On evaluation and accountability

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Why we need a “science” of valuing – Michael Scriven

- Society requires a science of valuing because it requires systematic, unbiased means of knowing if its products, personnel and programmes are good.
- It is crucial to see that the evaluation point of view is not the manager’s point of view, and it is not simply the consumer’s point of view; it is a point of view which should stand above identification with either of these parties, but make clear to each the importance of the other (1980)
- Bad is bad and good is good and it is the job of evaluators to decide which is which (Michael Scriven, 1986)
Theme 1: Shifts in evaluation (theory) practice since its origins in the 1960’s

Theme 2: Good practice in programme evaluation

Theme 3: Lessons learnt from our evaluation studies of Carnegie programmes
THEME 1

SHIFTS IN EVALUATION THEORY AND PRACTICE
The beginnings – the experimentalist orthodoxy

- The 1960’s witnessed the emergence of the first systematic approaches to programme evaluation with the establishment of the experimental tradition in the USA (Campbell, Stanley, Cook)
- Interventions were viewed as “social experiments” which meant that the existing methodologies of experimental design could be applied to them
- The emphasis was on designing studies that would maximise internal validity (establishing cause and effect) and control for any extraneous threats to validity
- The logic of programme evaluation design was basically equated with the logic of experimental design (random assignment, pre- and posttest measures and control groups)
The history of programme evaluation of the past forty years can be read as a systematic rejection of the dominance of the experimental model with a concomitant broadening of the “ambit” of evaluation practice through the inclusion of additional aspects of interventions.

- The inclusion of process (Naturalistic and Responsive Evaluation Approaches)
- The appreciation of utility in addition to technical quality (Utilization-focused Evaluation)
- Recognition of concerns of justice and building capacity (Democratic & Empowerment Evaluation Approaches)
- Inclusion of context (Realistic evaluation)
Theme 2

GOOD PRACTICE IN PROGRAMME EVALUATION
Good practice in programme evaluation

- Doing comprehensive evaluations, that combine
  - Formative and Summative purposes;
  - That are theory-driven (articulating the implicit theory of change of the intervention);
  - Are methodologically sophisticated (utilizing the full range of qualitative and quantitative methods);
  - and are
  - Context-sensitive (understanding the systemic and institutional dynamics that affect the potential success or failure of such interventions)
Comprehensive programme evaluation approach

**Intervention Life Cycle**

- Conceptualisation and design of programme
- Pilot version (s) of programme implemented
- Mature/standard version of programme implemented
- Intervention outcomes/effects

**Evaluation Studies**

- Clarificatory Evaluation (Formative)
- Process evaluation (Formative)
- Programme Monitoring (Formative/Summative)
- Impact assessment/ (Summative)
Theme 3

LESSONS LEARNT FROM CARNEGIE EVALUATIONS
What have we learned from our Carnegie evaluations?

• Overcoming the compliance culture - the one-sided focus on outputs/deliverables (and more recently the obsession with quantitative indicators)

• Project management have to understand that programmes incorporate different degrees and levels of accountability
  – Degrees of accountability (horizontal) - Compliance at the level of outputs and deliverables vs. accounting for short-to – long-term outcomes and impact
  – Levels of accountability - Understanding how programmes impact at different levels in universities which are complex institutions
What have we learned from our Carnegie evaluations?

- A more collaborative and responsive evaluation approach place new demands both on the institution and on the evaluators
  - A comprehensive evaluation approach – which requires that project staff theorize their interventions, be realistic about expected outputs and outcomes and also monitor their own implementation rigorously – places more demands on the team
  - Evaluators provide technical support, do training and ongoing capacity building but also conduct monitoring and ultimately impact assessment – this results in a constant redefinition of their different roles and the potential for role-conflict and confusion.
So does evaluation contribute to a culture of accountability?

- Yes if we understand that “a culture of compliance” does not equate to a “culture of accountability” (within the prevailing discourse of managerialism and corporatism)

- But we must also understand that credible evaluation studies perform other additional functions that imply a richer notion of “institutional accountability”:
  - The results of good evaluation research should build “a culture of learning” in order to continuously improve one’s programmes
  - Good evaluation research should contribute to a ‘culture of evidence-based decision-making” at the institution level
THANK YOU