COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION IN A COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVE: DILEMMAS OF CONTROL OVER TECHNICAL DECISION MAKING

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Abstract: Collaborative evaluation brings community stakeholders and evaluators together with the opportunity to provide significant meaning to their work. In a community change initiative, collaborative evaluation also affords the opportunity to build community capacity. This article provides a framework for how collaborative evaluation can help achieve the goals of a community change initiative. The manuscript then explores one process dimension of collaborative evaluation—control over technical decision making—and explicates five dilemmas in its navigation. A case study is provided to illustrate the five dilemmas and to offer strategies for overcoming the pitfalls involved in the process of control over technical decision making. The article concludes with two primary lessons learned for evaluators trying to navigate the control over technical decision-making dilemmas in collaborative evaluation.

Résumé : L'évaluation axée sur la collaboration offre aux intervenants communautaires et aux évaluateurs l'occasion de trouver un véritable sens à leur travail. Pour une initiative de changement communautaire, l'évaluation axée sur la collaboration fournit également l'occasion de renforcer la capacité communautaire. Cet article présente un cadre pour la contribution de l'évaluation axée sur la collaboration à l'atteinte des objectifs en contexte d'initiative de changement communautaire. Il explore ensuite une dimension du processus d'évaluation axée sur la collaboration—le contrôle sur la prise de décisions d'ordre technique—et explique cinq dilemmes liés à l'exploration de ce processus. Une étude de cas permet d'illustrer les cinq dilemmes et de proposer des stratégies visant à surmonter les écueils associés au processus de contrôle de la prise de décisions d'ordre technique. L'article conclut en proposant deux principales leçons qui ont été retenues

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à l'intention des évaluateurs qui tentent d'explorer le contrôle des dilemmes associés à la prise de décisions d'ordre technique pour l'évaluation axée sur la collaboration.

Researchers and evaluators, particularly in the last half of the 20th century, have debated the meaning and validity of their work. Coming from a historically positivist perspective, where the only way of knowing some truth was through objective observation and measurement, research and evaluation has evolved considerably (Fraser, Taylor, Jackson, & O'Jack, 1991; Wakefield, 1995). Post-positivist perspectives introduced the world of science to multiple epistemologies and include contributions from postmodern theory and constructivist ways of knowing (Fraser et al., 1991; Wakefield, 1995). In utilizing the strengths of the positivist and post-positivist ways of knowing, social scientists have strengthened both the validity and the meaning of their work (Fraser et al., 1991; Patton, 1997).

Social workers, planners, community health practitioners, and others work on a daily basis with people from disadvantaged communities. The goal of this work is to achieve change, not only for individuals but for the whole community. Practitioners across disciplines provide names for this work like *community-based programs*, *community practice*, and *community development*. A catch-all phrase for programs working with families and their communities is *community change initiatives*. Community change initiatives, which present challenges to positivist methodologies due to uncontrollable environmental and systemic variables (Gambone, 1998; Kubisch, Fulbright-Anderson, & Connell, 1998) and have historically leaned toward more socially constructed ways of knowing, have benefited from the evaluation movement toward pragmatism (Patton, 1997) including mixed methodological innovation. In particular, utilizing community members' knowledge and including community members in the evaluation process have allowed evaluators of community change initiatives to strengthen both their methods and their ability to measure program effects.

Collaborative evaluation has become well accepted in evaluation practice (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Included among collaborative evaluation methodologies are participatory action research (PAR) (Brisolara, 1998), empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001), and self-evaluation (Usher, 1995). The distinctive feature of collaborative methodologies is allowing the knowledge and perspective of community members to inform results. A major benefit of collaborative evaluation in a community change initiative is that community change goals—such as building community capacity—can be met

while engaging in the various stages of the evaluation. While the goals of a collaborative evaluation and a community change initiative may fit well together, the processes for achieving evaluation and community change goals present many challenges.

In an effort to better understand the collaborative evaluation process, Weaver and Cousins (2004) identify five process dimensions for this type of inquiry: control of technical decision making; depth of participation; diversity of stakeholders; power relations among stakeholders; and manageability of evaluation implementation. Identifying these five dimensions provides evaluators with a tool for assessing the collaborative process—and it is often the collaborative process that can derail evaluation project implementation and goal achievement. One identified process dimension, control over technical decision making, presents somewhat of a paradox to evaluators. On the one hand, evaluators have learned skills in technical issues such as sampling, design, analysis, and so forth. On the other hand, the collaborative community partners may have decision-making authority on all aspects of the evaluation including sampling, design, and analysis. In order for collaborative community partners to make good decisions about technical aspects of the evaluation, they would need to draw on the evaluator's technical knowledge and expertise. For the collaborative evaluator to fully realize the benefits of community knowledge, experience, and perspective, she would need to give control over technical decisions to the community partner.

This article first provides a general framework for how a collaborative evaluation can achieve the goals of community change initiative and then takes a closer look at the process dimension "control over technical decision making," examining the paradoxical nature of this process, and offering suggestions for overcoming this potential collaborative evaluation obstacle. A case study of a collaborative evaluation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative is used to illustrate the technical decision-making paradox and to illustrate ways of overcoming this process dilemma. The article concludes by identifying the capacity building of community collaborators as the key to successfully navigating the collaborative evaluation process.

COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES

Collaborative evaluation in the context of this article is an evaluation that is informed—at every stage—by program participants.

Collaborative evaluation achieves the evaluation goal of determining a program's success while advancing the community change process, and is thereby a particularly effective evaluation choice for community change initiatives. In traditional evaluation, an evaluator with no overt connections to a program provides an objective lens to view a program's progress or accomplishments. Program staff and administration utilize evaluation findings to direct future programming (Patton, 1997). In comparison, collaborative evaluation secures the investment of program staff, administrators, and participants by giving them control and power over the evaluation process. The investment of program staff, administrators, and participants in the evaluation will likely result in increased utility of evaluation findings (Patton, 1997; Usher, 1995).

Collaborative evaluation is rooted in a movement that has emerged over the last half-century toward participant-led approaches to evaluation (Brisolara, 1998). Participant-led evaluations go by many names depending on the depth of participation, the region of the world, and the evaluator's training, as well as other factors. One of the first blendings of positivist and constructivist methodologies was grounded theory (Glaser, 1978). In this methodology, theory is derived from an iterative and continuous process of observational data collection, data analysis, and reformulating theory (Wells, 1995). Grounded theoretical approaches are well suited to the collaborative context. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an evaluative approach based on the emerging ideas of inquiry from a postmodern perspective. In PAR, research is done by the community and for the community with an emphasis on emancipatory interests (McTaggart, 1997). Similar in many ways to PAR, participatory evaluation emphasizes community participation but has a stronger focus on evaluation as opposed to research interests (i.e., more judgement-oriented). Brisolara (1998) dissects participatory evaluation into a transformative strand and a practical strand. Transformative participatory evaluation has a more explicit goal of emancipation and empowerment, while practical participatory evaluation is more likely to focus on policy implications and the process of collaboration among multiple stakeholders (Brisolara, 1998; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Greene, 1997). Another evaluation theory, utilizing a blend of positivist and postmodern ideas, is empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001). Fetterman writes, "empowerment evaluation is the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self determination… it is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programs using a form of self-evaluation and reflection" (2001, p. 3).

Although there are many strategies for conducting a collaborative evaluation, all of the strategies can be conceptualized following six basic stages (see Figure 1). Consensually and collaboratively, participants in the collaborative evaluation decide the evaluation questions, the evaluation design, the data collection strategies, the data analysis techniques, an interpretation of the findings, and a strategy for dissemination of the results.

We now turn to look at community change initiatives as potentially viable contexts for collaborative approaches to evaluation.

Community Change Initiatives

The first community change initiatives were the Chicago settlement houses established at the end of the 19th century. Settlement houses were built in the middle of low-income urban neighbourhoods and were partly occupied by social workers who felt that by living in the community they could be effective in achieving some community change (Holden, 1922). Since the era of the settlement house movement, community-based practitioners have implemented numerous community change initiatives of different scopes and with different ideological principles. However, almost all of these initiatives shared the same goal of creating some social, economic, and/or political change that improves life for community members (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Rohe & Gates, 1985; Rothman, 2001; Weil, 1996).

To achieve their goals, practitioners in the community change field follow a well-accepted process of building relationships or organizing within the community, assessing the community's strengths and deficits, and taking an action step for change (Checkoway, 1997). An illustration of the community change process can be found in Figure 2. This process does not necessarily occur linearly; in fact, the elements often occur concurrently. In addition, each element of the process entails an array of activities. Relationship building occurs continually throughout the work of a community change initiative and includes dialoguing, building trust and familiarity, and sharing experiences

Figure 1
**Stages of a Collaborative Evaluation**
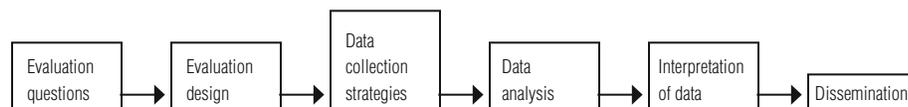
with other members of the community. Assessing the community's strengths and weaknesses includes uncovering hidden and embedded resources, identifying leaders, dialogue about the root causes of issues in the neighbourhood, and many other activities. The action step can take on almost any form, from development of a program to a social protest to running for political office. The key to this element is that some action occurs.

Embedding the Community Change Process in the Stages of a Collaborative Evaluation

As illustrated in Figure 3, the ongoing community change process can be embedded within the stages of collaborative evaluation. As the community engages in each new stage of evaluation, it builds momentum within the community change process. The essential community change processes of relationship building and assessment are advanced by working through the stages of a collaborative evaluation. Relationship building and assessment also drive community action. While community action is the ongoing goal of a community change initiative, this action will present new questions for a collaborative evaluation. Action toward community change demands renewed attention to the evaluation building new momentum within the community.

Collaborative evaluation should be an iterative, ongoing process that begins and ends with action. For example, if data analysis shows that education is not improving, then community action should focus on educational change. If the analysis suggests that there is no political support, a political campaign could be started in the community.

Figure 2
The Process of Community Change
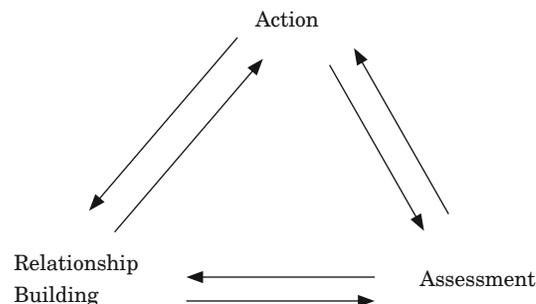
Further, once a decision on action has taken place, the community should begin the evaluation process anew—creating an evaluation plan for the new activities. The action stage brings the framework back to the start where new evaluation questions are formed and the process of community change utilizes and builds on the capacities that have been developed in the community.

Assumed in the embedded model of collaborative evaluation and community change is the building of community capacity—and more specifically building the community's evaluation capacity. The development of community capacity has been well established as a key factor in successful collaborative evaluation, particularly for community change initiatives (Chaskin, 2001; Gaventa, Creed, & Morrissey, 1998; Whitmore, 1998). Building community capacity in a collaborative evaluation means that an explicit goal of the evaluation is to develop skills and knowledge among community members and to transfer power to community members so they can lead evaluation decision making. Collaborative evaluation is an appropriate choice for

Figure 3
Embedding the Community Change Process Within the Stages of a Collaborative Evaluation
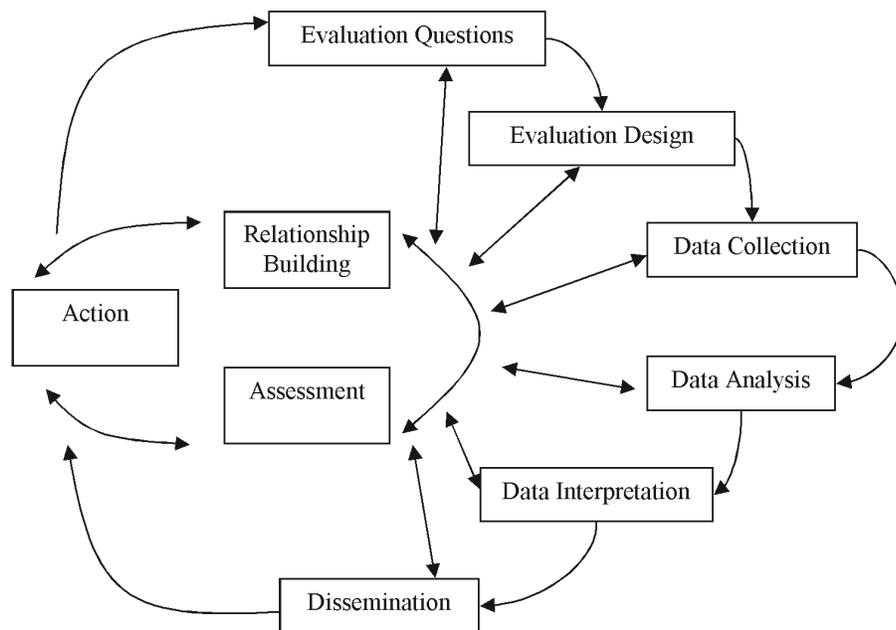
anti-poverty programs that are seeking community change because, done well, it will build community members' skills and trusting relationships among community members. These skills and trusting relationships can be used to sustain the ongoing work of the community change initiative. However, successfully building community capacity is not always achieved in a collaborative evaluation. The collaborative evaluation process can be rife with obstacles that can undermine the successful development of community capacity. One of the most perplexing is control of technical decision making.

THE CONFOUNDING NATURE OF CONTROL OVER TECHNICAL DECISION MAKING IN A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION

Conceptually, embedding the community change process within the stages of a collaborative evaluation meets both community change and evaluation goals. However, it is the collaborative evaluation process that can interfere with successful goal achievement. Weaver and Cousins (2004) identify five process dimensions to help evaluators characterize different forms of collaborative evaluation. The authors suggest the process dimension "control of technical decision making" can be measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with "5" representing stakeholder control over technical decision making and "1" representing evaluator control over technical decision making. While being able to characterize process dimensions is useful, evaluators of community change initiatives may be motivated to move a collaborative evaluation to a score of 5 (stakeholder control) on the process dimension "control over technical decision making"; such development is consistent with community capacity building objectives.

Certainly not every collaborative evaluation needs to achieve a score of 5 (stakeholder control) on the control over technical decision making dimension. However, when embedding a community change process into the stages of collaborative evaluation, we can observe the importance of stakeholder control of technical decision making. Stakeholder control is tantamount to building community capacity—a primary goal of community change initiatives—and to building skills of community members that leads to the initiatives' sustainability. Also, achieving stakeholder control presents a clear goal for both evaluators and community participants that can assist in navigating the collaborative evaluation process.

For evaluators of collaborative community change, it becomes clear that power over technical decision making is confounding. On the one

hand, a goal of the collaborative evaluation is to build the community capacity and the evaluation capacity of community members. This involves ceding decision-making power to the community—allowing the community to make innovative choices, and sometimes mistakes, but always to learn through experience. On the other hand, evaluators have been trained in the technical logic and precision of evaluation standards of professional practice (e.g., American Evaluation Association, Guiding Principles for Evaluators), and their expert decision making can often lead to a more technically sound evaluation. Evaluators understand that small technical decisions at the early stages of an evaluation have large ramifications for results. Sampling provides a good example of this conundrum. While community members may have strong ideas about participants to include in the study, an experienced evaluator knows the critical impact of carefully constructing a sampling frame and the benefits of probability sampling. The power over this technical decision pits high priority collaborative evaluation goals against one another. If community members choose a convenience sample, then the goals of building community capacity and evaluation capacity of the community have been favoured. If the evaluator insists on a probability sample, then the goal of creating the most rigorous evaluation is met.

Five Dilemmas in the Process of Control over Technical Decision Making

Through exploring the dilemma of control over technical decision making in a collaborative evaluation, five significant dilemmas for consideration present themselves. First, and most perplexing, is that the evaluator has skills and knowledge that the community needs to make technical decisions. I labelled this the *skills vs. control* dilemma. By virtue of having the technical knowledge, the evaluator, whether she wants to or not, has significant control over technical decisions. The evaluator can—and should—try to impart her knowledge of evaluation logic to community members. Community members are then left with evaluation choices framed by what the evaluator has presented. Related is the idea that a trained evaluator is always motivated to maintain high standards of rigour for the evaluation. This involves confronting resource limitations, design limitations, and the evaluator's own skill set. Not only does the evaluator need to impart her knowledge to community members, she also has to take community members with her, so to speak, as she pushes the limits of the evaluation. Considering this issue, the goal of moving to a score of "5" on the Weaver/Cousins Likert-type scale for control of technical decision making may not be realistic.

Second, from the perspective of community members in a community change initiative, the explicit goal of building community capacity means that working toward a "5" on the control over technical decisions dimension should always be a goal. This issue is what I would call the *maximum control* dilemma. Whereas an evaluator may know that the community is making a technical decision with only limited information, the community, in the community change process, needs to have control over the technical decision to build community capacity and even to make their own evaluation mistakes. If a collaborative evaluation is explicitly charged with building community capacity, community members must be given the opportunity to make technical decisions and make mistakes in their technical decisions. I would suggest that, without that opportunity, they would be highly limited in their ability to build capacity.

Third, as Weaver and Cousins (2004) suggest, control over technical decisions is not a stable process, but instead oscillates depending on the evaluation stage. This I consider the *oscillating control* dilemma. For example, the first stage of an evaluation—deciding on the research questions—is one more easily led by community stakeholders. A more technically challenging stage, such as data analysis, may benefit from an evaluator having more decision-making control. Still, in the context of building community capacity, the evaluator needs to recognize the value of ceding even the most technically difficult decisions to community stakeholders.

Fourth is the practical issue of being accountable to a funder. If the funder has prioritized building community capacity within the collaborative evaluation, then community stakeholders must be in control of technical decisions. More likely, however, the funder has prioritized both community capacity building and evaluation rigour—leaving the evaluator to decide which of these sometimes competing goals to favour. This I call the *competing goals* dilemma. Often implied is that the evaluator will be accountable for the evaluation rigour. Yet this assumption needs to be reconsidered when a collaborative evaluation is embedded in the community change process. For community stakeholders to have control over technical decisions they also must be accountable for evaluation rigour.

Fifth, deciding who has control over the technical decision-making process is largely a subjective proposition, what I would label as the *subjective control* dilemma. A decision may be made about the sampling strategy for a collaborative evaluation. Community stakeholders may perceive that they had little control over the decision because the

evaluator was constantly providing input and criticism about their decision. The evaluator may perceive that she provided only limited guidance and a few suggestions about the sampling strategy and that the decision was made almost entirely by the community. Over time, differing perspectives of who has control over technical decisions can lead to mistrust and a breakdown in the collaborative relationship.

We now turn to an examination of a specific case to see how these dilemmas played out.

A CASE EXAMPLE: "MAKING CONNECTIONS" COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION

Making Connections is a community change initiative sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 10 cities around the country (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006). A distinguishing characteristic of Making Connections is the creation of a Local Learning Partnership (LLP) that uses data to drive program decisions. The LLP can take many forms from local university teams with expertise in data analysis to community-driven teams with expertise in "on the ground" issues and trusting relationships with community stakeholders. The LLP presents an opportunity for case study as it confronts the issue of control over technical decision making, balances the need for evaluation rigour, and strives for relevance to community stakeholders.

In one Making Connections site, the LLP was committed to collaborative evaluation and was composed completely of community residents. Outside evaluation experts were hired to provide research and evaluation training to community LLP members, but LLP decisions were made by community members. As most of the LLP membership had minimal evaluation experience, the initial training was designed as an introduction to research and evaluation and followed the six stages of collaborative evaluation presented in Figure 1. A three-hour training was scheduled once a month and the initial training took approximately 12 months to complete. Whenever possible, training would incorporate the real evaluation tasks of the LLP.

The training was successful in providing an introductory understanding of evaluation to LLP members. However, challenges over control of the technical decision-making process were confronted at each stage of the training. I examine each stage of evaluation to assess how evaluation consultants and LLP members were challenged by the issue of control over technical decision making.

Evaluation Questions

The first stage in a collaborative evaluation is developing evaluation questions. In determining the evaluation questions, LLP members engaged in a dialogue that balanced the questions most important for the community with questions the funder needed answered. This process of deciding on the evaluation questions was arduous for the LLP. There was disagreement, compromise, uncertainty, and finally resolution. The evaluator facilitated the process by reminding LLP members that their questions must be answerable, but without the knowledge and experience of evaluation design, data collection, and analysis, LLP members were restricted in assessing the resources and skill it would take to answer their questions. In this example, the evaluator is faced with the competing goals dilemma. The evaluator must decide whether to take more control over the decision-making process in order to be able to respond to funder needs, or to allow the community to have more control over decisions even if their decisions about the evaluation questions might not meet funder needs.

The case of deciding on evaluation questions also provides an example of the skills vs. control and maximum control dilemmas. First, the evaluation consultant has a significant amount of control over the research questions based on how much information she shares with the community collaborative partner. With additional information about measuring constructs in either a qualitative or quantitative fashion, the evaluation consultant shapes the questions the collaborative partner asks. Also adding to the maximum control dilemma, to build the collaborative partners' evaluation capacity the evaluation consultant needs to give community stakeholders control over the research questions, even if it implies diminished evaluation rigour. It was often through ownership of decision making and the opportunity to make mistakes that the LLP learned evaluation skills and built community capacity.

Evaluation Design

The second stage in a collaborative evaluation is choosing a design. In the LLP evaluation training, mini lectures on quantitative and qualitative design, including issues of measurement, reliability, and validity, were provided. The LLP was in the process of constructing a study of 100 families participating in the Making Connections initiative, so the evaluation design training provided a forum for decisions

regarding the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study as well as issues of measurement, reliability, and validity.

Where it was relatively easy for the evaluation consultant to cede control of research questions to the community, it was difficult to give complete control of the evaluation design to community members. Design, of course, has enormous consequences for the continued administration and success of an evaluation in providing coherent and defensible answers to evaluation questions. The evaluation design determines how the evaluation questions will be answered, considers the strength and feasibility of data collection strategies and data analysis, and implicates the evaluation capacities of the community (King, 2002) to accomplish certain tasks—at this point in the evaluation training, the LLP still had not learned many of these skills.

The dilemma of oscillating control was confronted during the design stage of the collaborative evaluation. In the case of the LLP, oscillating control meant that the evaluation consultant was often in the position of giving subjective control to the LLP. LLP members had control over design decisions that they understood, but LLP members also understood that some of the technical design details were beyond their knowledge and expertise and decisions would have to be deferred to the evaluation consultant. Like every other stage of the evaluation, the skills vs. control and maximum control dilemmas were also present in the design stage. The evaluation consultant was forced to balance how much technical skill was necessary to create a successful design against building evaluation capacity of the LLP by giving control to community collaborators.

Data Collection

The third stage in a collaborative evaluation is developing and implementing a data collection strategy. Data collection involves a number of tasks. In a qualitative design, data collection may involve running a focus group, setting up contacts with key stakeholders, or making observational visits. In a quantitative design, data collection may involve conducting surveys, keeping administrative data, or accessing census data. Data collection, depending on the scope of the evaluation, can be a work-intensive task that will likely involve project management and administrative assistance as well as the direct work of data collection. The LLP made the decision to hire and train a team of community residents to carry out the data collection of their 100-family study. Community data collectors gained valuable

work experience in management, administration, and technical and community skills. This skill building is a major part of the necessary capacity building of a collaborative evaluation.

In the Making Connections case example, the emphasis on community capacity building during the data collection stage also meant confronting the competing goals dilemma. The evaluation team (community collaborators and consultants) received critical feedback from funders about the sampling frame, sampling strategy, and data collection instrument. Certainly the feedback was welcome, as it improved the data collection; however, the evaluation consultants' decision to allow more community control over technical decision making may have raised questions for the funder about the maintenance of rigour in the evaluation.

Data Analysis

The fourth stage in a collaborative evaluation is data analysis. Data analysis requires technical skills and is largely a solitary task. Data analysis, even for highly trained evaluators, is often contracted out to a technical expert. Therefore, handing control over the data analysis to community collaborators can be a fretful decision. Nevertheless, in the interest of building the evaluation capacity of the community, efforts should be made to give control over analysis decisions to community members.

In the case example, the LLP received training in univariate statistics, some bivariate statistics, and qualitative analysis. Training with SPSS and Atlas Ti software was also provided. Interestingly, the majority of LLP members expressed a keen interest in analysis and were eager to conduct analysis and learn more skills. The dilemma most prevalent in this stage of the evaluation is skills vs. control. The evaluation consultant has a tool box full of analytic methods and has to prioritize which methods will be provided in the ongoing LLP training. By simply choosing the analytic method on which to train, the evaluator has exhibited a fair amount of control over the technical decisions in this domain. Citing the maximum control dilemma, the evaluation consultant witnessed the LLP seizing control of the analysis with a relatively limited skill-set. A delicate balance based on trust, relationships, and strong communication skills from both parties allowed the evaluation consultant and the LLP to share control during the analysis stage of evaluation while also ensuring rigour in the generation of results.

Data Interpretation

The fifth stage in a collaborative evaluation is interpretation of the data. In line with constructivist thinking, there are many ways to interpret the same data. For this reason, the team of community collaborators should be well positioned to interpret the data. In the case example, the LLP was always provided with the analyzed data for interpretation. The evaluation consultant's role was to ensure that the data were not misinterpreted based on sampling and design issues (e.g., if the LLP were to inappropriately generalize findings from a purposive sample to a population, the evaluation consultant would provide guidance). The data interpretation stage still confronts the skills vs. control dilemma considering the evaluator's skill will still dictate (or control) the degree to which analytic findings are considered in light of design and data collection limitations. However, in a collaborative evaluation of a community change initiative the data interpretation stage provides a great opportunity to hand over control to the community and build the evaluation capacity of community members.

Dissemination

The final stage in a collaborative evaluation is dissemination of results. This stage should seamlessly integrate with the action process of community change. For this reason the dissemination stage is critically important. It is so important that, in the case of the LLP, community members crafted a staff position to be in charge of the ongoing dissemination of evaluation results. The staff member was a community resident and had control over the technical decisions of dissemination. Evaluation results under the control of the LLP were disseminated to citizens, community groups, local media, funding organizations, and city government, and at national conferences.

Some dissemination goals are still required by the program funder, which highlights the dilemma of competing goals. Also, because of the high level of control afforded the community collaborator, the oscillating control dilemma is apparent. However, two of the most confounding dilemmas, skills vs. control and maximum control, can be addressed if the evaluation consultant can simply relinquish control during this stage.

LESSONS LEARNED: THE CHANGING POWER DYNAMIC AND
BUILDING EVALUATION CAPACITY

Two lessons stood out in navigating the dilemma of control over tech-
nical decision making with the LLP. First, the collaborators became
comfortable with oscillating control between community members
and evaluators, and second, it became clear that building community
members' capacity needed to be an ongoing goal—with LLP learning
always being the highest priority. Evaluators need to be aware of
both of these issues as they occur simultaneously during the collabo-
rative evaluation process. Although these issues were identified in
conducting a collaborative community change initiative evaluation,
the points can be applied to other collaborative evaluations as well.
Scholarly work on learning organizations can assist organizations in
understanding this process (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

By virtue of background, training, and expertise, the evaluation
consultant began in a position of control over the technical decision-
making process. The evaluation consultant developed the evaluation
training and directed LLP learning. It would be hard to imagine a
collaborative evaluation starting with control in the hands of commu-
nity collaborators with limited evaluation skills, with the evaluator,
perhaps, in some sort of background facilitative role. However, as LLP
members' confidence in evaluation grew, they asked for some control
back—specifically in the form of developing training agendas and co-
presenting evaluation training. Letting go was often uncomfortable
for the evaluation consultant. A trained evaluator has strong ideas
about the substantive areas that need to be covered and what evalu-
ation material will be most helpful to community members. How will
LLP members know what substantive areas need to be covered on the
agenda? What if a community member does not present an accurate or
complete picture of some aspect of evaluation? How can standards of
professional practice be ensured? The evaluation consultant eventu-
ally realized that community member learning was more active and
effective when community members co-designed the training agenda.
The evaluation consultant also realized that it was more valuable for
community members to learn about evaluation by co-presenting what
they knew and gaining experience as a presenter than it was for an
expert to present more technically sound evaluation training. While
some evaluators may not like the idea of compromising the technical
rigour of an evaluation, in the context of a collaborative evaluation,
it is essential to build community capacity.

Interestingly, one of the more difficult parts of the collaborative evaluation was shifting roles from trainer to evaluation consultant. This required constant management of the oscillating control dilemma. Managing this dilemma requires a great deal of trust between evaluation collaborators, which is part of the goal of relationship building in a community change initiative (see Figure 2). Building trust also requires that community capacity building be the highest collaborative evaluation priority.

Building community capacity in a collaborative evaluation means that community members develop the skills and have the tools to sustain evaluation activities. A collaborative evaluation can successfully negotiate power over technical decision making when building community capacity is the highest priority. In the case example, one of the most significant lessons learned was that community members gain more skills by trying and struggling than they do through a polished expert presentation. Evaluators may believe that simply providing expert training is sufficient for building evaluation capacity, but the experience in this case example suggested that learning occurred when community members had power over technical decision making. Also, evaluation utility is greatly enhanced when community members struggle through—but ultimately embrace—technical decision making rather than an expert making an efficient technical decision that is not understood or owned by the community.

Navigating the collaborative evaluation process may be more likely to derail a collaborative evaluation than a weak design or flawed sampling strategy. For this reason I agree with Gaventa et al. (1998), who suggest that community members carrying out a collaborative evaluation is a success in and of itself. It became clear in our collaborative evaluation that prioritizing the learning and capacity building of the community collaborator was key to successfully carrying out the evaluation.

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