AN ATTEMPT TO INTEGRATE EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL EVALUATION

Craig Russon
Karen Russon
Russon and Associates
Davenport, Iowa

Abstract: Western countries currently donate large sums of money to developing countries. This money is used to fund programs that provide humanitarian assistance, protect the environment, build democracy, and encourage economic growth. In the implementation of such programs, donor agencies often adopt a top-down approach in which intended beneficiaries have little involvement. Empowerment evaluation could be used as a tool for overcoming this problem. Empowerment evaluation is, as the name implies, a collection of evaluation techniques that promote the empowerment process. The empowerment process has been thought of as having five stages, and evaluation can play an important role in most of these stages.

Résumé: Présentement les pays de l'Ouest accorde de grosses sommes d'argent aux pays en voie de développement. Cet argent est distribué afin de pourvoir aux programmes d'aide à l'assistance humanitaire, la protection de l'environnement, l'implantation de la démocratie, et l'encouragement à la croissance économique. Dans l'implantation de ces programmes, les agences donatrices adoptent souvent une approche par laquelle elles exigent peu d'implication de la part du bénéficiaire. L'évaluation de l'habilitation peut servir d'outil pour surmonter ce problème. L'évaluation de l'habilitation est, comme le nom l'indique, une collection de techniques d'évaluation qui promeut le processus de l'habilitation. Le processus de l'habilitation comporte cinq étapes, et l'évaluation peut jouer un rôle important dans presque toutes les étapes.

███████ Western countries currently donate large sums of money to developing countries. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the government agency that manages most of Canada's international development assistance programs, spent $2,196,840,000 in 1992–93 (CIDA, 1994). This money was used to

fund programs that alleviate poverty, achieve economic stability, increase women's participation in development, foster environmentally sound development, secure food supplies, and ensure access to energy resources.

In the implementation of such programs, international donor agencies often adopt a top-down approach (Bamberger, 1990). Decisions regarding selection, design, implementation, and evaluation are made by the donor agency in consultation with national governments. The intended beneficiaries typically have very little involvement in the programs (Snyder & Doan, 1995). Failure to involve beneficiaries can have several deleterious effects, including unwillingness to pay service charges, rejection of responsibility for project maintenance, a sense of alienation, and a feeling of disempowerment (Bamberger, 1990).

Empowerment evaluation has recently been linked to international evaluation (Fetterman, 1994). The purpose of this paper is to suggest that empowerment evaluation could be used to overcome problems with international development programs.

EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

Empowerment evaluation is, as the name implies, a collection of evaluation techniques that promote the empowerment process (see Fetterman [1993] for an alternative definition). The empowerment process (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Fetterman, 1994) has been thought of as having five stages: the first stage is the diagnosis of conditions that cause people to have feelings of powerlessness. This leads to the implementation of empowerment strategies in stage 2. In stage 3, strategies are employed with the purpose of providing people with self-efficacy information. As a result of receiving such information, people feel empowered in stage 4, and the behavioural effects of empowerment are documented in stage 5. Evaluation can play an important role in most of these stages.

Stage One

The first stage in the empowerment process is the identification of conditions leading to a psychological state of powerlessness (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). For example, gender inequity, poverty, illiteracy, and poor health may all contribute to the powerlessness of women's

groups in some Central American countries. Evaluators can facilitate the identification of the conditions leading to women's powerlessness by involving them in environment scans, need assessments, and climate surveys. In this manner, evaluators can help beneficiaries to have input into the process used to select and design international development programs.

Environmental scanning is typically associated with strategic planning (Goodstein, 1992). It occurs when evaluators and beneficiaries direct their attention to the internal and external environments that confront them. When beneficiaries examine the internal environment, they must consider two things: the groups' strengths and weaknesses. For example, the strengths of women's groups may consist of special knowledge, skills, and abilities. Weaknesses may include gender inequity, poverty, illiteracy, and poor health.

When beneficiaries examine the external environment, there are also two things that must be considered: opportunities and threats. Opportunities that are available to the women might include development grants, the nearby placement of a development aid worker, or training/education programs. Threats to the women might include changes in values, mores, and traditions. Scanning external and internal environments ultimately leads to the identification of strategic issues. Strategies can then be formulated to manage these issues.

Programs are also often predicated upon the results of a needs assessment. A needs assessment typically identifies the discrepancy between a present state of affairs and an ideal or desirable state of affairs. The needs are then ranked by importance. Once the most important needs are identified, they may become the basis for establishing programs. Programmatic activities can be carried out to meet the identified needs. For example, a needs assessment done with and for women's groups in some Central American countries might show that the groups need access to capital, health clinics, or non-formal education programs.

A climate survey is a survey carried out with the intent of revealing the collective mood of members of an organization or institution. Oftentimes the climate survey includes items that attempt to assess satisfaction with social, financial, educational, psychological, and political aspects of the organization. Programs can be founded to ameliorate sources of dissatisfaction. For example, Central

American women in a cooperative might be dissatisfied with the educational programs that the co-op offers. Therefore, programs could be undertaken to augment the educational offerings.

Evaluation techniques, such as those discussed above, can help donor agencies identify the present conditions leading to the psychological state of powerlessness. Equally important is the opportunity that these techniques afford beneficiaries to have input into project selection and design.

Stage Two

The second stage in the empowerment process uses program activities to heighten the beneficiaries' sense of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In addition to more traditional program activities, evaluation in and of itself can heighten one's sense of self-efficacy. This is possible if evaluation is viewed as an act of cognition for the powerless rather than as a transferral of information to decision makers (Freire, 1986). In this manner, evaluators can help beneficiaries participate in the implementation of international development programs.

A heightened sense of self-efficacy is similar to Mezirow's (1989) meaning transformations and to Brookfield's (1987) critical thinking. According to Mezirow (1989), meaning perspectives are the frames of reference that we adopt to help us perceive and comprehend our experience. Sometimes the meaning perspectives that we adopt distort the interpretations that we attach to the things that happen to us. Faulty meaning perspectives can be transformed through critical reflection of the assumptions upon which they are based. This is accomplished when people engage in critical discourse of their ideas, beliefs, values, and actions. Through critical dialogue, discussants can arrive at a "best judgement" consensus of the meaning of their experience.

Evaluation can provide the following elements that Mezirow (1989) considers essential to critical dialogue: (a) complete and accurate data on the topic being discussed; (b) logical arguments based upon the data; and (c) judgements based upon the cogency of the arguments.

For example, an evaluator and members of a women's group could do an evaluation of sex roles held by men and women in their com-

munity. The results could be presented to the group at their weekly meeting. The women could then analyze, through discussion, the assumptions that underpin their roles. The women might discover that the allocation of rights and responsibilities on the basis of gender is not equitable. They may further decide that current sex roles prohibit them from doing things at which they would be good. Thus, the women would have achieved a heightened sense of self-efficacy.

Stage Three

The third stage in the empowerment process is to provide self-efficacy information to the powerless (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The literature on organizational behaviour has identified four sources of such information: direct action, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal state. Evaluation can provide self-efficacy information through direct action and vicarious experience. This is another way that evaluators can help beneficiaries participate in the implementation of international development programs.

A sense of self-efficacy is of little value if it is not accompanied by action. According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking involves alternating phases of analysis and action. We question the assumptions that underpin our meaning perspectives and this naturally gives way to action. This, in turn, gives rise to new questions and further action. The powerless can and should engage in social action against institutions and practices that legitimize and apply sanctions to support distorted belief systems (Mezirow, 1989).

Evaluation should suggest courses of action to the powerless for transforming their world. For example, a women's group may decide to take action against poverty by forming a revenue-generating project to augment the income brought in by their spouses. When the powerless successfully engage in transformative action, their feelings of self-efficacy are enhanced and they are thus empowered. Evaluation must, therefore, be action-oriented.

Another way in which evaluation, and particularly some forms of qualitative evaluation, may provide information on self-efficacy is through vicarious experience. Some types of evaluation try to describe people, places, and things in such vivid detail that the reader feels as if he or she were a part of the program being evaluated (Patton, 1987). In effect, the evaluator becomes the surrogate eyes and ears for the reader. Upon reading a detailed narrative

description of a group that has mastered its affairs, other power-less groups may come to believe that they could do likewise. Vicarious efficacy information, however, is not as effective in empowering people as direct action.

Stage Four

The fourth stage of the empowerment process is one in which people experience a sense of empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). According to Rappaport (1987), empowerment is a multilevel construct that suggests both individual determination over one's life and democratic participation in the life of one's community. There may be some cultures in the world in which individuals relinquish their individual determination for the greater good of the community. In those cases, group empowerment would be the ideal.

Empowerment has been viewed by some researchers as a relational construct (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981). If Party A depends more on Party B than B depends on A, then B has power over A. The process of empowerment, in this context, involves lessening Party A's dependence upon Party B. Development programs that are based upon this view of empowerment have tried to increase the resources available to less powerful parties.

Empowerment has also been viewed as a motivational construct (McClelland, 1975; Rotter, 1966). Empowerment in this sense refers to an intrinsic need for self-determination or a belief in personal self-efficacy. Development programs based upon this view would attempt to strengthen this self-efficacy belief in order to make beneficiaries feel more powerful. The concept of empowerment evaluation advocated here is based primarily upon the view of empowerment as a motivational construct.

Stage Five

In the fifth stage, the empowering experience leads to positive behavioural effects. Effects that have been associated with higher levels of empowerment include greater work satisfaction, higher productivity, organizational effectiveness, and higher motivation. In this stage, evaluators and beneficiaries document outcomes and results for the purposes of program improvement or accountability (Fetterman, 1994). In this manner, evaluators can help beneficiaries participate in the evaluation of international development programs.

I have argued elsewhere (Russon, 1995) that evaluations based upon naturalistic paradigms (e.g., ethnography) that use humans as data-gathering instruments, qualitative methods, and inductive analysis are a good way of evaluating international development programs. Such evaluations often attempt to discover how the program looks from the inside. By so doing, they avoid charges of cultural imperialism. In addition, naturalistic evaluations often use holistic designs that take into account political, economic, social, historical, and cultural contexts. Attention to these contexts helps evaluators to be culturally sensitive. Furthermore, naturalistic evaluations often use qualitative methods. Unlike some quantitative methods, there are no assumptions (e.g., random sampling, normal distribution, or equal variances) that underpin qualitative data analysis that cannot be met in most cross-cultural situations. Lastly, reports based upon naturalistic paradigms are often very understandable and meaningful to people in developing countries because they are close to the strong oral and narrative traditions of such cultures (Cuthbert, 1985).

INTERNATIONAL EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

In this section, some pedagogical methods of noted Brazilian educator Paulo Freire are cited as examples of empowerment evaluation that have taken place in developing countries. Additional examples of the use of empowerment evaluation in an international context can be found in the work of Fetterman (1994).

The immediate aim of Freire's (1973) pedagogy is literacy. The broader focus of Freire's work is to imbue powerless people with a critical consciousness that will enable them to free themselves from oppressive influences.

Freire (1986) accomplishes the tasks stated above in the following manner. After being invited into a village, evaluators and local residents conduct needs assessments, climate surveys, and environment scans. Teams of evaluators and local residents analyze the data in order to discover the unique living code of the people. The results of the evaluations are used to develop a curriculum around themes that are meaningful to the people of the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This curriculum is tested on focus groups to ensure that the desired themes emerge from the data.

The curriculum is next presented to the people and serves as the focal point of dialogue. For example, members of a women's group

might learn to read words that deal with sex roles. As they learn the words, they have an opportunity to discuss issues associated with their role. Through critical and liberating dialogue, the women can come to understand themselves, the conditions in which they live, the factors that inhibit them from being more fully human, and courses of action that may be taken to transform their reality.

As Freire examines the constitutive elements of dialogue, he identifies two dimensions: reflection and action. The powerless must contemplate their present reality and its etiology. In addition, the powerless must take liberating action to change their circumstances. Evaluation is central to this process, which Freire has labeled "praxis." Evaluation should serve as a tool that enables the powerless to reflect upon their world, and the evaluation should suggest ways to act in order to transform it.

One of the ultimate goals of the struggle for liberation is the empowerment of the powerless. Rather than acquire the traditional form of power that has as its aim mastery or control, the powerless must reinvent power that is relational, mutual, and reciprocal among subjects. In other words, the parties should have equal power over each other.

CONCLUSION

Empowerment evaluation holds out the promise of allowing intended beneficiaries the opportunity to participate in the selection, design, implementation and evaluation of development programs. It can do this by allowing them to do the following:

1. diagnose powerlessness through climate surveys or environment scans;
2. heighten a sense of self-efficacy by facilitating meaning transformations or critical thinking;
3. reinforce feelings of self-efficacy by suggesting strategies for action and/or vicarious experience;
4. document positive behavioural effects.

More involvement by beneficiaries in development programs could have the salubrious effect of motivating beneficiaries to pay service charges, accepting responsibility for project maintenance, and being active participants in the development process.

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