Observational Evaluation

Observation is more objective (which doesn't necessarily mean better) than self-assessment and is used in clinical practice. The approach we've developed in Happy Museum is only partly tested in our action research, but nonetheless provides useful 'leading' indicators of change, particularly when it is backed up by academic research. Leading indicators (as opposed to 'lagging' indicators) are evidence that things are likely to change, especially if the behaviours are evidenced elsewhere to lead to good outcomes. For example, Manchester's Playful Museum was based on the research that academics had conducted that showed that play led to wellbeing. The team collected evidence of good quality play, confident that others had proved that would lead to wellbeing.

It can be an opportunity to engage the front of house teams.

There are three types of observational evaluation we might consider in our approach. These are standard techniques used by psychologists. These are transferable tools as long as they are tested for validity. Do this by testing until three observers reach a point of agreement.

Interval observation

Observe every five minutes, say. Only log the behaviours you've planned to look for using codes. Have two observers at one time to validate the approach. If their observations are very different something is wrong and the process needs refining until they are similar, when the average score can be used.

Frequency observation

Target a limited number of people for 10 minutes, say. Count the number of times they show the behaviour, for example, every time they smile.

Blow by blow account

This is harder to do, and not necessarily relevant for the Happy Museum. It records everything that happens.

The framework is simple, and can be worked out as long as you are logical and structured, and make sure samples are random. You need to look for behaviours that support OR refute your expectations. Defining the behaviours you are observing is more complex.

In Happy Museum we are looking for the LIFE outcomes (Learning, Interacting, Feeling happy, active or worthwhile, Environmental awareness and care of surroundings), but not all are demonstrated by observable behaviours. Here is a suggestion of behaviours you might observe:

Learning: take time reading, take time observing, discuss, ask questions, share thoughts

Interacting: smile at someone, talk, touch, offer help

Feelings: smile, laugh, play, cry, appreciate aesthetics, express yourself

Environmental awareness and care of surroundings: make a donation, recycle leaflets

Learning and interacting are behaviours evidenced in the Five Ways to Wellbeing and the third and fourth are important, particularly for Happy Museums.

To be able to evidence these in a busy gallery environment you need to easily record them using the LIFE coding and perhaps an additional code of 1,2, or 3 for the intensity of the behaviour. It might be too complex to observe for four at the same time, so you could take them sequentially and use either frequency or interval observation.

These observations will provide indicators that wellbeing is being promoted. The second stage might be to also look for evidence of what it is that is creating the wellbeing, which exhibits for example, or whether people are visiting in groups or individually. For example, Manchester Museum looked at types of behaviour and observation of who was involved in these responses. Where there was an adult involved the creative response was biggest (15 occurrences). Where there were multiple children together fun and imagination predominated (12 and 11) and where there was a single child, imagination was most frequently demonstrated (9). This presents some interesting ideas for ways to generate outcomes, or to respond to different groups of visitors.

Example of observational evaluation Excel sheet

Observation	Emotion	Group
	excited quiet fun negative enthusiastic creative imaginative VSA observation	adult involved mixed multiple children single child teenagers
One little girl picked up the smallest spider and carried it around before placing it carefully on the floor.	imaginative	single child
Another child shouted 'don't wake the spider!'	excited	multiple children
A group of children started jumping on the bubble wrap shouting 'is it real?'	imaginative	multiple children
One parent said to his children 'don't wake the spider' so they tiptoed towards it had a look and then carefully walked away.	quiet	adult involved
Several children walked into the area with parents and tip toe over the bubble wrap to see the display cases- it appeared they thought they shouldn't walk over it.	VSA observation	mixed
With a little encouragement two children tried to walk around the spider without making any noise, competing with each other.	quiet	adult involved
Towards early afternoon many children taking pieces of bubble wrap to jump on- no longer trying not to wake the spider.	excited	multiple children
A number of children sitting amongst the bubble wrap and popping it.	fun	multiple children

Other tools eg Dementia Care Mapping

By way of example of how these tools can be used, Dementia Care Mapping is an observational tool used by care practitioners, researchers and service providers to evaluate the quality of life and quality of care of people with dementia. As with individual assessments, it is sometimes useful to use the tools of partners. The observations recorded by the Mapper capture levels of behaviour and well-being in order to gain an understanding of the experience of care from the perspective of the person with dementia.

During a Dementia Care Mapping, every five minutes the Mapper will record a Behaviour Category Code (BCC) which represents what each person was mainly doing for that period of time. This is chosen from a list of 23 codes which are denoted by a letter for example, F= eating and drinking, E= expressive or creative activity, N= nod, land of! In each time frame the Mapper also records a Mood and Engagement (ME) Value, which represents how engaged the person is and whether their mood is positive or negative. This is represented on a 6 point scale (+5, +3, +1, -1, -3, -5).

Example of mapping sheet

Date: 8.1.13 Time period: 10.30-12.25 Place:

Total number of service users: Number of staff: 11 Observer: BC.

staff put music on.

Participant name	Time	10.30	10.35	10.40	10.45	10.50	10.55	11.00	11.05	11.10	11.15	11.20	11.25	11.30	11.35	11.40	11.45	11.50	11.55	12.00	12.05	12.10	12.15	12.20	12.25	Total ME / Total TF
Winnie	BCC	A*	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	K	B	A	A	A	B	B	B	D	
	ME	+1															+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	
Betty	BCC	A	B	B	B	I	B	B	O	N	I	N*	N	B	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	E	
	ME	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1		+1	-1	-1	+1			-1	-1							+1	
Phyliss	BCC	B	A	I	I	I	X	X	X	A	I	I	B	N	N	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	C	N	N	
	ME	+1	+1	+1	+1	+3*	/	/	/	+1	+1	+1	+1			+1	+1	+3	+1	+1	+1	+1	-1			
Ilean	BCC	B	A	B	N	N	B	B	N	N	N	B	B	I	B	A	A	A	°I	B	A*	B	B	E°	B	
	ME	+1	+1	+1			+1	+1				+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+3	+1	+3	+1	+1	+1	+1	
Margaret	BCC	K	A	I	I	I	I	I	A	A	I	I	I	I	A	I	A	G	A	A	A□	A	A□	B	A	
	ME	+3	+1	+1	+1	+3*	+1	+3*	+1	+1	+1	+1	+3	+1	+1	+1	+3	+3*	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	

- Blowing nose.
- waving hand to music.

member of staff started quiz...

10.30 - winnie taken for hair cut.
10.35 - staff starting quiz - letter game
10.50 - phyliss gave final answer to round - PE - congratulation from staff. (celebration)
11.00 - staff made joke to margaret - PE - INCLUSION
11.05 - BETTY found toy to cuddle on chair - talked to it 'i recognise yai, hold it.
11.15 - started a new game.

11.20 - Betty asleep in chair - looking comfortable.
11.25 - PE - celebration to margarets answer 'she's on a roll'.
11.50 - margaret, talking about pony when younger.
12.20 - ILEAN - moving head to music.
12.15 - margaret talking to cat.
12.12 - Betty - waving her hand to music - like conducting.

Observational evaluation guidance

Consider the ethics of this approach and use signage to explain what you're doing and why.

1. Choose and code behaviours to observe, for example reading (to show learning), discussing (to show interacting) smiling (to show feelings) recycling a leaflet (to show care of surroundings).
2. Target a group of people for 10 or 15 minutes and count the number of times they demonstrate the behaviours.
3. Get two or three people to do this for a while to make sure they agree so you are confident of the approach.
4. Enhance your learning of what works, by also coding what they were doing, or what exhibit they were engaged with.