

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS DE LIVRES

Barbier, J. C., & Hawkins, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Evaluation Cultures: Sense-making in Complex Times*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. 256 pages. Available in hardcover (ISBN 978-1-4128-4942-5) and e-book.

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Culturally competent evaluation utilizes evaluation approaches that correspond to the program context and are meaningful and relevant to the participants being served. There is no single, universally accepted “evaluation culture,” as evaluation is shaped and deeply influenced by organizational, political, and ethnic cultures. In this context, an empirical and analytical textbook that shows the implications of these three cultural dimensions on evaluation practice provides a lens through which to further our thinking about the significance of culture to evaluation. In *Evaluation Cultures: Sense-making in Complex Times*, co-editors Jean-Claude Barbier and Penny Hawkins assemble 11 chapters that examine the complex features of evaluation culture and advocate for an overt connection between evaluation and particular organizational, political, and ethnic cultures. The book is thus a very timely and insightful addition to the evaluation literature, providing a range of diverse views to expand upon the understanding of how culture influences evaluation practice.

The 265-page anthology includes an introductory chapter, nine logically organized chapters, an epilogue, and a list of contributors. In the introductory chapter, the authors introduce the concept of “culture” from both a relativist and a universalist point of view, identifying political, organizational, and ethnic cultures as the three essential sources behind the sociology of cultures. The rest of the chapters analyze the diversity of these cultures and their powerful influence on evaluation, seeking to answer three central questions: (a) Is there such a thing as evaluation culture? (b) Can political systems and countries be seen as harbouring diverse evaluation cultures? (c) Do cultures characterized by multiculturalism have any bearing on the way one practices evaluation?

The next four chapters focus on the political cultures of four countries in the European Union—Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Switzerland—and their impact on evaluation practice. In Chapter 2, “The Culture of Evaluation in Italy,” Nicoletta Stame reflects on the experience of several nationwide administrative reforms that took place in Italy in the 1990s. In Chapter 3, “Riding the Celtic Tiger,” Richard Boyle, Gerry McNamara, and Joe O’Hara examine the forces shaping the development of evaluation culture in Ireland based on differing experiences in the civil service and in the education sector. Chapter 4, “Sectoral Evaluation Cultures: A Comparison of the Education and Labor Market Sectors in Germany,” Sandra Speer discusses the influence of the diverse political and administrative systems and the low institutionalization of evaluation at the national level. In Chapter 5, Katia Horber-Papazian and Caroline Jacot-Descombes pose the question “Is Evaluation Culture Shaped by the Swiss Political System and Multiculturalism?” To answer this question, the authors provide an empirical investigation of the evaluation practices within the Swiss Federation, showing considerable diversity among approaches.

In Chapters 6 to 9, *Evaluation Cultures* details the influence of organizational culture on evaluation practice. In Chapter 6, “Independence in Evaluation and the Role of Culture,” John Mayne discusses the various forms of independence in evaluation, focusing on improved quality and less bias in evaluation. He also links the high level of independence in evaluation to a strong internal evaluation culture in organizations. In Chapter 7, “Clinical and Managerial Cultures of Evaluative Activity in the Provisions of Acute Health Care,” Barbara Coyle, Pieter Degeling, and Andrew Gray discuss an empirical study that looked at the evaluation culture of various types of health professional groups (e.g., medical clinicians, medical managers, nurse clinicians) in different English-speaking countries. In Chapter 8, “Cultures of Ombudsman and Audit Institutions,” Peter Wilkins highlights the role of organizational culture on evaluation practice. He compares the impact of internal organizational culture on the practice of performance review at two independent accountability agencies in Australia. In Chapter 9, “Four Organizations—Four Evaluation Cultures,” Kim Forss discusses a study that compared evaluation cultures in four organizations in Sweden, followed by a discussion of their relationship to the national culture.

The critique of the African evaluation guidelines in Chapter 10 is especially thought-provoking. In “Cultural Dimensions of the African Evaluation Guidelines,” Mbai-Hadji Mbairewaye and Steve

Jacob analyze and critique the development of the African evaluation guidelines that have been adapted from the *Program Evaluation Standards* of the American Evaluation Association, American Educational Research Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, using individualism vs. collectivism as an analytical framework.

In the book's concluding chapter, Barbier and Hawkins critically reflect on each author's contribution. Their reflection provides two conclusions: first, that there is no single, uniform, and homogeneous national evaluation culture, and second, the very idea of a unified transnational culture of evaluation is a mere illusion.

Barbier and Hawkins' book strengthens the existing evaluation literature by channelling discussions on the power of political, organizational, and ethnic cultures as mechanisms for shaping evaluation research and practice. The authors successfully highlight the three main idealized approaches to evaluation culture: (a) *political culture* as the dominant broader societal framework within which evaluation culture is embedded; (b) a sociological analysis of *organizational or administrative culture* linking evaluation practices and different organizational sectors in various national contexts; and (c) a focus on *ethnic culture* considerations of evaluation practices. The authors argue that these three cultures are simultaneously interacting with one another—with evaluation practice being placed at the centre of their interaction. Presenting a wide-ranging perspective and selection of issues, *Evaluation Cultures* is bound to elicit some criticisms. Although the book provides great examples of evaluation culture in different countries, it mainly focuses on European and English-speaking countries. It would have been interesting to include examples from Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries to expand our understanding of evaluation cultures in varied cultural contexts. Despite this shortcoming, the book presents a strong approach to intensifying the international discourse of scholars who are researching evaluation culture and cultural competency in evaluation. It also provides an excellent reference for graduate students and practitioners in the evaluation field who want to learn about evaluation culture in European Union countries, New Zealand, and Australia.