Conceptual journey on the use of evaluations and feedback mechanisms

GT M&E PLATFORM
NGO-FEDERATIE – ACODEV - FIABEL
WEBINARS 7TH AND 9TH OF APRIL 2020
Why now?

- KB 2016:
  - Principle of learning
  - Evaluation as part of “moral justification”
  - Programmes 2017-2021: min. 1%

- MTE’s are (almost) in
  - momentum to reflect about evaluation use
  - momentum to think about feedback (dissemination and MRS)

- Use mentioned in trainings, guidelines, ToR, ECB-certification process, but not profoundly addressed (even less for feedback)
  - conceptual instruments to improve use in your organisation
  - make evaluation efforts worthwhile
Dissertation:
“The use of evaluations: exploring feedback in development organisations – The case of EuropeAid”

BY PAOLA ANDREA VALLEJO PATIÑO
SUPERVISOR: PROF. DR. NATHALIE HOLVOET
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013 - 2014
1. Research questions and methodology

- **Programming**
  - Evaluation
  - Implementation
  - Formulation

- **Identification**

- **Purpose & stakeholders**
  - Questions & Design
  - Data collection and analysis => reporting
  - Dissemination
  - Promotion of use (e.g. MRS)

- **Feedback**
1. Research questions and methodology

- Research questions:
  - How are use and feedback conceptualised?
  - What are the use and, more specifically, feedback challenges that development organisations face?
  - How do they address these challenges?

- Methodology:
  - desk review (academic + practitioners’ sources)
  - case study (document review + rapid use assessment instrument + use and feedback guidelines for interviews)
2. Use and the history of evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19th Century</td>
<td>aim = identification of social problems</td>
<td>“Programmes will lead to desired improvement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 20th Century</td>
<td>aim = ascertain the success of programmes</td>
<td>“Evaluation findings will guide decision making”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End 1960s</td>
<td>Boom of evaluation (number, scale, methodology, profession, etc.)</td>
<td>“Evaluation studies DO NOT lead to programmatic and policy decision making”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980’s-1990’s</td>
<td>Knowledge focused =&gt; use-focused evaluation models</td>
<td>“The value of evaluations depends on its use”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990’s - …</td>
<td>“The limited use of and learning from evaluation results have come to be viewed as the Achilles heel of the aid sector” (Huyse, 2011: 46)</td>
<td>Tension: evaluations for decision making // learning // accountability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Key concepts regarding ‘use’

#### Types of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation products</th>
<th>Evaluation process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental – To judge and orient</td>
<td>Share understandings/Extending communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual – To generate knowledge</td>
<td>Support programme intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic/ritual/political/conspiratorial</td>
<td>Increasing engagement, self-determination and ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimative</td>
<td>Programme &amp; organisational development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Developing networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>Boost the moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-use; under-use; over-use; mis-use</td>
<td>“Hawthorne-effect”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive/affective/political</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation promotes data-informed decision making

- Knowledge of what works & why
- Regulatory environment
- Historical momentum
- Organizational environment
- Citizen needs
- Political philosophy
- Time
- Money

Jonny Morell
Figure 2: Intended user uses and misuses of evaluation findings

Source: Cousins and Shulba, 2006: 282
2. Key concepts regarding ‘use’

- Influence

- Theory of evaluation & influential pathways

- Approach: Utilisation-focused evaluation (M. Patton)

Kirkhart, 2000: 8
2. Key concepts regarding ‘use’

Approach: Utilisation-focused evaluation (M. Patton)

Premises:
- **FOCUS** = Intended use by intended users
- Deliberate and thoughtful choices
- Strategizing about use is continuous and from the very beginning
- Use is NOT the same as reporting and dissemination
- Stakeholders analysis to ID primary intended users and varied and multiple interests
- High quality and not high quantity participation = ultimate goal

- Enhance commitment by involvement in decision making
- Personal factor contributes to use
- Evaluator should be active – reactive – adaptive
- Evaluators have responsibility to train users in evaluation processes and uses
- Designed and adapted situationally
- Attention to use ~financial and time costs
2. Key concepts regarding ‘use’

- Factors that affect use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors related to the evaluation</th>
<th>Factors related to the context of the evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Commitment/involvement/engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Information needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Political climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Financial climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder participation &gt; intended users!</td>
<td>Organisational climate/culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Demand and supply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“without feedback, conducting an evaluation is senseless, but even so, it is one of the most neglected elements in evaluation”
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

- Essential part of the evaluation process
- Several levels
- Several audiences
- Academic ‘silence’
- Institutional setting:
  - Evaluation regime
  - Organisational (evaluation) culture
Figure 7: Target audiences for evaluation feedback

Source: OECD, 2001: 67
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

- **Institutional setting:**
  1. **Evaluation regime**
     - *Evaluation capacity:* skills, HR, financial resources
     - *Evaluation practice:* act itself of conducting evaluations
     - *Organisational arrangements:*
       - Position: localisation & organigramme
       - Independence: Organisational independence // Behavioural independence // External influence
  
  - *Institutionalisation of evaluation:*
    - rules and procedures
    - informally or formally (importance of explicit evaluation policy!)
    - Importance of incentives

  => Evolution, but challenge for development organisations
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

2. Organisational (evaluation) culture

- Dynamics of decision making:
  - Evidence based vs. Opinion based decision making
  - ~ promotion of evaluation
  - ~ formally embedded feedback mechanisms
  - “Feedback fallacy”

- Dynamics of learning:
  - “Organisational learning” ~”learning culture” ~ “evaluation culture” BUT different!
  - Traditional evaluation approach >…> Organisational learning approach
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

Challenge in development cooperation!

- What hinders learning?
  - associating mistakes with blame instead of learning opportunities
  - pressure to spend
  - a rigid tunnel vision
  - the lack of incentives
  - the loss of institutional memory due to the high staff turnover
  - the lack of an open culture to evaluations

- Evaluation culture expresses itself in:
  - the extent of use of evaluation findings
  - the extent to which evaluations create internal reflection
  - through improvements based on evaluations
  - in the interest and resources dedicated to figure all this out
  - Formal and creative practices
  - Real, operational, traceable, accountable commitment of management!
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

- Learning Culture
- Decision Making Culture
- Evaluation Culture

* = intersection areas that can increase through feedback
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

- Essential part of the evaluation process
- Several levels
- Several audiences
- Academic ‘silence’
- Institutional setting:
  - Evaluation regime
  - Organisational (evaluation) culture

Diagram:

- FEEDBACK
  - Dissemination
  - Management Response System (MRS)
    - Management Response
    - Follow-up
DISSEMINATION = “set of activities through which knowledge about evaluation findings is made available to the range of relevant audiences”

- 2 types: primary and secondary
- Different audiences: intended vs. non-intended; inside vs. outside
- Different means: written vs. oral; formal vs. informal; public vs. restrictive; etc.
- Different roles: evaluation consultant vs. evaluation manager
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**DISSEMINATION**

In development?

- recognised importance ⇔ communication of findings is a challenge
- new dissemination mechanisms
- BUT passive, great difference between donors, traditional, donor oriented
  - => make institutional links with communication services
  - => make use of dissemination plans
  - => target audiences
  - => diversify products
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS** = “a part of an evaluation system for the systematic handling of evaluation findings and recommendations so as to enhance evaluation use”

- **Purpose:**
  - increasing stakeholder and management buy-in
  - facilitate in-depth dialogue about findings and the course of action to take

- **7 functions:**
  1. Policy and programme improvement
  2. Internal accountability
  3. External and democratic accountability
  4. Legitimisation
  5. Promotion of learning
  6. Ritual/symbolic function
  7. Evaluation accountability
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

MRS

- Tension: non-/post-evaluative vs. part of evaluation process
- 2 dimensions:
  - degree of formality
  - knowledge sharing
- Principles: ownership, consultation, transparency
- 2 components: management response AND follow-up
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS**

- Importance of recommendations:
  - most attention ⇔ weakest product
  - quality ~

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Based on data</th>
<th>Timely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targetted</td>
<td>Implementable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>=&gt; Involve all relevant stakeholders!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

- **MRS**

  - different types:
    - general or specific
    - time scope (long term vs. short term)
    - priority level
    - one option vs. different options
    - operational level vs. more complex policy level
    - regard the behaviour, the rules, the structure or the purpose of the organisation
    - follow from the data collection and analysis vs. based on the qualitative and subjective knowledge of the evaluator

- controversy: shouldn’t be given / can be given if…/ should be given

  **Responsibility?**Evaluator, managers, steering committee, evaluation unit
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS**

- **MRS in development?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent ~ changing context</th>
<th>Lack of partner participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/3 MRS: great variation</td>
<td>Lack of corrective measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%: no follow-up; 1/5: does not work</td>
<td>Vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small audiences (only 50% public)</td>
<td>Not integrated in decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not useful/not relevant</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

Examples MR
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS**

- Examples MR

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**Annex 8: Format of EuropeAid’s ‘Fiche contradictoire’**

The "Fiche Contradictoire" is a document completed by the services in charge of implementing the recommendations. It presents i) the main recommendations; ii) the actions taken; and iii) the follow-up of these actions one year later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Response of the EU services</th>
<th>Follow-up – one year after Action taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1 : xxx</td>
<td>Agree / Partially agree / Disagree xxx</td>
<td>Done / Partially done / Not done xxx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EC, 2014d: 22
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS**

- Guidelines:
  - Conceptual understanding of an MRS (MR + follow-up)
  - Adapt to organisational context and evaluation objectives
  - Link MRS to decision making processes
  - Formal and informal mix
  - Open, regular and transparent communication
  - Assign people to oversee the process
  - Clear action plan
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

MRS

- Guidelines:
  - Instruments with:
    - Status acceptance
    - Status of implementation
    - Lessons about implementation
    - Effects on implementation
  - Action by authority upon failure of implementation
- Clear communication of roles and responsibility to all stakeholders
3. Key concepts regarding ‘feedback’

**MRS**

- Guidelines:
  - Clear communication of roles and responsibility to all stakeholders
  - Involvement of all stakeholders
  - Sufficient time and clear procedures for reflexion
  - Link with other decentralised levels (eval and operations)
Way forward?

► Dissertation available
► Organisational analysis/exercise (link with ECB-improvement plan?)
► Sectoral analysis/exercise
► Peer learning
► …

=> support of the federations
Thank you for your attention!
Well, you've been a pretty good hoss, I guess. Hardworkin' not the fastest critter I ever come across, but...

No, stupid, not feedback. I said I wanted a feedbag.