Evaluation and Data in a Learning Organization: One Philanthropic Organization’s Experience

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Sousan Arafeh, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Southern Connecticut State University
External Evaluator/Collaborator, William C. Graustein Memorial Fund

Paula Quenoy, M.S.
Doctoral Student, Southern Connecticut State University
KD Research Fellow, William C. Graustein Memorial Fund

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Today

• Brief review of the Context of the Targeted Assessment
  • Graustein Memorial Fund Contributions and The Research Context

• *Phase 1*: Shifting from *evaluation* to an *assessment and learning agenda*
  • Best & desired practice in measurement of philanthropic impact
  • Began process last year: design and initial data identification and collection

• *Phase 2*: Organizational learning and change as the process progresses
  • data identification, collection, cleaning, entry, use and sustinance
  • Organizational & network capacity for doing, understanding and using data

• Tensions, challenges, and aha’s

• Questions and collegial puzzlement
The William C. Graustein Memorial Fund

• A family philanthropy started in 1946
  • Mission: To improve the effectiveness of education in fostering both personal development and leadership. Connecticut’s children ages 0-8 are the focus of the Graustein Memorial Fund’s grantmaking.
  • Core Values: Leadership, collaboration, parent involvement
  • Strategies:
    • Financial investments
    • Capacity building
    • Convening
    • Advocacy
    • Policy change
    • Education
    • Research
    • Evaluation/assessment
    • Innovation & demonstration
    • Data systems

• Discovery Initiative/Network.....
Discovery Initiative/Network

- Investment in long term major initiative
  - Eleventh year of 14 year initiative
  - 52 community collaboratives
  - Four core statewide advocacy groups & other statewide partners
  - Connecticut Center for School Change (CCSC)
    - Early literacy
    - School-based administrative capacity building
  - Topic-based community demonstrations/convenings
  - State match: parent leadership/community planning
  - Research partnerships with CT colleges/universities
Targeted Assessment of Foundation Contribution

• Assessing the Graustein Memorial Fund’s strategic contribution to early childhood education and community change in CT
  • guided, and measured by, its mission, results statement & strategic plan
• Key Questions:
  • How do we build organizational and network capacity?
  • How can our organization(s) and network(s) learn?
  • How can we use data to develop knowledge and inform learning?
  • How does our approach to assessment/evaluation change?
Research Context

- **Paradigm**: interpretive—reflective
- **Stance**: collaborative action research (inside/outside)
- **Methodology**: mixed methods, descriptive/inferential, grounded theory, dialectic, etc.
- **Tools**: survey, observation, focus groups, interviews, document analysis
- **Units of study**: Memorial Fund & Discovery
- **Phenomenon of Study**: Memorial Fund's strategic contribution
  - guided, and measured by, its mission & results statements & strategic plan
Phase I and II of Targeted Assessment

• **Phase I:** the process of the shift from “evaluation” toward “assessment for learning”
  - Changes in one foundation’s approach to evaluation
  - First steps of a collaborative design process
  - Locating what data exist/might be useful & beginning collection

• **Phase II:** the ongoing developmental process underpinning the shift from evaluation to assessment
  - Refining assessment design and data collection
  - Beginning to interpret and use the data
  - Questions from staff re what having data to use means
  - Impact on organizational sense of self, process, and practice
Representing Our Process: One Approach

- Research We’ve Done
- Data/Analysis We Have
- What We Know
- What We Want to Know
- What Data/Analysis We Need
- What Data/Analysis We Want
- Research To Do

- Networks
- Commitments
- The Work

- Feed knowledge back to the organization & stakeholders
- Research-based best practices and trends
- What we know from the literature
- What we know from Memorial Fund documents
- What has been asked?
- What are the themes?

- Data analysis tools & resources (technical/human)
- Analysis Pkgs, Human Power, Integrated & Interactive Storage
- What Data/Analysis We Need
- Data "Asks" to learn about specific issues
- Data Asks Identified & Prioritized

- Question Crosswalk
- Focus groups/Interviews
- Big Questions?
Representing Our Process: Another Approach

- **Actionable Measurement and Learning Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAD/PLAN</th>
<th>ORGANIZE</th>
<th>SHARE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Approaches</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inputs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments and Clarified Commitments (e.g. vision, mission, goals, objectives, theory of change, results statement), Actors, Structures, Resources, Mechanisms, Materials</td>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify indicators of progress. Measure progress, test assumptions, Identify what works, how, and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify indicators of progress. Measure progress of implementation.</td>
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<td>Grants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Adapted from Gates Actionable Measurement Matrix., 2010 & GEO 2012.

- Superimposes organizational learning on actionable measurement.
  - Points to change in foundational commitments and approaches, processes, and actors. The actual micro-processes of organizational learning and change are not evident.
Result: Reflection, Reconsideration & New Design

**Targeted Assessment of Contribution** approach

- Evaluation continuing throughout the Memorial Fund re identifying and reporting outcomes, outputs, and impacts BUT....
- New Organizational Assessment Design: holistic assessment for knowledge development and individual, organizational, and systemic learning
- Based on new/best/desired practices in the fields of evaluation and evaluation of philanthropy
  - co-construction of knowledge re assessment design & data
  - collaborative learning focus; evaluation & assessment are components
  - data collection grounded in practice & aligned with broader phenomenon questions across the organization
  - ***** Intended to feed back into the organization and networks for learning to change practice (theoretical & methodological change)
Data Collection & Analysis Activities

• Extensive review of Memorial Fund guiding documents and internal and external evaluation reports and materials
  • Result: call for increased clarity re the communication about the organization and its commitments

• Crosswalk database of evaluation questions
  • Result: better sense of historic data strengths and weaknesses & data input of key non-digital data

• Qualitative interviews & meetings with Memorial Fund staff, leadership & trustees
  • Result: Data needs, data asks, and discussion and training re data and its uses
Data Collection & Analysis Activities

- Creation of data “snapshots” of external community data
  - Used public data and data points used by communities themselves to explore patterns and changes
  - Result: TBD

- Analysis of Community Self Assessments
  - Exploratory analysis of self-report data to identify themes or patterns
  - Result: Positive trend on all measures

- Input and Analysis of Non-Digitized Data
  - Membership in collaboratives, participation, grantee financial data
  - Result: Growth and change in collaboratives’ makeup, racial makeup matches the communities

- Capacity Building Program Data
  - Preliminary collection and analysis of observation, registration & evaluation Data
  - Result: Have initial data that need more analysis
Good Data = Increased Learning

- Having clean, usable data allows for:
  - Cross-organizational awareness of data collected and possible uses
  - Expanded organizational capacity to explore, ask and answer questions, and make meaning
  - Systematized and coordinated data collection, analysis, and use across program areas, the organization, and the network
  - Capacity to change organizational commitments, structures, and practices
Change In Understanding and Practice

• “Assessment for knowledge development and organizational/network learning” changes:
  • research questions (e.g., what can we/should we learn?)
  • data types and indicators (e.g., grounded in program interests and including outcome, process, and learning data)
  • tools and how we use them (e.g., network analysis, data mining, ETL)
  • procedures and practices (e.g., more internal responsibility for data identification, collection, analysis, and reporting and, particularly, use of data for organizational and network learning)
  • roles and responsibilities (e.g., notions of who guides, controls and collaborates on the process(es) and levels of transparency of organizational thinking and action)
Process Tensions, Challenges, Aha’s

• A complex, striving-to-be-comprehensive strategy that is always changing
  • Everyone understands evaluation/assessment and data differently
  • Data are better when coordinated; there are cross-organizational and cross-network data needs and uses
  • Data management and analysis resources are important, hard to come by, hard to conceptualize, and hard to manage
  • Working from the data – grounded theory approach – can help organization see blind spots and areas of need
  • Typical working structures and relationships can be reconceptualized: what is the process for making this explicit and for decision-making around it
  • Methodologically and conceptually: how does this connect with and/or advance the field?
Questions and Collegial Puzzlement

- Reactions? Struck, troubled, confused, excited?
- Contribution? How does our presentation re-assessment approach and experience inform the field of evaluation?
- Suggestions? How would you guide us as we continue this work and strive to expand it to our broader network of stakeholders?
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Sousan Arafeh, Ph.D.
arafehs1@southernct.edu
203-392-6443

Paula Quenoy, M.S.
quenoyp1@owls.southernct.edu
203-514-0891

http://www.wcgmf.org

Thank You!