Program Evaluation and Organizational Learning:
A Theoretical Perspective

Barbara Rosenstein and Miri Levin-Rozalis
Ben Gurion University of the Negev
Beer Sheva, Israel

Seville 2002

5th biennial conference of the EES
ABSTRACT
This paper proposes a theoretical scheme for the continuing popular discussion of Evaluation and Organizational Learning. We will try to unravel the intertwined elements in the fabric of Evaluation and Organizational Learning within a participatory framework. The unraveling begins with an inquiry into the threads of organizational learning, transformational learning, participatory evaluation and learning organization. We continue with an examination of the changing role of the evaluator within this context. We will end the paper with a brief look at the relevant issues of letting go, and utilization. At the outset, however, we would like to stress that this discussion does not in any way preclude the traditional functions of evaluation and the evaluator.

ABSTRACT
Cet article propose un cadre théorique de discussion concernant la formation à l'évaluation et la formation au sein des organisations. Nous tenterons de démêler les composantes de l'évaluation et de la formation au sein des organisations dans la perspective d'une approche de travail participative. Notre examen porte en premier lieu sur la dynamique de la formation dans les organisations, sur l'apprentissage transformationnel, sur l'évaluation participative et les organisations apprenantes. Il se poursuit autour d'une discussion sur les effets liées au développement d'une organisation apprenantes. Nous continuons en examinant le rôle changeant de l'évaluateur travaillant dans ce contexte. Nous terminons l'article en jetant un bref regard sur l'auto-évaluation et sur l'utilisation de l'évaluation et sur.. Nous tenons à préciser que la présente discussion ne remet pas en question le rôle traditionnel de l'évaluation et de l'évaluateur.
There are two ways to be a light – you can be a candle or you can be a mirror that reflects the candle (Edith Wharton).

INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a theoretical scheme for the continuing popular discussion of Evaluation and Organizational Learning. We will try to unravel the intertwined elements in the fabric of Evaluation and Organizational Learning within a participatory framework. The unraveling begins with an inquiry into the threads of organizational learning, learning organization, transformational learning and types of participatory evaluation. We continue with an examination of the changing role of the evaluator within this context. We will end the paper with a brief look at the relevant issues of letting go and utilization. At the outset, however, we would like to stress that this discussion does not in any way preclude the traditional functions of evaluation and the evaluator.

We begin with a definition and discussion of terms. Such a clarification of terms is necessary because of the proliferation of material written on the subject. Fuzzy use of terms leads to discussions that are more semantic than substantive.

DEFINITION AND DISCUSSION OF TERMS

Organizational learning

Organizational Learning is a phenomenon that takes place in various forms within an organization. According to Argyris (1992) organizational learning is “Any process of change in organizational structures, codes or practices that is triggered or reinforced by new experiences new interactions or new information.” Furthermore, Argyris and Schön (1996) describe two types of organizational learning: single-loop and double-
loop learning. Each entails a certain kind of organizational behavior and each engenders a specific outcome. In simple terms, **single-loop** learning deals with strategic changes and more or less maintains the status quo of the organization. **Double-loop** learning deals with declared and underlying goals and engenders basic changes in organizational outlook and behavior. These kinds of learning are based on models of behavior - Model I and Model II (Argyris and Schön, ibid.). Model I behavior strives to maintain the status quo. People who behave according to Model I Theory-in-use, act in ways that preserve order, protect their own positions and keep control firmly in their own hands. They tend to minimize discontent and dissent and maximize surface satisfaction and mutual agreement, maintaining unilateral control at all times. They view good management as a win-lose situation, striving to win at all times. This kind of behavior is deceptively positive by producing an outwardly smooth running operation through defensive postures. This calm exterior, however, limits the possibility of learning because challenges to the system are at a minimum since "everything is all right". Such an environment allows for single-loop learning only. Productive, creative dissensions together with deeper examination of the true workings of the organization are absent. Model II behavior, on the other hand, encourages discussion and disagreement, leaving the door open to change. Confronting opinions is more important than controlling them. The consequence of Model II behavior is an emphasis on double-loop learning, because the entire workings of the organization are open to scrutiny. Furthermore, members of the organization are encouraged to scrutinize. Such learning involves change, not only change in action, but **change in conception** and **change in perspective** brought about by what Mezirow (1998) calls **critical reflection of assumptions**.
Transformational Learning

Mezirow's Transformation Theory maintains that human learning is grounded in the nature of human communication. To understand the meaning of what is being communicated - especially when intentions, values, moral issues, and feeling are involved - requires the above mentioned critical reflection of assumptions. Through critical reflection one can break through the barriers and repertoires (van Der Meer, 1999) that normally prevent such learning among individuals and form a learning organization.

Learning Organization

Learning Organizations are organizations "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." (Senge, 1990) emphasis added.

A Learning Organization is a group of people who learn in a cooperative, supportive and mutually advantageous situation. They usually focus on a specific issue, for instance, knowledge management, improved social services, changes in a school environment, etc. Through a process of meetings, discussions, cooperation, collaboration and inquiry, the group solves problems, makes decisions, and over time changes the process of organizational learning of their common organization.

The creation of a learning organization is by definition a participatory process. A participatory process of transaction can hold up a mirror to an organization. By reflecting in this mirror the organization can form new experiences, new interactions and acquire new information so that it can engage in both single and double-loop learning. The results could be the transformation of the people in an organization into a learning organization so that the organizational learning that takes place is
cooperative, inquiry-based and takes the form of Model II organizational learning as defined by Argyris (1992).

Unfortunately such changes do not occur automatically. Someone has to hold up the mirror, help conceptualize the reflection. Evaluation and especially participatory evaluation can provide this needed perspective/

Types of Participatory Evaluation - Transactional, Participatory, Collaboratory, Empowerment

In 1973 Rippey proposed Transactional Evaluation. According to Rippey (1973), although evaluation was a requirement of the United States Office of Education in the 1960s, most evaluations had been useless. He attributed this phenomenon to the fact that most summative evaluations proved inconclusive and that most formative evaluations came too late. Many forms of cooperative, participatory, collaborative and empowerment evaluation, however, have evolved since Rippey introduced transactional evaluation as a solution to disenfranchisement of stakeholders (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman, Kaftarian, and Wandersman, 1996, Mertens, 1994; Owen, 1999; Patton, 1997; Caracelli and Preskill, 2000). Dissecting the participatory dimension, Cousins and Whitmore (ibid.) propose a three-dimensional framework for collaboratory evaluation: control of evaluation process, stakeholder selection for participation and depth of participation.

Furthermore, Cousins and Whitmore (ibid.) distinguish two main streams of Participatory Evaluation. In Practical Participatory Evaluation the core assumption is that stakeholder participation will enhance evaluation relevance, ownership and utilization, in which the central function is fostering evaluation use with the implicit assumption that evaluation is geared toward program policy or organizational decision making. Transformational Participatory Evaluation (TEP), is based on the
assumption that people should control their own lives and should be able to evaluate their own actions. Rooted in the belief in social justice and emancipation of classes, genders, races, age etc, TPE uses participatory principles and actions in order to democratize social change.

Returning to Rippey, we have the combination of the axes of summative/formative and non-participatory/participatory evaluation, to create more effective and responsive evaluation. The term 'transaction' was used by Rippey (ibid.) in a model of evaluation aimed at overcoming the 'stuckness' of evaluation at the time. Rippey's model is especially interesting, because he used evaluation to deal with change. 'Transactional evaluation looks at the effects of changed programs in schools and other institutions on the incumbents of the roles in the system undergoing change, i.e. on the changers themselves.' (Rippey, ibid, p.3)

The distinction between interaction and transaction is important when considering any form of participatory evaluation. Interaction is the relationship between two distinct entities that remain distinct throughout the interaction. Changes occurring from the interaction involve the re-determination and re-naming of objects comprised in the system, not on changes that occur as a result of the interaction (Dewey and Bentley, 1949). Interaction resides within the frame of those who are interacting. Transaction begins inquiry without any preconceived notions of truth or fact. No participant in the inquiry has a monopoly on truth. This situation is reminiscent of Model II behavior mentioned above. All parts to the inquiry are part of a free and open process during which changes and adaptations can be made at any stage. We should aim for transaction as much as possible. Such an approach is in line with the trend towards democratic process in evaluation (House and Howe, 2000).
Reconsidering the various forms of evaluation mentioned in this section, we can see that a primary differentiating feature is control. Who controls the process, the outcome and the knowledge? Both Transformational Participatory Evaluation and Transactional Evaluation locate control in the hands of the stakeholders. When evaluation is combined with organizational learning the locus of control is in the organization as a learning body. (In paper we use the word "Organization" for Program or Project as well as Organization since programs and projects function as organizations.)

All organizations learn. The goal of Evaluation in this process is to engender a type of learning that approaches a learning community, in which members of the organization share their own knowledge, build new knowledge, turn their tacit knowledge into explicit or actionable knowledge and their private knowledge into common organizational knowledge.

EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

In order to encourage or generate learning, evaluation has to be inclusive and responsive. One way of achieving inclusiveness and responsiveness is through the above mentioned participatory types of evaluation. Returning to Rippey's two dimensions, evaluation can be viewed on a two-dimensional plane. One axis is formed by top-heavy non-participatory formats at one end to open participatory and empowerment formats on the other. The other axis is composed of summative, outcome evaluation at one end moving towards various forms of formative evaluation at the other. The matrix below illustrates these two axes. For convenience we simplified the continuum of each axis into a dichotomy in order to examine its relationship to organizational knowledge.
Table No. 1: Types of evaluation. Degrees of participation and organizational knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-participatory</th>
<th>Participatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summative</strong></td>
<td>Report of the &quot;Inspector General&quot;</td>
<td>Members of the organization are partners to data Collection, analysis and interpretation toward the final report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative</strong></td>
<td>Feedback given throughout the process by the evaluator</td>
<td>Members of the organization participate in ongoing interactive question raising, data collection, analysis and interpretation toward immediate program improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Non-participatory column shows us that the organization can choose to use or not to use the evaluation findings. The evaluation itself plays no active role in use, disuse or abuse of its findings.

In the Participatory column, however, there is greater chance for the evaluation to encourage or even to propel organizational learning, simply because stakeholders and organization members are partners in some or all parts of the evaluation process (deciding on evaluation questions, collecting data, analyzing data, drawing conclusions).

These functions in themselves, however, are not enough. In order for evaluation to exert maximum influence over organizational learning farther steps are needed.
Organizational Learning and the Role of the Evaluator

There are several factors that contribute to forming a learning organization and the evaluator can have an important part in such formation. Evaluation can serve as the trigger to continual transformational learning. In the kind of evaluation proposed here, the evaluator has to help the organization reflect and learn via providing new experiences, new interactions or new information or at least new ways of looking at old information in addition to being able to reflect and learn alone or with selected stakeholders. Stakeholders then act by improving, developing or disseminating their programs. Such action takes several concurrent forms.

- transformation of tacit knowledge into actionable knowledge,
- creation of a body of accessible usable organizational knowledge
- program improvement based on informed decision making,
- organizational improvement based on the principles of learning organizations and knowledge management, and
- dissemination of successful programs and actionable knowledge

These roles require the evaluator to possess highly developed reflective capacities in addition to data collection and analysis skills. Such reflection is based on the four types of knowledge listed in the table below. The type of knowledge appears in the first column: new knowledge, collected knowledge (information), members' knowledge and formalized organizational knowledge.

The form of the knowledge is found in the second column. New knowledge is in the form of information that the evaluator can bring into the organization from a variety of sources outside the organization (current research, articles, or experience). Such knowledge is new to the organization, not new in the sense that it is created by the organization. Collected knowledge is drawn from within the organization and its
programs. Members' knowledge is exposed through participatory reflective workshops, journal writing, etc. Formalized Organizational Knowledge derives from knowledge that exists within the organization, but has not been conceptualized, formalized and preserved. It is accessible neither to new members nor to outsiders.

The third column lists the source of each type of knowledge. The location of the knowledge appears in the fourth column - evaluator knowledge, individual knowledge, team knowledge, and organizational knowledge. The last column shows the accessibility of the knowledge: formal, explicit, or implicit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Knowledge</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Knowledge (new to the organization)</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Outside the organization</td>
<td>Experts in area, Written documents</td>
<td>Formal, explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collected information / knowledge - analyzed data from the organization</td>
<td>Presentations, Video, Pictures, Reports</td>
<td>Collected from inside the Organization</td>
<td>Evaluator OL consultant, Staff and clients</td>
<td>Formal, explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members' knowledge</td>
<td>Tacit, Private</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Individuals, teams</td>
<td>Implicit - Accessible only via reflection, transaction and transformational learning with the guidance of a facilitator (evaluator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formalized organizational knowledge</td>
<td>All sorts of Information</td>
<td>Researched inside the organization</td>
<td>Operators, clients, communitie s, individuals</td>
<td>Implicit - accessible through transformation and institutionalization of all types of knowledge into formal communicable and actionable knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All four kinds of knowledge must be rendered actionable and usable and should become an integral, public and accessible component of the Organization's Knowledge. The above is possible through the formation of a Learning Organization in which the participants transform individual knowledge into shared organizational knowledge; tacit knowledge into actionable knowledge; individual and organizational actionable knowledge into formalized knowledge; and use external observations for critical reflection of assumptions and double-loop learning. These tasks are discussed in detail below.

1. **Transform individual knowledge into shared organizational knowledge.** For example, in a project for empowering Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, each professional worker knew a lot about Ethiopian cultural codes, customs and beliefs on his own. Such knowledge was not common, public organizational knowledge, however, and was not taken into account, for example while planning and implementing new programs. Reflection was the tool through which existing knowledge was turned into usable knowledge that remains an integral part of the repertoire of the Organization.

2. **Transform tacit knowledge into actionable knowledge.** Tacit knowledge is knowledge that, once learned, became automatic and basically "indescribable", for instance, walking up stairs or riding a bicycle. In a Project for Knowledge Management in a Social Services Department, social workers were unaware of the special quality of the work they were doing. They thought that 'everyone worked that way' or that they just did 'what came naturally'. Of course these comments constitute the definitions of tacit knowledge. The evaluator had to persist in
asking 'What did you do? How did you do it? Be specific. Explain further'. The role of the advisor/evaluator was often never to be satisfied with the obvious. For instance, in trying to document a successful intervention in the schools, the social worker in charge said she 'contacted the schools'. Upon examination and reflection, however, it became apparent that 'contacting the schools' consisted not only of sending notices, but of making repeated phone calls, making appointments that were convenient for the school personnel, attending parent/teacher meetings and school events, and sitting in the Teachers' Room available for impromptu conversation. Once reflected upon and verbalized these obvious points of tacit knowledge had to be formulated in a way that could be used by others to develop similar programs.

The diagram below illustrates the process of turning tacit knowledge into actionable knowledge via reflection, documentation and inquiry.

**Figure 1**

*From Tacit Knowledge to Actionable Knowledge*

3. Transform individual and organizational actionable knowledge into formalized knowledge. A good example of the implementation of this task is a book compiled by an experimental educational project in Israel. The book contains stories telling
experiences of many members of the projects. Referred articles accompany the stories and elaborate on the contents. (Similar to biblical commentaries on biblical stories.) The book is a resource for project developers and operators as well as for researchers. It presents a body of knowledge concerning many aspects of the intervention (Goredeski, 2001).

4. Use external observations for critical reflection of assumptions and double-loop learning. For example in the evaluation of the Knowledge Management Project in Social Services in Israel, the aim of the evaluation is the thorough examination of the basic assumption that 'learning, reflective social workers provide better service'. Through the use of logic models combined with critical reflection, the evaluator can break through the existing frames and repertoires (Schön and Rein, 1994; van der Meer, 1999) that are the barriers to learning. The organization for its part has to be ready for such consciousness raising.

The focus on Organizational Learning transforms the role of the evaluator to one of knowledgeable facilitator who returns responsibility of the operation, development, maintenance and evaluation back to the organization through the creation of a learning community. The evaluator is responsible for the procedures of learning – providing tools and monitoring the ongoing learning. The learning content is the mutual responsibility of the organization and the evaluator. Then what is the difference between the evaluator and the organizational learning facilitator?

**Role of the evaluator compared with the role of an Organizational Learning Facilitator**

The difference lies not so much in the practice but in its purpose. Both the evaluator in a participatory setting and the facilitator use reflection, in-depth phenomenological
interviews, observations and other ways of data collection and analysis in order to
clarify unclear data and in order to make sense of the complex organizational context
and knowledge. Evaluators conduct these procedures to help themselves form a deep
understanding of the evaluand so that they can perform the job of evaluation well.
Once they understand the organizational reality and situation they are able to present
their findings to the organization.

The organizational learning facilitator does the same for the organization. The
understandings, the sense-making, the researching and the conclusions are conducted
by the organization for the purposes of learning, adjustment, improvement and
empowerment.

In the orthodox evaluation, participatory or not, knowledge is controlled by the
evaluator who decides what sorts of knowledge will be presented to the organization,
in what ways and to what audiences. In a learning organization, the organization and
its members control knowledge. Thus, the main criteria for creating a learning
organization rest in the locus of control.

The above discussion of the fabric of Evaluation and Organizational Learning raises
the issues of letting go of the evaluation and utilizing the evaluation. We will touch
these issues briefly in the following section.

**RELATED ISSUES**

**Letting go**

By helping the organization learn and develop evaluative inquiry skills the evaluator
relinquishes control. Not all evaluators, or other professionals for that matter, are
willing or eager to give up such control. What does it mean in terms of “self-
evaluation” or the current popularity of organizations evaluating themselves? Issues
arising from this kind of mainstreaming concern limits of time and lack of
professional evaluation skills on the part of the stakeholders and the subsequent quality of the evaluation.

**Utilization of the evaluation**

Again the question of use arises. Who is responsible for knowledge use in this scenario, the evaluator or the organization? Who is "the organization" for that purpose? Who determines use, misuse or abuse? Is use determined by the capacity of the organization to function as a learning organization or by the effects of this learning on the programs and the lives of the people involved in those programs?

The same issues contributing to evaluation use are present in the combination of evaluation and organizational learning. The combination, however, has the potential for greater success in overcoming or dealing with those contributing factors: political issues, organization, individual, information, stakeholder involvement from the beginning, timing, data, credibility, communication, presentation, institutionalizing of evaluation practice.

There is a definite risk of the combination of Organizational Learning and Evaluation being “top-heavy”. That is that a disproportionate amount of time is devoted to organizational learning and not to outcomes in the “field” of that organization and its learning. Who benefits? Do all levels of the organization including service users as well as providers benefit?

The combination does not provide a panacea for difficulties of evaluation use, but rather raises issues concerned with it. Like in all other forms of evaluation the basic skills of the evaluator still carry great weight in the effectiveness of the evaluation. The difference lies in the fact that in addition to reflecting and learning the evaluator has to help the organization reflect and learn via providing new experiences, new interactions or new information or at least new ways of looking at old information.
The depth and extent of that joint reflection and learning will still determine the depth and extent of evaluation utilization. (Owen, 1995; Patton, M Q. 1997; Preskill, H. and Torres, 1999; Preskill, H. and Torres, R. T., 2000)

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the symbiosis between Evaluation and Organizational Learning, why they are intricately entwined and the issues that evolve from this relationship for the organization and the evaluator alike. By clarifying the terms and by examining types of knowledge involved in learning, we have draw up the following theoretical scheme.

A learning organization is created through Model II theory-in-use that allows the organization to deal with underlying conflicts and confrontations and learn from them. Such learning is participatory by its very nature. Since organizations tend to operate according to Model I behavior, they need a facilitator to guide them into Model II modes of operation. Evaluation has evolved in a way that is conducive to transaction and aims at learning. Evaluation plays the role of exposing information and knowledge to the organization in order to make that knowledge actionable. Thus evaluation serves an important function in building learning organizations by enabling them to understand, create and preserve their own organizational knowledge.

The figure below illustrates this scheme. The evaluator, represented by the two-way arrow, draws on her knowledge of participatory types of evaluation, types of knowledge, types of learning, components of organizational learning, to enable the organization represented by the thick two-way arrow, to become a learning organization in its own right.
REFERENCES


The Education of Teachers, 98th yearbook of the NSSE (pp. 114-144). Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.


Senge Learning Organization Web (SLOW)
