

samtaler

**Guide to social
value impact
measurement**



Introduction

What's your yardstick for success? How do you know when something is going well or when it's time to shift course?

We use metrics, numbers and stories to track our progress at work. Whether we're counting pounds and pence, products produced or monitoring how long things take; measurement is usually fairly straightforward.

But what about social value? How do you measure something that seems intangible? How can you know what difference your organisation makes to people, places and the planet? How can you measure success without it requiring a full-time team of social impact measurement experts? And how can you shout about your successes without it morphing into hyperbole?



The Obstacles

You are not alone if you think your organisation is struggling to measure social impact effectively. From obsessing about numbers to ignoring inherent problems within an organisation, such as how staff are treated or the carbon footprint of your supply chain, there are lots of common issues we encounter repeatedly across both the public and the private sector.



Red Flags

- You don't know what to measure
- You don't know how to measure it
- You claim credit for too much
- You don't have an easy way to collect the data
- Social Value sits in a silo
- You drift towards only doing things that can be easily measured, not those that are most impactful
- You only want to focus on the numbers
- You only want to focus on the stories
- You only want to use the data for external 'good news' stories
- You struggle to get staff buy-in



Back to Basics

The good news is that impact measurement can be as straightforward or complicated as you like. Of course, genuine social value should benefit your bottom line, so there will always be that marker, but given the long-term payoff for many social value initiatives, it can be helpful to have some more immediate feedback by way of impact measurement.

At Samtaler, our approach is, unsurprisingly, very practical. We believe that your measurement and evaluation should not be a burden regarding the social value you are creating or your core business.

Our general rule of thumb is to encourage you to think first about what you do as an organisation regarding your core business. Then, how you will do it better, and then consider measurement that captures what it needs to drive improvement.

Measuring your social value requires you to be clear about the outcomes you set out to achieve. Committing to strategic monitoring will enable you to track your progress and result in exciting, tangible achievements that you can communicate to your internal and external stakeholders.





**5 tips for effective
impact measurement**

Tip 1

SEPARATE OUTCOMES FROM OUTPUTS

Words such as ‘impact’, ‘evaluation’, ‘outcome’ and ‘output’ often seem to be used interchangeably, but there are significant differences.

Outcomes are the specific changes, benefits, learning or other effects that directly result from your work.

Outputs – are the detailed activities, services and products you do or provide to achieve the outcomes.



The Outputs

The outputs might include a recruitment brochure targeted at Armed Forces personnel. Training for HR to understand Armed Forces qualifications and establishing a service leaver buddy system at the company to ensure new employees are supported effectively in the workplace.

Output and Outcome Indicators are the data they need to collect to show that these things are happening.

For the outputs above, output indicators could include:

- The number of recruitment brochures distributed to armed forces resettlement teams.
- The number of HR staff trained in recruiting armed forces personnel.
- The number of buddies trained and ready to support service personnel in the workplace.

This is the ‘bums on seats’ data – how many people are you engaging in your project or workstream? It’s an essential part of the puzzle, but it cannot be the only part.



The Outcomes

The outcome indicators could be:

- Percentage increase of service leavers recruited into the company during a specific period.
- The number of people supported in the transition to civilian life by the employment of service personnel.
- The number of service personnel who report increased confidence in the transition process since securing employment.

This is the ‘so what’ data. What is the difference between getting those people engaged in your project or workstream in the first instance? Why do you want to achieve that outcome? It can help to keep asking ‘why’ until you uncover the change you want to make. This helps you identify the wider impact your project is contributing towards. The impact is the broader long-term change happening for individuals, the community or even on a societal level. You are likely contributing to it rather than being the sole creator of something that is exciting and headline-worthy.



Tip 2

BE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHAT YOU MEASURE

While gathering data as evidence is good, it can quickly become time-consuming. Or the volume of data collected can become too large for practical in-house analysis.

A whole industry is vying to help you measure and communicate the difference your organisation is making. But unfortunately, the conflicting terminology, various tools, and metrics can quickly become confusing and all-consuming.

We often get nervous that we will miss something vital if we don't measure it, which can lead to an unsustainable amount of data collection that burdens your staff. Occasionally we feel like rabbits in the headlights and therefore don't start gathering any data, which can be unproductive for the project.



If you're wondering how much to measure, starting with a long list of all the possible things you could measure can be helpful. First, put everything on paper on one long list, then take a step back.

What is the purpose of your evaluation? What will your business do with this information? Is it about informing others of what social value you are adding? Is it motivating staff with how much the company achieves in the community? Is it so you can develop future business programmes or areas of work? Is it because you are required to evidence your social value in tender processes?

Which of the indicators you have listed will help you fulfil these purposes? Select the indicators that best demonstrate change is happening and the ones that will be most useful when communicating your project goals. Don't choose too many. 2 - 3 indicators per outcome are enough to measure change, and 1-2 indicators per output are plenty to ensure the work is happening within the scope required.

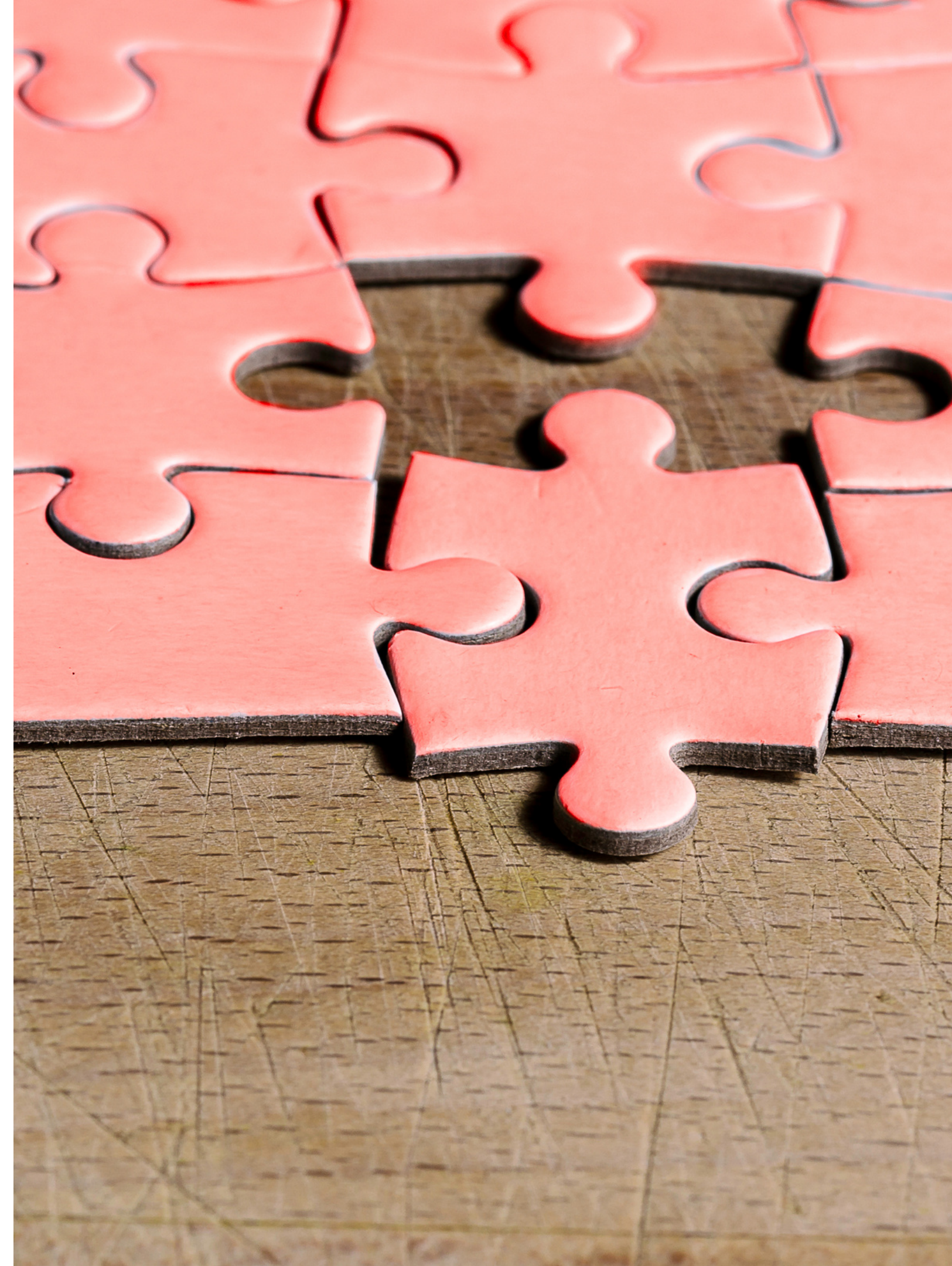
Angela Halliday, Director of Social Impact at Sodexo, told us: "Reporting isn't all about data. We measure what we value. Doing stuff for the right reason is the most important way organisations can truly embed and demonstrate their social value commitments. The measurement and reporting then come naturally."



Tip 3

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

It is essential to be aware that sometimes unexpected changes occur directly from our work or projects. These unexpected outcomes are important to capture as sometimes they are more powerful and exciting than the outcomes we set out to achieve. So how do we leave space for the unexpected? Ensure that you are regularly capturing qualitative data as well as quantitative. Collate case studies, interview staff members, and talk to community members. These conversations will be where you get the first inkling that something you didn't expect to see is happening. This is often positive, but sometimes you may hear of negative changes you hadn't anticipated because of your project. Be prepared to act quickly on the new information. Make sure you have planned qualitative 'touchpoints' in your routine monitoring and evaluation framework. If you identify positive or negative unexpected outcomes, make sure that you respond to these. Do you need to adjust what you are measuring or add an indicator to monitor the new outcome? Perhaps you need to put in place additional support to mitigate any negative results you didn't anticipate.



Tip 4

GET STAFF BUY-IN

It is crucial that from the earliest stage possible, measurement is embedded into the workflow for your project and that staff buy-in is sought. Once staff understand the value of the data they are gathering. They are more motivated to ensure it is collated effectively and take ownership of the process.

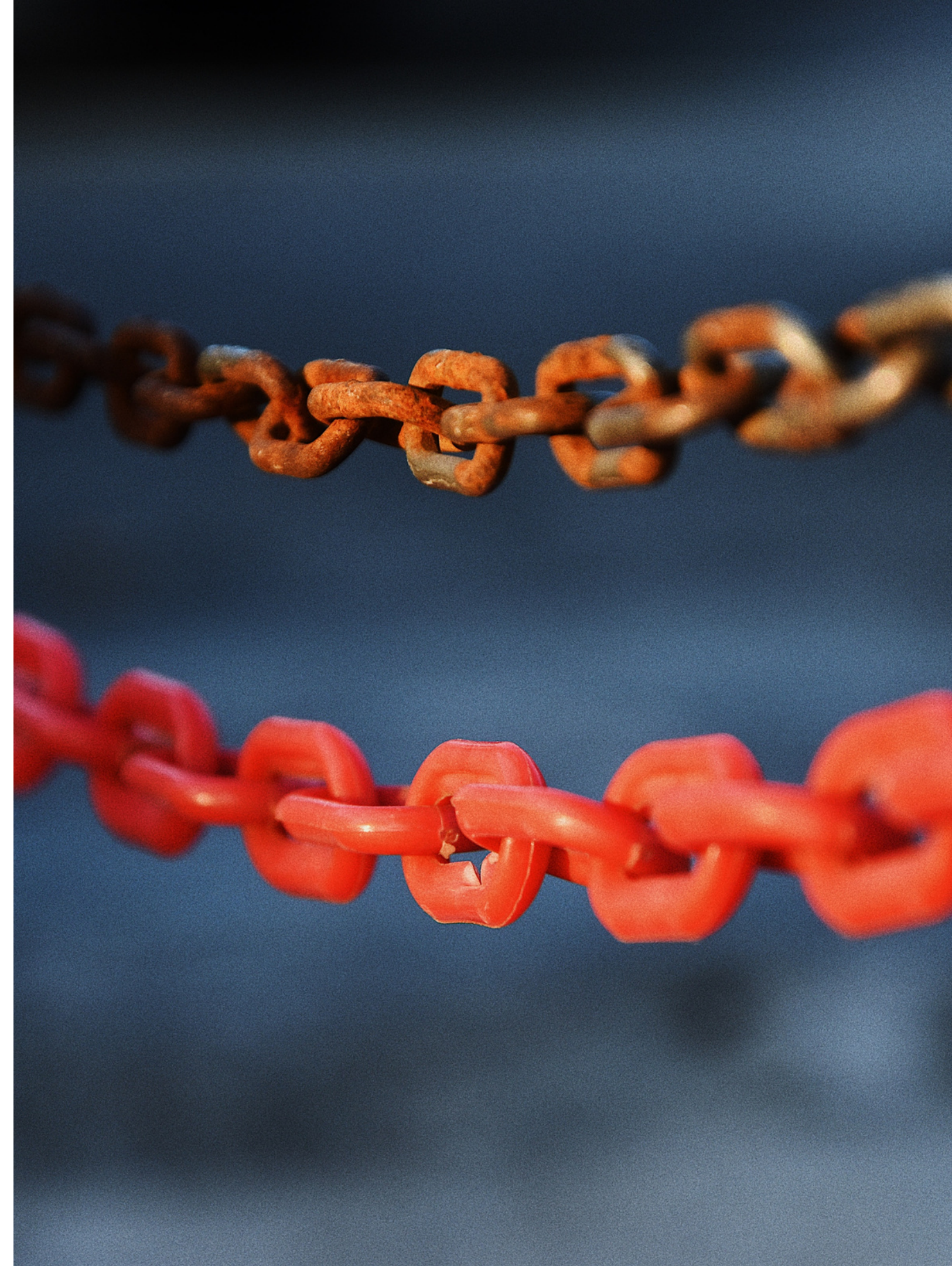


Tip 5

OWN YOUR PART IN THE CHAIN (AND DON'T CLAIM WHAT ISN'T YOURS!)

Why is it important to understand the difference between outcome and impact? The impact is the broader, long-term change we seek to contribute to in society or our community. Impact statements quite rightly sit at the head of most theories of change.

In the example of recruiting service leavers, the impact may be as broad but significant as 'all service leavers in the UK can find a job when they leave the Armed Forces'. The example of a particular company's service leaver recruitment pathway is an integral part of this, but the business can't claim that they are solving all service leaver recruitment in the UK.



You can claim specific outcomes such as a 10% increase in the number of service leavers recruited by your company. In addition, the number of service leavers and their families in Leeds who are confident in the transition to civilian life increased. These contribute to the broader aim of companies working together to provide Armed Forces personnel with job opportunities.

Owning your part in the broader impact chain is essential but don't overstate what you are doing. Be proud to claim your outcomes and the journey towards the overall impact you are supporting. Qualitative data can provide a brilliant insight into the real lives you are impacting. Case studies and quotes can also play an essential role in internal and external communication. You might also identify third-sector partners you want to work with to maximise the benefit of your projects.

Wherever your organisation is on its social value journey, it's essential that you focus on delivering 'action' before 'words'. There is plenty of time to shout about what you're doing once you have a real story to tell. For example, suppose you are creating social value in a genuinely meaningful way. In that case, much of the communication should arguably be taken care of by your suppliers, staff and customers becoming your ambassadors.



How we can help

If you have a question about social value or want to learn how we can support your business, please get in touch.

Our expert team understand the challenges you're facing and are ready and waiting to help support you on your social value journey.

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