Research in action through independent evaluation for change

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Contents

Section 1 | Evaluation and independence. *Debunking the naysayers: "it's all about learning"*

Concepts

> Key aspects of independence for evaluation in a multilateral environment. Importance and reasons for the weight of independence in this context, including in light of the need for accountability. False dichotomy between accountability and learning, which are part of the same process and form a knowledge continuum.

Key messages
- The reason for independence is a critical one. You want a unit, within an organization, that is able to conduct its work without fear, favour or prejudice, that is not under any political or administrative pressure.
- We need to be quite clear: evaluative work is political. There is always pressure. The evaluands may not always appreciate the perspectives coming in.
- IOE focuses on both learning and accountability. It's not just about saying what is right or wrong. We are dealing with social data, where it is sometimes not easy to cast a judgement, and often times we are dealing with a motion picture, not a simple snapshot.
- The learning comes from receiving frank and direct feedback. Our job is to provide this feedback. We want to make sure that the product received by the beneficiaries on the ground is the best they could get.
- What is clear is that it is possible, within the rubric of a fully independent office, to engage in learning if we consider that as a reflective activity and we also consider that both evaluators and evaluands can learn and deepen their understanding through a very interactive process.

Select references
- Naidoo, I. (2021). "Evaluation for Transformational Change: Learning from Practice". Chapter 2. In Transformational Change for People and the Planet. Sustainable Development Goals Series, Juha. Uitto and Geeta Batra (Eds), Springer [here].
- Naidoo, I. (2021). 'Evaluation Capacities to Advance Sustainable Development for All', Japanese Evaluation Society Journal Special Edition, vol.21, n.2 [here].
- Independent Evaluation Office (2016). 'Evaluation and Independence: existing evaluation policies and new approaches'. UNDP [here].
- Sheikh, A., Atun, R., & Bates, D. W. (2014). The need for independent evaluations of government-led health information technology initiatives. BMJ quality & safety, 23(8), 611-613 [here]
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Section 2 | Methodological pluralization. *Keeping the foundation solid*

Evaluation mixed methods and process, driven by methodological pluralism. Revising the obsolete idea of a 'golden standard' of randomized controlled trials and quasi experimental design. Considering the environment and ensuring methods allow for downward accountability. Moving beyond the idea that impact is the only criterion to be focused upon.

Key messages
- IOE advances a process of principled engagement. Traditional, static and linear approaches move from learning to sequencing. IOE's approach is based on dynamic and engaging process of triangulation that is based on together independence, credibility and utility.
- The construct of all evaluation needs to accept engagement as a part of process credibility, and seen as necessary for generating ongoing reflection as part of the learning process to build understanding. This implies moving beyond a transactional approach to evaluation between evaluator and evaluand.
- IOE embraces and understands new content and methodologies that provide both real time information on change and impact. In this regard, IOE recognizes that there is no gold standard, that methods should feed the question, and that issue need to be framed in the context of the multi-disciplinary world that we live in.

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- Bamberger, M., Rao, V., & Woolcock, M. (2010). Using mixed methods in monitoring and evaluation: experiences from international development. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, (5245) [here].
- Woolcock, Michael (2009) 'Toward a Plurality of Methods in Project Evaluation: A
- Contextualized Approach to Understanding Impact Trajectories and Efficacy' Journal of
- Development Effectiveness 1(1): 1-14 [here].
- Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J., & Graham, W. F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. Educational evaluation and policy analysis, 11(3), 255-274 [here]

Section 3 | Crossing boundaries. *Audit and evaluation working collaboratively*

Independence vs. non-independence conundrum of evaluation and audit offices in multilateral organizations as a seemingly insurmountable divide for joint efforts. Differences in methodological approaches, and in uses of qualitative and quantitative data. Tensions among the presumed reductionist audit approach, and the presumed generalist evaluation approach.

Key messages
- Audit and evaluation play crucial roles in the oversight function of organizations. Both professions share commonalities that have led some to call for "enhanced oversight" through stronger collaboration of the two functions.
- Joint assessments can help promote a holistic three-dimensional view of performance, which looks both inside and outside organizations to see whether inputs matched with outputs and outcomes.
- Collaboration between auditors and evaluators not only has the potential of enhancing the results of their work, but could also contribute to increasing efficiency and cost-effectiveness of these activities.
- Tangible differences in paradigm and approach need discussion before further convergence of the functions is countenanced. The separation of the two functions ensures their independence, which is a guarantee of the credibility of the auditors and evaluators' work.
- Other existing gaps that would need to be bridged are in establishing common expectations as to what constitutes quality evidence and adequate data-gathering methodologies, as well as in report writing.

Select references
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- Naidoo, I. (2018). 'Audit and Evaluation: Working Collaboratively to Support Accountability', Evaluation, vol 26(2) [here].
- UNDP (2017). Joint Assessment of the Institutional Effectiveness of UNDP [here].
- Bemelmans-Videc, M.L., Lonsdale, J., & Perrin, B. (2007). Making Accountability Work: Dilemmas for Evaluation and Audit. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Leeuw, F.L. (1996). Auditing and Evaluation: whither the Relationship? In Carl Wisler (Ed.), Evaluation and Auditing: Bridging a Gap, Worlds to Meet? (pp. 51–60). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Section 4 | Psychological dimensions of evaluation. *Building a humanized approach for better results*

Creating a culture of receptivity to results and ensuring buy-in through engaged processes, including in the face of critical feedback, by crafting communication and outreach strategies that build on social neuroscience foundations.

Key messages
- Social neuroscience investigations are already being used to great effect in the fields of crime, justice, security, child development, education, mediation, health, and social well-being and social cohesion. Stemming from this success, IOE recognizes that there may be scope for further growing and expanding this use, to apply it to the field of evaluation.
- Evidence suggests applying social neuroscience-based principles to the field of evaluation would likely strengthen evaluators' resilience, help them to find the mechanisms that make policies, programmes and interventions work, and enhance the impact of their communication efforts.
- In particular, the application of neuroscience to the field of evaluation can: a. foster constructive engagement between the evaluator and the evaluand, and present the benefits of this constructive engagement; b. create psychologically safe environments where people feel open to expressing themselves, helping people to really look forward to an evaluation, and ensuring that the evaluative approach is stress-free; and c. help evaluation work to be more deeply appreciated so that recommendations are implemented.
- From a communication perspective, evaluation outreach efforts need to build on a strategic effort to foster engagement, build empathy, cultivate audiences and bring value. To do so, evaluation communication must shift from 'communicating independence' to 'independently communicating'.

Select resources
- Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (2022). 'Performance appraisal and feedback myths debunked'. Independent Magazine, issue 4 [here]
- Voccia, A. (2022). 'Communicating independence' or 'independently communicating', that is the question. IFAD IOE [here]
- Voccia, A. (2021). 'Behind the glossy cover: six reflections on communicating evaluations.' Evalforward [here].
- Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (2021). Mindset Strategies for Post-Evaluation Transformation [seminar - video]
- van Woerkom, M., & Kroon, B. (2020). The Effect of Strengths-Based Performance Appraisal on Perceived Supervisor Support and the Motivation to Improve Performance. Frontiers in Psychology, 11, 1883 [here]

Annex I: resources

Communities & professional networks for development evaluation

United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)
- Includes 50 members and observers: evaluation offices of United Nations agencies
- Produces studies, guidance documents and events on evaluation
- E.g. Norms and Standards for Evaluation, Evaluation Competency Framework

Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG)
- Includes 13 members and observers: evaluation offices of Multilateral Development Banks (e.g. World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc.)
- Promotes harmonization of evaluation practices
- E.g. ECG Big Book on Good Practice Standards

Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI)
- Provides governments with capacity development for national evaluation functions

Learning resources

- Online training on IOE Evaluation Manual [here]
- IOE video series [here]
- International Programme for Development Evaluation (IPDET): online workshops or on-site programme in Switzerland [here]
- International Training Center of the International Labour Organization: Monitoring and Evaluation certification programme [here]
- The future of Monitoring and Evaluation (The Wits School of Governance) [here]
- IPDET 2018 – keynote speech [here]
- IPDET 2016 – Ethics, independence and credibility for evaluations [here]
- IPDET 2016 – Opportunities and challenges for evaluators [here]

Capacity development

National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) conference 2022
- Opening session [here]
- In an era of complexity and uncertainty, can we do without national systems [here]
- Evaluating beyond the 2030 Agenda [here]
- Rethinking evaluation to address the crisis in the Anthropocene [here]
- Fragility and Crisis as the New Normal [here]
- Reference documents [here]
- IOE Resource Pack [here]

Quality assurance

IOE Evaluation Advisory Panel (EAP)
- Evaluation and social justice [here]
- Evaluation and Sustainable Development [here]
- The revised evaluation criteria [here]

- Measuring multidimensional poverty [here]
- Indigenous evaluations [here]
- EAP seminar series fact sheets [here]
- EAP seminar series fact sheets [here]

Reference materials

Information and guidance
- IFAD Evaluation Policy [here]
- IOE Evaluation Manual [here]

- IFAD country operations [here]
- Manual of the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to monitor and evaluate IFAD projects [here]
- Better Evaluation (guidance and learning on evaluation design) [here]
- OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria [here]

Multimedia resources
- Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) of IFAD [here]
- Independent Magazine [here]
- IOE media [here]
- IOE Twitter [here]
- IOE LinkedIn [here]
- IOE YouTube [here]