Ethical Issues in Evaluation

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Sources of ethical dilemmas

- Those that arise in doing an evaluation
- Those that are created by the evaluator
- Those that are inherent in the context
Ethical dilemmas, reporting findings

- Evaluation findings or reports are laundered to omit negative findings
- Evaluation findings exaggerate successes and positive findings
- Evaluation findings are suppressed altogether
- Evaluation findings are released belated so they are no longer relevant
- Evaluation findings are prematurely released or leaked to the public
- Complex findings are turned into sound bytes
Ethical dilemmas, planning evaluation

- Evaluation questions become so diffuse, or so complex, or so multiple that the evaluation is not doable.
- The evaluation is under-funded.
- Some stakeholder perspectives are excluded.
Ethical dilemmas, doing evaluation

- the evaluation is dumbed down by an advocacy of weak measures or low standards
- information is withheld, distorted, or hidden
- evaluation information is used as ammunition by one stakeholder against other stakeholders
- promises of confidentiality to stakeholders are breached
- the evaluand itself entails inherent ethical dilemmas because of its explicitly moral content
Ethical dilemmas introduced by the evaluator

- Personal or financial interest in the evaluand
- Lack of knowledge or skill in technique or method
- Lack of cultural sensitivity
- Lack of respect for local cultures and values
- Ideological positions that predetermine the evaluation outcome
- Propensity to deliver positive evaluations to increase job security
- Making promises evaluators cannot deliver on
- Making decisions without consultation with appropriate stakeholders
Ethical dilemmas in the context

- illegal activities
- malfeasance
- immoral behavior
Program Evaluation Standards

‘Propriety’

- P1 Service Orientation
- P2 Formal Agreements
- P3 Rights of Human Subjects
- P4 Human Interactions
- P5 Complete and Fair Assessment
- P6 Disclosure of Findings
- P7 Conflict of Interest
- P8 Fiscal Responsibility
AEA Guiding Principles

- Systematic inquiry
- Competence
- Integrity/Honesty
- Respect for people
- Responsibilities for general and public welfare
Canadian Evaluation Society
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct

- Competence
- Integrity
- Accountability
Ethical codes represent a common professional vocabulary but…

- Ethical decisions are not simple applications of a rule
- Ethical decisions mostly involve conflicts between right and right
- Ethical decisions are contextual, particular
Ethics of Virtue

- Intuitions and character of evaluator is key
- Practical wisdom or phronesis
- Desirable end goal ~ responsibility for the general and public welfare
Evaluators’ Virtues

Bayle’s professional virtues
- Honesty
- Candor
- Competence
- Diligence
- Loyalty
- Discretion

Simon’s evaluator virtues
- Honesty
- Sincerity
- Kindness
- Respect for people
- Being honourable
“Will the outcome of my decision result in my no longer doing evaluation?”

We have strong views of ourselves as evaluators. We work to find and understand quality, quality of the institution, quality of individual performances. We offer little assistance in remediation. We do not think of ourselves as collaborators in redevelopment. Directly and indirectly, we promise to help the [program] staff understand the quality of its operations. We provide details of merits and shortcomings. We interpret and discuss the issues.

Stake & Mabry
Fostering virtue in evaluators and evaluation

- Sharing cases of typical ethical dilemmas and their resolution
- Procedural routine evaluators can use in their practice to resolve ethical dilemma
- Determine who is involved.
- Gather relevant information.
- Involve others in deliberation.
- Test for right-versus-wrong issues.
- Test for right-versus-right issues.
- Invoke tests of a decision about a resolution or action.
- Revisit and reflect on the decision.
Ethics in evaluation practice

Ethics of evaluation practice

How evaluation is done

What gets evaluated