

SAMEA capacity-building workshops: Top 3 lessons from an emerging evaluator

The saying that *'it takes a village to raise a child'* is what comes to mind when I think about my experience attending the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) Capacity-building Workshops, having received a scholarship as an emerging evaluator.

As a current student in M&E and intern, my recent experience of M&E in theory and practice has been comprehensive and, at certain points, overwhelming. And as I progress in my studies and career, with more exposure to the practice of evaluation and the evaluation community, I develop a more realistic sense of what it means to be a competent evaluator. It's tough work! You have to be a jack-of-all-trades: a negotiator, a strategist, a statistician, an analyst, a writer, a designer and a team player. And to be frank, in retrospect, if I had known all of this I might have not started what feels like an expedition up Everest.

What's becoming more apparent to me is that as evaluators, we cannot work in silos – and this is even truer for emerging evaluators. Attending workshops with veteran evaluators, programme managers and commissioners of evaluations is hugely insightful. These are **top 3 lessons I learnt:**

1. Take nothing for granted

Evaluation theory can be intimidating to those that are not familiar with the technical terms and concepts within evaluation – even if they have been implementing programmes and conducting evaluations. It's always important to take the time to establish clarity before beginning the work of evaluation.

2. EQ is critical

Because evaluation requires collaboration, the ability to understand and effectively communicate with people is critical. In one of my workshops I worked in a group with a very experienced but combative evaluator. Whilst my initial response would be to respond in a passive aggressive manner, I decided to express the need for patience. I ended up developing a good rapport with the evaluator who shared a lot of insights.

3. Engagement in a professional association is key to professional development

I now have a better understanding of where the challenges and opportunities lie in evaluation, as well as what I can do to contribute to strengthening the practice, particularly as an emerging evaluator. Actively finding mentors and a network of peers has helped me manage challenges and take a shot at opportunities that I once felt were out of my grasp.

It takes a community to develop an evaluator and being an active member of SAMEA has provided an avenue to participate in important conversations and develop some key skills as an emerging evaluator – even if I'm just climbing to base camp.