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The Shifting Locus of Control in Participatory Evaluations

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An evaluation project – ongoing for more than three years – will be used to show that shifts of authority between stakeholders are a major criterion for determining the evaluation process. Utilization, process learning, knowledge transfer, evaluative thinking, emancipation and democratization have become increasingly important facets of the evaluative process in participatory evaluations. This implies that greater authority to make decisions and to control the evaluation process has shifted towards the participants. Therefore, the focus is to ascertain who decides the characteristics of the evaluation in the course of its process. This article will look at the effectiveness of an evaluation and the utilization of evaluation results within a charitable organization. The authors analyse to what extent each of the 200 individual employees or the 23 teams within the organization have an impact on, and assume responsibility for, decisions that are crucial to them.

KEYWORDS: decision making; empowerment; locus of control; participatory evaluation; roles of participants

Introduction

Panta rhei: all things are in a state of flux and nothing is permanent. (Heraclitus)

The roles of evaluators and stakeholders are no exceptions to the rule above. The different roles evaluators should be ready to take on are described in articles by Folkman and Rai (1997), Cousins and Whitmore (1998), Schratz (1999), MacDonald (1974) and Preskill and Preskill (1997). Folkman and Rai (1997) highlight the exemplary roles evaluators have in an evaluation project. As programme evaluators, they are 'monitoring and tracking systems aimed at gauging program effectiveness and describing implementing activities' (p. 464); as facilitators they 'function as interventionists in order to help stakeholders improve their interpersonal skills and organizational capacity' (p. 464); also they support the empowerment function of an evaluation.

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These roles, however, are not static, played from the beginning of an evaluation to its end. The evaluators' roles change and differ between and within every phase of the process. However, whereas Folkman and Rai (1997) refer to the changing roles of evaluators, the roles of the other people involved are also prone to alteration (e.g. from interviewee to co-operator to decision maker).

When the term 'locus of control' is used we are not referring to Rotter's (1966) assessment of the extent to which an individual possesses internal or external reinforcement beliefs. Participatory evaluations definitely influence the attitudes and values of people involved in this process (Fetterman, 2001); however, the locus of control refers to the persons, groups, positions or coalitions who have a determinant influence on the evaluative process. Therefore, the person/people whose decisions establish the course of the evaluation are in control; they constitute the locus of control.

In each phase of the evaluation, decisions are on the agenda which vary strongly in their significance for the project. Decisions are made concerning the research question, the design, and the methods which can be used, while other decisions are less influential for the entire process, e.g. decisions about informing other co-workers, co-ordinating dates, or the organization of the evaluation report. Based on the evaluation of an organization providing psychological support for children and young people, we will illustrate the shift in decision making and control authority of different stakeholders as a major criterion for determining the evaluation progress. Yet, what are the consequences of this role shifting? What possibilities and caveats have to be considered? Can this reversal of functions be utilized?

Many organizational, social, individual and technical influences affect evaluative processes and cause difficulties when assessing these processes. Additionally, there is that which Patton (1997) calls the personal factor. An evaluation stirs emotions in stakeholders and evaluators. All those involved have to deal with both their own and other stakeholders' feelings. They discover that an evaluation can be frustrating, annoying and disappointing as well as rewarding for everyone in a wide range of senses.

A prerequisite for these learning possibilities is that the 'programme people' are willing to learn, and that they are ready to invest some energy into the evaluation project.[1] The evaluator can take neither their willingness to learn nor their readiness to engage in evaluative activities for granted. Evaluators have to be aware, for example, that evaluation often has the unpleasant taste of job elimination, supervision, or control. Therefore, there are always sceptical stakeholders, especially at the preliminary stages of an evaluation.

Prior to co-operating, stakeholders will have already formed their own opinions concerning the evaluation's outcomes and merits. Some stakeholders will regard the evaluation as a chance to develop the organizational culture as well as their personal status quo. Others will have premonitions about resulting job losses and devastating budget cuts.

Some stakeholders will later take on active roles in the evaluation, others will simply do what is expected of them, without showing any further commitment. A third group of stakeholders will not show any interest in the proceedings as

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long as they do not see any effects, whether positive or negative; they have no interest whatsoever in the evaluation. A fourth group will actively or passively resist the process.

Conscious and active participation of stakeholders is not a necessary prerequisite for empowering and emancipating the participants. Both processes are mainly determined by vicarious experience (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995) and by tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Stake, 1978). Consequently, stakeholders are not required to have a vital interest in the evaluation. They learn and acquire knowledge by being informed about the progress of the project. Despite potential lack of interest in the evaluation they will learn about it from informal discussions with colleagues. They have informal talks over coffee, on the phone, in the gym, etc., the key element being that they talk about it and therefore share opinions, learn and reflect on their overall situation. Previously, this has been regarded as biasing the process; however, their involvement actually enriches it in numerous ways.

Decision Making and Control Authority

Participatory evaluation approaches emphasize the negotiating and co-ordinating of objectives and the outcomes of the evaluation. The selection and involvement of participants (e.g. 'programme people') are supposed to ensure that evaluation findings will be utilized. Moreover, the 'programme people' are the natural experts in their field and therefore are invaluable when conducting a successful evaluation. The involvement of evaluees also facilitates effects such as process learning, knowledge transfer, evaluative thinking as well as emancipation and democratization among the participants (see Fetterman, 2001).

These considerations all impact upon the 'programme people's' decision making and control authority. Involving the evaluees means equipping the participants with knowledge and motivation. Once they are informed, experienced and motivated, they are then expected to implement new ideas. Inviting stakeholders to participate as a result of their natural expertise means encouraging them to tackle their problems on their own. Through their participation they learn, obtain experience, and get used to evaluative thinking (Patton, 1998). As a result individuals will adopt this new 'thinking' for their own gain as well as the benefit of the organization.

These effects, subtle as they sometimes are, can be noticed by focusing on the changes that occur in relation to decision making and control authority in the course of an evaluation. The centre of attention then focuses on who decides the research question, design, methodology, implementation and execution of the project, as well as on the selection of stakeholders and the depth of their participation throughout the evaluation.

Participation, Empowerment and the Locus of Control

Cousins and Whitmore (1998) provide a theoretical basis to distinguish between assessing the utilization of evaluations and facilitating empowerment. They differentiate between two streams of participatory evaluation that nevertheless

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are closely interconnected: practical participatory evaluation (P-PE) and transformative participatory evaluation (T-PE). According to their definition, P-PE 'Supports program or organizational decision making and problem solving' (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998: 6), whereas the interests of T-PE lie in the empowerment and the establishment of social justice. Empowerment in this sense has two basic meanings. Firstly, motivating stakeholders to participate 'in the process of constructing and respecting their own knowledge'. Secondly, and equally important, enhancing 'their understanding of the connections among knowledge, power, and control' (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998: 8). Regarding the epistemological question, the advocates of T-PE consider popular knowledge to be just as valid and useful as scientific knowledge. Brisolara (1998) comments on the epistemological debate from a feminist perspective:

> T-PE explicitly works to improve the human condition through social justice and equality. Feminist theorists have been instrumental in promoting the idea that a detached, uninvolved role for the researcher is morally unconscionable and professionally unwise given their privileged position and skills. (Brisolara, 1998: 32)

Advocates of T-PE claim that both the researcher and the participants are integral parts of the context when it comes to conducting evaluations. All participants are legitimate contributors, and moreover, their involvement greatly intensifies the general level of understanding and respect of the evaluation.

Patton (1997) categorizes T-PE as a form of P-PE. We sympathize with Cousins and Whitmore (1998), who argue that incorporating empowering effects into the practical utilization dimension is like 'clipping a bird's wings'. It will still be a bird, but it will not be able to spread out and develop its natural abilities. The same is true for empowerment and emancipation. Although empowerment and utilization are closely interconnected, as individual approaches they are fundamental to the evaluation process. Limiting empowerment to teleological considerations would eliminate much of its potential learning and educational effects. The nature and the effects of these variations on the locus of control will be discussed later.

Despite differing central objectives, P-PE's and T-PE's primary functions and the roots they developed from overlap. Both streams eventually empower the evaluations' participants, as in both cases the persons involved gain knowledge and experience. Both are of practical value and both consider knowledge and evaluation data as valid only when gained through the practitioners' perspectives (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998).

Whose knowledge and which data are considered valid are useful indicators about who has the power in evaluations. Stakeholders whose information is judged to be valid will have their share in determining the outcomes and the consequences of the evaluation. In this respect, it is essential to reflect on the stakeholders' and the evaluators' attitude toward the evaluation. Do they feel they have any influence on its outcomes and its practical implementation? Do they consider themselves to be competent enough to participate in the project? Does the focus lie in the utilization of the evaluation's outcomes? Is it on the evaluees' emancipation and empowerment or are both effects desirable?

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Schratz (1999) and Cousins and Whitmore (1998) both constructed models portraying how different dimensions influence evaluations. These models are useful when analysing the different participator stances on evaluation. Schratz (1999) designed an evaluation cube with dimensions relating to ownership, know-how, and the primary function of evaluators and the evaluation (see Figure 1). With regard to ownership, the dimension spreads from a top-down evaluation to a bottom-up evaluation. Top-down evaluations are initiated and conducted by persons not directly involved in the evaluand's activities. Bottom-up evaluations are initiated and conducted by the persons who are affected by the process and the results. The internal–external dimension depicts the source of 'know-how' (e.g. methodological) and states whether the evaluation is conducted by internal or external evaluators or whether 'critical friends' (Schratz, 1999) are asked to share their independent perspective with the self-evaluators. The third dimension refers to the scope between development-oriented projects and evaluations as a statement of accounts. Schratz emphasizes the locus of control in the evaluation. The cube helps to determine the dominant roles and participants in the evaluation and the reasons why those involved conduct the project.

Cousins and Whitmore (1998) introduce a model to demonstrate how every collaborative inquiry is placed within the continua of three dimensions (see Figure 2). The first dimension determines who has control over the evaluation process, ranging from being exercised solely by the researcher to being completely in the hands of the practitioners. The second dimension deals with stakeholder selection for participation and ranges from involving all legitimate groups to only the primary users. The third dimension describes the depth of participation, whether those involved take part in decision making and conducting the various steps of the project, or whether the evaluator is assigned the role

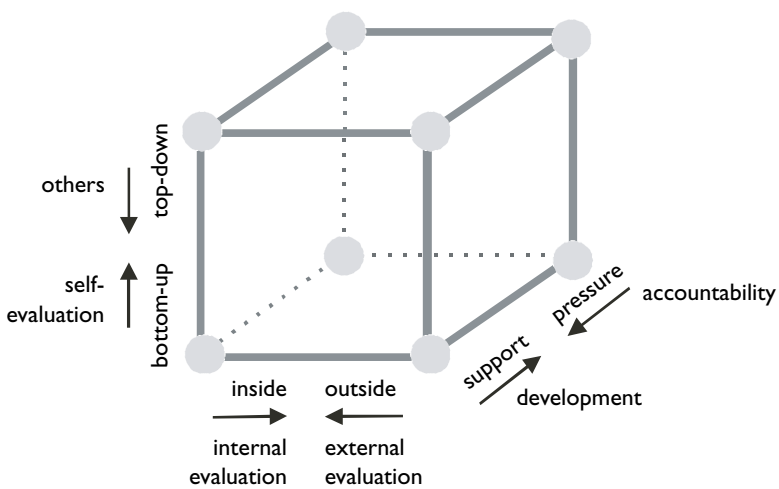

Figure 1. The Evaluation Cube (Schratz, 1999: 219)
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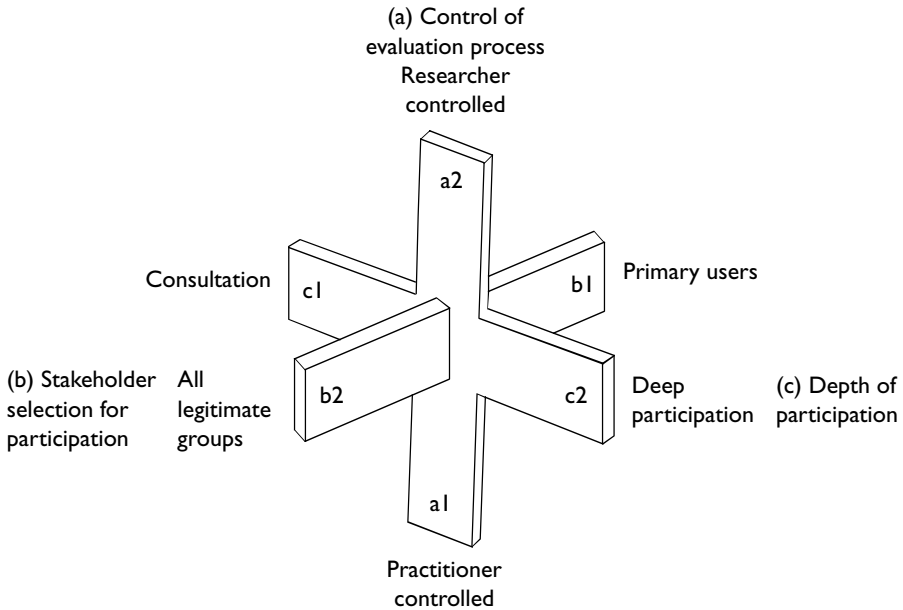

Figure 2. Dimensions of Forms in Collaborative Inquiry (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998: 11) © Reprinted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

of a consultant who realizes the project on his or her own. In our opinion, taking a look at who is in charge, which people or groups take part, and the degree of their involvement helps to establish the form of a collaborative inquiry.

In our view, Schratz's model is useful for analysing an evaluation's political context. It helps to determine what powers and demands influence the evaluation's direction on a meta-level. Cousins and Whitmore's cross indicates the practical distribution of power and involvement. It is useful in understanding why certain stakeholders are involved whereas others are not; it is also useful in tracking the participants' different levels of involvement. Both visualizations support reflections on the decision making and control authority. They are especially helpful in analysing who makes what decisions and the respective consequences.

Decisions in Evaluation

During an evaluation process several issues arise for decision. Partly, they will be the consequences of preceding decisions (e.g. questions determining the choice of the evaluation model, the design, etc.) and partly they will be new (e.g. adaptation of design due to the current status of information, the modified conditions, the obstacles and conflicts occurring, etc.). The manner in which these issues are decided upon, and to a greater extent, who makes the decision, determines the direction of the entire evaluation process. It is therefore of interest for all

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involved to reflect on the process of decision making. Each stakeholder group will have their own demands and their own idea of a 'successful' evaluation. Consequently, in the course of the evaluation's progress the stance of the stakeholders changes depending on how the evaluation helps them in pursuing their objectives. Promoting their individual or group-based goals demands continuous effort by those involved. As soon as certain steps have been initiated, new situations with new challenges will evolve. This dynamic process conforms to the philosophy behind participatory evaluation (Stufflebeam, 2001). Moreover, it shows the need for stakeholders to periodically adapt their activities and their roles to the given circumstances. As a consequence, the locus of control is expected to shift and this shifting responsibility is a prerequisite for the success of an evaluation.

The Remedial Education Families – An Example

In spring 1998, we were invited to conduct an evaluation in an Austrian social-benefit organization called the Association of Remedial Education Families (REF).[2] Eighteen years after its foundation, the REF currently has a total of 186 ambulatory remedial instructors. Together, they care for approximately 500 children and young people. In addition, there are 35 semi-professional families who care for about 50 children (as of February, 1999). The REF focuses on three major activities:

1. supporting foster and adoptive parents in caring for handicapped children;
2. ambulatory remedial education; and
3. integrating young handicapped people into the labour market.

Consequently, their clients are mostly children and young people with psychomotor disabilities. The employees are professionals, psychologists, educationalists, social workers, psychotherapists, etc.

In their statutes and contracts they have committed themselves to periodically evaluating their work processes and achievements. Following two summative projects in 1994 and 1996, the managing committee agreed to conduct an evaluation with a formative line of action. The committee explicitly required the inclusion of the clients and if possible every employee in the data gathering process. In addition to this demand, the design of the evaluation, the choice of methods and instruments, and the responsibility for the whole process were considered the task of the evaluators. Unfortunately, we, the evaluators, lacked a clear and specific mandate. Consequently, our first challenge was to define an explicit remit. In this respect, we had talks with all major stakeholder groups: the managing committee, staff, clients and the association's external partners. The committee agreed to use the evaluation to identify the different stakeholders' assessments of the programme's quality and its achievements. Eventually, our mandate was to ascertain the committee's, the staff's, and the clients' claims, concerns and issues regarding the organization and their daily work. We decided to proceed with a participative design, ensuring the involvement of all stakeholder perspectives.

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Changing Our Roles and Activities

We recapitulated the evaluation at the REF in four evaluation phases. We highlighted each of the (partly overlapping) phases and considered the roles and activities of those involved. Focus was placed on the given requirements and significant events as well as on decision making and the changing character of the evaluation process.

Phase 1

Due to the circumstances we faced at the beginning of the project (lack of an explicit mandate, staff resources and time, no primary interest) and in agreement with the participants, a responsive evaluation approach was chosen (Stake, 1991, 1996) to address their claims, concerns and issues (Stake, 1995). According to the literature, the responsive evaluation approach can be used at the pre-evaluation phase. It is open and sensitive to any issue that is important for judging the programme's worth and merit. We developed a plan, in accordance with Stake's (1991) list of twelve prominent events in responsive evaluation (Figure 3).

We decided to proceed with qualitative and quantitative methods. We agreed on standardized scales and combined the information we gained from the quantitative

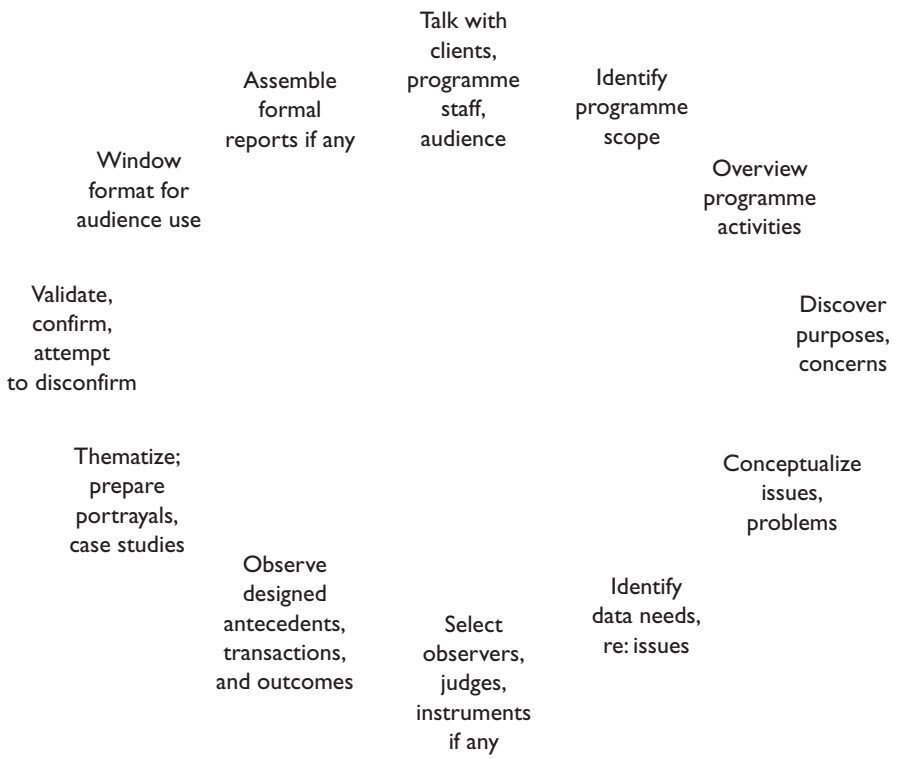

Figure 3. Prominent Events in Responsive Evaluation (Stake, 1991: 69) Reprinted by permission of the American Evaluation Association and Elsevier Ltd.

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data with that from the qualitative. We tried to ensure that the full range of social science methods were used (observations, field notes, logbooks and focus groups, etc.). We focused on obtaining information from multiple sources at multiple levels of the programme. This information was intended to help elicit which aspects of programme quality should be evaluated. As expected, the participants differed in their assessment of several aspects of the programme. They also highlighted various difficulties and issues on the programme's operative level. A common goal was established to judge the merit and shortcomings of the programme's quality by including and honouring various perspectives and standards (compare Stake's (1991) 'Countenance Structure' framework).

The evaluators were qualitative researchers, analysts and organizational psychologists. A health psychologist was also part of the evaluating team, with expertise as a remedial instructor and experience of working with social institutions.

The participating employees' role was limited to that of informants. With one of the programme managers we were able to discuss questions regarding the organizational structure and internal proceedings. Other participants were involved as interview partners and appreciated as insider experts. The participants of the focus groups we organized to gather information mostly appreciated these meetings as they also provided learning opportunities for them. These meetings played a significant role in strengthening the participants' stance within the evaluation. The following quotes are taken from the 'comments' section of questionnaires we used to receive feedback about the focus groups.

> I was interested in the meetings the evaluators organized for us. We used these meetings to discuss outcomes and problems of our work and to address them from different perspectives.
>
> The openness and honesty of the meetings were very important. I liked the mutual exchange. This was about *us*, our wishes and expectations.
>
> It was good to hear the opinions of others and to get to know them better.
>
> I liked the fact that we had to categorize our problems and to rate their impact on our work. Without this one just complains without realizing one's real concerns.
>
> I liked the procedure so far. However, I fear that there will be no further group discussions in the future.

Co-operation with the major stakeholders allowed us to evaluate the quality aspects raised by the internal stakeholders. This was achieved through relating the dimensions of Schratz's (1999) evaluation cube as well as Cousins and Whitmore's (1998) cross, in an attempt to find our roles and positions within the project.

In line with the methodical flexibility of the responsive approach, we intended conducting a mixed external and internal evaluation. Therefore, we tried to establish a sense of ownership among the various stakeholder groups to both overcome current issues and produce evidence about the quality of the organization's work. Table l gives an overview of our roles, the approach we chose, and the objectives we tried to achieve in Phase 1.

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Table 1. Roles and Functions as Evaluators (in Phase 1)

Period	*Model/Approach*	*The Evaluators' Role and Function*	*Objectives*
Mar.–Sep. 1999	Responsive evaluation (Stake, 1991, 1996)	Responsive evaluators (judgmental evaluators, experts)	Judging the merits and shortcomings of the programme; focusing on Stake's prominent events; including various perspectives; focusing on the programme's supporting structure; data collection, evolving issues

Phase 2

The evaluation proceeded with an analysis of the restrained flow of internal information. The employees had limited contact with each other and with the organization. They were working with the clients' families and usually visited the headquarters once a month. As a result, the employees that we interviewed (except for the managers) were not familiar with all relevant organizational procedures. Moreover, the majority of employees complained about having too little contact with their colleagues.

Therefore, and in accordance with the advocacy approach (Greene, 1997a), we balanced the employees' perspectives with others. We constructed an evaluation report integrating the different stakeholder perspectives, which provided detailed information about their concerns. We were convinced that transparency and illumination were tools to make participants' concerns clear to other stakeholders (Parlett and Hamilton, 1981). Therefore, we sought to make the other stakeholder perspectives and underlying activities understandable to the managers.

As evaluators, we considered our role to be 'brokers of information' (MacDonald, 1974). Stakeholders were provided with sophisticated information about each other's working styles and their underlying motives. In our view, sophisticated information and insights into the others' perspectives would contribute to, or even, trigger a process in which everyone (including the managerial staff) gains a deeper understanding of why certain proceedings give rise to criticisms (e.g. regarding organizational support, improving job performance). Consequently, the claims of both sides would enrich their perspective. The evaluees' comments (also taken from questionnaires – see below) convinced us to proceed in this direction:

> It was important for me to see that others have similar work-related problems to those I have. For me this [focus group] meeting was more important as an ego-boost than it was for my actual work. I went home greatly motivated. I hope that together we'll be able to actually foster change.

Therefore, it was one of our principal tasks to make sure that the participants allow for, and bring up, unpopular or sensitive issues. A major effort was necessary to ensure that these claims were dealt with in a fair and balanced manner.

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The majority of participants' criticisms regarding the association were, as we saw it, based on misunderstandings, biased internal information, logistics, lack of clear-cut tasks, lack of supervision and skills.

In this phase we started to withdraw as theoretical and methodological consultants and attempt to deepen stakeholder participation in order to give control of the evaluation process over to the participants (see Cousins and Whitmore, 1998; Schratz, 1999). Table 2 lists the approaches, roles and objectives we applied in Phase 2.

Phase 3

After the evaluation findings had been officially presented, we were criticized by some managers on several levels, resulting in a categorical depreciation of the evaluation. According to certain managers, the findings were a severe criticism of how the programme and the organization were managed. Their criticisms were directed at the evaluation's design, at the use of qualitative instead of quantitative methods, and at the choice of quality aspects that were being evaluating. Programme managers attempted to ignore the issues mentioned in the evaluation report and redirect the evaluation. They argued that organizational and interpersonal deficiencies were not major issues and that the methods and theories that the employees applied in their work, their education and training were more important. This attitude caused tensions between the managers, the employees and ourselves, the evaluators. We were accused of being unstructured in our proceedings and deficit-oriented in our interviews. Furthermore, the opinions of the employees' and the other managerial concerns were in danger of being ignored. At this stage of the evaluation the findings ran the risk of being neglected.

Fortunately, at the beginning of the project we had agreed to discuss the findings with volunteers from the staff. This proved to be important, as we had to negotiate with the managers and agree on further procedures. It was necessary to convince the programme managers that we would seek solutions and

Table 2. Roles and Functions as Evaluators (in Phase 2)

Period	*Model/Approach*	*The Evaluators' Role and Function*	*Objectives*
Nov.–Oct. 1999	Advocacy approach (Greene, 1997); democratic evaluation (MacDonald, 1974); illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1981)	Ensuring that all voices and points of view are included; broker of information	Promoting the employees' concerns and balancing points of view; enhancing the interest of the conducted evaluation. Due to the lack of information we felt obliged to communicate and distribute information in a forthcoming evaluation report; focusing on understanding, illuminating misunderstandings, and information sharing

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improvements, and that our objective was to contribute to increasing the programme's effectiveness. It was a political process, where we had to negotiate an agreement that voluntary participants should deal with the remaining issues and that any conclusion or solutions we were to draw would immediately be communicated to the executive team.

At this stage, we became active promoters of interaction and mediators between the managers' and the employees' interests. We succeeded in creating an evaluation platform where further discussion could take place; this would have the executive team's support as long as they were informed about the steps to be taken in the project. Subsequently we had to motivate those involved in the programme into participating in quality circles and to reflect and work on the remaining issues.

In the interim, some managers revised their initial unfavourable judgement of the evaluation's progress; others kept their distance from the evaluation and did not show further involvement, as did the majority of the staff. Other staff members encouraged their colleagues and ourselves to tackle the problems that had evolved. Some examples of the encouraging comments are listed below (taken from questionnaires).

> I like the fact we can participate in a free and uninhibited fashion. I liked the [focus group] meeting and I will enjoy continuing to work with you.
>
> I am glad that some of us were ready to reflect on our work and now are trying to make improvements.
>
> The outcome presented in the evaluation paper should now be implemented in the organization. In a next step we'll have to clearly define what we want to change.
>
> Based on my experience with the REF, I do not believe in basic changes of internal processes and structures anymore. I can't see any problems in this respect. I tried to go my own individual way and I actually enjoy that. I can't be bothered to participate in the initial stages of change processes anymore because my private interests are more important than my work-related ones. However, I really appreciate your work but I can't see any changes resulting from what you are doing. Nevertheless, I think it is good that we employees have a chance to meet and discuss our issues.

Gradually, some participants showed more initiative and started to tackle some of the issues mentioned in the evaluation report. Although the participants still relied on the evaluators' impetus, they already controlled the choice of subjects they worked on (e.g. informal flow of communication). Accordingly, they also determined who were the primary users of the project, the employees themselves (see Cousins and Whitmore, 1998; Schratz, 1999). Table 3 lists approaches, roles and objectives applied in Phase 3.

Phase 4

Eventually, an evaluation team consisting of 11 motivated people including one of the programme managers and the evaluators started working on the issues presented in the evaluation report. The team was able to act on the preliminary findings. For example, to improve the internal flow of information

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Table 3. Roles and Functions as Evaluators (in Phase 3)

Period	*Model/Approach*	*The Evaluators' Role and Function*	*Objectives*
Jan.–Jun. 2000	Participatory/ collaborative evaluation (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998)	Conflict managers, being consensus-oriented; facilitators of deliberation; promoters of solutions	Moderating between managers and employees; negotiating unresolved issues; seeking for solutions; creating a platform for communication; promoting a climate of dialogue

we implemented topic-centred evenings, acquired information regarding the employees' legal status, and installed several discussion platforms. However, the evaluation team continuously came up against obstacles. The team was either criticized by the managers or was discouraged by the staff's lack of interest regarding their initiatives. Nonetheless, the team members dealt effectively with these obstacles. They adopted new strategies, learned how to handle criticism, and how to successfully suggest procedures to the managers. As a result, the evaluation team founded a works council which was later legalized by one third of the employees' votes. This council was a clear sign to the staff that they now had a strong legal position and that the persuasion of their rights and demands had been institutionalized. One of the employees told us:

> I think it is fantastic that we now have a works council. We now have a chance to put our suggestions into action. For the members of the works council this will even be part of their work. Many clever suggestions were never implemented because no one wanted to spend even more of his or her leisure time with work-related issues. With the council this should now be possible. (personal communication)

As evaluators we constantly encouraged the participants to aim at new goals and to co-operatively deal with recurring difficulties. The participants continued the decision process on each successive step in a collaborative manner. Gradually, we withdrew from our active involvement. Eventually, our role was more or less limited to giving methodological and procedural guidance (as critical friends might do; see Schratz, 1999). Table 4 gives an overview of approaches, roles, and objectives we applied in Phase 4.

The Changing Locus of Control

Regarding the REF, the evaluation had a significant impact on the employees' 'right to a say'. The establishment of a works council and the ongoing meetings of quality circles are the obvious manifestations of some of the employees' increased self-confidence and willingness to bear responsibility.

As previously explained, the evaluation programme went through various stages and each stage involved shifts in control. We started out trying to convince all employees to participate in the project; however, we soon realized that working with a few motivated stakeholders was actually more rewarding.

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Table 4. Roles and Functions as Evaluators (in Phase 4)

Period	*Model/Approach*	*The Evaluators' Role and Function*	*Objectives*
March 2000 to date	Self-evaluation (Preskill and Preskill, 1997)	Active promoters (of measures and steps)	Encouraging employees to implement a works council; raising questions, informing participants about proper legal steps, implementing measures and institutionalizing a works council

Throughout the evaluation a handful of the staff offered their co-operation on various occasions. They played a major role in the development of the evaluative inquiry. They were also our link to less active but also interested colleagues. In their informal talks with other employees, they educated the remaining staff about the ongoing process, thereby also triggering some rumours about the evaluation. Their major achievement was maintaining the profile of the evaluation with other staff members, irrespective of the different stakeholders' attitude towards this project. Through informal talks, they gained control over the selection of contents that were dealt with in the course of the evaluative process. Intentionally or unintentionally they determined which claims, concerns and issues were discussed and which problems were of minor importance or negligible. The staff's complaints and their discontent decreased notably in the course of this process. The authors deduced that when the employees were talking about the evaluation they were also negotiating their issues.

In an attempt to prove this assumption we refer to Guba and Lincoln (1989) as well as to Parlett and Hamilton (1981) and MacDonald (1974). They argued that once stakeholders were communicating and negotiating their issues, many irregularities would be clarified. We also experienced this phenomenon in the course of our discussions within the focus groups. Many participants experienced the relief in finding out that their colleagues had similar problems and worries. Unfortunately, later in the project we rarely encountered such a sense of commonality. However, we assumed that such negotiations and their accompanying insights happened during innumerable informal talks among the employees; there is only circumstantial evidence to confirm this. However, the overall higher morale among the staff seems to be a reliable indicator.

The stakeholders had control over the evaluation's contents and also gained control over the decision-making authority in various stages of the project (see Figure 4). The degree of decision making and control authority fluctuated among the individuals and groups involved during the project. Consequently, at various stages the evaluators turned out to be facilitators while the interviewees became active in designing the further evaluative process and gained the power to make decisions.

This shift in focus and decision-making power was not linear, or circular, but in our words 'human'. These patterns of change were mostly subtle and their

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origins difficult to identify. Nevertheless, the different stakeholders' shifting authority has been a major criterion for determining the evaluation progress. With reference to the evaluation cube (Schratz, 1999), it is fascinating to note that the participants (including the evaluators) used the full range of each dimension. At the beginning of the process only the evaluators felt some kind of ownership concerning the evaluation. Gradually, the ownership moved away from evaluators to the participants and peaked in the foundation of a works council.

Whereas the evaluation was initially started to provide evidence about the REF's quality of work, this aspect was thrust into the background during the course of the evaluation procedure. Increasingly, the evaluation's primary objective was to work on employee issues.

We understood that this shift was critical and that it is debatable whether or not we were conducting an evaluation of programme, staff or organizational development. We argued that we were conducting an evaluation, which had developed from a practical participatory focus to a transformative emphasis. The transformative quality of evaluation (Greene, 1997b; Brisolara, 1998) allows or encourages the evaluator 'to shift into a new role as a program or group advocate, after participants have evaluated their program or social condition and proposed ideal solutions to their problems' (Fetterman, 2001: 116).

There was a satisfactory increase in knowledge about the 'logic of evaluation' (following Preskill and Preskill, 1997) in some of the participants. At the beginning the evaluators put the employees' ideas into practice; however, the employees soon started to do so themselves. The evaluators continued to ask for help with specific matters (e.g. the establishment of quality circles).

Furthermore, we discovered that the depth of participation is not important for the process and acceptance of the evaluation within the organization, nor did the different stakeholder groups need or want to be involved in every single decision-making process. They neither had the time nor the interest, for example, to determine whether we handed out the questionnaire before or after the group discussions (an important methodological question). A crucial matter for the effectiveness and the efficiency of an evaluation as well as for the utilization of evaluation results is which person or group makes decisions and takes on responsibility when it comes to significant issues, with their significance depending on the specific context.

Folkman and Rai (1997) declared in their reflection on a participatory community self-evaluation that they did not perform:

> an outstanding job . . . rather this article is our way of taking stock of what we learned about our practice as evaluators and how we may expand our repertoire of skills in the future. (Folkman and Rai, 1997: 455)

This article had a great impact on our own procedures. In the course of evaluating the REF, we also did not feel we were performing an outstanding job. As Folkman and Rai (1997) noted, we also realized that we, as evaluators, had to change our roles in accordance with the altering contextual conditions. What they did not mention in their article was that the roles of the 'programme people' also

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involved change (see Figure 4 below). There is a reciprocal relationship between evaluators and stakeholders. Both parties negotiate the contents of various factual issues as well as the personal attribution of authority and power.

Throughout the evaluation we emphasized negotiating and co-ordinating the objectives and the utilization of the evaluation, thereby increasing process learning, knowledge transfer, evaluative thinking as well as emancipation and democratization among participants. As a consequence, authority to make decisions and to control the evaluation process shifted between the 'programme people' and the evaluators. Competencies of decision-making authority varied among the persons and groups involved throughout the project. According to Fetterman (2001):

> (e)ven groups who request an empowerment evaluation may not fully understand the open democratic nature of the experience. Many have been socialized within another framework and easily retreat into the relative safety or ease of well-defined boundaries and expectations, including opting to hand over the evaluation to the 'professional evaluator' (a typical stage in empowerment evaluation that should initially be resisted to foster self-reliance and avoid dependency). (Fetterman, 2001: 115)

In Figure 4 we created a simplified diagram to illustrate the changes in the control authority during the entire evaluative process. The diagram shows that the first stage of the evaluation was controlled by the evaluators suggesting a methodological approach and the design of the study. Note here that the diagram does not start with an icon for the mandate as the evaluators were never given a clear mandate.

After suggesting a study design we ascertained what the managing staff thought of our recommendation. Accordingly, the control authority shifted towards the managers when their considerations and comments were included in planning the next steps. Following the adjustment of the design, we interviewed

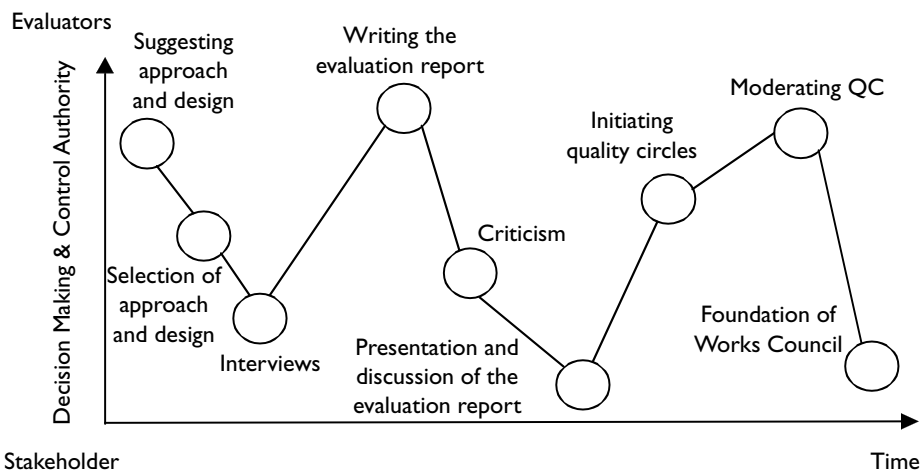

Figure 4. Alternation in Control Authority

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the staff. We were planning to use their arguments as guidance for further proceedings and thereby hand the control authority over to the stakeholders. However, we regained control over the evaluation faster than we intended. Our plan had been to write an evaluation report in co-operation with volunteers from the staff; regrettably there were no volunteers. After it was published the report attracted considerable criticism. Subsequently, in what appeared to us as an attempt to clear up the mess we had created, the managers took charge of the presentation and discussion of the evaluation report. They moderated the presentation and introduced their own plans for further evaluations. In doing this, the executive team controlled a process that is usually firmly in the hand of external experts. Although, we were asked to introduce the report, the managers and the rest of the audience were in control of this event.

The next considerable shift in control authority occurred shortly afterwards when we were asked to initiate the next step of establishing quality circles. Quality circles are by definition a highly participative instrument. The tricky part was getting people to participate in these circles. Once this had been achieved, our task was to administrate and moderate their meetings. After about six meetings they had gained complete control over the endeavour. Following the establishment of quality circles their members realized that these circles would not have a great impact on organizational and interpersonal conditions. Furthermore, the lack of volunteers willing to attend the quality circles in their leisure time led to the decision to set up a works council. This strategy answered the needs of the organization as well as its members.

- Independent of the evaluation, the foundation of a works council had been a pressing legal necessity demanded by government agencies. Due to the lack of employee commitment so far every attempt in establishing this legal body had failed.
- Members of a works council were required to spend a fraction of their working hours on employee issues. The members now working on the utilization of evaluation outcomes are doing so during their working hours and are getting paid for their work.

Ever since its conception, the works council has been expanding its remit and its influence on decisions regarding organizational and work-related processes.

Conclusion

It has been widely acknowledged that in addition to supporting decision making and problem solving, evaluation has an empowering effect.

A substantial amount of the recent literature on evaluation focuses on individual and organizational learning and change. In particular the changing roles of evaluators are discussed as well as changes in stakeholder behaviour and their possible influence on the evaluative process. In this debate we argue that it is an illusion for evaluators and 'programme people' to think that evaluators are in control throughout the entire evaluation. This illusion also applies to those who commission a project. The stakeholders are neither powerless nor are their

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demands and wishes negligible. From our experience of interaction with stakeholders and comparing this with the literature, we concluded that far too little attention has been paid to the changes relating to decision making and control authority in the course of an evaluation. From the perspective of a social scientist, these are essential features of individual, group-based and organizational activities that have an impact on the evaluation's progress.

In our example, the change in decision-making authority alternated between programme managers, employees and the evaluators. We started out with the management's top-down decision to look at the quality of the organization's work. The management also demanded a comprehensive inclusion of stakeholder opinions. The main reason for this was the management's discontent with the employees' lack of involvement and interest in everything about the organization apart from their immediate work. This emphasis on stakeholder issues gradually led to the evaluation changing the focus from quality of work to dealing with the stakeholders' discontent with organizational structures, processes and outcomes.

The question of who makes decisions is closely connected with organizational as well as with individual learning. Learning and gathering experience has an impact on the staff's empowerment and emancipation, which again directly contributes to the organization's future. Moreover, concentrating on the shift of control authority also gives an account of the different participants' competences. Thus evaluation goes hand in hand with human resources development. Hopefully, given the practical effects expected from the evaluation, it can supply personnel departments with vital information about the participants' abilities, competencies and shortcomings, not to mention information about the organizational culture, the decision-making strategies and the effectiveness and efficiency of people or departments involved. As the evaluations are being conducted anyway, it is a waste of resources to neglect these perspectives.

We argue that evaluators will learn much about the organization, the people involved, and also the evaluative process by paying close attention to the shifts in decision-making authority between those involved. As illustrated in Figure 4 these shifts occur in almost every step of the evaluation. Many of these changes are triggered by informal exchanges among employees and between employees, employers and evaluators; partly, they may be influenced by the personal development of stakeholders and some seemingly have no origin at all. Making these changes and their patterns explicit to the participants will play a crucial part in developing the 'logic of evaluation' and thus in ensuring sustainable effects of the evaluation. We suggest that these shifts are themselves important outcomes of the evaluation and deserve the same (or even more?) attention than other effects of an evaluation.

Notes

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1. The terms 'programme people' or programme evaluation as such do not have a long tradition in the German-speaking evaluation discourse. As the social, political and

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cultural framework, and especially the nature of social programmes, differs greatly between the USA and Austria, we consider it necessary to define what we mean when we use these terms. 'Programme people' are all stakeholders actively involved in the organization's daily activities. When talking about the REF's programme, we are referring to the organization itself, not only its core activities, including ambulatory remedial and foster parenting, but the actual purpose and the sole reason for the existence of the REF. The REF was founded with the intention of giving children with handicaps 'a second or better chance in life'. This guiding philosophy is implemented at numerous levels and corresponds to the organization, its structure, the people involved, and their activities. All this is what we will refer to as the programme.

2. The authors do not like the term 'non-profit organization', as it simply indicates that these organizations do not make any financial gain. The term 'social-benefit organization', however, reveals the true value of such enterprises.

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