TOOL | DEVELOPING EVALUATIONS THAT ARE USED

Evaluation (aka reality testing) – a systematic process of testing ideas, hunches and beliefs about the nature of a challenge and how it might be addressed through the use of data and rigorous 'sense-making'.

MAIN IDEAS

- Most evaluation findings are not used by their intended users for their intended use.
- There are a variety of different factors that affect the uptake of evaluation findings; e.g. interest in findings of evaluation user, evaluability of intervention, skill of the evaluator, political context, etc.
- Research suggests that the "personal factor" is the most important: the interest of the evaluation user in the evaluation process and findings, the quality of the evaluator, and the trustful working relationship between the two.
- The probabilities of getting intended users to use evaluation findings can be improved by embracing a utilization-focused approach.
- There are many helpful strategies typical of a utilization-focused approach.

> "Evaluation findings, if used at all, are usually one piece of the decision making pie, not the whole pie. Rhetoric about "data-based decision making" and "evidence based practice" can give the impression that one simply looks at evaluation results and a straightforward decision follows. **Erase that image from your mind. That is seldom, if ever, the case.**
>
> - Michael Quinn Patton. Utilization-Focused Evaluation. 4th Edition.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "USE"?

1. Instrumental use – evaluation findings are used to directly inform a decision, improve a program or policy, develop new directions, or contribute to solving a problem – the findings are linked to some subsequent, identifiable action.
2. Conceptual use – when an evaluation influences how key people think about a program or policy and understand it better in some significant way – but no immediate action or decision

flows from the findings.

3. Process use – when an evaluation encourages people to more fully embrace the process of evaluative thinking, learning, and use of data in making decisions – but no immediate action or decision flows from the findings.
4. Misuse – when evaluation users manipulate evaluation data findings or process for some political or self-interested purpose.

TYPES OF USES (PURPOSES)

1. Judgment (Summative) – to help decision-makers decide whether to sustain, wind-down or expand an intervention.
2. Learning (Formative) – improve or refine an intervention.
3. Accountability – demonstrate that resources are well-managed, intervention plan followed and results attained.
4. Monitoring – manage the intervention, routine reporting, early identification problems.
5. Development – create or radically adapt an intervention in dynamic conditions.
6. Knowledge generation – enhance general understandings and identify generic principles about effectiveness.

THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

#1 Primary Intended Users:
Who are the primary intended users of the evaluation and what are their major questions?

#2 Primary Intended Use:
What is the intended user's primary intended use of the evaluation findings?

#3 Tailoring Key Features:
What are the key features to keep in mind to improve the probability that primary intended users "use" the evaluation findings ('interpretive lens', preferences for data and methods, window-of-use)?

TAMARACK
I N S T I T U T E

RESOURCES

Drowning in Data. Alive Conner Snibbe. http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/drowning_in_data/

Evaluation Blues: How Accountability Requirements Hurt Small Non Profits the Most. Laura Silverstein and Erin Maher. http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/evaluation_blues/

Why Measure? Nonprofits Use measures to Show they are Efficient, but what if Donors Don't Care?. Katie Cunningham, Marc Ricks. http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/why_measure/

The High Cost of Accurate Knowledge. Kathleen Sutcliffe and Klaus Webber. http://hbr.org/2003/5/thehigh-cost-of-accurate-knowledge/ar/1

Utilization-Focused Evaluation: An Interview with Michael Quinn Patton. http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/family-support/a-conversationwith-michael-quinn-patton

An Evaluation Scope of Work. United States Agency for International Development. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABY207.pdf

Utilization-Focused Evaluation. 4th Edition. Michael Quinn Patton. http://www.amazon.ca/UtilizationFocused-Evaluation-Michael-Quinn-Patton/dp/141295861X