**How Can Understanding Stakeholders’ Personal Epistemologies Enhance Evaluation Use?**

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**Study Purpose**

As part of my dissertation research, I tested an **exploratory** **conceptual framework (*see reverse side*)** for understanding how evaluation stakeholders’ preferred **“ways of knowing”** (or personal epistemologies) might relate to their preferences and behaviors regarding: evaluation **design/methodologies**, evaluation **discourse**, and prioritized **types of organizational learning** from evaluation.

I aimed to develop a **practical tool** for categorizing stakeholders’ (and evaluators’) preferred “ways of knowing, adapting existing rating-scale surveys to Q methodology. I believe that better anticipating stakeholders’ epistemological preferences will help enhance evaluation **facilitation, credibility, and use**.

**Methodology**

* **Baseline survey & Q study** with 27 purposefully selected participants
	+ Q methodology asks participants to sort a series of statements (here on “ways of knowing”)
	+ Participant sorts are grouped & categorized via by-person factor analysis
	+ Categorizations were compared to survey responses via non-parametric statistics
* **Year-long case study evaluation** with 5 participants above serving on evaluation team
	+ Established representative evaluation team, developed theory of change & evaluation plan
	+ Seven total meetings, five of which were recorded, transcribed, & coded

**Results**

1. The Q results **supported the three “ways of knowing”** found in academic literature.
	1. However, there were concerns with **socially desirable responding**.
2. In the case study, the team’s **evaluation design preferences** were strongly related to the **purpose & context** of the evaluation (e.g., need for a **quantitative dashboard** to report on metrics from strategic plan & top-down network mandates).
	1. However, in **abstract survey questions**, participants preferred methodologies as predicted.
3. **Discourse styles** closely followed the “ways of knowing” categorizations within case study meetings.
	1. Did my **facilitation & group “ground rules”** influence discourse?
4. **Organizational learning outcomes** of the evaluation – primarily **single-loop** – were also associated with the **purpose & context** of the evaluation, as well as the team’s **managerial sub-culture**.
	1. The **theory of change** process enhanced **double-loop learning**, especially for team members most familiar with the program (i.e., staff members), but was perceived as unnecessary.

**Discussion Questions**

How can (and should) evaluators **assess & apply “ways of knowing”** to a participatory evaluation?

Specifically in terms of process & group **facilitation**, how might “ways of knowing” be useful?

How can (and should) evaluators promote **deeper organizational learning** outcomes despite constraints?

**Mumford Dissertation Conceptual Framework**

Key Sources: *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1997); *Participatory Evaluation Up Close* (2012)

**PARTICIPATORY**

**EVALUATION**

Narrative

Qualitative

Quantitative

Argument

Mixed Methods

Dialogue

***DISCOURSE***

***DESIGN***

**Group Dynamics**

**Bias & Heuristics**

**Evaluation Context**

**WAYS OF KNOWING**

**Separate Knowing**

* + "Doubting game"; critical
	+ Emphasis on justification
	+ Adversarial reasoning *against* the other
	+ Impersonal detachment & distance
	+ Adopting "neutral" perspective avoiding bias

**Connected Knowing**

* + "Believing game"; accepting
	+ Emphasis on meaning
	+ Supportive reasoning *with* the other
	+ Personal attachment & intimacy
	+ Adopting other's perspective through empathy

**Constructed Knowing**

* + "Dialectical thinking" balancing detachment & empathy
	+ Assume complexity & ambiguity in knowledge claims
	+ Duty to consider alternative knowledge constructions

**Organizational Culture**

**Single-Loop Learning/ Instrumental Use**

* + Program improvement
	+ Improved program planning
	+ Improved resource allocation
	+ Increased support & funding

**ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING**

**Double-Loop Learning/ Conceptual Use**

* + Increased self-, program & contextual understanding
	+ Improved strategies & goals
	+ Improved structures & processes

**Deutero Learning/ Process Use**

* + Increased eval. capacity
	+ Increased empowerment
	+ Cultural change
	+ Improved eval. processes