each run you complete is an output - a direct result of your activity (the act of running according to your plan).

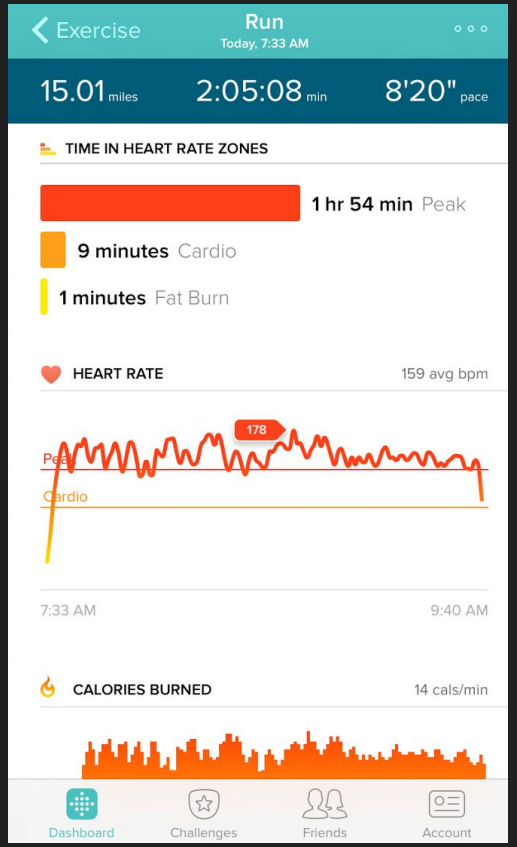


Pictured Above: Digital Run Log via App

Outcome.

In Simple Terms: Outcomes are the changes or benefits that happen as a result of what you're doing. If you think about planting a garden, the outcome would be the vegetables or flowers that grow as a result.

Marathon Training: For example, one desired outcome of your marathon training program might be improved cardiovascular health.



Pictured Above: Runner Checking Their Time

Impact.

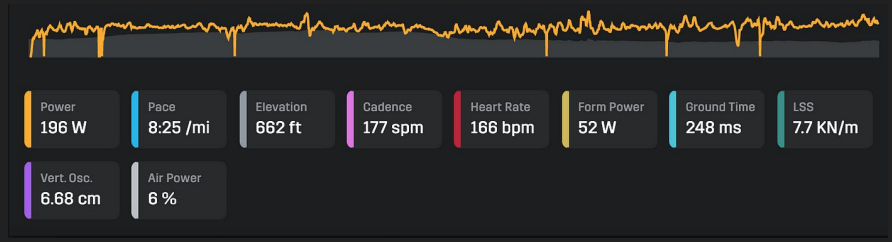
In Simple Terms: Think big, long-term change that happens as a result of your work. Using a gardening example, impact might be creating a sustainable food source for your family or improving the local ecosystem.

Marathon Training: In the context of the marathon training, an impact might be a sustained healthy lifestyle, increased self-esteem, or even inspiring others in your life to take up running or exercise.

Quantitative Data.

In Simple Terms: This would be numerical data like the number of fruits produced by each plant, the height of your plants, the percentage of seedlings that survived, or the amount of rainfall received each month.

Marathon Training: This would be the measurable, numerical data you collect about your training, such as your running speed, distance, heart rate, and so on. This data can be easily measured and compared over time to track changes and progress.



Qualitative Data.

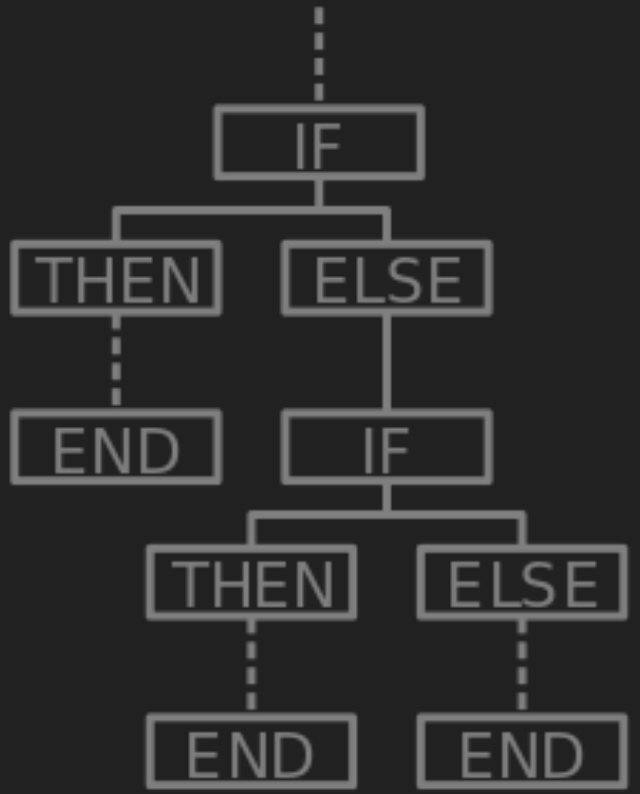
In Simple Terms: Qualitative data is about exploring and understanding things in depth. If quantitative data tells us 'how much' or 'how many', qualitative data tells us 'why' or 'how'.

Marathon Training: This would be like keeping a training journal where you write about how you feel after each training run—how hard it was, how you felt emotionally, what parts of the run were most challenging or enjoyable, etc. This gives you a different type of information than your quantitative data (like running speed or distance) and helps you understand more subjective aspects of your training progress.

Theory of Change.

In Simple Terms: This is like a roadmap for your project. It clearly outlines what you plan to do, what changes you expect to see, and how you think those changes will occur. It's about thinking through the steps from where you are now to where you want to be.

Marathon Training: "If I follow this marathon training program (your activity), then I will improve my cardiovascular fitness and running speed (outputs), which will enable me to complete a marathon (outcome) and lead to better long-term physical wellness (impact)."



Putting It All Together (A Logical Process).

Impact *(Evaluation)*		Improved physical health and wellness
Outcome		Complete a full marathon race
Output *(Monitoring)*		Increased endurance and speed
Activity		Training runs four days a week

Putting It All Together (A Logical Framework).

		Summary	Indicator	Data Source	Risk/ Assumptions
Impact *(Evaluation)*		Improved physical health and wellness	BMI, Resting Heart Rate, Mental Resilience	Post-race health check-up, self assessment	Running a marathon leads to improved health
Outcome		Complete a full marathon race	Marathon completion	Marathon completion time/certificate	Potential Injuries might prevent completion
Output *(Monitoring)*		Increased endurance and speed	Distance, Speed	Running log distance and speed measures	Training plan will lead to increased endurance/speed
Activity		Training runs four days a week	Training Runs	Running logs	Unforeseen circumstances may interrupt training

Reference: tools4dev.org

Considerations on Logical Frameworks.

- One of the most commonly used frameworks in MEL project planning
- De facto proposal requirement
- Articulates work to be done and the resulting effects at multiple levels
- Embraces linearity and is one-dimensional
- Does not an denote iterative process (learning and adaptation!)

Putting It All Together (As a Cycle).

Learning
Analyze Plan Effectiveness and Adapt

Activity
Training Plan

Monitoring
Run Logs

Impact
Improved Health and Mental Resilience

Output
Progress in Speed, Endurance

Evaluation
Time/Distance Comparisons, Health Assessment

Outcome
Marathon Completion

What might this look like in another scenario?

Learning
Sensemaking w/ Stakeholders, Program Adaptations

Activity
Handwashing Trainings

Monitoring
Attendance Lists

Impact
Fewer People with Diarrheal Disease

Output
People Trained in Handwashing

Evaluation
Sanitation Knowledge & Behavior Survey

Outcome
Increase in People Using Proper Techniques

Putting It All Together (A Logical Framework).

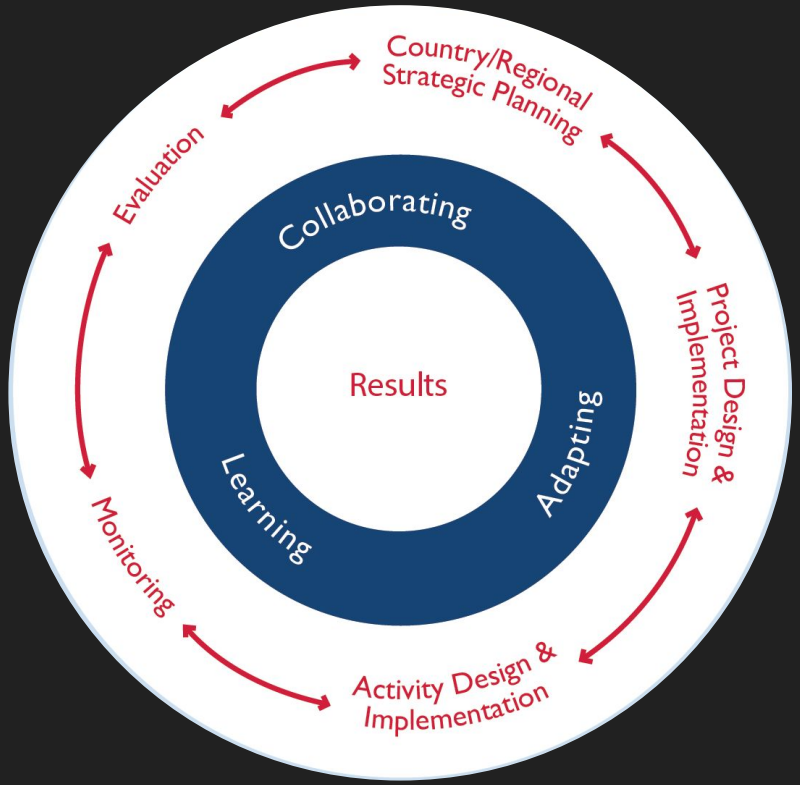
		Summary	Indicator	Data Source	Risk/ Assumptions
Impact *(Evaluation)*		10% fewer people with diarrheal disease	--	--	--
Outcome		40% increase in people using proper handwashing	--	--	--
Output *(Monitoring)*		800 people trained in handwashing	--	--	--
Activity		20 handwashing trainings	--	--	--

Putting It All Together (A Logical Framework).

		Summary	Indicator	Data Source	Risk/ Assumptions
Impact *(Evaluation)*		10% fewer people with diarrheal disease	Prevalence of diarrheal disease	Health clinic records, monthly	--
Outcome		40% increase in people using proper handwashing	Use of proper sanitation methods	Self-reported use and focus groups	Cross-infection from cooking water is negligible
Output *(Monitoring)*		800 people trained in handwashing	Number of people trained	Attendance lists	Knowledge initiates behavior change
Activity		20 handwashing trainings	Number of trainings	Project officer activity log	Willingness to attend, availability of infrastructure

Reference: tools4dev.org

Where does MEL fit in the program cycle?



Source: USAID Program Cycle

MEL without a MEL Specialist?

Recommended Strategies.

Strategy	Description
Training	Invest in training for existing staff. This could be through workshops, online courses or mentorship from someone with MEL expertise. Trainings could cover basic concepts of MEL, survey design or other data collection tools, analysis methods and data-driven decision-making.
Collaborative Approach	Divide MEL responsibilities among different team members based on roles. For example, project coordinators could be responsible for monitoring activities and outputs, while communications team could focus on evaluating efforts. This ensures that MEL is a shared responsibility and embedded throughout the organization.
Leverage Technology	Use available technology to simplify the MEL process. This might include the use of survey tools like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey for data collection, spreadsheet software for data analysis and project management tools to track progress.
Regular MEL Dialogue	Schedule regular meetings where the team can come together to review MEL data and discuss insights. This not only helps to keep everyone updated on the organization's progress but also fosters a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Recommended Strategies.

Strategy	Description
Partnerships and Networks	Leverage relationships with other organizations, networks, or coalitions (e.g., MCLD) that can provide support or resources for MEL. This could include opportunities for peer learning, sharing of best practices, or even pooling resources to hire a shared MEL consultant.
Simplicity and Relevance	Keep MEL systems as simple as possible and ensure they are relevant to the needs of the organization. It's more important to have a few meaningful and useful indicators than a complex system that's difficult to maintain.
Use Data for Decisions	Make sure that data collected is actually being used in decision making and strategy development. This will make the process feel more valuable and relevant to those involved.
Celebrate Success and Learn from Failure	Encourage a culture that celebrates success but also sees failures or challenges as opportunities for learning, growth and improvement.

Scenario 1: Small Environmental Non-Profit

Let's consider a small environmental non-profit organization that works on local river restoration projects. They don't have a dedicated MEL specialist, but they still want to measure their impact and improve their projects based on data and feedback.

The organization decided to train a member of their team who had shown interest in data analysis. This staff member spent part of their time coordinating MEL efforts alongside their usual duties. They created simple surveys for project participants and local community members, collecting data on how the river restoration projects were perceived and what changes people noticed in local ecosystems.

This data was collected using Google Forms, a free and user-friendly tool, and analyzed using spreadsheets. Every month, the team came together to review the data and discuss potential improvements. Over time, they were able to use this feedback to make their projects more effective and to demonstrate their impact to donors and the local community.

Scenario 2: Medium-Sized Health Non-Profit

Consider a medium-sized health non-profit that works on improving access to medical services in underserved urban areas. They couldn't afford to hire a full-time MEL specialist, but they knew the importance of MEL for their work.

To tackle this, they divided MEL responsibilities among existing team members. For instance, project coordinators were in charge of monitoring their projects, collecting data on how many people were reached by their services and what kind of health outcomes were being achieved. The communications team took responsibility for evaluating how well their outreach efforts were working, using metrics from social media and website analytics.

Each quarter, the team came together for a MEL meeting where they shared their data and insights. This allowed them to see the bigger picture of how their work was going and to make data-informed decisions about future projects and initiatives.

Both of these examples highlight how MEL can be integrated into organizations without a dedicated specialist, using accessible tools and a collaborative, team-based approach.

Scenario 3: Your Context (Discussion) // Votre contexte

1. What do you call a ‘MEL’ lead in your organization? (e.g., Impact Officer, Data Manager, Not Applicable, etc.) // *Comment appelez-vous un responsable "MEL" dans votre organisation ? (par exemple, responsable de l'impact, gestionnaire de données, sans objet, etc.)*
2. What type of reporting do you do on your programs? Where do you get the information for those reports? // *Quel type de reportage faites-vous dans le cadre de vos programmes ? Où trouvez-vous les informations nécessaires à ces reportages ?*
3. Without a MEL lead, what do you think is missing in your organization? // *Sans responsable du suivi, de l'évaluation et de l'apprentissage, que manque-t-il à votre organisation ?*

Unlearning and Relearning MEL.

Poll Questions

How can we approach MEL differently based on today’s discussion?

THP Principles on MEL.

The Hunger Project Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) philosophy is based on four principles:

Build Simple
MEL provides insights into program impact, effectiveness and progress towards goals. THP is committed to building systems to deliver these results in a way that is intentionally light on cost, infrastructure and burden to the communities and staff.

Measure What Matters
Our MEL system serves as the framework for best delivering on our organizational mission to end hunger and poverty by empowering individuals and communities.

Deliver Learning
For MEL to be useful, it must connect to program design and implementation choices. MEL data and systems should provide information that can be used to adapt and improve THP's ability to create impact.

Emphasize Collective Impact
MEL systems need to leverage shared measurement tools and adopt existing and universal standards - both within the organization and from outside - wherever possible. This encourages scalability and the ability to deliver data on a collective and meaningful level.

Case for Community-Led MEL.

The most effective and sustainable approach to implementing a MEL strategy integrates community-led principles, for the following reasons:

Increased Ownership and Accountability (Integrating communities in MEL increases their investment in the project's success and fosters a sense of responsibility for outcomes)

Contextual Understanding (Community partners bring irreplaceable knowledge about their local context that can shape more effective and realistic MEL strategies)

Quality Data (Community involvement often leads to more accurate and reliable data, given their in-depth understanding of local realities)

Sustainability (Community-led MEL contributes to sustainability by building local capacities to monitor and evaluate projects, which can continue even after external support ends)

Agency (Inviting communities to shape MEL the MEL process acknowledges their expertise and inherent capacity to make informed decisions about their own realities)

Thanks!

Questions?