Utilization-Focused Evaluation for Transformation

Michael Quinn Patton
IDEAS Conference
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UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION

Michael Quinn Patton
Charmagne E. Campbell-Patton
Intergenerational Evaluation
U-FE begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use. Therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that will be done, from beginning to end, will affect use.
USE

• Take use seriously by evaluating use, the source of our own accountability and ongoing learning/professional development
• Different from dissemination
• Different from producing reports
• Groundwork laid and expectations set at the beginning
• Doesn’t happen naturally or automatically: requires skilled facilitation
Overarching Principle

Focus on intended use, by and with intended users, in every aspect of, and at every stage of, an evaluation.
“Establish only those very few requirements necessary to define something, leaving everything else open to the creative evolution of the complex adaptive system” (Zimmerman et al., 2001, p. 161)

U-FE MIN SPECS
Core elements identify what is essential, that is, what is the minimum that must occur for an evaluation to be considered utilization-focused.
Detailed comprehensive complete guide to everything you should do.

MIN SPECS: Essential Principles

'This one!'
U-FE MIN SPECS

1. Honor the personal factor. Identify and engage primary users.

2. Be purpose driven. Focus on priority intended uses.

3. Facilitate process use. Be active-reactive-interactive-adaptive in engaging users in all aspects of the evaluation.

4. Take a full-journey stance. Focus on use from beginning to end and every step along the way.

5. Adapt to context changes. When the context for an evaluation changes, the evaluation may need to change.
MIN SPECS Framework for U-FE Thinking

- **Primary Intended Users:** Who is the evaluation for?
- **Primary Intended Uses:** What is the purpose of the evaluation?

Focus on use throughout: How will everything that is done from beginning to end affect use?

Monitor and adapt to context
Take a full-journey stance

Focus on use from beginning to end and every step along the way.

Readiness
Engagement
Prioritization
Reflection
Process Use
Adaptation
Findings Use
Follow-up
Adapt to context changes

When the context for an evaluation changes, the evaluation may need to change.

1. Include in evaluation designs and contracts language specifying that significant changes in context may lead to changes in the evaluation.

2. Pay attention to trends and patterns that may affect the evaluation.

3. Be open to change. Relevance is contextual. Use is contextual.
We're sure this evaluation will completely meet ALL the information needs of absolutely EVERYONE.

Would you buy a used car from this evaluator?
Tensions

Different intended uses serve different purposes and, typically, different intended users.

Thus the need to FOCUS and manage tensions between and among different purposes.
Balancing Different Purposes

ACCOUNTABILITY

LEARNING
TRANSFORMATION
Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Developmental Evaluation

Principles-Focused Evaluation

Blue Marble Evaluation

U-FE in Context
EVALUATION & the GLOBAL PANDEMIC
GEORGE FLOYD,
“I CAN’T BREATHE.”
“We are the first generation to know that we are destroying the planet, and the last generation that can do anything about it.”

WWF (2018)
Post-normal world
BLUE MARBLE EVALUATION
Premises and Principles

MICHAEL QUINN PATTON
Evaluation grew up in the projects
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Evaluation...</th>
<th>Nontraditional &amp; New Directions: Evaluating...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Projects &amp; Programs</td>
<td>• Mission fulfillment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Clusters of grants</td>
<td>• Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Goal attainment</td>
<td>• Principles &amp; values</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Outcomes</td>
<td>• Advocacy campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implementation</td>
<td>• Policy change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generating...</td>
<td>• Systems Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Findings</td>
<td>• Complex dynamic interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lessons</td>
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<td>• Recommendations</td>
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Innovations & Challenges: Evaluating...

- Community impacts
- Regional initiatives
- Networks and collaborations
- Leadership
- Inclusiveness and diversity
- Innovation
- Collective impact
- Scaling
- Environmental ecosystem sustainability
- Global systems change: TRANSFORMATION
Global problems transcend national and agency boundaries

- Climate change
- Economic turbulence
- Refugees
- Virulent infectious diseases
- Dying oceans
- Global cyber-terrorism
- International drug cartels
- Human trafficking
- Weapons trafficking
- Poverty and inequality
- Multi-national corporate collusion
Global problems

- The definitions of the problems are disputed
- The “facts” are a matter of intense debate
- Politics and special interests dominate:
  -- national interests
  -- multi-national corporate interests
  -- agency agendas
  -- competition for resources
- The stakes are huge
“We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.”
EVERY NATION MUST NOW DEVELOP AN OVERRIDING LOYALTY TO MANKIND AS A WHOLE IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE BEST IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL SOCIETIES.

NEW YORK 1967
Think globally
Act globally & locally
Evaluate the interactions
ZOOMING IN & ZOOMING OUT

- A BLUE MARBLE EVALUATOR SKILL!
EVALUATION FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE
Opportunities and challenges for the Sustainable Development Goals

Prague Declaration on Evaluation for Transformational Change
Adopted on Friday 4 October 2019

We, the evaluators, commissioners, parliamentarians and other evaluation users, gathered in the IDEAS Global Assembly and the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development, recognize the need and urgency of systemic change from local to global levels to address the global crises endangering our future. Having discussed the role of evaluation in promoting learning, systemic and transformational change, we agree on the following statements.

1. Promote Transformational Evaluation for the Sustainable Development Goals
   We commit to evaluations that help us learn, understand and support the transformational and systemic changes needed in our countries and the world, as agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A sustainable balance between the social, economic and environmental domains is crucial in light of the existential threats of the climate crisis, mass extinction of species, growing local and global inequity, and ultimately unsustainable use of the resources of the planet.

2. Work in partnership
   We will promote partnerships among evaluators, based on applied ethic codes and professional standards, and on mutual trust.
   At the same time, we commit to engage and recognize new evaluators and collaborators from many different disciplines and fields of work, including young and emerging evaluators, students and interns in evaluation teams whenever possible, in order to promote mutual learning and to discover and leverage new views and skills.
SUSTAINABILITY as a universal criterion in evaluations

6. Focus on sustainability

In all our evaluations, we commit to evaluating for social, environmental and economic sustainability and transformation, including by assessing contextual factors and systemic changes. We commit to assessing and highlighting, in all evaluations, unintended negative social, economic and environmental effects.
BATTLE of OUR TIME

Closing session Friday
All evaluations should address equity

Jara Dean-Coffey
### Guiding Principle E. Common Good and Equity (was General and Public Welfare)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Principle E: Common Good and Equity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Version</strong></td>
<td><strong>Updated Version</strong></td>
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#### GP-E: Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:
Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

#### GP-E: Common Good and Equity:
Evaluators strive to contribute to the common good and advancement of an equitable and just society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-statements for Guiding Principle E: Common Good and Equity</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E1.</strong> When planning and reporting evaluations, evaluators should include relevant perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders.</td>
<td>See D1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E2.</strong> Evaluators should consider not only the immediate operations and outcomes of whatever is being evaluated, but also its broad assumptions, implications and potential side effects.</td>
<td><strong>E2:</strong> Identify and make efforts to address the evaluation’s potential threats to the common good especially when specific stakeholder interests conflict with the goals of a democratic, equitable, and just society.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E3.</strong> Freedom of information is essential in a democracy. Evaluators should allow all relevant stakeholders access to evaluative information in forms that respect people and honor promises of confidentiality. Evaluators should actively disseminate information to stakeholders as resources allow. Communications that are tailored to a given stakeholder should include all results that may bear on interests of that stakeholder and refer to any other tailored communications to other stakeholders. In all cases, evaluators should strive to present results clearly and simply so that clients and other stakeholders can easily understand the evaluation process and results.</td>
<td><strong>E4:</strong> Promote transparency and active sharing of data and findings with the goal of equitable access to information in forms that respect people and honor promises of confidentiality.</td>
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<td><strong>E2:</strong> Identify and make efforts to address the evaluation’s potential threats to the common good especially when specific stakeholder interests conflict with the goals of a democratic, equitable, and just society.</td>
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TRANSFORMATION
DECOLONIZATION
SYSTEMS
CLIMATE CHANGE
POLYCRISIS

- Coronavirus Pandemic
- Infodemic: Shared knowledge
- Climate Emergency
- Economic Turbulence
- Equity/Justice
U-FE 5th Edition
with
Charmagne E. Campbell-Patton
EXTERNAL INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

- Future of Humanity
- Human Rights
- Social Justice
- Equity
- Sustainability

Evaluator

Man and child pushing the wheel.
Skin-in-the-Game Evaluation
UTILIZATION-FOCUSED, PROCESS-USE-ORIENTED, DEVELOPMENTAL, PRINCIPLES-FOCUSED BLUE MARBLE EVALUATION in support of and guided by a THEORY of TRANSFORMATION
TRANSFORMATION
Transformational thinking

Systems thinking:
Thinking beyond *projects and silos* to *systems transformation*
Theory of Transformation
Theory of Change:

“Nothing as Practical as a Good Theory”

1995 Aspen Institute
Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-Based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families

Carol Hirschon Weiss

The topic on the table is the evaluation of comprehensive cross-sector community-based interventions designed to improve the lot of children, youth, and families. These types of initiatives draw on a history of experience, from the Ford Foundation’s Gray Areas Program in the early 1960s, continuing through the federal programs of the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, the large Community Action Program of the War on Poverty, the Model Cities Program, community development corporations, services integration programs, and others. Most of the government programs incorporated requirements for systematic evaluation; for foundation-supported programs, evaluation was more sporadic and informal. None of the programs was satisfied that it had achieved either maximal program benefit from its efforts or maximal evaluation knowledge about program consequences from the evaluations it undertook.

In recent years a new generation of comprehensive community initiatives (CPIs) has been funded. Supported in large part by private foundations, the initiatives aim to reform human service and collateral systems in geographically bounded communities. They work across functional areas such as social services, health care, the schools, and economic and physical redevelopment—in an effort to launch a comprehensive
A call for Theory-based evaluation

“The theory-driven approach is essential to tracking the many elements of the program [or initiative], and assuring that the results identified in the evaluation are firmly connected to the program’s activities. Tracking all aspects of the system makes it more plausible that the results are due to program activities...and that the results generalize to other programs of the same type”

-- Carol H. Weiss
Multiple theories of change

One significant point should be mentioned here. A program may operate with multiple theories.

I do not mean that different actors each have their own theories, but that the program foresees several different routes by which the expected benefits of the program can materialize.

To take a simple example, a counseling program may work because the counselor gives support and psychological insight that enables a young person to understand her situation and cope with it; it may work because the counselor serves as a role model for the young woman; it may work because the counselor provides practical information about jobs or money management; it may work because the counselor refers the client to other useful sources of help.

All of those mechanisms are possible, and some or all of them may work simultaneously.
A community initiative may work through a variety of different routes. There is no need to settle on one theory. In fact, until better evidence accumulates, it would probably be counterproductive to limit inquiry to a single set of assumptions.
Weiss wisdom

✓ Evaluation should probably seek to follow the unfolding of several different theories about how the program leads to desired ends.

✓ It should collect data on the intermediate steps along the several chains of assumptions and abandon one route only when evidence indicates that effects along that chain have petered out.
Table 1. The Four Dimensions Defining Transformational Engagements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Addresses a major developmental challenge such as poverty, equity, or climate change</td>
<td>The constraint or problem addressed is of critical importance to development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of change</td>
<td>Causes or supports fundamental change in a system or market; addresses a root cause; supports a change in trajectory</td>
<td>Market change, systemic change, or behavioral change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale of change</td>
<td>Causes large-scale impact at a national or global level</td>
<td>Scale-up of approaches and innovations and of replication; catalytic effects; demonstration effects; positive spillovers and externalities; acceleration or discontinuity in a development indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Impact is economically, financially, and environmentally sustainable in the long term</td>
<td>Financial, economic, and environmental sustainability of results after engagement ends</td>
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</table>
Evaluation becomes part of the intervention.

Design, implementation, and evaluation are integrated.
Okay, so we've got to make our own pathways...
Principles of Systems Thinking

• Interrelationships
• Perspectives
• Boundaries
• Dynamics
Understanding complex, dynamic interconnections
A fish is swimming along one day when another fish comes up and says “Hey, how’s the water?” The first fish stares back blankly at the second fish and then says “What’s water?”
The Water of Systems Transformation

- Policies
- Practices
- Resource Flows
- Relationships & Connections
- Power Dynamics
- Mental Models

Narratives

Structural Change (explicit)

Relational Change (semi-explicit)

Transformative Change (implicit)
SYSTEMS CHANGE CONDITIONS—DEFINITIONS

**Policies:** Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity’s own and others’ actions.

**Practices:** Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

**Resource Flows:** How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

**Relationships & Connections:** Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

**Power Dynamics:** The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

**Mental Models:** Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.
SYSTEMS CHANGE ... beyond projects

• Deep
• Broad
• Long-term
Transformational thinking

Systems thinking:
Thinking beyond projects and silos
to systems transformation
SYSTEMS COMPLEXITY

• Interconnections
• Perspectives
• Boundaries
• Dynamics

• Emergence
• Nonlinearities
• Uncertainty
• Uncontrollable
• Adaptation

Beyond Projects and Programs
Evaluators part of the design process
Think globally
Act locally & globally
Evaluate interactions

TRANSFORMATION
Interdependence
Ubuntu in Nguni languages, or botho in Sotho.

“My humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I'm human because I belong. The principle of ubuntu means wholeness. It is knowledge that we belong to a greater whole and are diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. Our purpose is social and communal harmony and well-being.”

Bishop Desmond Tutu