

Straddling the Internal and External Evaluator Role: Issues of Independence

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Session Objectives:

- To identify principles that influence the internal and external evaluator's role;
- To discuss legal, ethical, and professional expectations of an evaluator; and
- To examine how personal values including independence, honesty, and collegiality, affect one's preference for the role of internal and/or external evaluator

Presenter's Discussion/Reflection

The American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators include integrity/honesty and responsibilities for general and public welfare. Other professional practice philosophies uphold similar values. In practice, the necessity to meet contractual requirements per agreed upon scopes of work or responses to work proposals predisposes work teams to meet performance standards and deadlines while possibly undermining professional values. If unaware of that possibility, evaluators who aim to ensure the honesty and integrity of an evaluation process and its findings are at risk of yielding timely deliverables, but dishonest findings. This risk is greater when the internal evaluator is not among an organization's leadership team or lacks strong support of evaluation from key organizational leaders.

Evaluators may have a dual and, possibly, multiple roles within their organizations e.g., evaluation designer and implementer. A discussion of practices to address dilemmas encountered within organizational structures that do not yet embrace evaluation as a key, integrated function is necessary. This roundtable exchange supports a continual development of effective strategies across organizational types to help maintain internal evaluators' values of independent thinking, collegiality, engagement of stakeholders, and honest application of evaluation findings for which such evaluators are hired.

Some Contextual Distinctions that May Influence Evaluation Approaches

As an external evaluator . . .

- You retain control of your work i.e., you determine how to go about achieving agreed upon results/deliverables
- The evaluation function is exclusively yours or you determine with whom to collaborate
- Relationships are dependent on your ability to establish and sustain them, they may have a value proportional to time cost considerations
- Written agreements should be in place to establish a contractual relationship
- Request for client input is for inclusion of stakeholder interest, to identify client priorities, to confirm/discard assumptions
- Schedule of deliverables becomes part of a written contract
- Compensation may be on a per project basis

As an internal evaluator . . .

- Project manager/director may provide direction, input, approval for processes and work dissemination
- The evaluation function is part of an internal team with varied degrees of appreciation for its value
- Relationships are determined based on organizational hierarchy
- Evaluation expertise may not be shared to heighten organizational evaluation capacity
- The tacit contractual relationship is employer-employee
- Evaluator's request for feedback may be interpreted as a request for direction
- Evaluation deliverables may be in a written project/program charter or work plan
- There may be ongoing requests for reports on work status
- Usually compensated on a per hour basis

Roundtable Exchange:

- At what cost, independence?
- Independence from what, really?

Assuming you value truth, applicability, relevance, and honesty in reporting, analyzing, and interpreting evaluation study findings . . .

- What approaches have you, as evaluator, taken to work effectively while continually adhering to professional principles?
- What telltale signs in implementing a project/program or personal alerts (i.e., "red flags") have been useful and reliable to keep you from diluting values and principles?

What, specifically would you say works best when straddling internal/external roles?

American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles (abbreviated)

A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data based inquiries.

B. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

C. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior, and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

D. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders.

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.

References:

American Evaluation Association. (2004). **Guiding Principles for Evaluators Long Form.** In *Guiding Principles Training Package*. Retrieved from:
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