TYPES OF EVALUATION DATA AND WHEN TO USE

Quantitative: Most people think first about evaluation in a quantitative way only – capturing and communicating experience using numbers. Quantitative evaluation practices count number of events, number of recipients, etc. These numbers are important to have and communicate in a quick way the reach of our TA. However, quantitative data alone gives us a limited picture of what impact our TA is having.

Qualitative: When we talk about qualitative evaluation practices, people often think of it as "soft data" or anecdotes, but in fact, qualitative practices are equally rigorous as quantitative. Qualitative practices use open-ended questions on surveys, focus groups, narratives or interviews to provide more detail than numbers can alone.

We are going to choose quantitative approaches when we want to report in the form of numbers, seek to confirm what it is that we already know, "objectively" compare across groups. You can take qualitative data and make it quantitative through a process called "coding" where you agree with a group of stakeholders that every time you see in qualitative data indications of a certain reference or behavior it is counted as that behavior.

When choosing qualitative approaches, we are trying to understand what happened and why for this program in ways that cannot be captured with a number. Qualitative approaches help us tell the story and connect process (the way in which it is done) to outcome (the result). You cannot take quantitative data and qualify it.

There is a general belief that quantitative data has no bias and that qualitative data does. It is important to understand that bias does exist in quantitative data – it is present in what you choose to measure, the tools you design to measure it and how you report it. It is also important to understand that qualitative data can be collected systematically and objectively just like quantitative data.