SAMEA
South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association

South African
Monitoring
and Evaluation
Association

KNOWLEDGE COMPENDIUM 2019

sponsored by

CIVICUS

Contact information

T 081 354 9777
F 0866 200 455
E info@samea.org.za

Stay tuned and contribute: www.samea.org.za
Follow us on Twitter: @SAMEA_ZA
Follow us on LinkedIn: SAMEA
Like us on Facebook: SAMEA

Acknowledgements

The SAMEA board is grateful to CIVICUS for sponsoring the compendium and contributing to the body of M&E learning. We appreciate the contributions of the webinar presenters, from which the content for this compendium was sourced. We thank Data Innovator for sponsoring the printing of the compendium. Lastly, we acknowledge our members and partners who continue to support SAMEA in creating a thriving M&E community.

CONTENTS

Message from the Chairperson

The South African monitoring and evaluation (M&E) ecosystem has evolved significantly over the years. More universities are offering M&E training, both as standalone qualifications and within other professional degrees, and the not-for-profit sector remains an important employer of M&E practitioners and consultants, while contributing to developing systems. Within the public sector, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) continues to reaffirm government's commitment to accountability, learning, and achieving results. In addition, M&E is firmly integrated through the National Evaluation System (NES), Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), community-based monitoring system, and government's ongoing efforts to build M&E capacity.

These developments attest to the value placed in the M&E of interventions by organisations and policy-makers. It would seem that South Africa has the virtuous cycle needed to sustain the M&E field. Capacity to meet the demand for evidence from both government and the not-for-profit sector exists within academic institutions, think tanks, and private consulting firms. In addition, there is adequate investment in infrastructure including units, policies, and systems to support the sector – though more is still needed.

The South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) places great importance on building the M&E knowledge base and sharing information in different ways to make it accessible. We are therefore excited to be publishing our first ever knowledge compendium, which we hope will serve as a valuable asset for established and emerging evaluators alike. In it, we provide a wide range of useful content, from summaries on topical webinars, to practical tips on how to use different M&E tools, and more.

This product has been made possible through the generous sponsorship of our partners, CIVICUS and Data Innovator. I would also like to thank the SAMEA board for their support and inputs that shaped the compendium, particularly Jerusha Govender for leading the project.

Ms Matodzi Amisi
SAMEA Chairperson

Practioner insights:

Implementing impact reflections to embed data-driven decision-making

Tamryn-Lee Fourie
Impact & Accountability Lead, CIVICUS

At CIVICUS, a global civil society alliance, our mission is clear: to strengthen civil society and citizen action for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world. But how does this look in practice? "Accountability and data-driven decision-making have become buzz words in the civil society sector," explains our Accountability and Impact Coordinator, Merle Rutz, in her article Turning data-driven accountability into meaningful action for civil society.[1] "And yes, the idea of turning information into real-time and meaningful action to deepen our impact and achieve our mission seems a valuable ambition – with the realities of competing systems or reporting standards, differences in data or tech proficiency within teams, and difficulties to measure long-term impact of human rights campaigns and advocacy work."

Using data-driven decision-making means that we learn, adapt, and change based on evidence. In 2018, we realised that in order to really embed data-driven decision-making at CIVICUS, we needed to go beyond just monitoring data collection – we needed to implement a process that enabled staff and partners to really engage with and analyse monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information and other performance-related data. We've consequently invested in several systems and processes to capture and analyse programmatic and organisational data to improve data utilisation, inform decision-making, and ultimately help us effectively implement our Strategic Plan 2017-2022. One of these processes is our new Impact Reflection Process. Using this tool, we can proactively scrutinise and reflect on the data we collect, channel this into decision-making forums, and communicate decisions and changes back to all our stakeholders, from management and our board, to our donors and members.

FEATURE

PILOT IMPACT REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What was the overall progress against our plans for 2017-2018?
2. What were our biggest successes? Why?
3. What blockages/delays did we experience? Why?
4. Related critical learning questions

Impact reflection approach

Our first Impact Reflection Process pilot took place from August to September 2018, and consisted of 11 impact reflection discussions. The discussions were based on our annual results (July 2017 - June 2018), and included broader themes as well, such as civil society resourcing and convening. Almost every CIVICUS staff member engaged in this process, and results and recommendations were then shared with management and the board.

SECOND ITERATION IMPACT REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your most significant outcome achieved in the first half of this year? Why is this outcome important to our strategy? How do you know (evidence)?
2. What was your most successful cross-functional collaboration?
3. Which (external) feedback received was the most influential for this planning process?

The second iteration of the process took place in April 2019 in the form of a mid-year self-facilitated impact reflection. Insights from these discussions were subsequently incorporated into our annual planning process for 2019-20. Importantly, staff were asked to post their answers to the three impact reflection questions on the CIVICUS intranet to facilitate cross-functional discussion so that we can learn from one another's successes and challenges, and celebrate our collective wins.

The next cycle of impact reflections will be implemented shortly and will consider CIVICUS's annual performance for the period 2018-2019. This time, however, instead of staff doing a self-reflection on their most significant achievements over the course of the year, they will reach out to between three and five stakeholders outside the CIVICUS Secretariat to find out what they think are our most significant achievements, and why.

[1]*Read the full article online at https://accountablenow.org/turning-data-driven-accountability-into-meaningful-action/.*

This will feed into an online analysis process as well as a series of strategy goal discussions, and in turn inform our 2017-2022 mid-term strategy review, which is currently underway.

Looking forward

As CIVICUS moves into the third iteration of the Impact Reflection Process, we have taken stock of some important lessons from the previous two cycles. These will be essential for our future success as we continue on our journey with data-driven decision-making. We are already seeing the benefits of this tool when it comes to joining the dots between data collection, analysis, and its communication to relevant decision-makers for response and action. For example, sharing regular trend analysis of our M&E data captured on another of our new systems, a platform called DevResults[2], has allowed our management fora to discuss the impact of an increasingly diverse growing membership, on our organisation. Conversely, lack of data in some areas of our work, such as more detailed data around our new members' needs, demonstrates gaps in organisational knowledge. This can be a challenge when we design and implement new interventions.

We are also exploring ways to better link discussions to progress in terms of measuring the impact of our work. Although there has been enthusiastic engagement in the Impact Reflection Process, we need to ensure that the action points we've identified are channelled through decision-making processes so that these discussions do not end as "talk shops" and that we can feed back to our staff on what has changed.

To learn more about CIVICUS and its work, visit *www.civicus.org*.

Photo credits: **ICSW2019, CIVICUS**

[2]*www.devresults.com*

Evaluating evaluations: What can we learn?

Overview from the article "Evaluation2 – Evaluating the national evaluation system in South Africa: What has been achieved in the first 5 years?" (2019). African Evaluation Journal, (Vol 7, No 1). Ian Goldman, Carol N. Deliwe, Stephen Taylor, Zeenat Ishmail, Laila Smith, Thokozile Masangu, Christopher Adams, Gillian Wilson, Dugan Fraser, Annette Griessel, Cara Waller, Siphesihle Dumisa, Alyna Wyatt, Jamie Robertsen https://aejonline.org/index.php/aej/article/view/400

South Africa's national evaluation system (NES) has gained impressive traction since being adopted in 2011. Since then, 67 national evaluations have been completed or are underway within the NES, covering over $10 billion of government expenditure, seven of South Africa's nine provinces have provincial evaluation plans, and 68 out of 155 national and provincial departments have departmental evaluation plans. These developments are a significant indicator of government's commitment to improved public accountability and service delivery. Even so, the Department of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (DPME) decided it was important to evaluate whether its own evaluation system was fully achieving what it set out to do – impact government programmes and policies and shape South Africa's evaluation agenda, which is one of the country's developmental priorities.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess whether, five years into its implementation, the system was working, and how it could be strengthened. The results of this evaluation are particularly pertinent to share, given the growing interest in national evaluation systems globally. For example, many believe that a NES is the antidote to donor-driven systems which tend to side-line national capacity and do not adequately feed evidence into country decision-making processes. Evaluating the NES could therefore answer some important questions on how a NES plays into a country's broader evaluation ecosystem, and what this means for evaluators themselves.

TYPES OF EVALUATIONS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN NES

- Design: Programme design
- Diagnostic: Root causes
- Implementation: Activities as outputs and outcomes
- Impact: Outcome or impact levels
- Economic/synthesis: Organisation of findings

How was the NES evaluated?

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach to focus on three key research areas:

1. How is the evaluation system working as a whole as well as the specific components, and how they can be strengthened?
2. What is the value for money in establishing the NES?
3. Are there other evaluation mechanisms that need to be included to maximise the benefits accrued to the government?

[3]*Read the full article online at https://aejonline.org/index.php/aej/article/view/400.*

Holvoet and Renard's theoretical framework was used to interrogate six characteristics of an emerging NES (policy, methodology, organisation, capacity, participation, and use)[3]. This provided a highly effective mechanism for drawing out findings, and in turn recommendations.

Evaluation conclusions

The evaluation findings show that the NES has widened substantially since its inception, from national to provincial, and later departmental evaluations. It operates at significant scale and, crucially, departments undertaking evaluations have become more strategic in their operations. The findings also reveal that implementation evaluations are preferred, as they provide quicker feedback into policy. Other key findings included the importance of identifying areas of growth in strengthening the evaluation mandate, and the critical need for evaluation budgets, capacity development, managing and tracking of evaluations, and strengthened use of evaluation results through communication and improvement plans.

DEPARTMENTAL FEEDBACK – THE USEFULNESS OF EVALUATION

- Basic Education: Evaluation results enhance understanding of processes. The theory of change is the most useful tool presented.
- Human Settlements: Evaluations are helpful as reflective exercises but not as decision-making exercises.
- Justice and Constitutional Development: Evaluations shed light on good practices and influence internal processes.
- Social Development: Theory of change allows for smoother programme implementation.
- Trade and Industry: Programme collaboration improved.

Taking stock

The level of institutionalisation a NES provides is vital to strengthen use of evaluation evidence in government policies: the more government knows about what does and does not work in responding to pressing socio-economic challenges, the less likely that resources will be used in interventions that do not produce results, or worse, cause harm. In addition, a strong culture of evaluating programmes and policies supports adaptive management, which is much needed for government to effectively deal with complex problems in an ever-evolving global context.

However, while the evaluation findings clearly point to the importance of national evaluation systems, it also highlights that there are a number of key ingredients that are needed to implement a NES effectively: evaluation systems must be easily identifiable through values, practices, and institutions; evaluations must not operate in silos – it is crucial that they involve broader society in order to encourage institutionalisation and promote sustainability; and finally, the participation of stakeholders outside of government, including voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs), institutions of higher learning, and civil society, needs to be strengthened for the system to remain relevant and generate evidence that is useful to different policy-makers.

[4]*Holvoet, N. and Renard, R. (2007). Monitoring and Evaluation Reform under Changing Aid Modalities: Seeking the Middle Ground in Aid-Dependent Low-Income Countries. UN University, Research Paper No. 2007/52.*

Evaluative thinking: A cognitive process

SOURCE:
SAMEA webinar: *"Evaluative thinking", Thomas Schwandt, 2019*
Presentation: *www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learn-poor-monitoring*
Recording: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkS9Tg_GfYA*

Evaluative thinking is a concept that has been in circulation for some time already, and is growing in popularity in the M&E sector. However, the meaning of evaluative thinking and how it differs from traditional programme evaluation is not always fully understood. SAMEA hosted a webinar with Thomas Schwandt[4] to explore the concept and implications for evaluation practice, including how it influences evaluation methods and approaches. Schwandt argues that evaluative thinking is *two* ways of looking at the world: One as a type of critical thinking; and two as the logic of evaluation.

Defining evaluative thinking

Taken from the work of Tom Archibald, one way that evaluative thinking is defined is as a: *"Cognitive process in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves skills such as identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking and making informed decisions in preparation for action.*[5]

From this definition, it is clear to see that evaluative thinking is critical thinking. This theory implies that an evaluator can improve the quality of their thinking by analysing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective[6], and requires specific kinds of skills and personal traits or dispositions. Skills include interpreting, inference-making, analysing, explaining, and probing unstated assumptions, while dispositions are habitually inquisitive, open and fair-minded, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, and diligent in pursuing relevant information and evidence.

CRITICAL THINKERS...

- Raise clearly formulated questions and problems
- Gather, assess, and interpret information effectively
- Come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- Think open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognising and assessing their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences
- Communicate effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

[4]*Further reading: https://tgarchibald.wordpress.com/2013/11/15/evaluative-thinking-lit-review/*
[5]*Archibald, T. (2013). "Evaluative Thinking". Free Range Evaluation, WordPress, 11 November 2013. https://tgarchibald.wordpress.com/2013/11/11/18/.*
[6]*For further information on critical thinking, go to https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-concept-and-definition-of-critical-thinking/411.*

"I believe it is easy to see how evaluative thinking can be thought of as form of critical thinking," Schwandt explains in his webinar on the subject. "The evaluator needs to engage these kinds of behaviours throughout all phases of an evaluation, from initial negotiations with a client, commissioner, or other stakeholders on evaluation questions and design, through data gathering and analysis, to the final stages of reporting." Furthermore, he notes, an evaluator can encourage the development of these behaviours, skills, attitudes, and dispositions in clients and consumers of evaluation – which is considered an important part of evaluation capacity-building.

Evaluative reasoning

The second way of understanding evaluative thinking is through an evaluative reasoning lens, which underlies the process of inference in evaluations. It is considered unique because it is concerned with how to combine matters of fact with matters of value to reach evaluative conclusions. In other words, it combines evidence about performance on particular criteria, relative to definitions of 'how good is good', to generate a rating of performance on that dimension (criterion). The definition is also relative to ratings of performance on several dimensions to conclude how good performance is for a particular site, project, programme, policy, or other 'evaluand' (a generic term for that which is being evaluated). Importantly, because evaluative thinking is both a collective, social undertaking and a private, individual one, in many evaluations, individuals or groups with different concerns are involved in some way to establish a common point of view on what to evaluate.

Best of both worlds

While these views are very different, conflict between critical thinking and reasoning is not inevitable, Schwandt tells us. "We can employ a 'both-ways' philosophy to support dialogic spaces to construct new understandings of valuable knowledge and evidence," he explains. "We can learn to reason well through issues of complexity, interdependence, uncertainty, and diversity. These ways are characteristic of working with multiple stakeholder understandings, viewpoints, and ways of knowing." Schwandt believes that the hallmarks of evaluative thinking as critical thinking are asking and honestly answering questions such as: Am I being clear in my thinking? Am I thinking in ways that are just and fair? Am I dealing with the complexities inherent in the issue? Am I sticking to the issue at hand? Do I need to consider another point of view? Do I have good reasons and evidence for what I am claiming? "And, of course, notions such as 'clear', 'fair', 'just', 'good reasons', and 'evidence' are themselves all subject to critical examination," he concludes. "There is no escaping the necessity of explaining and justifying one's interpretation no matter what tools of reasoning we employ."

"Evaluation is an activity. Evaluative thinking is a way of doing business. This distinction is critical… Evaluation is more useful – and actually used – when the programme and organisational culture manifests evaluative thinking. Evaluative thinking involves systematic results-oriented thinking about what results are expected, how results can be achieved, what evidence is needed to inform future actions and judgments, and how results can be improved in the future." - Embracing Evaluative Thinking for Better Outcomes, CLEAR-AA

Debunking the monitoring myth

SOURCE:
***SAMEA webinar**: "Ag shame, poor monitoring", Dugan Fraser, 2017*
***Presentation**: www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learn-poor-monitoring*

There are many misconceptions around the function of monitoring in organisations and public service, but monitoring processes, if understood and implemented correctly, need not be as complex and confusing as they often seem. To debunk the monitoring myth, we have extracted some key points from Dugan Fraser's Ag shame, *poor monitoring* webinar on monitoring processes, and how to improve evaluative systems.

Mediocre monitoring

Mediocre monitoring means mediocre evaluation. Large-scale evaluations are needed to ensure correct organisational functioning and progress, however, inadequate data and information that is of little value inevitably leads to the process becoming difficult. Part of the problem is not only that monitoring is not taken seriously, but that it is often treated as merely a compliance issue, where in fact it serves a critical strategic core function. In addition, it is commonly a demand process, rather than an internal, deliberated one. This can make the process feel more like an imposition than a necessary, justifiable activity to track areas of improvement. This is further compounded when monitoring is performed as a pressured activity, which can result in mistakes or missed details, particularly if staff are ill-equipped to conduct monitoring. Analysis conducted on weak data is then not always useful or complete, and processes are not integrated into organisational planning either. Weak monitoring data also compromises performance management reviews, which in turn can damage organisational capacity.

WHAT IS RESULTS-BASED MONITORING?

RBM is a participatory and team-based management approach which aims to:

- Focus an organisation's efforts and resources on expected results.
- Improve effectiveness and sustainability of operations.
- Improve accountability for resources used.

Finding solutions to fixing monitoring systems

The litany of negative consequences resulting from poor monitoring clearly spell out how important it is to address monitoring processes. As Fraser points out, "the solution to this problem is not mysterious… mindfulness and intention are needed, rather than the generic, routine approach that is usually followed.

At the core of the problem, he explains, is weak management, lack of results-based monitoring (RBM) implementation, and a general failure to adequately theorise monitoring, especially compared to evaluation.

Drawing on the work of Irene Guijt in challenging monitoring "presuppositions", Fraser highlights that a constructive way of addressing these flaws is to identify alternative ways of looking at monitoring. For example, it is often assumed that monitoring and evaluation must be separated, and that monitoring is only about collecting data. Furthermore, it is believed that those involved in monitoring know how to serve management, and that stakeholders are capable of articulating needs into indicators and collection methods. In contrast, Fraser suggests the relationship between monitoring and evaluation should be reconsidered, based on specific learning purposes, and the relationship redesigned as interlinked functions. It is also a good idea to shift to a view of monitoring as an evolving practice that is subject to reviews and adaptation, and one that is a process that transforms data into information for learning.

It is important to note that a reliance on indicators does not always present a balanced picture and stakeholders do not always have the time, interest, or intention to ensure good data is gathered and used. "Critical reflection needs specific guidance, capacity to do so must be built, processes created, and resources allocated," says Fraser. Innovation is also key – other diverse ways of sharing information are needed, together with traditional processes of sharing and engagement. In addition, incentive structures should be considered to ensure realistic learning expectations and perceived system usefulness

Ultimately, however, there is no "one size fits all" monitoring approach. To modify monitoring processes, practitioners need to account for the factors influencing monitoring processes, such as socio-cultural, historical, and capacity, among others. Power relations are an important factor too, as participation from diverse groups is needed in monitoring of programmes, and so inequalities between groups must be minimised to ensure a fair balance between participants. Finally, linking informal interaction processes and encouraging debate around monitoring processes encourages valuable lateral thinking and cohesive interaction between groups to enhance the use of monitoring information

Improving monitoring practice

Monitoring should be an evolving practice which can be reviewed and adapted. Here are a few steps that can be taken towards improving monitoring practice and fostering a culture of evaluative thinking in monitoring:

- *Understand that monitoring is an in-depth participatory process.*
- *Hold staff workshops to demystify jargon and unpack theories of change.*
- *Conduct monitoring as an iterative process to set operational and strategic indicators and targets.*
- *Coach business units in reporting using indicators and analysing data to make sense of the process.*
- *Make reporting a role that every manager in the organisation must take on.*
- *Recognise the importance of a senior manager who champions M&E.*
- *Link monitoring to organisational development work on promoting evaluative thinking and a culture of curiosity and enquiry.*

Dealing with data in the digital age

SOURCE:
***SAMEA webinar**: "Evaluator competencies: Skills and ethics for the digital era", Linda Raftree, 2018*
***Presentation**: www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learn-technology-data-privacy*

The growing digitisation of data and ever-expanding range of digital platforms, devices, and processes are revolutionising the M&E landscape. While the potential this holds to transform the way in which we engage with information is extremely exciting, finding ways to integrate digital knowledge into our practices can be a daunting task. Linda Raftree's webinar on evaluator competencies offers some valuable insights and advice on digital data skills and ethics for those working in the monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) space today.

Digitisation influences personal and institutional behaviour, as well as organisational development. To remain relevant as practitioners, we must move with the times and implement digitised operating systems. There are now many digital tools for M&E data which support evaluative thinking.

"Knowing what kinds of tools and platforms people use is helpful for both evaluation design and for interpreting results, because digital is changing how the world works and how people behave in many ways," Raftree points out.

However, we must be aware of the risks around data use and digital processes as well. To resolve these risks, and ensure that vulnerable people and institutions are not jeopardised[9,10], evaluators must have digital competence.

Digital access

Before we can effectively use digital data to design an M&E plan, we need to understand digital access. Digital access relates to equitable participation of citizens in digital society through technology and online tools and platforms. This includes the people who are the focus of the evaluation, conducting the evaluation, and even commissioning the evaluation.

[9]For further information on data privacy, go to https://paper.dropbox.com/doc/Responsible-Data-Hackpad-SA6kouQ4PL3SOVa8GnMEY.
[10]For additional tips on data privacy and security, and guidance on things to look for when selecting a third-party vendor, go to https://prd-girleffect-corp.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Digital_Safeguarding_-_FINAL.pdf.

"Access matters at all of these levels so that we can design an evaluation that is user- and utilisation focused, and that is capable of gathering high quality data from the people we want to involve," emphasises Raftree. Unfortunately, not everyone has equitable digital access: it is therefore imperative that digitisation in evaluation design evolves in a way that addresses limited access. Nevertheless, as Raftree points out, "knowing what kinds of digital tools and platforms people use is helpful for both evaluation design and for interpreting results, because digital is changing how the world works and how people behave in many ways."

Adaptive management

The tools we use to collect data are also changing, for example, mobile devices rather than pen and paper. For evaluations to adapt to these changes, Raftree explains that we need to be able to change course quickly if data is telling us we are on the wrong path. "Real-time data" is increasingly being used by funders for decision-making in an effort to move more quickly rather than waiting for the full programme and endline evaluation to be complete before adjusting plans and implementation. Despite the rise in digital data collection, it is important to note that not everything may have a digital solution. "In some cases, people think they can resolve much deeper underlying problems, such as mistrust, low capacity, apathy, unwillingness to provide data to outsiders, or other cultural or social behaviours using technologies," says Raftree.

Digital integrity

As with any tool, there are challenges associated with using digital data in evaluations. For example, evaluators need to know how to ensure that incorporating technology and digital data is not excluding certain populations by neglecting to consider aspects like age, literacy, and economic status, which may have an impact on access. Likewise, when relying on tech or on Big Data, it is crucial to check for exclusion, sample bias, and representativeness, such as "elite capture", where, for instance, only a particular subset of the population is included. "Sometimes, you may need to supplement the newer approaches with more traditional approaches to ensure representativeness and inclusion," advises Raftree. Involving experts in the sector you are evaluating to check data is another useful tip, as they will have the best insight into the data being used. Above all else, evaluators need to be aware of how to protect the privacy of data that is collected for evaluation purposes and how to ensure that data is secured. Ethics training should not be discarded just because the nature of the data has changed, and informed consent is still critical, as is the storing and managing of personal and sensitive data – particularly as outsourcing to technology and data analytics companies increases.

Nurturing young emerging evaluators to sustain M&E for the future

SOURCE:
SAMEA webinar: "Options for advancing careers in M&E: A note to emerging evaluators", Christo de Coning
www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=readoptions-for-advancing-careers -in-me- a-note-to-emerging-evaluators

To keep any profession alive and evolving, we must invest in young professionals, nurture their careers, and encourage their development. In 2018, SAMEA commenced the development of a strategy to place specific focus on supporting the development of young and emerging evaluators (YEEs).

Tips for YEEs pursuing an M&E career:

- To get started, it is important to figure out where your career path lies, what qualifications you need, and where you need to grow. This can be done with an experienced facilitator. You can also investigate the range of certificate courses, post-graduate diplomas, and advanced degrees in the field. In doing so, this can also expand your networks.
- *Find an internship opportunity at an organisation that will help you grow and increase your value as an M&E practitioner. A portfolio of work will help when applying for positions, be it internship experience, job shadowing, or working as a junior evaluator.*
- When looking for work or accepting junior positions, seek out broader M&E fields and further exposure to different applications of evaluation. Volunteering is also a good way to go about this.
- *Read, explore, and ask – this will help you in the field in the future. Read evaluation reports, journal articles, blogs from evaluators, and so forth to get a good conceptual grasp of evaluation theories, methods, and tools. This will come in handy when you start working on evaluations.*
- Find a mentor. Whether formal or informal, this is a powerful form of career advancement.
- *Develop strong relationships with your educators and other evaluators – this will help you keep learning and will assist you in developing your social capital and professional relationships.*
- Try and attend conferences as well – and be brave enough to present your work! Consider publishing your work, develop written case studies and success stories, and record your own efforts as a map of your experience and growth.
- *Last but not least, join SAMEA, be part of the YEE topical interest group, and participate in discussions that are shaping how the association is responding to needs of YEEs.*

HOW I BECAME AN EVALUATOR

Sarah Chapman is an Associate Professor at the University of Cape Town, where she is the Director of the Institute for Monitoring and Evaluation and convenes the Masters and Doctorate courses on programme evaluation. Her areas of expertise include evaluation theory, evaluation design, statistical techniques for the analysis of evaluation data, and monitoring framework development. An experienced field evaluator and team leader, Prof Chapman has led the evaluations of complex multi-sectorial programmes in over 10 African countries.

There are many different routes aspiring professionals can take as they navigate their way to a career in evaluations. We spoke to Professor Sarah Chapman to find out about her journey towards becoming an evaluator, and gather some valuable tips to help you on your way.

What sparked your interest in evaluation?

I had always been drawn to an academic training that allowed me to work with social and development issues. For example, my PhD had looked at approaches to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS on household food security. But my first exposure to programme evaluation came in 2009, when I assumed a position as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Global Health and Economic Development at the Earth Institute at Columbia University. I spent three years there as part of the M&E team on the Millennium Villages Project which sought to carve out approaches to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa at scale. Being part of this project, at a time when programme evaluation was rapidly expanding into an exciting new applied academic discipline, was a game changer for me. I never looked back, and I have been doing evaluation ever since.

How did you find out what you needed to become an evaluator?

I was lucky to be working at Columbia University with people at the cutting edge of key international debates in evaluation at the time. I also got the opportunity to do many field evaluations across the African continent. Later, as a Fellow at the Institute for Monitoring and Evaluation (IME) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), I was supervised by (now Emeritus) Professor Joha Louw-Potgieter, who was the director at the IME at the time. She had pioneered the formalisation of programme evaluation as a taught academic degree in South Africa in the late 2000s, and under her guidance, I got the opportunity to teach evaluation methods at the Masters level, supervise student dissertations in evaluation, and lead applied evaluation projects at the IME.

Can anyone become an evaluator?

Yes. The ability to make value judgements in a manner that is informed by evidence is something that I believe is inherent in most people, and this ability can also be developed through training and experience. At UCT, I now convene the MPhil in programme evaluation, and I am constantly amazed at the diversity of skills and personality types that it takes to create a complete and effective evaluation team.

What experience do you need to become an evaluator?

It really varies. In our academic Masters in Programme Evaluation at UCT, we naturally emphasise a solid research design and data analysis background, as well as critical and analytical thinking – but I have worked with amazing programme evaluators whose strengths are more on the management and organisational learning side. Ultimately, complex evaluations usually require a team of people with diverse experience.

What are some of the hurdles you face as an evaluator, and how do you overcome them?

Evaluation can be tough because the need for rigour is constantly traded off with pragmatic constraints. As a trained researcher, I understand how to conceptualise and execute the most credible and rigorous approach possible, however, in evaluation, we are often required to make alternate choices that suit the needs of the client, or even the programme beneficiaries. Constantly adapting my research training to these practical constrains is the most exciting – but also often the most challenging – part of evaluation.

What advice do you have for others wanting to venture into the evaluations field?

I would strongly recommend further study in evaluation – from a short-course, to a postgraduate diploma, or even a Masters in Programme Evaluation. The evaluative process is to a certain extent intuitive, and many people can successfully adapt their general professional training to an evaluation career. That said, there are a number of fundamental principles that will not necessarily come through experience and personal initiative alone. At some point, your ability to absorb skills and capabilities will saturate and this will limit your capacity to excel in the field professionally.

What resources does an emerging evaluator need to get their foot in the door?

If you have no formal training and experience in evaluation, at least doing an online short-course, such as CLEAR-AA's free online course, is an absolute must. Make yourself conversant with the key terminology and the basic evaluation process. Thereafter, keep your interest and excitement in the field at the forefront, and the work will follow!

Toolkits

Painting a picture with data viz

SOURCE:
SAMEA webinar: "Visualising evaluation data: Practical tips for creating engaging data visualisations", Marinda Kotzé, 2019
Presentation: https://www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learnevaluation-data-visualization-using-advanced-excel
Recording: https://zoom.us/recording/play/li4n8F394WBYFGNhLLvSWRbYEr4AANaQVO6CWiwJoVOiO12fCCK7t5kGDhcOIZUN?continueMode=true

As evaluators, we often need to find creative and engaging ways to communicate our evidence. Drawing on Marinda Kotze's recent webinar, we've compiled some practical and easy tips on how to use data visualisation and presentation to tell your story in a single snapshot.

Typically, as Marinda points out, we use data to tell one of four stories: how far the organisation has gone in achieving its targets; how a situation has changed over time; how different groups fare in comparison to each other; and where groups, incidents, or concepts are located, either geographically or conceptually. Marinda's guidelines not only tell us which tools are best suited to tell each story, but also how with simple adjustments to well-known charts, you can communicate your message even better.

Before we outline the different types of tools and charts, it is important to note that most of Marinda's charts presented in her webinar were created using Excel 2016, a platform she highly recommends, along with PowerPoint, as powerful tools for data visualisation.

DATA VISUALISATION IN EXCEL

TIP 1

Tracking performance and progress

- Clustered column charts show progress in achieving performance indicator targets.
- An overlapping bar chart displays visuals of targets vs. achieved figures. The bar could feature just one bar to emphasise one indicator, or include multiple bars to visualise and allow for easy comparisons of different indicators, or even the same indicator across multiple time periods.
- A stacked column or pie chart provides a simple illustration of progress made.
- Combination charts highlight performance in relation to a target or a predetermined benchmark.
- Gauge charts also indicate progress to targets. They can be created to visualise a single value, or include multiple ranges to convey more information about what the value means in the context of the project.
- Data bars and deviation bars illustrate the difference between achieved vs. target indicators.
- Gannt charts (designed from scratch or using Excel) demonstrate progress in terms of achieving a project deadline or other time sensitive project activities.

TIP 2

Comparing different groups and data collection periods

- Multiple small charts, clustered bar charts and side-by-side bar charts can be used to present more complicated categories side-by-side.
- Dumbbell dot plots replace bar charts with circles aligned to easily spot and interpret differences.

If an evaluation has more groups and categories, for example, gender, age across groups, rural and urban, a chart can look too busy. If this is the case, try the following:

- 100% stacked bar chart.
- Separate tree maps for each group that are presented side-by-side for easy comparison.

Another instance where you may want to visualise comparisons is when you have data from two assessment dates, such as pre- and post-tests. Line charts are ideal for this purpose. Moreover, you can use background shading in your line chart to visualise the data against a benchmark, for example, to highlight which scores are abnormally high or low.

Likert scales:

- Bar charts typically work the best when visualising Likert-type scales.
- If you want to highlight only one response category, you can use pie, circle, or donut charts, as well as waffle and picture charts.
- Stacked and diverging stacked bar charts can be used to present several questions in one chart.

TIP 3

Visualising change over time

- Typically, we use line charts to indicate patterns and trends over time.
- If you do not have data for each time point in your chart, you could consider using a bar or column chart.
- 100% stacked bar or area charts are useful if one sub-category is particularly small, compared to the other sub-categories in your data, and you would like to emphasise that.
- Slope graphs can be especially useful when visualising different data collection points over time, such as baseline, midpoint, and endline assessment results.
- Excel's sparklines feature allows you to create a line or column chart directly alongside your data.
- A timeline is an often used and easy to understand way to visualise data over time. Timelines can be especially useful if they not only include the basic data, but also some additional text boxes with contextual information.

TIP 4

Mapping data

- A popular way to illustrate data on a map is with choropleth maps, whereby data is displayed through various shades of colour on a map. Typically, the shades are arranged in ascending order, that is, the lower values are represented with lighter shades, while the higher values are represented with darker shades. Excel 365 and Excel 2019 have built-in choropleth features, but if you have an older version of Excel, you can use dmap.com to download empty maps and then use a programme like Adobe Illustrator, Inkscape, or Paint to edit the map.
- Bubble maps display data as circles of varying sizes on a map. The higher the value, the larger the circle will be.
- Heat maps use a colour-coding system to represent different data points as different colours, either on a map or in a table. Conditional formatting in Excel can be used to create heatmaps in a spreadsheet.
- Pushpin maps identify geographical locations that are of interest by plotting simple dots (or symbols) on a map. You cannot create pushpin maps directly in Excel, but you can create them quite easily in other programmes, for instance, Tableau or even Google Maps.
- Social network maps show the relationships among different entities, such as people, groups, concepts, and keywords. A software tool that is often used for social network analysis and visualisation is Gephi, however, the Excel add-in, NodeXL, can also be used to create social network maps.

Tips for data visualisation in PowerPoint

- Animation can be a powerful tool to tell your data story in a compelling manner. However, it is important to use animation in a tactful and strategic way.

- Do not over-use animations and refrain from using animation styles and slide transitions that are too lively and over-the-top. Instead, use subtle animations and slide transitions.

- If you need to present a complex data visualisation, do not present the entire visualisation at once. Rather present segments of the visualisation sequentially with the use of animation. This gives you the opportunity to explain each segment to your audience, thus allowing them to understand the visualisation better.

- Smart Art can help you use less text and bullet points and will make your slides look more visually appealing.
- PowerPoint has a variety of data visualisation templates, including timelines, charts, and diagrams, as well as infographics and icons
- Use icons for further visual impact. If you don't have Excel 365 (which has a built-in icons feature), you can use Excel's Symbols feature, or an online platform, such as Flaticon or IconFinder, to download icons for free.

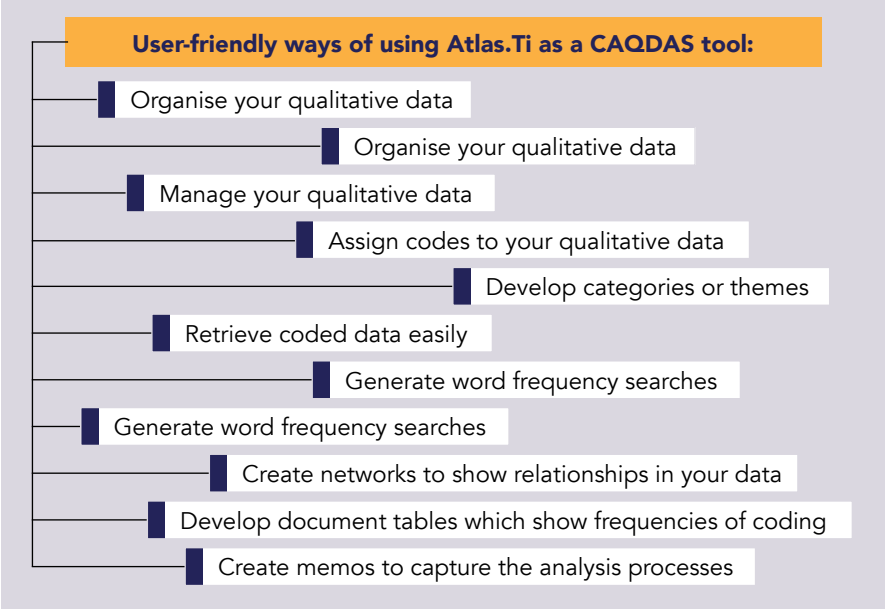
  There are many helpful weblinks to tutorials in Marinda's presentation – we encourage you to go through the presentation online and learn more.

Using ATLAS.ti to support evaluation processes

SOURCE:
SAMEA webinar: "Using ATLAS.ti to support evaluation processes", Lauren Wildschut, 2018
Presentation: https://www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learnevaluation-data-visualization-using-advanced-excel
Recording: https://www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=learn-using-atlasti-for-monitoring-and-evaluation-process-es-an-overview0

The role of technology in performing evaluations is becoming increasingly prevalent, with a number of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) tools entering the market. CAQDAS encompasses a wide range of software that support analytic styles in qualitative work, including NVivo, MAXQDA, ATLAS.ti, QDA Miner, Dedoose, HyperRESEARCH, and Transana.

Atlas.TI, in particular, is a popular tool for evaluators. In 2018, Lauren Wildschut presented a webinar on CAQDAS and Atlat. Ti taking the audience through exactly how evaluators can use these, as well as a list of CAQDAS-related resources.



Atlas.Ti allows evaluators to describe programmes, gather credible evidence, justify conclusions and share lessons learnt. If you want to continue using software to help you in your evaluations, you can:

- Explore the various CAQDAS options
- Sign up for relevant SAMEA workshops
- Sign up for training near you or check in with the African Institute for ATLAS.ti
- Watch online webinars and YouTube videos
- Download manuals and the demo version from www.atlasti.com
- Use your new tool and skills – you'll see how your work will benefit

Useful CAQDAS resources

Open source platforms for CAQDAS:
- EZ TEXT: http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/SOFTWARE/ez text.htm
- AnSWR: http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/SOFTWARE/answr.htm

Alternative CAQDAS resources:

- http://www.researchware.com/HyperRESEARCH
- http://www.maxqda.de/ de/
- http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx NVivo

Online QDA courses

- http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/
- http://hsc.uwe.ac.uk/dataanalysis/index.asp

General CAQDAS support

- http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/
- http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Introduction/index.php
- http://www.socresonline.org.uk/1/4/CAQDAS.html

Useful overview of qualitative research in general with some useful critique of coding

- http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/~t-oka/papers/2000/qrsw/qrsw.html
- QualPage-resources for qualitative researchers: http://www.qualitativeresearch.uga.edu/QualPage/

Manuals

- http://www.worldbank.org/oed/ipdet/modules.html
- http://www.quarc.de/qualitative-analysis-with-atlasti

Using social network analysis in evaluations

SOURCE:
SAMEA webinar: "Social network analysis", Jerusha Govender, 2018
Presentation: https://www.samea.org.za/resource?slug=read-sna

Social network analysis (SNA) is a method and set of metrics to measure, visualise, and draw inferences on the characteristics of a group or a group of individuals. [11]According to Hoppe and Reinelt, "SNA is used to increase the awareness of leaders about the power of networks, to further catalyse relationships and connections, and to strengthen the capacity of the network to act collectively." [12]The technique identifies individuals in a network, the kinds of information sharing or interactions across network and information to design interaction and connections. To find out more, we tuned into Jerusha Govender's webinar, where she talks us through SNA as a key evaluative process, how it is used, and how you can get started using it.

SNA key metrics to understand networks

In a social network map, there are connections between individuals or organisations: a dot is a 'node' and a connection is an 'edge'. If there is no connection, this is referred to as an 'isolate'.

What kind of measures are used to define a network?

- ***Density*** is a measure of overall connectedness (measured from 0-1). Perfect connectedness is 1 – this is the highest level of density
- ***Modularity*** is how much a group is broken up into subgroups (within a larger network)
- ***Components*** define how many separate unconnected groups there are
- ***Betweenness centrality*** is how often one individual is likely to be a relay point (receiving/giving information/business connections)
- ***Hubs and authorities*** are a measure of the out or in degrees of the direction of the question (request info/go to for information/receiving information). Some nodes have directionality in both ways or one (receiver, giver, or both)
- ***Attributes*** are an overlay on metrics based on the character of the node - are there specific differentiations?

How is SNA used in evaluation?
SNA is used to understand the nature of 'networks' and the changes in network formations.

How do I get started with SNA?
A good SNA tool is Gephi, which is visualisation and exploration software for graphs and social network analysis.

STEP 1
Define your SNA questions to inform how you will use SNA (specifically look at networks – your question must relate to networks).

STEP 2
Define your survey questions in line with broader questions. Design two to four, but not more than six questions related to the connection you want (info, advice, collaboration). You don't want a connection that is too broad – be specific about the questions you are asking.

STEP 3
Design the survey using SurveyMonkey or Google Forms. List every possible connection.

STEP 4
Configure your dataset to suit your software (use an Excel-based export into Gephi).

STEP 5
Import the data and run the analysis, looking at the specific statistical metrics you want.

STEP 6
Explore the data insights and compare analysis by attributes – play with data based on what comes out, for example, ways and formats of visualising data in Gephi.

[11]*Models for Social Networks with Statistical Applications Book by A.R. Rao, Bikas Kumar Sinha, and Suraj Bandyopadhyay. https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/35208_Chapter1.pdf.*
[12]*Hoppe, B, Reinelt, C. (2010). Social network analysis and the evaluation of leadership networks. The Leadership Quarterly, Vol. 21.*

About SAMEA

SAMEA strives to cultivate a vibrant community to support, guide, and strengthen the development of M&E as an important discipline, profession, and instrument for empowerment and accountability in South Africa. As a network, SAMEA provides opportunities for members to meet, discuss, share ideas, and access the expertise of its members. In this way, the organisation aims to grow the body of knowledge, provide rich discussions, strengthen the community, and contribute to the global dialogue on M&E. SAMEA provides a number of platforms through which members can connect and engage, including discussion groups and meetings, a listserv, topical interest groups, and Eval Cafés and community of practice events. SAMEA also assists members find mentors, mentees, and evaluators.

Join the SAMEATalk listserv

The SAMEATalk listserv is a forum which provides all SAMEA members and other individuals interested in the M&E environment in South Africa with:

- Information about SAMEA news, events, and activities.
- Opportunities to communicate with colleagues, share interesting information, advertise employment opportunities, and promote training courses and other activities of interest to the evaluation community in South Africa.

To join the SAMEATalk listserv at Yahoo! Groups, send a blank email to **sameatalk-subscribe@yahoogroups.com** and follow the instructions.

If you already have a Yahoo! ID, or you want to create one, you can also go online and join directly.

Please note, the list is moderated and messages are approved for distribution to prevent inappropriate mailing and to protect members' privacy.

BENEFITS TO MEMBERS

Build your network capital

Access live, virtual discussions, debates and presentations

Promote your services, share your experiences, and seek advice

Access reserved resources, job opportunity postings, and discussion groups

Save costs on event participation

Participate in selection of the board of directors for the association

Stand a chance to win exclusive scholarships/awards

BECOME A MEMBER

Visit www.samea.org.za

Click on the "Membership" > "Become a member"

Click on Become a Member

Click on 'JOIN' to start the registration process

Follow the simple steps to complete registrations

Upon completion, you will receive an invoice for payment

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

planning, monitoring and evaluation
Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

WFP
World Food Programme

University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

SOUTHERN AFRICA TRUST
INFLUENCING POLICIES TO END POVERTY

clear
Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results
ANGLOPHONE AFRICA

civilian secretariat for police
Department:
Civilian Secretariat for Police
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

GAUTENG
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

WDB | TRUST

pact
building local promise.

social development
Department:
Social Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

tourism
Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NLC
NATIONAL LOTTERIES COMMISSION
LOTTO FUNDED

GAUTENG
LEGISLATURE
Your View ~ Our Vision

cooperative governance & traditional affairs
Department:
Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

higher education & training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

COLLABORATORS

IDAM
Institute for Development Assistance Management

HSRC
Human Sciences Research Council

University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

ZENEX FOUNDATION

accenture

BRIDGE
LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

planning, monitoring and evaluation
Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

clear
Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results
ANGLOPHONE AFRICA

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
PSC
Custodian of Good Governance

COMPENDIUM SPONSORS

CIVICUS

DATA INNOVATOR
strategic information management, analysis & communication

SAMEA
South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association

South African
Monitoring
and Evaluation
Association

KNOWLEDGE COMPENDIUM 2019