RESULTS

What do foundation evaluators and evaluation consultants care about?

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> This article offers raw qualitative data as a supplement to the article published in the *American Journal of Evaluation* titled "How Far Dare an Evaluator Go Toward Saving the World? Redux, Update, and a Reflective Practice Facilitation Tool" (Patton, 2020). It is based on participant responses during an April 2019 convening of the Evaluation Roundtable at the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies in Eden Prairie (Minneapolis), Minnesota.
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> After reviewing a 2004 article in the *American Journal of Evaluation* by Robert Stake titled *How Far Dare an Evaluator Go Toward Saving the World?* in which Stake listed six things he believes evaluators care about, convening participants were invited to: 1) react to Stake's list and suggest revisions if inclined, and 2) identify what they care about.

In reporting qualitative results, I have become leery of too much synthesis, of reporting themes without the raw data on which the themes were based. I invite readers to experience what these evaluators had to say in their own words. Bulleted points are responses to the question: "What do I care about?" Quotation marks indicate verbatim statements. *Savor these expressions of values.*

Diversity

One prominent theme was diversity. Stake's article ended with an emphasis on valuing diversity among evaluators. Evaluation Roundtable convening participants were concerned with

ensuring that their evaluation work makes visible the diversity of voices and perspectives among program stakeholders, particularly those whose lives are effected by programs.

- "Elevating ideas and voices and perspective of diverse voices."

- "Different voices being a part of the conversation about the change that affects our lives (and the role of evaluation as a tool)."

- "Definitions of validity that honor diversity or perspectives, history and identity."

- "My role in ensuring that different voices are a part of the conversation about the change that affects their lives."

- "Understanding things from perceivers' points of view."

- "Figuring out how to decolonize evaluation—making sure more and diverse voices are heard, especially from the communities most affected, and measuring things that are relevant and guided by community input.

- "Building stronger connections between foundations and evaluators from underrepresented groups."

Inclusion

Closely related to diversity was the theme of inclusion, again with an emphasis on inclusion of those whose lives are most likely to be affected by a program or change strategy.

- "Being inclusive."

- "Inclusive meaning-making."

- "Using evaluation to bring in traditionally marginalized voices."

- "Recognizing the power of the question as primary to the power of method—that the topic and framing of inquiry should be inclusive and privilege those closest to the problem."

- "How can foundations and evaluators engage and support grantees to value/prioritize the voices of the people their work is intended to benefit?"

- "The people who the program intends to serve would recognize their perspective in the findings and recommendations."

- "Meaningfully integrating voices of who we are serving."

- "The voices of populations most impacted driving and owning the evaluation at all phases."

- "How the evaluation is performed (inclusive, presenting the full set of findings)."

- "Having the profession of evaluation be accessible to people who have been oppressed and marginalized historically."

Equity

Concern for equity was a dominant theme, often linked to inclusion and diversity.

- "Inequities."

- "Equity in voice and power"

- "Evaluation being in service of equity."

- "The community being served and seek to name our bias and power in an effort to create equity and inclusion."

- "Disrupting white supremacy, eliminating structural barriers in service of equity."

- "Human equity, that the structures and practice in both organizations and governments are dramatically shifted towards being conducive to all people's well-being."

- "I have a moral imperative to contribute to equity."

- "I would add an equity advocate instead of being "distressed by underprivilege" [Stake's language] because this distress implies an actionable response."

- "Evaluation ultimately helping to transform inequities and improving social conditions."

- "Evaluation being in service of equity and justice (reflecting)."

- "How do we use `window' of equity in philanthropy to speed up these ideas in practice and make them expected/standard/required?"

- "Income inequality and role that plays in funding our work."

Social Justice

- I care about Social Justice." I care about "addressing social justice in communities." "I advocate for shifting power to advance social justice." I care about "doing the work of unlearning the beliefs and mental models and mindsets that we've internalized that keep us complicit to the challenges and realities of social injustice."

Co-creation

- "Evaluation being a co-created process from design to Socialuse = community, grantees, staff."

- "Co-building evaluative practice with all who care about (or are affected by) the evaluation, access to, voice in, meaning for."

- "Co-production and sharing of ideas through inclusive meaning-making."

- "Knowledge creation being democratized."

- "Evaluation can support and build respectful, meaningful and reciprocal partnership across all levels of stakeholders (staff, leadership, grantees, communities, consultants, etc.)."

- "I believe in co-creating change. Our life's purpose is to make life better and reduce suffering for others."

- "Owning and sharing power as an evaluator."

Learning

- "Learning – my own, org's, the field's—with eye towards progress not perfection."

- "Learning at scale (across orgs and at the field level)."

- "Ongoing learning."

- "Open, accessible transformative learning amongst/within all those involved in the evaluation. All have learned through the process of evaluation—content, knowledge, skills, assumptions—and are different (see world differently) after (and hopefully their organizations have transformed)."

- "Speeding up and bettering change through learning and ground truthing."

- "Learning and evolving in my practice."

- "Thinking, facilitating, thinking, learning = knowledge = info and thinking."

- "Iteration, continuous improvement."

- "Evaluation must be designed to meet a clear need for improvement and learning."

Evaluation Use

- "The way evaluations are used and that people involved know how and why an evaluation is working."

- "I do not care for science for the sake of science. Learning for the sake of learning without using it for good to increase public's health."

- "Using evaluation in useful moments and not when it's not."

- "Utilization, where evaluation deliverables help stakeholders make informed choices and decisions."

- "How findings and recommendations should be shared."

- "People in authority paying attention, hearing, and thinking and acting in ways aligned with the findings."

- "Evaluation informing strategy and grantmaking in a useful and timely manner."

Evaluative Thinking

- "Evaluation should not be thought of as a single point-in-time event but as a continuous evaluative thinking state through the life cycle of an intervention, project, program, etc."

- "Critical thinking."

- "Questioning what evidence is."

- "Developing an evaluative mindset in everyone. We should all be evaluators, to some degree."

- "Thinking, facilitating thinking

  Learning = [actionable] knowledge = info x thinking

  We have too much info $I \neq K$

  Not enough thinking. $K = I \times T$" [Knowledge = Information x Thinking]

Supporting Social Change and Betterment

- "Making things better/doing good."

- "Making people's lives better."

- "Spurring progress."

- "The larger society."

- "The role of government and policy as a source of societal good."

People and communities

- "People, communities."

- "The people being evaluated."

- "Thriving communities."

- "The trust of the communities we engage in evaluation."

- "People and community. While I need to develop a sound evaluation plan and reports/products for my client, I need to continually ask myself if what I am doing is causing harm and perpetuates systems of oppression."

- "That evaluators contribute to creating conditions where people/groups flourish."

Integrity, Morality, Values, and Ethics

- "Be and act morally. Integrity of you as a person should guide the work you are facilitating to see the future where people are working with want to be."

- "Ethics of evaluation."

- "I embrace uncertainty as an ethical priority."

- "Do no harm" (2 respondents)

- "Do not harm the vulnerable peoples the work is supposed to be helping."

- "Privacy and the right of people to decide how, when and by whom their stories are told."

- "Values-driven approaches."

- "Making the values that set our boundaries explicitly and challenging them if not."

Context and perspective

- "Context of community and lessons of the land/ecosystem."

- "Perspective/context. Context gives meaning to data."

- "The story behind the data—context and perspective."

- "Situated-ness …. From where/whence we and others are looking, and in addition to rationalities and logic, our physicality, emotion, spirituality, and mental burdens [and]

recognizing and naming the fact that our assumptions + biases from our situatedness will never all be visible."

Complexity

- "Acknowledging uncertainty, complexity and tradeoffs."

- "Wrestling with and addressing complexity in evaluative inquiry."

- "I embrace uncertainty as an ethical priority."

Individual commitments and concerns

- "Re-awaken, re-cover, re-ignite traditional knowledge, language, and cultural practices.

- "Letting people be their `true self'."

- "Being thoughtful and transparent about boundary setting."

- "Broader conception of evaluation."

- "Dispersion of evaluation practices and ideas beyond evaluators into phil. leadership and communities."

- "Matching the effort to the stakes."

- "Setting the evaluation boundaries more broadly."

- "Power of the question, rather than just method."

- "What questions need to be asked, of whom, in what ways."

- "Right people at the table."

- "Evaluation being a place where truth can be spoken."

- "Evaluation as a way to improve programs and processes."

- "Flattening the curve—avoiding problems that can be avoided, and solving new problems faster."

- "I believe people doing the work must be the evaluators of their work (Schón—reflective practitioner)."

- Stories, both listening for the stories people tell and helping to connect and share those stories."

- "Story behind the data."

- "Contributing to the open source knowledge base about what has been tried, what worked (whom?), what didn't work, so we use philanthropic money for highest and best use."

- "Avoiding false certainty and avoiding biased truths."

- "Connecting values, measurement and strategic action."

- "Making space for incommensurable truths [and] throwing light on/testing accuracy [of what we believe].

Single, bottom line comment from one participant

What do I care about? EVALUATION.

BEYOND LISTS

Most participants listed distinct items as reported in the thematic categories above. Some went beyond lists to offer a more integrated framework. One wrote:

"I care about stories, both listening for the stories people tell

& helping to connect & share those stories,

and

I care about privacy & the right of people to decide

how, when, and by whom their stories are told."

Another participant responded with the diagram shown in Exhibit 1, an example of an integrated worldview about one's values from an evaluator used to making explicit her values when conducting evaluations.

Exhibit 1

An Integrated Worldview from an Evaluator Who Makes Values Explicit

***Nii alohkaakanam*. I am in service (care):**

"This is internal, expressed as an evaluator, teacher, auntie, colleague, etc."

Several respondents elaborated the basis for their values in response to the question in a follow-up survey: Is there anything about yourself that you would add to help readers understand who you are and how you approach the use of values in your work? Sample responses are included in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2

Select Statements to Illuminate Responses About Values

Participants were asked in a follow-up survey: Is there anything about yourself that you would add to help readers of the *American Journal of Evaluation* understand who you are and how you approach the use of values in your work? Here are five responses.

- "I believe that by intentionally collaboratively learning with and sharing as we go, evaluators can become change agents that can enable citizens to hold our democratic institutions accountable, so we can be where we want to be as a society."

- "My spirituality is a driving force as to how I approach the use of values, and certainly as to how I conduct evaluation."

- "Educational background is Applied Sociology (focused on program evaluation). Very traditional curriculum. It wasn't until later in my career (working at a foundation) when my views on evaluation focused on utilization, participation, and equity began to shift."

- "Culture, language, traditional knowledge, Tribal treaties, First Nations constitutions, and community contexts are the foundation to the work I do in evaluation."

- "I chose to work in evaluation at an institution with values in line with my own. Therefore, in my work, I express and promote the Foundation's values and not my own (although they are compatible)."

References

Patton, M.Q. (2020). How far dare an evaluator go toward saving the world?
redux, update, and a reflective practice facilitation tool. *American Journal of Evaluation.*

Stake, R. E. (2004). How far dare an evaluator go toward saving the world? *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25(1), 103–107.