

Benefits, Objectives, PIs & Targets

What are they, and how do they relate to one another?

It's easy - they are a progression.

- Benefit - a vague expression of nice things that we want to happen
- Objective - a refinement of a Benefit into a more concrete statement of the project outputs
- Performance Indicator - a way of measuring how much of the Objective has been achieved
- Targets - a statement of the minimum amount of achievement that is acceptable i.e. what constitutes "success".

Examples:

- Benefit - the reputation of the estate will be changed from a place where people do not want to live, to a place where people want to live and choose to stay;
- Objectives¹ –
 - to improve the quality of the dwellings and public areas on the estate
 - to introduce more of a mix of household types in terms of income level
 - to improve the employment prospects of residents
- Performance Indicators (respectively) –
 - to increase the HQI of the estate
 - to provide shared ownership and some outright ownership dwellings on the estate
 - to provide construction-related training and employment opportunities for residents

¹ Should be phrased in SMART terms – Specific, Measurable, Agreed (by stakeholders), Realistic & Timescaled

- Targets (respectively) –
 - to achieve a minimum HQI score of 65 for the estate, while aiming for a score of 70.
 - At least 15% of the dwellings on the estate to be sold on a shared ownership or outright sale basis
 - provide at least 400 person days of construction training or employment during the construction phase.

As you will see from the examples, we need think very carefully when moving from one "level" to another. For example, the best way to improve the reputation of an estate (getting the Benefit) may be nothing to do with the Objectives used in the example. It might be to improve the local school!

Similarly, the presence of shared owner or owner occupied households on the estate may or may not be a particularly good measure of whether we have households with different incomes. Particularly if we're thinking about disposable income! Construction related training may or may not be a good indicator of improved employability. It might depend on whether there is a good prospect of further construction work in the area once project is completed. Maybe training in IT, or some other set of skills, would be better.

Finally, we have to consider what are reasonable targets. They should be realistic, but stretching. If we are spending £150m on the dwellings and public areas, presumably the HQI score should increase by more than 2 or 3 points! But what is reasonable?

So thinking through what it is that we're trying to achieve and how we are going to know whether we've achieved it isn't as easy as it might first appear. Of course, for some schemes it may simply be a matter of building a certain number of new houses that are affordable. If so, life is simple. But many schemes are trying to deliver more than simply houses.

Terminology Problems

The terms "benefits" and "objectives" are the project management terms for things that other people might refer to as "outcomes" and "outputs". Sometimes people talk about objectives when they really mean benefits. Others may talk about "critical success factors" (which are something completely different to a project manager!).

None of this really matters if we really are dealing with synonyms. Just check with your interlocutor what it is that they are talking about. You may well find that they haven't organised their thoughts as clearly as you have, having read this marvellous IMPORTANT POINT!