Research, facilitate, evaluate – the roles of ongoing evaluation in triple helix projects

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Subtheme: S2.5 Triple helix evaluation: indicator systems

Keywords: Evaluation research; ongoing evaluation; professional roles; project facilitation; societal learning

Abstract:
Ongoing evaluation is typed as a new generation of evaluation methodology, aiming at facilitation and learning during the process rather than at ex post control of projects and programmes. It is currently becoming an integral part of many large-scale Triple Helix projects. Ongoing evaluation is said to increase learning prospects and understanding, as well as project quality, by aiding the project management in achieving the goals of projects. In this paper we focus on two related challenges for ongoing evaluation: (1) the combination of incompatible goals inherent in the mission of ongoing evaluation; (2) dissemination of outcomes and knowledge gained through ongoing evaluation to the wider society. The purpose of this paper is therefore to identify and analyse the different roles of the ongoing evaluator with focus on implications for societal learning. We propose that the ongoing evaluator is expected to simultaneously engage in three roles – these of the evaluator, project facilitator and researcher. This can potentially lead to role conflicts as the three roles have different guiding principles. Four alternative solutions are suggested in the paper for this problem of conflicting roles, e.g. performing ongoing evaluation in teams where each member takes on a specific role. We also propose that in order to increase the prospects for societal learning from ongoing evaluation there is a need for: (i) clear principles on the usage of data collected by the ongoing evaluators; (ii) additional resources dedicated towards reaching out with results, for example through conference presentations and research publications; (iii) continued support for and development of the interfaces between the public sector, private companies and academia as these constitute important channels for diffusion of results from ongoing evaluation.

Introduction

Ongoing evaluation is becoming an integral part of many large-scale Triple Helix projects. For example, large projects which are financed by EU's structural funds are required to include an ongoing evaluator, financed by the project itself. The ongoing evaluator, who is supposed to closely monitor the project, is often either a consultant or an academic researcher. One of the merits of ongoing evaluation is that the ongoing evaluator gains greater insight in the project through a continuous evaluation process and can for example give an early warning if the project runs the risk of not reaching its goals. However, as will be discussed in this paper, the ongoing evaluator is often expected to combine incompatible aims, inherent in the mission itself.

According to Vedung (2010) evaluation has developed in four waves, i.e. the scientific wave, the dialogue-oriented wave, the neo-liberal wave and the evidence wave, and "all four have deposited layer upon layer of sediments that have remained even when the next waves have rolled in" (Vedung 2010, p. 275). The philosophy underlying the practice and research of evaluation has likewise developed in pair with the scientific and governmental trends (Vedung 2010). The outset of New Public Management and associated trends have changed the nature of evaluation. In the previous, more rule-driven bureaucracy, consequence analyses of decisions were made early on in the policy process and were typically followed by internal revision or monitoring. Implementation of decisions was seen as a technicality. With increasing goal orientation, the implementation of political decisions has become delegated, and evaluation has gained importance as an important tool to critically and systematically assess the actual consequences of policy decisions and also, the extent to which the goals are being met in the first place (Karlsson, 1999; Norrman and Bager-Sjögren 2010).

Over time, evaluation has become a research field in its own right and also a lucrative business for consultants as well as for academics, as external funding has become more important during recent years. Within the realm of evaluation we may today find an array of different schools, with little more than the denomination in common. Therefore, under the umbrella of evaluation, evaluations are conducted by both researchers and practitioners with different degrees of ambitions and for different objectives. Although evaluations do contain an element of control for the most part, they often also have a promoting, developmental objective, aiming at helping the organisation to further its activities, along with a critical stance which in itself also furthers development (Karlsson 1999). In addition, the evaluation also serves the purpose of contributing with knowledge about the project and investigated phenomenon as well as methodological issues.

Ongoing evaluation is typed as a "new generation" of evaluation methodology, aiming at facilitation and learning during the process rather than at ex post control of programmes (Brulin and Jansson, 2009; Svensson and Sjöberg, 2009)

The EU has been one of the driving forces in the development of ongoing evaluation. In Sweden several public agencies financing various types of projects have demanded that large scale projects dedicate a part of the budget to ongoing evaluation. However, the concept is only defined in general terms by the financiers, as shown by the following quotations.

> "Regulation [1083/2006] provides for a shift from a concept of mid-term evaluation driven by regulatory imperatives towards a more flexible, demand-driven approach to evaluation during the programming period: on-going evaluation."(European Commission, 2006, p. 4)

> "On-going evaluation is a process taking the form of a series of evaluation exercises. Its main purpose is to follow on a continuous basis the implementation and delivery of an operational programme and changes in its external environment, in order to better understand and analyse outputs and results achieved and progress towards longer-term impacts, as well as to recommend, if necessary, remedial actions." (European Union, 2008, p. 14)

Furthermore, the term "ongoing evaluation" itself can be considered ambiguous which adds to the possible interpretations of the concept. There is a de facto substantial variation in the implementation of the activity of ongoing evaluation in projects which in part may be explained by the recent emergence of the concept, but also by the discrepancy in actors' understanding of it and the ongoing evaluators' varying professional backgrounds encompassing both research and consulting.

Ongoing evaluation is said to increase learning prospects and understanding, as well as project quality, by aiding the project management in achieving the goals of the project. Although evaluation for long has been a moon-lighting activity of researchers, the shifted focus has made ongoing evaluation a potentially more integrated part

of research since it provides access to rich sources of data. This means that there is more scope for knowledge development at several different levels, i.e. going from single and double loop learning to societal learning.

The concept of single- and double loop learning models of Argyris (1976), argues that single loop learning implies improvement of how to execute a given task, while double loop learning entails reflection and the possibility to alter roles and strategies (Faugert et al, 2005). The ongoing evaluator typically contributes to first loop learning, for example by pointing out possible faulty logic within the project or programme. Contributing to second loop learning is more difficult since it entails applying lessons learned in one situation to be applied in another. However, to reach societal learning, first and second loop learning is not enough. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) an intermediary is required to externalize and diffuse learning to a larger audience. This intermediary, as suggested by Storey (2000, 2003), could be the researcher involved in ongoing evaluation, since researchers, through the publication of their results and participation in debates, add to the accumulation of societal knowledge.

In this paper we focus on two related challenges for ongoing evaluation.

A first problem concerns the ambiguity of ongoing evaluation. Ongoing evaluation has big ambitions, but there are few pointers on how to accomplish and combine these ambitions. According to the guidelines of the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional growth (Brulin and Jansson, 2009), the ongoing evaluator is supposed to be actively engaged instead of distanced, and his or hers findings are to be immediately returned to the project management in order to monitor the programme towards achieving its goals. These principles are in conflict both with the classic standards of the evaluator who is supposed to take a critical stance towards the project (Eriksson 2009) as well as with the traditional principles of the researcher, e.g. objectivity and systematic rigor (Patton 2002).

The second problem concerns the dissemination of outcomes and knowledge gained through ongoing evaluation. An important objective of ongoing evaluation is that the lessons learned in projects should also be diffused to the society (Brulin and Jansson 2009). As this requires generalisation and reformulation of results it presents a challenge for the ongoing evaluator, both in terms of resources such as time or access to channels for dissemination and in terms of possibilities for sharing data and results obtained during ongoing evaluation.

Ongoing evaluation is considered as being better suited to tool to facilitate goal compliance within the realm of the project itself as well as support sustainable learning (cf. Svensson and Sjöberg, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is therefore to identify and analyse the different roles of the ongoing evaluator with focus on implications for societal learning.

Methodology

The paper is based upon the writers' experiences from ongoing evaluation. We have extensive experience from various types of evaluation projects, with varying financiers and thus also varying prerequisites and requirements. Additionally, we have equally extensive experience from traditional evaluation of Triple Helix projects.

We utilise our experience in a comparative analysis of the various positions an ongoing evaluator can assume and is expected to assume while being involved in a project. Specifically, we draw upon three projects, in which we currently work as ongoing evaluators. The projects are briefly presented and possible role conflicts in ongoing evaluation processes are highlighted by examples of situations that we have experienced during our work. Our analytical framework consists of a triangle of what we have defined as the three archetypical roles of an ongoing evaluator.

Findings

In the following we describe three typical Triple Helix projects where ongoing evaluation is used and give a brief account of the evaluation process in each case. We continue by presenting three archetypical roles that the ongoing evaluator is expected to fulfil simultaneously. As these roles are played out a wide variety of role conflicts can arise, some of these potential conflicts and dilemmas are explored further on in this section. Finally, conclusions are drawn and possible solutions for the conflicts inherent in the ongoing evaluation process are put forward.

Example projects where ongoing evaluation is used

Project A aims at promoting every-day innovation development in health care. The public innovation support system is used to increase the innovativeness of public health care sector employees so that their innovations may give rise to new jobs as well as improve their working environment. The ongoing evaluator has to greatest possible extent tried to work indirectly - using a coaching approach and asking questions rather than providing answers. Trust has been a prerequisite to gain empirical access to a research-wise interesting context. It has made it possible to ask sensitive questions and get honest answers. The ongoing evaluator has mainly contributed to the project through asking questions on view-points and taken-for-granted circumstances. The findings are transferred to the project through board meetings, dialogue with the project manager, official evaluation reports and through academic papers.

Project B aims to increase industrial relevance in the graduate education within life science technologies through integrating mobility and industrial experience into PhD studies, as well as offering PhD courses in entrepreneurship and intellectual property rights. The ongoing evaluation aims at documentation of expectations and experiences and subsequent diffusion of learning from the project. The ongoing evaluator here has more of a traditional researcher role and aims at working distanced from the project. The findings are transferred to the project through participation in board meetings and other project events, through academic publications as well as informal conversations with project members.

Project C is an initiative to promote growth and innovation in a regional innovation system in biomedical engineering. This project aims at facilitating development from idea to market. The ongoing evaluator in this project has an active role in close cooperation with project management. At the same time data is collected and presented in both part-time project reports and research publications. The researcher's findings are transferred to the project through board meetings, dialogue with the project manager, official evaluation reports and through academic papers.

Three roles of the ongoing evaluator

We propose that ongoing evaluation in its broadest sense demands that the performer of ongoing evaluation takes on three different archetypical roles simultaneously. We have chosen to label these archetypical roles the evaluator, the researcher, and the project facilitator. Each of these roles entails different loyalties, intrinsic goals and activities on the part of the ongoing evaluator. Figure 1 below illustrates the three roles involved in ongoing evaluation.

Figure 1. The archetypical roles of the ongoing evaluator

The role of the evaluator primarily directs the attention towards goal attainment of the project and learning within the project itself. The role of the evaluator can also encompass determining the effectiveness of policies or programs and improving them. A critical and scrutinising stance is characteristic of this role, which means

that there is an opportunity for identifying strengths and weaknesses and learning from them. However, the evaluator also runs the risk of identifying him- or herself too much with the project's mandator/financier, which means that he or she runs the risk of being viewed primarily an instrument for control. This may hamper the evaluation since the evaluator may be seen as a threat to the project and be excluded from certain information.

The role of the researcher entails characteristics given by the ideals of scientific method, i.e. objectivity, a distanced stance, careful documentation and sharing of all data, hypotheses testing, peer review and freedom of inquiry. The ultimate goal of the researcher is to understand and explain the observed processes thus contributing to scientific development. Activities such as publishing in peer reviewed journals, securing funding for further research and participating in scientific debates are important means towards that goal. Following from this, the archetypical researcher sees the project primarily as an object of study and an empirical base. Detachment from the project and the need for data sharing within the scientific community may marginalise the researcher during ongoing evaluation, hence making it difficult to influence the course of the project and gain access to sensible data. However, the researcher may also form strong bonds with project members in order to obtain as much data as possible, thus forsaking the distanced stance of a researcher.

The role of the project facilitator involves acting as a knowledge-broker within the project and his or her primary goal is to see to it that the project develops forward as smoothly as possible and quickly solve problems. The facilitator plays a more active role than researcher or evaluator, and can for example interfere or guide the project in new directions. Contributing to the project development in an active way can be positive but it also creates the risk of not being able to distance oneself from the project enough in order to evaluate it.

The archetypical roles can also be linked to the three main stakeholders in projects, each with their own agendas and expectations on the process of evaluation: the researcher's faculty expects the researcher to produce publications and attract more funding; the project manager expects facilitation of the project and tangible results; the financier expects unbiased evaluation, control and societal learning.

Our characterisation of the archetypical roles is summarised in Table 1 below.[1]

Table 1. Five aspects of the archetypical roles in ongoing evaluation.

	Evaluator	Researcher	Project facilitator
Focus of the mission	Control the project	Contribute to the academic knowledge base	Facilitate the project
Main goal	To understand the project	To produce publishable research	To move the project forward towards its goals
Loyalty	To the financier/project mandator	To the research question and academia	To the project or project leader
Influence on decisions	Gives advice and viewpoints, but is careful not to take part in formal decision-making	Feedback in the form of research results on a project as well as societal level	Forms strong bond with project management and influences decisions in the interest of the project
Access to data	Gains access to a wide array of information, some of which cannot be published	Formally collected data which can be published and shared: written documents, survey data and formal interviews	Has access to unsorted overwhelming amounts of data, including personal conflicts and gossip, most of which cannot be published

Positioning oneself between the archetypical roles in the triangle (see Figure 1) is context dependent and may vary over time as the project develops. Even though the roles might be more or less pronounced in different projects, there is an apparent risk for conflict between these three roles which needs to be solved, often on the level of the individual engaged in ongoing evaluation. Furthermore, the outcome in the form of societal learning is influenced by one's position in the triangle.

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[1] The descriptions apply to the stereotyped roles rather than to actual professions or persons.

Role conflicts

The ongoing evaluator seldom takes a one-sided position among the three archetypical roles, but rather combines the roles in various ways and hence slides within the triangle of ongoing evaluation during a project's duration. The three archetypical roles are difficult to combine even though planning and awareness of potential role conflicts might alleviate that (Nählinder 2009). Each position taken within the triangle has its merits and drawbacks, and presents different dilemmas for the ongoing evaluator. Below we describe some example of such challenges that may arise.

#0 Getting acceptance from the project management
When the project was initiated none of the people involved had heard the word "ongoing evaluator". From the beginning this was considered as a necessary evil which costs money and had been laid upon them by the financier/mandator. The fact that the evaluator was an entrepreneurship researcher was regarded as positive by some of the board members and more sceptically by others. I realized from the start that I had to approach the project with a large proportion of humbleness and awareness. I then tried to earn trust by ensuring them that I really wanted to make a contribution to the project. From the start a minority, although influential, of the board stressed that this ongoing evaluator should take a "fly on the wall role" but after half a year, I had gained their trust and acceptance.

#1 Revision triggers identification with the project
The half-way revision of the project organised by the financier represents a challenge for the ongoing evaluator that leans towards the role of the distanced researcher. The situation where the project members together with the researcher present the project for an external committee can push the researcher towards identifying with the project and acting as a spokesperson for it, thus mostly praising it. This strengthens the trust and social bond between the researcher and the project members, which can increase access to data and possibilities for internal discussions, but can hamper critical comments and viewpoints from reaching the financiers or the research community.

#2 Project mandator's revision
This project is funded by means from the EU structural fund, and since is budget is about 6.5 million EURO it has to undergo revision from the national agencies through which the money is handled. This revision consist of a 20 page detailed questionnaire and the questions are to be answered orally to the representatives from the agency. All answers are also noted down in the form. Furthermore, the accounting procedures and systems are checked. During the revision day the project was represented by the project leader, one member of the executive committee, the accounting manager of the project and the ongoing evaluator. In this case I, as the ongoing evaluator, was regarded as an allied both by the representatives of the project and by the representatives of the authority that undertook the revision. This is a typical case where the loyalties are double and where it is easy to feel that you are "stuck in the middle" in a palpable way.

#3The ongoing evaluator wants to make an academic contribution
Early on in the ongoing evaluation of the project, I was asked by the steering committee to make a qualitative investigation which was meant to function as an ex ante description of the innovative climate prior to the onset of the programme. I initially hesitated, since it did not fit my research agenda, but then agreed to do it. To my surprise, I came to understand during the interviews that my pre-understanding of innovative climate could be refined and have value as research. I wrote the report and presented it to the steering committee. However, when I then wanted to publish the report and present my findings at conferences, the project leader was reluctant, and asked me to ask permission from the stakeholders. Before this occurrence, I had not reflected upon my rights to publish my research and the potential conflicts with the members of the steering committee. Sitting in on meetings I had gained their trust but the borderline between what is publishable and not publishable is constantly renegotiated.

#4 The ongoing evaluator interferes with the project
When the project had passed the first year out of three, I as the ongoing evaluator suggested on a board meeting that it was time to stop for a moment and think about how the project currently was moving towards its goals. I suggested them to investigate what goals that had appeared to be easy to reach and what goals that required more resources than expected and finally what actions they needed to undertake to be able to fulfil their goals within the time frame given – I suggested them to arrange a strategy exercise. In my follow-up of the programme I had realised that the board members had a bit different views about how to interpret the goals, they also had different priorities of what goals that were the most crucial to reach. As the ongoing evaluator I wanted to be present at the strategy meeting and I wanted to ensure that they really engaged in discussing, declaring and making strategies to fulfil their goals; however I did not want to interfere in their decision-making. I had gained trust

from the board and they wanted me to take part of the planning of the event. Together we formulated an agenda and decided how they should work. I then prepared exercises and took the role of moderator during the event. After the event the general opinion was that it was successful. This year they have, without my involvement, decided to make a new strategy event and they have asked me to organise the event again.

#5 What would have happened otherwise
One challenge coupled to ongoing evaluation is the problem to isolate whether the effect of the programme evaluated is coupled to the programme and its management per se or to the input from the evaluator or other sources – this is since we cannot know what would have happened without the presence of an evaluator. For example in a situation where the ongoing evaluator directs the project management's attention to faulty project logic, i.e. that the steps taken are not sufficient to reach project goals, the ongoing evaluator has not devised a solution, but pointed towards an important problem, nevertheless influencing the project's course. What would have happened if the evaluator had not made such a comment? Would it then have been suggested by one of the members of the board instead? As the tape cannot be reversed, there is no way of surely knowing.

#6 Time to write the annual report from the ongoing evaluator
I had almost finished my work with my annual report of how "my project" had developed during its first year. I had collected lots of data. I realized that my findings, presented in the form of a written report sometimes seemed rather sharp and could be interpreted as a betrayal towards the project. None of my points or critiques was new – I had already made my points known as they showed up during the past year, and most of them had also been taken into account and treated. Additionally, all my findings were based on solid empirical evidence; I had conducted interviews with the board members, sent a questionnaire to all research groups that were financed through the project, read protocols and notes from board meetings. Nevertheless, when I saw all my bullet points on the paper which I aimed to send to the project mandator I realized that my loyalties indeed were double. Despite my doubts the board members as well as the mandatory approved of the report.

The above examples illustrate different types of conflicts between the three roles. They also show how the same conflict may be solved in different manners by different ongoing evaluators.

In the following we present a tentative analysis of the seven examples of role conflicts in order to clarify that tensions may arise between all three roles and that the combination of roles which the ongoing evaluator chooses is important in order to interpret the outcome. We have also placed the example role conflicts in the triangle of archetypical roles, see figure 2.
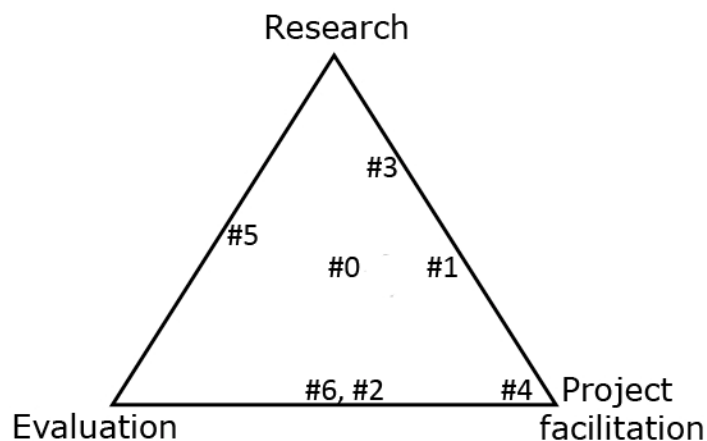

Figure 2. Positions of the role conflicts in the triangle of archetypical ongoing evaluator roles.

Example #0 shows that trust, which is coupled with loyalty, is important in all three archetypical roles, but for varying reasons. The researcher needs trust to gain access to (sensible) data, the evaluator needs trust to understand the project and the project facilitator needs trust to be able to impact the project.

Examples #1 and #2 relate to similar dilemmas, but the important difference between them is that the ongoing evaluators have taken different combinations of archetypical roles in what is basically the same situation. In example #1, the ongoing evaluator's foremost loyalty is towards research, which leads to the interests of the

financier coming in third. In #2, the ongoing evaluator is closer to the facilitator role, with the financier as second priority.

In example #3 the ongoing evaluator finds herself in a conflict between what is good for the project and what is good for research. The project management is threatened by the potential publication, whilst the ongoing evaluator experiences irritation since she cannot use the collected data for research.

Examples #4 and #5 are associated. In example #4 the ongoing evaluator and the project manager work towards the same goal. However, the ongoing evaluator has in this situation slid away from the role of the distanced researcher, possibly making it more difficult to generate scientific contributions. In #5, the conflict between evaluator and researcher is palpable. The evaluator has not suggested a solution to the problem (which is being done in #4) but merely pointed out the problem. However, the decisions made in the board based on the input of the evaluator have had an impact on the outcome of the project. When the ongoing evaluator is publishing results gained from the project, data is tainted by the differences made due to the intervention of the evaluator.

Example #6 is in principle the same as #1 and #2, but since it in this case is a question of a written document, which reaches the mandator, it brings matters to a head. The document may for example affect future allocation of funding to the project. There are also parallels to example #3. In both examples #6 and #3, the output from the ongoing evaluation is a written report, but in #3 the project management is threatened by the publication to research community rather than to the mandator.

As the examples presented here illustrate, the role conflicts are greater for an ongoing evaluator than for a traditional evaluator. An ongoing evaluator is supposed to come closer to the project than an evaluator, which subsequently gives rise to conflicts of loyalty. Furthermore, when the ongoing evaluator also is a researcher, specific types of role conflicts are triggered. Two of the most common conflicts concern the freedom of the researcher (what may be published, in what circumstances/to make which claims may the project use the researcher?) and the value of data collected. Since the researcher is required to be close to the project, and direct attention to the problems of project, the data will be tainted by a certain "researcher effect". In the next section we propose certain mechanisms that could be used to manage the role conflicts inherent in ongoing evaluation.

Conclusions and implications

The wide formulation of the mission of ongoing evaluation demands ongoing evaluators to slide between all three archetypical roles presented in this paper, namely evaluator, project facilitator and researcher. However, this cannot be achieved without trade-offs. The consequences of these trade-offs can be mitigated if the ongoing evaluator is aware that his or her mission is complex and the goals incompatible at times.

Although it is difficult to reach the full expectations of ongoing evaluation, we would like to propose that the following factors are vital in order to secure a successful outcome:
- In order to combine and slide between the archetypical roles, the qualities of the ongoing evaluator himself/herself are of utmost importance. The ongoing evaluator, in order to succeed with fulfilling the mission, has to have authority, integrity, previous relevant experiences (for example from committees or boards) and a relevant theoretical background.
- The ongoing evaluator has to earn trust, legitimacy and a position in the project.
- A clear picture of expectations from all parties involved in ongoing evaluation is important and should be agreed-upon in the earliest possible phase of projects. This should for example include principles on usage of data collected by the ongoing evaluator.

The multiple loyalties implicit in ongoing evaluation are demanding. It is difficult not to identify with the project and even if the ongoing evaluator manages to take a step back, there are still expectations of loyalty that result in being stuck in the middle. Therefore we want to suggest the following alternative solutions concerning the problem of conflicting roles inherent in ongoing evaluation:
1) **Team work** - a team of ongoing evaluators, where each individual focuses on one of the three archetypical roles, would make the positions of the ongoing evaluators clearer and possibly limit role conflicts.
2) **Co-publishing** - enrolling other researchers, not involved in the project, when using data gained in the project for scientific publishing may help in critically assessing and countering the inherent bias of the ongoing evaluator.

3) **Separating the roles in time** – when the ongoing evaluator clearly focuses on one role at a time, the awareness is raised and conflicts may be handled more constructively.
4) **Double duties of data** - when designing the mission, make sure to separate data collected for evaluation and data collected for research or use the collected data to address different types of questions for evaluation and research purposes respectively.

The second problem raised in the paper concerns the diffusion of results gained through ongoing evaluation to the wider society. Taking part in the public and academic debate is an important task of ongoing evaluation, as this is one of the links to societal learning. Since this takes time and effort, we suggest that both a set-up of incentives and resources have to be in place in order to move towards societal learning. Active researchers already have powerful incentives for diffusing their research results. In addition to that, resources should also be dedicated towards making use of the experiences from ongoing evaluation as well as the data collected during the process for conference presentations and research publications. In such way results gained through ongoing evaluation can be integrated into the ordinary stream of research in relevant disciplines. Furthermore, interfaces between the public sector, private companies and academia should be developed and supported as they constitute important channels for diffusion of results from ongoing evaluation. Otherwise the lessons from the programmes are hidden in the drawers of the clerks rather than becoming an interactive instrument for learning.

The importance of societal learning – from ongoing evaluation to ongoing research?

Triple Helix projects are increasingly being supported by a process of ongoing evaluation. We would like to argue that enrolling active researchers as ongoing evaluators may contribute to diffusing knowledge, not only within the project, or within the organization itself, but also between organizations, contributing to societal learning. As has been mentioned, the researcher typically has the incentive to diffuse the results of the ongoing evaluation process since academia merits publication. Also, the theoretical foundation of the researcher is an important prerequisite for putting the results of the ongoing evaluation process into perspective and context. In order to attract more researchers to ongoing evaluation missions we suggest that additional resources necessary for getting results from ongoing evaluation into publications are important. Furthermore, it has to be made clear that lessons from ongoing evaluation are taken into account before launching other similar projects. We also suggest that a new definition of ongoing evaluation, based on the three archetypical roles, should be adopted, i.e. clarifying that ongoing evaluation should involve aspects of project facilitation, evaluation and research, thus taking into account the importance of societal learning as well as first- and second-loop learning. It is also worth considering if the Swedish term for ongoing evaluation – ongoing research – might be more in line with the aims stated by the advocates of the concept.

Ongoing evaluation/research is still in the process of finding its forms, it is constantly developing and therefore needs to be discussed and renegotiated. It has the potential for helping public sector, industry and academia co-operate in more efficient ways. Allowing ongoing evaluation/research to prosper while acknowledging it as a complex mission with triple goals could boost learning in triple helix projects as well as societal learning while contributing to a more efficient utilisation of common resources.

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