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Involving Service Users: Testing Content and Face Validity for the Purposes of Social Value Measurement within an Employability TSO

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Summary:

Within the context of rising pressure on Third Sector Organisations to evidence their social impact, this paper aims to assess how content and face validity testing can contribute to the development of questionnaires to measure social value. Through statistical analysis of the Content Validity Index (CVI) and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses, this paper presents a potential method for ensuring indicators of social value are robust and actively involve service users and other stakeholders (including caseworkers, academics, and the organisation's management staff). With the consideration of content and face validity through CVI testing, this paper therefore demonstrates a potential method for TSOs to involve stakeholders when evaluating their social value and consequently shape Third Sector services.

1. Introduction

With increasing pressure on Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) to evidence their impact and effectiveness in meeting their charitable objectives, social value evaluation has arisen as an approach to measuring, reporting and collaborating with service users and stakeholders to co-produce the services they receive (Barraket and Yousefpour 2013; Cooney 2017). Despite a range of tools, guidance documents, and government procurement notes, there remains a gap in social value and impact literature in how to ensure the ‘indicators of change’ utilised to track achievement of outcomes effectively measure the concepts in question and are usable for the target group (Cooney 2017; McArdle 2020; Social Value International 2012; UK Government 2012, 2020). These considerations are particularly significant when collecting data from often vulnerable populations supported by TSOs, such as individuals facing multiple barriers to entering employment who receive employability services.

Involving service users in the development and testing of questionnaire design to measure social value has gained increasing acknowledgement of its significance (Connell et al. 2018: 1893; Polit and Beck 2006; Social Value International 2012). One method for incorporating service users involves testing content validity; or the extent to which the questionnaire items cover the different components of the concept in question; and face validity; or the extent to which the items are “sensible, appropriate and relevant” to the participants utilising the questionnaire, such as service users (Bryman 2012; Connell et al. 2018: 1893-4). This paper presents a structured method for assessing content and face validity through the Content Validity Index (CVI) for the purposes of refining social value measurement, an under-studied yet significant element for evaluating the effectiveness of Third Sector employability interventions.

Offering a potential method, content and face validity tests provide a pathway for enabling social value evaluation of TSO services that actively involves service users and other stakeholders in the development and validation of outcome measurements. Largely attributed to educational research in the 1970s, the Content Validity Index (CVI) has been widely utilised for the validation of scales and individual items of questionnaires, particularly psychometric scales (McEwan et al. 2020; Polit and Beck 2006; Polit et al. 2007). Aligning with the participatory approach advocated for within social value ‘grey’ literature, this paper adapts the approach to CVI taken by McEwan et al. (2020), aiming to validate and refine the questionnaire created to longitudinally measure outcomes achieved by service users of Routes To Work, an employability TSO based in Scotland (Social Value International 2012).

2. Methods

As part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between the University of the West of Scotland and Routes To Work, a multidisciplinary team of academics collaborated to create a questionnaire to measure the impact of employability and skills services on its service users. Routes To Work is a TSO that provides a range of employability and skills interventions to individuals facing multiple barriers to entering and progressing within employment, such as long-term health conditions, caring responsibilities, and experience of the justice system. Interventions range from one-to-one caseworker support; training courses; health and wellbeing support; access to community support groups; and financial advice and guidance. The process for creating the questionnaire to measure the impact of these services involved qualitative interviews and focus groups with service users and caseworkers, as well as secondary management data and service user feedback surveys. As a result of this process, a combination of pre-existing scales (e.g., the Brief Resilience Scale), and

bespoke questionnaire items for the outcomes experienced by service users were collated into a 'Social Value Questionnaire.' Due to the development of new questions and the barriers faced by the target population that will use this questionnaire, a need to ensure the validity of the questionnaire was identified.

To address this, the content and face validity was tested utilising the Content Validity Index (CVI), as previously implemented by McEwan et al. (2020). In total, 12 participants were sampled through a hybrid of purposive and snowball sampling methods, comprising of service users (n=3), caseworkers (n=3), academics with questionnaire expertise (n=3), and members of the leadership team at Routes To Work (n=3). Participants were provided with information sheets and completed consent forms before electronic questionnaire completion. The research was approved by the UWS School of Health and Life Science Ethics Committee.

Participants were asked to rate outcome indicators on a Likert scale of 1-4 the ease of understanding (1 = not easy; 4 = very easy); relevance to Routes To Work's employability services (1 = not relevant; 4 = very relevant), relevance to service users (1 = not relevant; 4 = very relevant); match with the outcome description (1 = poor match; 4 = good match); and clarity of the response options (1 = not clear; 4 = very clear) (Dunn et al. 1999; McEwan et al. 2020). Following data collection and statistical analysis, the Likert scale ratings were split into a binary (1-2 = not acceptable; 3-4 = acceptable). From these ratings, the CVI was determined by dividing the scores by the number of participants. As recommended in Polit and Beck (2006) and McEwan et al. (2020), content validity has been defined as $CVI \geq 0.78$.

In addition, the validity test asked respondents for further comments, and these open-ended responses were thematically analysed with NVivo to determine any emergent challenges or concerns with the questionnaire design. As per these results, the Social Value Questionnaire has been refined to optimise its ease of understanding, relevance, and 'match' with the experiences of service users.

3. Analysis

Following data collection and analysis, the mean, range and CVI index for each outcome questionnaire item have been calculated and displayed in Table 1. As indicated, 11 out of the 17 scales have been deemed valid ($CVI \geq 0.78$), with two receiving complete agreement ($CVI = 1.00$) from the participants. Six sections of the questionnaire did not receive CVI scores that met the validity criteria ($CVI \leq 0.78$).

Table 1: Content Validity Index (CVI) for each section of the Social Value Questionnaire for service users (n=12)

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	Please rate the degree to which you believe the wording of the above question is clear and concise. (1 = not clear; 4 = very clear)		Please rate the degree to which you believe the question listed above is relevant for understanding the current employability services at Routes To Work. (1 = not relevant; 4 = very relevant)		Please rate the degree to which you believe the items listed above are of relevant to Routes To Work's clients. (1 = not relevant; 4 = very relevant)		Please rate the degree to which you believe the question listed above matches the description provided. (1 = poor match; 4 = good match)		Please rate the degree to which you believe the scales/response options are clear and easy to use. (1 = not easy; 4 = very easy)	
	Mean (Range)	CVI	Mean (Range)	CVI	Mean (Range)	CVI	Mean (Range)	CVI	Mean (Range)	CVI
1. General life satisfaction	3.67 (2-4)	0.92	3.17 (2-4)	0.75	3.50 (2-4)	0.92	3.08 (1-4)	0.75	3.83 (3-4)	1.00
2. Improved routine	3.67 (2-4)	0.92	3.25 (2-4)	0.75	3.42 (2-4)	0.83	3.17 (2-4)	0.67	3.83 (3-4)	1.00
3. Brief Resilience Scale	3.67 (3-4)	1.00	3.50 (2-4)	0.92	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (2-4)	0.83	3.58 (3-4)	1.00
4. General Physical Health	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.92 (3-4)	1.00	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.58 (3-4)	1.00	3.83 (3-4)	1.00
5. General Mental Health	3.83 (3-4)	1.00	3.92 (3-4)	1.00	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.58 (3-4)	1.00	3.83 (3-4)	1.00
6. Mental Health (Subjective Vitality Scale)	3.42 (2-4)	0.75	3.00 (2-4)	0.67	3.08 (2-4)	0.67	2.75 (1-4)	0.67	3.42 (2-4)	0.83
7. Physical Activity	3.92 (3-4)	1.00	3.25 (2-4)	0.83	3.33 (2-4)	0.83	3.50 (2-4)	0.92	3.75 (3-4)	1.00
8. UCLA 3-item Loneliness Scale	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.33 (2-4)	0.75	3.25 (2-4)	0.83	3.33 (3-4)	1.00	3.50 (3-4)	1.00
9. Family Support	3.75 (2-4)	0.92	3.50 (2-4)	0.92	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.75 (3-4)	1.00
10. Friend Support	3.83 (3-4)	1.00	3.33 (1-4)	0.83	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (2-4)	0.92	3.67 (3-4)	1.00

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11. Neighbourhood / Community Belonging	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	2.83 (1-4)	0.67	2.83 (1-4)	0.67	3.17 (2-4)	0.83	3.75 (3-4)	1.00
12. Volunteering	3.75 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (1-4)	0.75	3.42 (1-4)	0.75	3.75 (2-4)	0.92	3.83 (3-4)	1.00
13. Confidence & Motivation	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.67 (3-4)	1.00	3.33 (2-4)	0.83	3.67 (3-4)	1.00
14. Satisfaction with Household Income	3.67 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (1-4)	0.83	3.58 (1-4)	0.92	3.58 (3-4)	1.00	3.42 (2-4)	0.83
15. Financial Comfort	3.83 (3-4)	1.00	3.58 (2-4)	0.92	3.67 (2-4)	0.92	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.75 (3-4)	1.00
16. Debt & Financial Burden	3.67 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (2-4)	0.83	3.42 (2-4)	0.92	3.42 (2-4)	0.83	3.58 (2-4)	0.92
17. Budgeting Behaviour	3.75 (3-4)	1.00	3.50 (1-4)	0.92	3.58 (1-4)	0.92	3.50 (3-4)	1.00	3.50 (1-4)	0.92

Data are presented as mean range, CVI, content validity index.

4. Discussion

As indicated by the CVI calculations, the Social Value Questionnaire items were mostly valid (n=11 items with a CVI $\geq$ 0.78), with some key areas for refinement for measuring mental health, neighbourhood community/belonging, volunteering, routine, and general life satisfaction. Following analysis of the open-ended qualitative responses within the questionnaire, participants cited concerns about a lack of clear definitions for some areas, such as ‘neighbourhood’ and timescales within the questions. One participant also felt the questionnaire could be too long and may need to be delivered once service users have built trust with [organisation], due to “mistrust of the system.” Consequently, a number of changes were made to enhance the usability and relevance of the Social Value Questionnaire. Primarily, ‘ToolTips,’ or guidance when hovering over keywords, were added to questions with terms that could be deemed unclear, e.g., life satisfaction; mental health; physical health; family member; friend; volunteering; household income; and neighbourhood. The definitions provided were sourced from secondary governmental or academic literature, such as definitions from the National Health Service. Consistent timescales were added to all relevant questions to reflect the changes experienced between completions of the longitudinal questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire will only be distributed to service users after their first session with caseworkers to ensure they understand and trust Routes To Work before receiving the questionnaire to avoid disengagement.

This CVI testing of the questionnaire enabled consideration of the experiences of individuals supported by Routes To Work to actively shape the design and distribution of the questionnaire, with key elements refined and designed for the specific intended users. Although the CVI testing process should be complemented with interviews or focus groups with service users, it provides

a pathway for developing indicators of outcomes that are suitable and accessible for the targeted individuals; match well with the outcomes being measured; and remain relevant to the services and populations supported by Third Sector Organisations. With a proliferation of social impact measurement and management tools, it is vital that organisations consider content and face validity, and thus inclusion of service users and stakeholders, in designing questionnaires to report outcomes (Cooney 2017; McArdle 2020).

5. Conclusion

As Third Sector organisations increasingly face pressure to evidence their impact and social value, there is a growing need to ensure questionnaires that measure the outcomes experienced by stakeholders are valid and usable (Cooney 2017). This paper therefore aimed to determine how Content Validity Index tests can contribute to the social value evaluation of Third Sector Organisations. Importantly, this process actively involves service users, the staff that support them and external expertise to ensure the questions are easy to understand, clear and relevant to the service users' experiences and the interventions provided by the organisation under analysis. This additional step of validation through the CVI index contributes to more robust, yet participatory outcome measurement within social value evaluation for TSOs striving to evidence their impact. Thus, the approach outlined within this paper to content and face validity can ensure that social value and impact measurement support, rather than hinder, potentially vulnerable individuals supported by the Third Sector, and particularly those that provide employability interventions, whilst enhancing their ability to co-produce and co-design [organisation's] services.

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