Working with non-government organisations: dropping the defences and building bridges

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- *Reflects on the professional relationship between evaluators and NGOs involved in evaluation*
- *2 Evaluators*
- *5 NGO program managers*
- *Suggests ways that evaluators can work more effectively with program managers—building bridges—so that evaluations can have greater effect in terms of policy and practice.*

Paper purpose

- ***The evaluators asked themselves:***
  - why it is that some program managers embrace evaluation while others resist, sometimes to the end.
  - We asked five program managers who embraced evaluation with us why they did.
- ***Their feedback is reflected in this paper.***

Rationale

- Part of an improvement process: 'prospective and proactive' (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 2007: 23)
- Formative evaluation tends to focus more on qualitative than quantitative outcomes
- Utility (Patton) fosters a degree of engagement (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 2007)
- Engagement enhances ownership (Greene 2000)
- Continuous Improvement (Carr and Kemmis 1986)
- Community of Practice (Wenger 1998)
- Organisational learning (Gill 2010)
- Participation and 'empowerment' (Fetterman and Wandersman 2005)

Evaluation as a formative and collaborative process

- To build a good working relationship with our partners;
- To improve data quality;
- To support better outcomes for NGOs;
- To add more value to programs; and
- Constructive cooperation is of itself of value.

So why would we want to engage?

- ***Any number of good reasons:***
  - Data management systems
  - Capacity
  - Training and skills
  - A difficult task (Kopczynski and Pritchard 2004)
  - Excessive Evaluation Anxiety (Donaldson et al 2002)
  - Psychological reasons (Taut and Beams 2003)
  - Power, leadership, fear of change (Abma 2006)

And why do some NGOs choose not to engage?

- *5 semi-structured interviews in which we asked:*
  - Reflect on the time when first confronted with an evaluation: What was your initial reaction?
  - Was there a point at which you saw the worth of evaluations?
  - What contributed to your view of the worth of evaluations?
  - What makes for a good working relationship with an evaluator?
- *Analysis in Nvivo*

Method

Being around, communicating, being involved with professional development with us, feeding us information…

so when I became aware that the [evaluation] team were prepared to take time and yarn with us on issues, understanding what the work was like and what the struggles we were dealing with were and some of our successes, and as we went through the journey and as the relationship built I was able to put aside any anxieties I had about whose side they were on.

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[It was when I felt] a sense of partnership and the time that we had a dialogue about what matters and is important… those things built our relationship, confidence.

I thought 'oh shit'… and for me it felt overwhelming. Also I felt like I was being directed to do something that I didn't really understand…

Findings

- **_Where does the value of evaluation lie for NGOs?_**
  - Opportunity for mutually beneficial and shared ~~onal~~ learning
  - ~~eedback and legitimisatio~~

It is when I could bring it down to getting data and information that related to the effectiveness of the operational stuff we were doing. Were we making a difference as a result of what we were doing was that occurring? That is the stuff that I value about evaluation.

When I started to recognise that we were going to be working together on this; when you guys came in started the rocess, you sation to the ng that.

...when [the evaluator] us things that were ogether that could us success, how worked I could start ow you could prove hings worked and efore seek more funding…

I'm sitting here now with a sense of achievement from multiple points of view, looking back and knowing that we are likely to get that recurrent funding and we wouldn't have been able to do it on our own.

- *First, we recognise the risk of bias*
  - that might result from a strong relationship between and NGO and evaluator
- *However, we wish to suggest*,
  - that for program managers and evaluators alike, a healthy, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship adds considerable value to the outcomes of an evaluation.
- *In order to do this we need to*
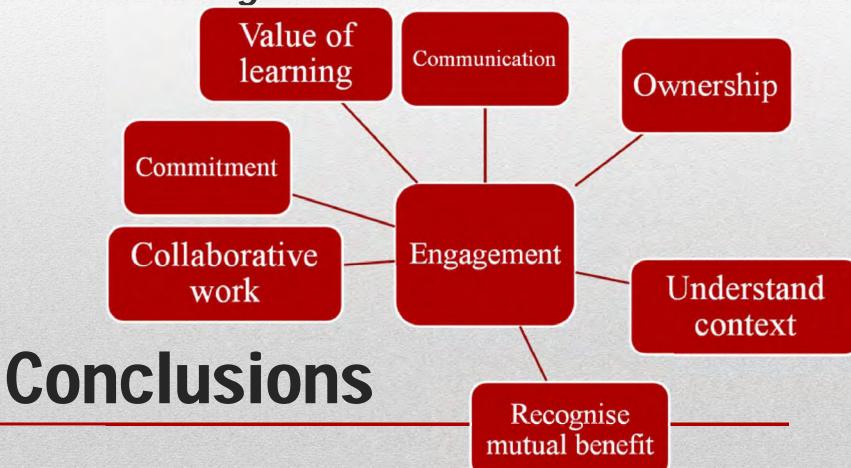 - Be available
  - Allow time

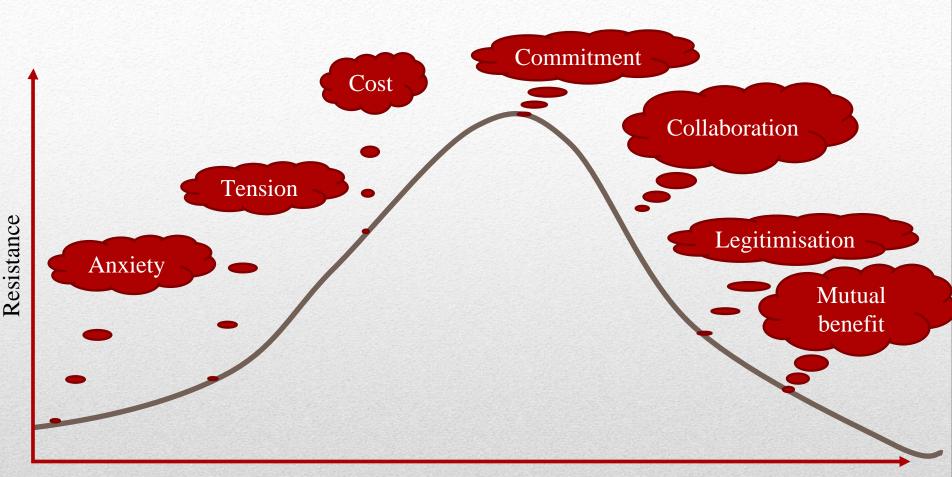# How do we improve our relationship with an NGO?

- ***This paper is premised on the assumption that participatory approaches to evaluations are important for quality in formative evaluations***
  - Engagement is important for **improved program outcomes**.
  - The value arising from **mutual learning** and shared PD is of paramount importance to both the NGO and the evaluator.
  - Collaborative work can lead to **better outcomes for funders and communities** alike
  - The **evaluator adds value** to the program by enabling the professional growth of stakeholders in the program
  - the **evaluator becomes a partner** in the program.
  - the **quality of data obtained in this process is improved** because of the trust built between the program manager and the evaluator.
  - Allowing time is important but the resulting **cost may be a sticking point**

Implications

- *Why is it that some non-government organisations embrace the process of evaluation, and others do not?*
- *Essential ingredients*

Conclusions

Overcoming the hurdle