“EVALUATOR” ethics for evaluators

Abstract

This paper aims to present series of ethical values related to M&E in an abstract. These “EVALUATOR” values are intended to stimulate discussion among M&E professionals and can actively guide M&E design and implementation. Furthermore, this paper is intended to promote better practice in evaluations, and seek to inform both those who commission evaluation research.

Introduction

An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results\(^1\). The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors.

Robust, independent evaluation of development programmes provides information about what works, what does not and why. This learning contributes to improving the development effectiveness of aid and helps hold donors, partner country governments and other organizations accountable for results.

\(^1\) DAC definition
Although the instrumental value of evaluating international development projects, programs, and policies long has been understood, its values have not often been addressed.

Worldwide, there is growing trend towards professionalization in evaluation. To be professional implies an allegiance to, and a performance of duties in compliance with, stated norms and ethics. Further competencies combined with ethics, norms and standards; provide the basis for professional credentials. Norms and standards for evaluation have been developed by evaluation associations.

In an evaluation, evaluators have many tasks, including planning, organizing and designing evaluations and collecting, analyzing and presenting data. They also have to deal with internal and external pressure. They may be asked to make changes to the plan, organization, or reporting of the evaluation of the needs of others. Sometimes proposed modifications are welcome; at other times they may raise ethical or political considerations. Ethics and politics are issues for all evaluators. (Linda and Ray 2009)

When ethical issues arise, programme staff and stakeholders need to acknowledge them and discuss them with interested parties to reach a resolution. Program managers and M&E specialists should develop a strong working relationship with project staff to discuss M&E ethical issues openly and honestly. In some instances, it may be appropriate to involve community members in resolving ethical challenges. Local residents can often provide valuable insights into devising a culturally appropriate solution.

“EVALUATOR” ethics

This paper aims to present series of ethical values in an abstract manner to guide M&E professionals. Although many guidelines and strategies available on explaining evaluation values it is a required to bring a abstract way of presenting them to evaluation professionals and those who interested in commissioning or managing evaluations. These “Evaluator” values are intended to stimulate discussion among M&E professionals and can actively guide M&E design and implementation, not just support problem-solving efforts. Furthermore, this paper is intended to promote better practice in evaluations, and seek to inform both those who commission evaluation research and those who carry it out. The “EVALUATOR” values are given below with brief descriptions.

Evidence

Most of the international development agencies in recent years have seen an increased interest in evidence and evidence-based policies and practices. The central idea of the evidence movement is for policies and practices to be based on the best available scientific research about what works, what does not, and the reasons why. Evidence-based evaluations have appeared later in international development cooperation than in areas such as medicine, social work, and education. Many researchers and evaluators, and indeed administrators, managers and politicians call for and look for evidence of results of development spending. Hence it is required to provide evidence-based recommendations which improve the quality of the evaluation.

\(^2\) Definitions extracted from Oxford Dictionary, Oxford, UK
Validity

In general validity refers to the extent to which a concept, conclusion or measurement is well-founded and corresponds accurately to the real world. Validity of a measurement tool (i.e. test in education) is considered to be the degree to which the tool measures what it claims to measure. The concept of external validity concerns the extent to which the (internally valid) results of a study can be held to be true for other cases, for example to different people, places or times. In other words, it is about whether findings can be validly generalized. If the same study was conducted in those other cases, would it get the same results?

At the evaluation evaluators need to be assured the validity by, the sample (e.g. the research participants) are representative of the general population along relevant dimensions. Other factors jeopardizing external validity are:

- Reactive or interaction effect of testing, a pre-test might increase the scores on a post-test
- Interaction effects of selection biases and the experimental variable.
- Reactive effects of experimental arrangements, which would preclude generalization about the effect of the experimental variable upon persons being exposed to it in non-experimental settings

Accuracy

Evaluators have an obligation to ensure that evaluation reports and presentations are accurate and complete. In the evaluation process and in the production of evaluation products, evaluators shall: Carry out thorough inquiries, systematically employing appropriate methods and techniques to the highest technical standards, validating information using multiple measures and sources to guard against bias, and ensuring errors are corrected. Further it is required to describe the purposes and content of object of the evaluation clearly and accurately.

Learn

The need for improved evaluation feedback is widely recognised by development agencies, both on grounds of accountability and learning. Greater accountability is seen as a prerequisite for continued support for development assistance within donor countries, while also being a vital component in creating robust and meaningful partnerships with countries and organisations that are recipients of aid. Better learning is crucial for improving the effectiveness of aid and ensuring that the hard won lessons from experience – both positive and negative – are heeded. Evaluation feedback is an umbrella term describing the various channels and mechanisms by which these crucial messages get through – and make a difference.

Accountability

Evaluators are to be accountable for their performance and their product.

Evaluators should be responsible for the provision of information to clients to facilitate their decision-making concerning the selection of appropriate evaluation strategies and methodologies. Such information should include the limitations of selected methodology.

Evaluators should be responsible for the clear, accurate, and fair, written and/or oral
presentation of study findings and limitations, and recommendations.

Evaluators should be responsible in their fiscal decision-making so that expenditures are accounted for and clients receive good value for their dollars.

Evaluators should be responsible for the completion of the evaluation within a reasonable time as agreed to with the clients. Such agreements should acknowledge unprecedented delays resulting from factors beyond the evaluator’s control.

**Transparency**

Transparency and consultation with major stakeholders shall be essential features in all stages of monitoring and evaluation processes. The evaluation office shall clearly communicate the purpose of the evaluation or monitoring activity, the criteria applied, and the intended use of findings. Evaluation documents shall be in an easily readable form, facilitating their transparency and legitimacy. Evaluation and monitoring reports shall provide information on their sources, costs, methodologies, and approaches. At the same time, however, they must honor all commitments made concerning the confidentiality of information given to individuals or institutions.

Stakeholders shall be consulted on the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the evaluation and their views taken into account in the final TOR. The Evaluation Manager shall carefully balance the views and requirements of stakeholders, ensuring that the evaluation retains a clear focus and that sound evaluation principles are not compromised by the wishes of stakeholders.

Evaluation methodology shall be disclosed in advance of the evaluation and clearly described in the evaluation report, including the assumptions and values underlying the evaluator’s judgments. Evaluation documents shall be easily readable and specify their information sources and approaches.

Evaluation reports shall make the link between evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations transparent, persuasive and proportionate to the body of evidence collected.

Transparency and consultation with the stakeholders are essential features of evaluation. The Evaluation Office and the evaluation team leader shall clearly communicate to stakeholders the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria applied and the intended use of findings.

Evaluation reports shall make the link between evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations transparent, persuasive and proportionate to the body of evidence collected.

**Omissions and wrongdoing**

Where evaluators find evidence of wrongdoing or unethical conduct, they are obliged to report it, whether or not such conduct relates directly to the evaluation Terms of Reference. Evaluators shall inform the Evaluation Manager who will in turn agree with the Evaluation Director on the most appropriate channel for reporting wrongdoing. Details of any wrongdoing, including names or events, shall only be divulged to the proper oversight authority.  

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Rights

Evaluators shall ensure:

Right to Self-Determination - Prospective participants should be treated as autonomous agents and must be given the time and information to decide whether or not they wish to participate and be able to make an independent decision without any pressure or fear of penalty for not participating.

Fair representation - Evaluators shall select participants fairly in relation to the aims of the evaluation, not simply because of their availability, or because it is relatively easy to secure their participation. Care shall be taken to ensure that relatively powerless, ‘hidden’, or otherwise excluded groups are represented.

Compliance with codes for vulnerable groups - Where the evaluation involves the participation of members of vulnerable groups, evaluators must be aware of and comply with legal codes (whether international or national) governing, for example, interviewing children and young people.

Redress - Stakeholders receive sufficient information to know a) how to seek redress for any perceived disadvantage suffered from the evaluation or any projects it covers, and b) how to register a complaint concerning the conduct of an Implementing or Executing Agency.

The design of the evaluation took into consideration the rights of those from whom I would be collecting data. This was of particular importance because the main mode of data collection was to be interviews and, in the course of being interviewed, subjects were likely to reveal personal and/or private information which they might not want to be made public. For this reason, it is required to be acutely aware of the need to guarantee participants' rights to privacy.

Smith (1980, p.193), in discussing the ethics of fieldwork in case study research, has stated: "The two most important operating principles in maintaining respect for the persons involved in one's study are informed consent and anonymity of participants." In addition to this, Simons (1984, p.88) has made the following statement when discussing procedures for the conduct of an independent evaluation:

"Confidentiality is necessary to protect individuals from inappropriate use of information which is private to them. Rules of access and consultation give individuals opportunities to decide what to share, to reflect on what they have shared, to edit or comment upon their information in context: to control, in other words, the use of their own information.

Conclusion

Finally I hope that these “EVALUATOR” values are intended to stimulate discussion among M&E professionals and can actively guide M&E design and implementation. Furthermore, this would lead to promote better practice in evaluations, and seek to inform both those who commission evaluation research.

Bibliography


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Glossary

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