Quality as praxis: A formative meta-evaluation tool to inform transformation

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Our aim

• Explore formative meta-evaluation as a means for quality assurance

• Review a tool that may help us move toward a more deliberate formative quality evaluation practice

• Explore the transformational potential of formative meta-evaluation practice
Metaevaluation: origin and definition

• Theoretical and practical function, as defined by Scriven (1969)
  ➢ Theoretical - “involves the methodological assessment of the role of evaluation”
    • Evaluation theorizing
    • Research on evaluation
  ➢ Methodological - “concerned with the evaluation of specific evaluative performances”
    • Currently the dominant connotation of metaevaluation
Meta-evaluation

• A “professional imperative” (Scriven, 1991)
• An endeavor in “practicing what we preach” (Schwandt, 2015)
• If we do not engage in continuous reflection and assessment of the quality of our work, the purpose and intent of the system in which we work will be lost (Dahler-Larsen, 2019)
Meta-evaluation operationalized

• Formative or summative
• Internal or external
• Ex-ante, concurrent, or retrospective
• External and summative more prevalent
• Calls in the evaluation literature for more research and guidance
Quality as practice

• *Phronesis* (practical wisdom or judgment, reason and self-knowledge)

• Value-rational questions of “How should I be in this situation? What should be done? Is this desirable?” (Schwandt, 2003)

• A knowledge akin to craftsmanship or that of a learned musician (Dahler-Larsen, 2019)
Quality assurance in evaluation

• Standards and principles
• Yet how standards are interpreted varies (Wingate, 2009)
• Subjective adherence to standards in practice (Harnar, 2020)
• “Intrinsic” vs “extrinsic” quality (Harnar, 2020)
• Evaluation as economic exchange further complicates the defining of quality
“The status of any expert occupation is best understood in terms of the sources of power and authority over the definition and control over specialized knowledge work.”

(Picciotto, 2011)
The context

- 5-month inception phase to develop a baseline study, formative and summative evaluations
- Third-party contracted by donor to design and implement evaluations
- Donor had a summative quality assurance process, implemented by a contracted fourth party.
- The evaluation team wanted to lead and participate on quality assurance
Tool Design

• Internal formative meta-evaluation (IFME)
• Consolidated representation of Table Slide
• Phase
  • Design
  • Design/Implementation
  • Reflection
## Pertinent questions by phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the critical moments?</td>
<td>What should be done when, how and with whom?</td>
<td>Were desired outcomes achieved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evaluation standards and principles are relevant?</td>
<td>What is my desired outcome?</td>
<td>Were standards met?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>Heading</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Critical moment</td>
<td>The central issue or moment in the evaluation expected to involve decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Program evaluation standards</td>
<td>Identification of standards that may come into play in addressing the critical moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ethics and principles guidance</td>
<td>Identification of ethics and principles that may serve to guide in addressing the critical moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Degree of extrinsic gravity</td>
<td>The evaluation team’s understanding of other stakeholders’ areas of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Degree of intrinsic gravity</td>
<td>The evaluation team’s areas of concern and priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Detailing of questions to ask when and whom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Detailing of action to take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Desired outcome</td>
<td>Detailing of desired outcome to action taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Outcome realized</td>
<td>Detailing of outcome of F and G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Observations/comments</td>
<td>Detailing main points of reflection based on columns A through I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical moment (A)</td>
<td>Program evaluation standards (B)</td>
<td>Ethics and principles guidance (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working as a multicultural and international evaluation team on a complex socio-economic problem</td>
<td>Accuracy, validity</td>
<td>Integrity, competence, accountability, honesty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13
Small group discussion

• Review the tool as a group and identify areas where it resonates and makes sense and areas where it does not.
  • Examples to extend understanding?
• What are its merits? What aspects of it do you see viable to test?
• What shortcomings do you identify when you think about applying it to an evaluation?
  • Any suggested revisions?
• Tool purpose: How might the tool improve quality practice?
Large group discussion

• How might IFME improve quality practice?
• How can formative meta-evaluation support discipline transformation?