

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

Design	Implementation	Reflection
What are the critical moments?	What should be done when, how and with whom?	Were desired outcomes achieved?
What evaluation standards and principles are relevant?	What is my desired outcome?	Were standards met?

Column	Heading	Definition	Phase
A	Critical moment	The central issue or moment in the evaluation expected to involve decision-making	Design
B	Program evaluation standards	Identification of standards that may come into play in addressing the critical moment	Design
C	Ethics and principles guidance	Identification of ethics and principles that may serve to guide in addressing the critical moment	Design
D	Degree of extrinsic gravity	The evaluation team's understanding of other stakeholders' areas of concern	Design
E	Degree of intrinsic gravity	The evaluation team's areas of concern and priority	Design
F	Questions	Detailing of questions to ask when and whom	Design/ Implementation
G	Action	Detailing of action to take	Design/ Implementation
H	Desired outcome	Detailing of desired outcome to action taken	Design/ Implementation
I	Outcome realized	Detailing of outcome of F and G	Reflection
J	Observations/comments	Detailing main points of reflection based on columns A through I	Reflection



Critical moment (A)	Program evaluation standards (B)	Ethics and principles guidance (C)	Degree of extrinsic gravity (D)	Degree of intrinsic gravity (E)	Questions (F)	Action (G)	Desired outcome (H)	Outcome realized (I)	Observations / comments (J)
Working as a multicultural and international evaluation team on a complex socio-economic problem	Accuracy, validity	Integrity, competence, accountability, honesty	Low	High	What are our individual orientations with respect to the program we are examining?	Develop a process to enable reflection in nurturing each of our own awareness and “knowledge of self”	A process undertaken that assists the team in exploring understanding and biases, and which contributes toward approach to data collection and analysis		

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?