

14. TOOL FOR CHOOSING A COMMON LANGUAGE (Appendix E)

The Tool for Choosing a Common Language (TCCL) has two purposes. First, I use it as a teaching tool in the two-day Training for Trainers and Coaches. Each group of four is given 20 minutes to identify the words their group would choose for each idea. Choosing language is a new experience for most people and this reinforces the notion that words are just labels for ideas. It's not the labels that matter but the ideas.

This exercise is intended to change the prevailing view that words have fixed meanings. Labels are important only because they provide a useful shorthand for talking about ideas. This provides people trained in RBA with an intellectual dexterity not easily gained from other methods. Once you know how to use words to label RBA ideas, you can sit in a meeting and figure out what people are talking about no matter what words they use. And perhaps you can help them move toward greater discipline in language usage.

The second purpose is to help organizations that want to adopt a standard language convention as part of RBA implementation. In this case, a small committee should be formed to consider the choices and come back to the executive team with a set of recommendations. These definitions can then be shared throughout the organization. It is not a bad idea to put the definitions of the top 10 RBA ideas on a poster that can be placed in conference rooms. Another poster (or two) could include the 7 Population and Performance Accountability questions. All of that in addition to the population and performance baseline curves you are trying to turn.

It is very important to understand that completing the TCCL is NOT intended for RBA beginners. I show people the TCCL in RBA 101 as a way of explaining the idea of language choice. But, when you teach RBA, do NOT run this as an exercise in an introductory class. In the early stages of learning about RBA, beginners can be confused by too many choices. You can use the TCCL to make sure your own language usage is clear and consistent.

15. THE IMPORTANCE OF FORECASTS:

Forecasts shift the conversation into the future. The usual state of affairs with government and non-profit data, and social data in general, is that the most recent data is not very recent. This often discourages people from using data at all. After all, what is the point of talking about the teen pregnancy rate from three years ago or even one year ago? Forecasting can be a powerful tool for shifting the data discussion from the past into the future.

Appendix E (See Chapter 1 Essay 14)

TOOL FOR CHOOSING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Ideas	Possible Labels (and modifiers)	Choice
A. THE BASICS		
1. A system or process for holding people in a geographic area responsible for the well-being of the total population or a defined subpopulation.	Population Accountability	
2. A system or process for holding managers and workers responsible for the performance of their programs, agencies and service systems.	Performance Accountability	
3. A condition of well-being for children, adults, families and communities.	Result, Outcome, Goal (Population, Community-wide)	
4. A measure that helps quantify the achievement of a population result.	Indicator, Benchmark (Population, Community-wide)	
5. A measure of how well a program, agency or service system is working.	Performance measure, Performance indicator	
6. A measure of the quantity of effort (how much service was delivered).	How much did we do?, Quantity of effort, Inputs, Outputs	
7. A measure of the quality of effort (how well the service functions were performed).	How well did we do it?, Quality of effort, Efficiency measure, Process measure	
8. A measure of the quantity and quality of effect on customers' lives. (Note: for infrastructure, effect on condition of infrastructure.)	Is anyone better off?, Is anyone or anything improved?, Customer result or outcome, Quantity & Quality of effect	
9. A visual display of the history and forecast(s) for a measure.	Baseline, Trendline	
10. Doing better than the forecast part of the baseline.	Turning the curve, Beating the baseline	

TOOL FOR CHOOSING A COMMON LANGUAGE (continued)

Ideas	Possible Labels (and modifiers)	Choice
B. OTHER IMPORTANT IDEAS		
1. A picture of a desired future that is hard but possible to attain.	Vision, Desired future	
2. The purpose of an organization.	Mission, Purpose	
3. A person (organization or entity) who directly benefits from service delivery. (generic category)	Customer, Client, Consumer, Beneficiary, Service user	
4. A person (or organization) with a significant interest in the performance of a program, agency or service system or population quality of life effort.	Stakeholder, Constituent	
5. A person (or organization) with a role to play in achieving desired ends.	Partner (Current, Potential, Active, Inactive)	
6. An analysis of causes and conditions that helps explain why a baseline looks the way it does.	Story behind the baseline, Root cause analysis	
7. Possible actions that could have a positive effect on a population indicator or performance measure.	What works, Options	
8. A coherent set of actions that has a reasoned chance of producing a desired effect.	Strategy	
9. A description of proposed actions.	Action Plan, Strategic plan	
10. The components of an action or strategic plan.	Goals & Objectives, Planned actions	
11. A description of why we think an action or set of actions will work.	Theory of change (Logic model)	
12. A prioritized list of where we need new or better data.	Data Development Agenda	
13. A prioritized list of where we need new information/research about causes and solutions.	Information & Research Agenda	
14. A desired future level of achievement for a population indicator or performance measure.	Target, Goal, Standard, Benchmark	
15. A study or analysis of how well a program is working or has worked.	Program evaluation, Performance evaluation	

(Other modifiers: measurable, urgent, priority, targeted, incremental, systemic, core, quantitative, qualitative, intermediate, ultimate short-term, mid-term, long-term, internal, external, infernal, eternal, allegorical, extraterrestrial)