

'A balancing act': Resolving multiple stakeholder interests in program evaluation

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Attempting to balance multiple stakeholder interests in program evaluation presents many challenges. The views of different stakeholders as part of a reference group, or multiple stakeholder voices within a sector, are often diverse and reflect different political and organisational interests. In order to ensure that the evaluation product is widely accepted, and thereby utilised, these differences need to be recognised, and mediated.

To work effectively with multiple stakeholders in this manner, the evaluator requires well developed negotiation skills. This paper argues that negotiation is an essential component to the planning stage of an evaluation, and that strategic steps need to be taken early in the evaluation process to ensure consensus is developed in stakeholder expectations regarding methodology and outcomes from the evaluation.

This article will put forward a number of negotiation principles for evaluation practice which view the evaluator as enabling stakeholders to appreciate all positions, including that of the evaluator, with consensus emerging from increased understanding and consciousness raising.

Introduction

Evaluations involve a range of stakeholders who represent a variety of political and organisational interests. It is important to acknowledge the importance of diversity as reflective of different societal perspectives and positions. However, there is a challenge for the evaluator in the management of differences arising between stakeholders and the evaluator, and amongst stakeholders themselves, in relation to the focus and outcomes of the evaluation.

This article proposes that the evaluator requires well-developed negotiation skills to manage multiple stakeholder interests, and provides a model of negotiation for evaluation. This model proposes the creation of a negotiation milieu, the use of an assertive negotiation style, and strategic use of effective communication skills. A set of principles are developed which cumulatively represent a framework for evaluators to consider when anticipating their involvement in an evaluation with multiple stakeholder interests.

There is an assumption frequently made by communities of stakeholders and evaluators, that evaluators naturally possess the requisite negotiation skills, in addition to the research skills of methodology development and implementation.

Alternately, the assumption is often made that research skills are all that is required to undertake an evaluation. However, the disciplines of evaluation and research have different epistemological bases, with the former concentrating upon planning and communicating with stakeholder audiences in order to inform decisions about program or policy directions, and the latter concentrating upon the advancement of knowledge (Owen 1993; Owen with Rogers 1999).

Strategies and skills for effective negotiation in evaluation contexts are often not identified in the evaluation literature, or covered in training courses in evaluation, or perhaps not given the prominence they deserve as an integral part of the evaluation process. Therefore, the attempt is made here to locate and identify appropriate strategies and skills based on the examination of a range of negotiation frameworks.

Multiple stakeholders

Negotiation in evaluation is inextricably bound to the notion of multiple stakeholders. It is thus necessary to provide a brief overview of the existing literature on stakeholder theory and examine its implications for effective negotiation practice.

A stake is a share or an interest in an enterprise, which can be fiscal, but can also represent individual or organisational reputations and aspirations, political influence, and resources such as time and energy (Guba & Lincoln 1981). Stakeholders are defined as those who have a stake in the program under review or as individuals with a vested interest in the outcome of evaluations (House 1993; Gold 1983; Patton 1997). Three broad groups of stakeholders emerge from the literature (Guba & Lincoln 1989a, Weiss 1983a, b; Berk & Rossi 1990). These are:

- policy makers and senior management staff
- practitioners or community members who operationalise the program
- service users or clients and their representatives.

Some would classify the evaluator as part of the stakeholder constituency, based upon the individual

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morality and integrity the evaluator brings with him or her to the process (Patton 1997).

The stakeholder concept recognises that most programs include a range of groups with divergent and even incompatible concerns. The presence of competing interests among stakeholders has been recognised as a distinguishing feature of evaluation (Guba & Lincoln 1989b; Berk & Rossi 1990; House 1993; Alkin, Hofstetter & Xiaoxia 1997; Patton 1997). Evaluators have moved from

a position of seeing themselves as experts using scientific research techniques to adopting a position that recognises the inherently political nature of evaluation, the use of multiple methods and measures, the presence of multiple perspectives, and the need to acknowledge multiple audiences and accountabilities (House 1993).

There are different theoretical rationales about why it is essential to consider stakeholders as an integral part of the evaluation process. Contemporary evaluation theory highlights concepts of utilisation and participation. The aim of increased utilisation of evaluation findings, together with increasing value placed upon participation as part of an empowerment approach to evaluation, have given emphasis to the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluative process. There have been a range of models that stakeholders developed, based upon either utilisation or participation principles, or a combination of both. Examples of models primarily based upon principles of utilisation include Stake's responsive model (1983); Patton's utilisation-focused evaluation (1997); Guba and Lincoln's fourth generation model (1989a, 1989b); and Byrk's stakeholder-based evaluation (1983). Stake (1983), Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Patton (1997) have uniformly proposed substantial consumer involvement in the evaluation process, in order to increase the utility of evaluation findings. Meanwhile, Cousins and Earl (1995) propose a model of participatory evaluation as a means of increasing the relevance of social enquiry knowledge for the benefits of organisational learning and change. Then, Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman (1996) put forward a model of empowerment evaluation, which emphasises self-determination.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders in evaluation is thus consistent with effective evaluation practice in enhancing the opportunities for full utilisation of findings and results and the achievement of stakeholder participation and empowerment. Multiple stakeholders reflect a democratic process where diversity of values and interests in society are represented. Furthermore, where multiple stakeholders are represented, there is improved relevance of the evaluation, increased

commitment to the evaluation, and the opportunity for enhanced evaluation use (Alkin et al. 1997).

There are three main models that conceptualise the involvement of stakeholders.

These models are positioned along a continuum of stakeholder control at one end versus evaluator control over the process at the other end. The first model is stakeholder-directed evaluation, where the authority and initiative for the conduct of the study arises from the stakeholder group. This model can also be termed 'citizen run', or 'self-evaluation' (Peters et al. 1979 in Ayers, 1987, p. 266). The second model, termed the 'stakeholder collaborative model' (Ayers, 1987,

p. 266) involves the evaluator and stakeholders in joint planning, administration and reporting of the results of the evaluation. In this model the stakeholder is in control and the evaluator has an influence over the process. In the third approach, termed the 'stakeholder based model' (Ayers, 1987, p. 266), the stakeholders are involved in planning and report review, but the evaluation professional is primarily responsible, retaining control, and taking into account stakeholder input and influence. There are arguments that support a high level of stakeholder involvement, and other arguments that highlight the adverse consequences of involving stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Critical decisions, therefore, need to be made at the commencement of the evaluation about the role stakeholders are to play in the evaluation process. This is almost the first point of negotiation, and requires clarity in regard to the expectations of both the stakeholders and the evaluators. It should be based upon chosen theoretical frameworks, pragmatic decisions around available resources, and decisions concerning which approach would lead to more positive outcomes for the evaluation project.

Negotiation and program evaluation

The evaluation literature highlights the need for the evaluator to possess and utilise negotiation skills as part of their repertoire of evaluation competencies. In the fourth generation evaluation model (Guba & Lincoln 1981) there is the expectation that the evaluator must be both informed about conventional evaluative instruments, and able to exercise 'the use of self' as an essential skill or tool of trade (Guba & Lincoln 1989b). The necessity for the evaluator to have the interpersonal and political skills necessary to maximise stakeholder participation is thus highlighted (Alkin et al. 1997, p. 33). Patton (1997) suggests that in working with key stakeholders, there is the need to negotiate a win/win scenario, and to seek consensus and shared ownership. Patton (1997, p. 136) goes on to establish the principle that in utilisation-focused evaluation the evaluator is always a negotiator, 'bringing to the negotiation table their own style, personal history, and professional experience'. A vital factor in all stakeholder-based evaluations is thus the personal characteristics of the evaluator.

There is scope for negotiation to occur during all stages of the evaluation process, spanning inception to finalisation. Conflict and differences in perspectives among stakeholders, and between stakeholders and the evaluator, can emerge at any time. Consequently, it is important for the evaluator to be in a position to respond to these differences in both a timely and competent manner, so that further stages in the evaluation process are not impaired by unresolved conflict. An understanding of processes of negotiation is vital to the operation of the effective evaluation practitioner.

In developing an understanding of the use of negotiation processes in evaluation, a broader understanding of the existence of social conflict,

together with conflict resolution responses, is appropriate. Social conflict can be defined as a product of incompatible goals that exist between two or more parties, and negotiation as a way of intervening with this conflict. Social conflict may occur at a variety of levels including interpersonal, inter-group, inter-organisational and international. There are common features regarding conflict at all these levels. These include having a variety of causal antecedents, being derived from a divergence of interest, containing a mixture of motives, being able to be ended through either behaviour or attitude change, and having a limited range of solutions, with either destructive or constructive results (Levinger & Rubin 1994).

Furthermore, there are a number of terms in current use that describe the processes of deliberate and systematic conflict resolution. The terms 'mediation', 'negotiation', 'conciliation', and 'problem-solving' have all become popular terms to be applied to court processes, industrial processes, workplace settings, and family disputes. In this paper the term 'negotiation' is used eclectically to incorporate all mechanisms of conflict resolution. Negotiation, and its close cousin mediation, are seen to be the best way to resolve social conflict (Pruitt & Carnevale 1993). Mediation is like negotiation, except there is a clearly identified third party present to help the parties reach agreement.

Negotiation is a process that is traditionally depicted in terms of common strategies and techniques, steps and stages. The setting up stage, problem-solving stage, and the achievement of workable agreements are three fundamental steps in negotiation practice (Pruitt & Carnevale 1993). Wall and Stark (1996) emphasise the importance of the order in which the techniques of negotiation are used, and believe that more research should be undertaken to identify similar processes, steps and stages used by negotiators.

The concepts of sequential and staged processes of negotiation, and the neutrality of the convener or mediator, are open to critique in contemporary negotiation literature. There is dispute in the literature in relation to notions of logic and order in the negotiation process. Many of the alternate frameworks for considering negotiation processes rest firmly in what is termed postmodernism. In this regard, there are common foundations to both stakeholder theory and negotiation theory, based upon a postmodern view of conflict and its resolution. The postmodernist perspective suggests that the aim is not to impose one discourse over the other, but rather to canvass the range of discourses and place them in their context, arriving at a new, shared understanding. Negotiation can thus be viewed as a transformative process (Bush & Folger 1994), with the more positivist, problem-solving orientation adopted by traditional negotiation theorists opened to critique. There is the challenge to negotiators to move beyond the problem-solving approach, which is limited in being solution fixated, thereby potentially overlooking

opportunities for growth and enhancement of the relationship between the parties. Bush and Folger (1994) propose that the process of negotiation be viewed as a transformative one, where the goal is the growth of the parties through empowerment and recognition. This perspective considers that during negotiation there are opportunities to recognise the perspective of the other party, and negotiators need to focus upon facilitating this recognition along with enhancing opportunities for empowerment. Solutions to problems then emerge as by-products of empowerment and recognition, when parties become better placed to make constructive decisions.

The framework developed by above authors is moved a step further by Antes et al. (1999) in their emergent-focused model which argues that the sequential approach to negotiation is limiting and prohibitive. Antes et al. state that negotiation offers parties who are weak and self-absorbed as a result of conflict, the opportunity to move to strength through processes of recognition of the perspective of other parties, and consequent empowerment. Negotiations thus need to focus upon the identification of opportunities for recognition and empowerment, as opposed to moving parties through staged processes. This model moves away from the problem-solving and solution driven orientation to adopt a non-sequential process. The role of the negotiator in this model is thus one of assisting the parties to become aware of, and take advantage of, opportunities to address conflict through different facets of negotiation as these opportunities emerge (Antes et al. 1999). This model frees the negotiator from having to gauge whether particular stages have been completed, and guiding parties from one stage to the other, to the adoption of a here-and-now focus which addresses the key facets in whatever order they arise. Antes et al. (1999) refer to the work of Benjamin (1997) who describes the negotiation process as a non-linear, circuitous approach. This circular approach is depicted in the emergent-focused model of negotiation. Antes et al. (1999) perceive that their emergent-focused model is a way of operationalising Bush and Folger's (1994) transformative perspective in relation to negotiation. Putnam (1994) also proposes the need for a more complex understanding of negotiation, proposing that dominant approaches focus on the key elements of the process, thereby concealing more subtle elements that are important to an understanding of conflict management processes. One of the hidden areas is that of building a mutual understanding and creating a forum for effective interaction.

The perspective in the literature is that there should be greater recognition of the role that emotions and feelings have to play in negotiation as an adjunct to the instrumentally outcomes-driven approach (Putnam 1994; Adler, Rosen & Silverstein 1998). Intuition and sensing become critical components of negotiation, tied closely to feelings. Putnam suggests new models of negotiation need:

... to find ways of integrating emotions with substantive issues—not to serve the ends of rationality or instrumentality, but to reveal how negotiators came to understand self, the other party, and the connectedness between them. (1994, p. 344)

Then, Adler et al. (1998) note the role of emotions and how their effects on thoughts and actions have been under-investigated in the field of negotiation. They assert that negotiation is about identifying and reconciling differences between parties, and that differences can lead to conflict.

An alternate concept to traditional negotiation theory incorporates a narrative approach where different assumptions are held about conflict (Winslade, Monk & Cotter 1998, p. 25). Instead of viewing conflict as a process for addressing underlying needs, objectives and interests, conflict is viewed as reflective of differences in people's narratives or stories. In this perspective, relations of power are played out in terms of 'whose experience becomes privileged (and whose experience becomes excluded) in the dominant way of talking'. This perspective suggests negotiators adopt a recognised position in relation to issues of power and privilege. The valuing of difference is important in narrative approaches, and similarly to the position of Antes et al. (1999), during the process of developing an understanding of others' perspectives and realities there is dissolution of conflict.

Negotiation is traditionally characterised by the neutrality of the third-party facilitator, often termed a 'mediator' (Roberts 1983). Winslade et al. (1998, p. 22), however, refer to the 'folklore of neutrality' which has developed in relation to negotiation processes, and query whether the facilitator can 'stand outside time and space and their own historical and cultural narratives and be objective and value free'. They see an increasing awareness that the perspective and values of the negotiator influence the process of negotiation and the choice of content for discussion.

Traditional negotiation models based upon staged processes and a neutral facilitator require review and further development. More flexible and holistic models that emphasise the need to create an effective opportunity for negotiation processes to occur, are emerging. The facilitation of a consciousness-raising process to inform each member of the other's position, and the arrival at consensus through processes of enlightenment, rather than operationalisation of staged problem solving endeavours, are favoured. In the new models of negotiation, facilitators aim to foster high levels of exchange and interaction, and create a responsive environment, rather than placing themselves in the position of managing paced movement through certain steps and processes. The negotiator has a role in understanding the use of language and metaphor, and the deconstruction of beliefs and perspectives in order to tolerate other positions. The negotiator empowers the parties to express

their positions, and move to a constructive domain of negotiation, rather than remaining in a self-absorbed, isolated state.

The following section proposes a negotiation model for evaluation in two parts. The first deals with broad principles for evaluation which places negotiation as an important step to consider in the evaluation process from inception to completion. The second section deals with negotiation skills required by the evaluator.

Negotiation model for evaluation: principles

The following are a number of proposed principles which build negotiation as an integral part of the evaluation process.

1 Recognition of the inherently political nature of evaluation

The first step in developing sophistication in processes of negotiation with multiple stakeholders is to recognise that evaluation is an inherently political process, rather than a research opportunity. In adopting the role of the evaluator, the individual recognises that they will be operating in a politicised context, where there is a high level of application to individual stakeholders. These stakeholders are not always conversant with applied approaches to research, and are often more interested in ramifications and implications of findings. The evaluator therefore needs to develop 'people' skills to communicate processes and findings, facilitate conflict resolution strategies, and engage stakeholders throughout the process of the evaluation.

2 Valuing the contribution of multiple stakeholders

A necessary precursor to operating effectively as an evaluator with multiple stakeholders is acceptance that stakeholders can enhance the evaluation and actively contribute, rather than being viewed as a hindrance. An evaluator who is uncomfortable with the political context of the evaluation, and the pressures that emerge from a variety of stakeholder perspectives, may not operate effectively in this field. Theorists such as Stake (1983), Guba and Lincoln (1989a, 1989b) and Fetterman et al. (1996) argue that stakeholder participation provides recognition of the diverse values and interests in society, and that this pluralism needs to be acknowledged and responded to. Such writers hold a moral and philosophical commitment to the recognition of pluralism of interests in evaluation processes, a perspective that is consistent with postmodernist definitions of power and vested interests. This perspective is also consistent with a commitment to social justice principles, where the less empowered and the less well-represented have the right to participate and to have an active voice in programs or processes that impact upon their wellbeing. For the evaluator, this means comfort

with notions of pluralism, and a belief that truth is found in the incorporation of many meanings and interpretations, not just those advanced by the prevailing power structures and orders. The position held by the evaluator may also include a commitment to social justice, where opportunities are created for the participation of members who may not be able to contribute to the evaluation without affirmative action strategies.

Another rationale posed in the literature supporting multiple stakeholder involvement is the notion that inclusion will enhance evaluation utilisation. Patton (1997) strongly advocates this stance, and there is further discussion in relation to this position below. For the evaluator, this means an acceptance that utilisation is an important aim and outcome of the evaluation experience, and that the dissemination of findings which will impact upon practice, is worth pursuing.

3 Assessment of stakeholder positions and planning the evaluation

The organisation of stakeholders into reference groups, steering committees or advisory committees to oversee the evaluation process is a key strategy for dealing with multiple interests and stakes in the evaluation. Patton (1997) argues that an evaluation taskforce (being some form of organisation of stakeholders) should be assembled to provide a forum for involving stakeholders in the evaluation.

Tools for mapping stakeholder requirements and interests have been developed by various authors, such as Lawrence and Cook (1982). These illustrate the advance planning which can take place to establish the role and function of stakeholders, and their potential positions as either supporters or adversaries of the initiative being evaluated. It is recommended that the interests and agendas of the stakeholders be determined as early as possible in the evaluation process, and that strategies be developed to respond to the areas of conflict identified.

It is also important to establish the ground rules for the reference group, and how actively its members are to become involved in the evaluation processes. Patton (1997, pp. 355–6) suggests that a minimum of four meetings take place, with longer

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term projects requiring more meetings. In the minimum context, the first meeting would consider the focus of the evaluation, the second the methods and measurement tools, the third would consider the instrumentation developed prior to data collection, and the final meeting would review the emergent

data to find agreement on interpretations which will lead to findings. Patton's (1997) framework stresses the need to plan for meetings, with each having a specific focus based upon the stage to which the evaluation has progressed, in order to provide a focus for active participation.

Scriven (1993, 1996) purports that the professional evaluator is in the best position to consider issues of methods, measurement tools and instrumentation, and that stakeholders may have little to contribute in this regard. Other theorists adopt the position that the evaluator is well placed to educate stakeholders about evaluation theory, rather than holding onto this area of expertise in an elitist manner. The debate is a difficult one, as the evaluator may find it an onerous task to explain and disseminate evaluation experience and expertise to an uninformed audience. Yet, in order to have the evaluation product accepted and owned by the stakeholder constituency, this appears to be a vital process which, though time consuming, will produce worthwhile results.

4 The evaluator as an active player within the stakeholder community

The evaluator needs to obtain the acceptance of the stakeholder group, and derive legitimacy from this acceptance, in order to be in a position to exercise conflict resolution functions. The evaluator's authority may have a number of components, these being cognitive, political and charismatic (Heron 1992). Cognitive authority emerges when the mastery of a body of knowledge and skill in a particular field is demonstrated and desired by the group. Cognitive authority incorporates more than just intellectual competence, but also includes emotional and interpersonal competence. The evaluator may gain authority when s/he demonstrates both the knowledge base of evaluative enquiry, and the interpersonal skills to be able to disseminate this knowledge appropriately. Political authority emerges when the evaluator is able to exercise educational capacities in a cooperative context. This is enhanced when the evaluator is able to establish credibility in a facilitative manner. The charismatic element refers to the personal attributes of the evaluator which reinforce authority, including behavioural manner, choice of language and expression, and other personal characteristics.

Evaluators who are both responsive and flexible are most effective in engaging stakeholders in the evaluative process (Alkin et al. 1997). The evaluator, by demonstrating intellectual and personal attributes, can gain acceptance from the stakeholders as a legitimate person to assist them with their underlying issues of conflict and dissension.

There are difficulties of potential co-option of the evaluator by the stakeholders, if the evaluator becomes too close and has too much interpersonal interaction with the stakeholders. Patton (1997, p. 357) notes the dilemma that 'getting too close to decision-makers may jeopardise scientific credibility,

remaining distant may undermine use'. He suggests remaining focused on the empirical process, and assisting stakeholders to do so as well. This means using the data obtained objectively and avoiding the intrusion of bias or misuse of evaluation findings.

It is also important for the evaluator to be an active participant in stakeholder forums, such as reference group or steering group meetings. There is difficulty in moving into negotiation roles if the evaluator is external to these processes, and only invited to select meetings. The evaluator needs to forge a position as an active player within these forums, and assuage concerns that such involvement is a threat to objectivity and neutrality. In this regard, Patton (1997) has noted that the evaluator should actually be seen as a legitimate part of the stakeholder constituency.

5 Skills of the evaluator as negotiator responding to conflict

Having established a level of credibility and acceptance with the key stakeholders, an intrinsic part of the evaluation process involves the evaluator negotiating areas of conflict or dispute in relation to the evaluation. The literature has highlighted that many of the principles of evaluation and negotiation are similar, and dovetail well. Most contemporary evaluation and negotiation theorists do not suggest that the evaluator stands outside the processes as the expert who makes a judgement. Rather, the evaluator and negotiator are to act as catalysts to assist the stakeholders at arriving at their own solutions. There is recognition in both disciplines of multiple realities and a pluralism of perspectives, without attribution of one perspective being superior to the other. The first step then is for the evaluator to facilitate a process where the variety of perspectives and realities can be shared and openly acknowledged.

In order to facilitate a productive sharing of perspectives, the utilisation of various communication skills are suggested. The blend of empathic skills which create an environment conducive to sharing and problem-solving, with assertive skills which ensure that the process remains focused and progresses to a point of resolution, are highlighted. Both affective and instrumental elements need to be attended to in moving to effective negotiation and problem-solving.

These skills require the evaluator to be an active listener and good at paraphrasing stakeholders' contributions. The evaluator needs to facilitate and encourage interaction among all stakeholders, reframe conflict as a political rather than a personal difference, and move people through processes so that they do not become stuck in un-productive interactions. These facilitation skills require the evaluator to be flexible, responsive, skilled in understanding and reframing complex disputes, and respectful of the variety of perspectives being presented.

6 Skill development in managing conflict with multiple stakeholders

It is important for evaluators to be adequately prepared, and receive support for their role as negotiators. Evaluators are frequently independent contractors who work outside organisational structures. They may not receive feedback, supervision, or any input in regard to their performance in the challenging domain of negotiation. The assumption that evaluators naturally possess the requisite negotiation skills is not necessarily valid. This is particularly the case as many evaluators have research backgrounds where they may not have developed the necessary skills to operate effectively in this politically charged environment.

The consequence is that many evaluators are ill-prepared for the complex negotiation that is required in evaluation. Such evaluators may avoid conflict, but the lack of resolution will have deleterious consequences in the future. Evaluators, therefore, need to develop negotiation skills as part of their professional repertoire, and also cultivate peer support mechanisms where experiences of conflict resolution, both successful and unsuccessful, can be shared.

Negotiation model for evaluation: practice

It seems then that the structured, stepped model of negotiation and the narrative, intuitive models can be blended into one, so that there is a balance achieved between structure and control (instrumental functions) and process (affective functions). In order to achieve this blend, the negotiator in an evaluation context needs to be equipped with a range of skills, broadly defined as empathic and assertive. The empathic skills would be required to create a conducive environment for the negotiation process, and the assertive skills used to provide some structure to the process.

For the purposes of negotiation, empathy can be defined as 'the process of demonstrating an accurate, non-judgmental understanding of the other side's needs, interest and positions' (Mnookin, Peppet & Tulumello 1996). These authors suggest there are two components to empathy in negotiation: perspective taking which involves trying to see the world through the eyes of the other, and expression of the other person's viewpoint. The technique of empathy thus involves translating the understanding of the experience of the other, into a response in which this understanding is shared (Egan 1990). Empathy is an important characteristic in being able to acquire information about the parties' goals, values and priorities. Negotiators need to take the other party's perspective, and negotiators who exercise empathy are more successful in reaching win-win scenarios in negotiation (Pruitt & Carnevale 1993). Empathy, therefore, is a catalyst for inspiring openness in others and of itself is a persuasive tool in negotiation.

Effective negotiation involves paraphrasing to ensure that realities are clear, getting one party to state their understanding of the other party's position (Hale 1998). Bush and Folger (1994) recommend that the negotiator ask the parties directly if they heard anything different from what they had heard before. Active and reflective listening are also considered to be important attributes for successful negotiators. This means paying attention to what is being said, asking appropriate questions, and checking understanding by paraphrasing.

Assertiveness refers to the ability to express and advocate for one's own needs, interest and positions (Mnookin et al. 1996). Another term to describe assertiveness in negotiation is the notion of facilitator authority (Heron, 1992, p. 121). Mnookin et al. (1996) go on to state that empathy and assertiveness are in tension in negotiation practice, with facilitators seeing them incorrectly as mutually exclusive attributes. Rather, the latter authors see them as two interdependent dimensions of negotiation behaviour which, used together, can produce substantial benefits in negotiation. They suggest that the common negotiation styles of competing, accommodating and avoiding can each represent different combinations of empathy and assertiveness. A competitive style is tilted towards assertion with little empathy, whereas an accommodating style is tilted toward empathy over assertion. An avoiding style consists of both low-levels of empathy and assertiveness. The effective negotiator is seen to be able both to empathise and assert in a given situation although it is acknowledged that some negotiators may find it difficult to be both highly assertive and empathetic.

The negotiation scenario may be viewed as one of facilitating a consciousness-raising process, where the parties become aware of each other's positions, and the rationale underpinning these positions. Through this process, there is a journey towards enlightenment, which facilitates a shared process of problem-solving. Problem-solving is a by-product of the enhanced understandings achieved, a transformative process, rather than a focus in and of itself. Aspects of the staged model of negotiation are also useful in recognising that negotiations progress through certain stages and phases, which when recognised can assist in managing the process. The initial stage to negotiation is one where positions are taken and put on the table, the middle stage is one where there is active negotiation, and the last stage is one where steps are taken to reach consensus.

Conclusion

For an evaluation to have a utilisation and participatory focus the involvement of multiple stakeholders, who represent a variety of interests, is required. These multiple interests are likely to result in difference and conflict during the evaluation process, to which the evaluator has a role in responding. Contemporary social theory affirms the notion of value pluralism, which is reflected in the frameworks and approaches of negotiation

and evaluation theories. These theories both share an underpinning belief in the resolution of conflict between competing interests, through processes of shared consciousness, enlightenment, and collaborative movement toward consensus. They also share a belief in the evaluator or negotiator as a facilitator of these processes, rather than posed as an external expert who judges and presides over the matters in dispute.

The consequences for the evaluator are that they require both an understanding of the conflict resolution process, and complementary applied skills. This requires some preparation for the evaluator in negotiation models and approaches, and the development and refinement of skills in communication. This is particularly so if the evaluator has a research background. There is benefit in highlighting the knowledge and skill areas of negotiation, to ensure that evaluators are consciously implementing them in their work, or developing such knowledge and skills where gaps are evident. The notion of utilising empathic and assertiveness skills concurrently, and in a balanced fashion which attends to both instrumental and affective aspects to the process, provides a new framework for many evaluators to consider.

This paper argues that evaluators need to position themselves among stakeholders in such a way that they are able to enter the negotiations as a player and interested party. Therefore, the evaluator needs to adopt a framework at the outset that anticipates multiple stakeholder involvement, and consequent value differences.

The list of requirements for the effective evaluator may appear onerous, as they span technical competencies in methodological design and implementation, with highly developed interpersonal skills in the negotiation medium. Meeting the requirements of all stakeholders, and finding the time to attend to, and negotiate, issues of conflict that emerge, can be difficult to achieve when working within tight evaluation budgets and time frames. There are limitations in the level of skill one individual can develop in evaluation and negotiation contexts, as there are restraints in the capacity of the evaluator to incorporate conflict resolution alongside the evaluation process. These limitations and constraints are inevitable and expected, particularly where resources are inadequate. The proposed model incorporates negotiation as a natural component or feature of the evaluation process. Compromises and concessions, as well as choices and priorities, are realities in the implementation of program evaluation.

The evaluator is often a sole operator, working outside an organisational setting. This can lead to isolation, and the absence of a venue to discuss dilemmas and difficulties in conflicts that arise between stakeholders. Evaluators would therefore benefit from some input through supervision or peer support. Any occupation that involves conflict requires a debriefing process and an opportunity for learning from the events through reflection.

Therefore evaluators working independently need to seek support to promote reflection upon the conflicts, and the development of new skills and approaches that could be applied in future instances.

There are a number of areas in which the above recommendations could be implemented. Courses in program evaluation could consider including units of study on negotiation skills, to equip evaluators with the requisite theoretical frameworks and communication skills. Evaluation societies and groups could consider auspicing specialist workshops on negotiation skills, leading to some accreditation in this field. The Australasian Evaluation Society could also consider hosting peer support groups when interest in this occurring is expressed among members. Importantly, there needs to be more literature published in evaluation journals, highlighting the importance of negotiation processes in evaluation. Finally, the concepts presented require further investigation and refinement, using the experiences of evaluators in their work. It is, therefore, hoped that this article will result in further investigation and published work on the topic of the place of negotiation in program evaluation.

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