CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION

PROMPTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

By Ricardo Ramírez, Dal Brodhead and Wendy Quarry

DESIGNING EVALUATION AND
COMMUNICATION FOR IMPACT

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IDRC · CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

The guide is available for free download from the DECI project website evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net

Ramírez, R, Brodhead, D. & Quarry, W. 2022. Capacity Development in Evaluation & Communication: Prompts for facilitators. Metcalfe, Ontario: DECI-4 Project.

Cover page credit: "Rainbow"
12" diameter glass art by Barbara Bryce

Graphics by DNA Graphics   Illustrations by Robin Baird Lewis

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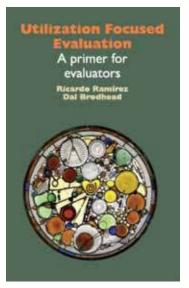
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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is primarily meant for facilitators of capacity building and organizational learning. The group includes professionals from various fields, including evaluation, communication, organizational learning, adaptive management, and multi-stakeholder planning. Those with a background in evaluation and in communication will find it most relevant. Here we are telling the story of how our mentoring in evaluation and communication with selected research groups across Latin America, Asia, and Africa, unfolded over a four-year time frame (2018-2021).
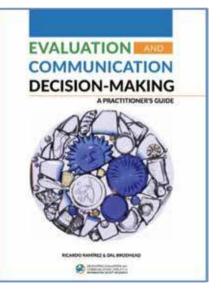
Its focus is on facilitation which is the process of making something possible or easier. [1] The origin of the term comes from the Latin facilis, which means "to render less difficult" or "to make easy." Facilitation is about creating a structure and environment that makes it easy for people to carry out an activity. In this booklet, we focus on facilitation as it applies to evaluation design and communication planning, and specifically where the task is capacity building and organizational learning. The ultimate goal here is to increase project impact and create the conditions for evaluative and communication thinking to be institutionalized within the partner organizations.

Our evidence comes from the work of an international team of facilitators who have worked together for over a decade in capacity building in evaluation and communication. We are part of the DECI Project (Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact), a combined technical support and research project supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Our partners have included applied research projects; community based social innovators; and non-profit groups working to support social and environmental change in different countries. We have gathered our reflections from this multi-year experience to assist others who may be seeking suggestions, advice, reassurance, and confidence in their role as facilitators. We have linked our experience with the literature to validate our work and provide structure and practical suggestions for our peers.

This book is the third in a series: Utilization-focused evaluation: A primer for evaluators (2013), and Evaluation and Communication Decision-Making: A practitioner's guide (2017). This series is available to readers - free of charge and in three languages (EN, FR, ES) at: ***https://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net/featured-publications/***

Left - A Primer for Evaluators (2013)
Right - Evaluation and Communication
Decision Making 2017)

OUR STORY

Our practice in the DECI project is focused on collaborative approaches to evaluation design and communication planning. For the last decade, we have provided evaluation and communication capacity building through what we call, 'just-in-time' mentoring. This approach is a form of facilitation that helps partners move at their own pace. It allows them to discover the value and benefits of program evaluation and communication planning.[2]

We constantly adjust the intent and tone of the conversation, depending on what is required, the questions raised and the objectives of the initiatives. We have relied on our own intuition and practical experience. We do this work within a framework of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE), an evaluation approach developed by Michael Quinn Patton (2008, 2021), as well as communication capacity building principles and experience. Our mentoring focuses on enabling partners to design their own evaluations following the steps and principles of utilization-focused evaluation and in tandem, their communication strategies. This approach emphasizes participation and ownership of the evaluation process by primary evaluation users. The same could be said for the communication strategy being developed by each partner organization.

In our work with partners, we focus on building their evaluative thinking skills. At the outset, we were not sure how to go about this task. As we struggled through our own learning, we realized that UFE is essentially a decision-making framework that offers a guide or road map for different activities. Among the early steps of the UFE process, the primary interested evaluation users (PIUs) are assisted in determining broad evaluation purposes or 'uses.' For each evaluation use, the primary users are encouraged to identify their Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs). The process of moving from identifying broad uses to creating relevant questions, challenges partners to be clear about their project goals; it also helps them to clarify their strategies to reach these goals. This exercise helps team members to clarify their assumptions - moving them from implicit to explicit. Helping them make these choices is the way they discover that they can create and own their evaluation designs. This approach literally pushes the UFE evaluator (the outsider) into becoming a facilitator or mentor. A mentor who must take the time to listen, to question and to support the emergence of an evaluation framework seen through the eyes of those whose project or programs are being evaluated.

Many of our partners are dealing with complex, dynamic projects, where some outcomes are difficult to predict, let alone measure. We have introduced elements from Developmental Evaluation (DE) (Gamble et al., 2021; Patton, 2017) which is an appropriate approach to respond to such circumstances. DE, just like UFE, is a decision-making framework that is also driven by a use-focus, which explains why it is sometimes referred to as UFDE (Patton, 2011). In this guide, we draw lessons from our recent DE experiences that help illustrate the importance of facilitation in dynamic contexts.

Communication planning follows similar steps. These steps include understanding the nature of the issue; mapping out who needs to be involved within the organization and beyond; defining intended audiences and conducting audience research; working with the most affordable, accessible, and tested channels, methods, and media; confirming the facts and essential content; pretesting materials before dissemination; defining outputs and a gradient of target outcomes; and finally implementing, monitoring, and improving. Very often, the most effective communication strategy is difficult to anticipate and plan. However, when it comes to supporting policy influence, being ready to respond to windows of opportunity is an effective strategy (Ramírez et al., 2019) that calls upon relationship building, interpersonal communication skills and networking, often forgotten attributes within a more 'message' oriented communication approach.

The principles that guide our work are the following (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2017): [3]

- Utilization-focused evaluation is a decision-making framework.
- Research communication enhances use of findings for influence.
- Attention is paid to readiness from the beginning and can be revisited.
- Training is demand-driven and provided through just-in-time mentoring.
- Course correction of project strategy is expected and planned.
- Utilization is the focus from initial project design to completion.
- A collaborative, learning, and reflective process is embedded.
- Participation and shared ownership are fundamental.
- The process builds individual and organizational capacity.
- Complexity and evolving contexts are addressed.

A unique feature of the DECI project is that the project itself has a dual purpose: aside from the mentoring support to partners, there is a research component concentrating on how best to provide capacity building in evaluation and communication. This duality of purposes has caused us to periodically pause and question what we are doing, how we are progressing and what we might be learning from assisting partners to design their own strategies. This research purpose enables us to 'learn by doing' with partners and makes DECI a living lab to support the adaptation of mentoring practices to different contexts.

This guide is based on five case studies emanating from the last four years of the DECI project working with partners around the world [to add a map here]:

- Africa: Research ICT Africa (RIA) in South Africa, and the Centre for Intellectual Property, and InformationTechnology Law (CIPIT) in Kenya.
- Latin America: Derechos Digitales (DD) in Chile, and Centro Latam Digital (CLD) in Mexico, and
- Asia: LIRNEasia in Sri Lanka.

As part of the CPC Program, these centres placed special attention to research on the following topics. Cyber-security issues (e.g., the risks of biometric technology), cybercrime (e.g., hacking, state security, and surveillance), data for development (e.g., data governance, open data), digital finance (e.g., MPesa and Safaricom in Kenya), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and issues associated with privacy. In all cases, the research was applied with the intent of using evidence to inform policy making.

These five organizations have been funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Ottawa) within several different program funding initiatives. The last round of funding was part of the Cyber Policy Centre initiative that lasted a little over four years, ending in late 2021.

CHAPTER ▌

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING ────────────

Our approach to organizational capacity building is based on linking two interrelated fields: evaluation and communication. Each brings distinct traditions, and both have branches grounded by a commitment to participatory development. [4] In our approach, the partners voluntarily take on our mentoring support using one of their short-term projects as the learning focus. Borrowing from Outcome Mapping terminology, the 'expect-to-see' outcomes [5] of this process include evaluation designs, communication strategies, and reports of the implementation, findings, and outcomes. Perhaps more significant are the mid-term 'like-to-see' outcomes indicated by increased confidence in adaptive management, and improvement of evaluation and communication competencies. The adaptive management aspect stems from the mentoring in evaluation and communication that pressures teams to be clear about intent, to express their assumptions, to clarify their objectives and fine-tune their strategies. The competency development aspect takes place mainly at the individual level and has been measured with staff self-assessment tools. Finally, the "love-to-see" outcomes were (or are taken to be) institutionalization of these ways of thinking, along with confirmed staff positions or departments designed to be responsible for evaluation and communication, supportive organizational policies, and resources allocated to these new structures and systems.

EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING

Attention paid to evaluation capacity building (ECB) is a practice that has been around for two decades and is closely associated with collaborative approaches to evaluation. Some argue that it basically seeks to decentralize and democratize evaluation practice (Hargraves et al. 2021).

> *"ECB involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice - where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. For evaluation practice to be sustained, participants must be provided with leadership support, incentives, resources, and opportunities to transfer their learning about evaluation to their everyday work. Sustainable evaluation practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that help embed evaluation work into the way the organization accomplishes its mission and strategic goals."* (Preskill & Boyle, 2008: 444)

Labin (2014) presents an Integrated Evaluation Capacity Building model with three levels of outcomes:

- Individual level: improved attitudes towards evaluation and its benefits, along with changes in evaluation competencies (knowledge, skills, and behaviour)
- Organizational buy-in: organizational leadership that is willing to accept negative feedback and use data for strategic improvements; and organizational culture that is open to collaborative learning, learning from mistakes and problem solving.
- Organizational structure and policy: emergence of distinct roles and functions dedicated to evaluation, integration with communication, and policies to integrate evaluative thinking throughout the organization.

At both the individual and organizational levels, the main goal is to nurture evaluative thinking, which is defined as follows:

> *"Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action."* (Buckley et al., 2015, p. 378)

While we concur with this aim, we are also aware of how difficult it can be to create this space for organizations that receive outside grants with strings attached to prescribed deliverables. Identifying assumptions and being reflective may be perceived by funders as dithering rather than pursuing results-based management. This challenging context is a reason why our approach places much emphasis on the enabling conditions (see section on Readiness below).

COMMUNICATION CAPACITY BUILDING

Much of our background in communication planning comes from the long-established field of communication for social change; earlier known as communication for development. In communication capacity building (CCB), our emphasis has been on enabling practitioners to become more strategic: defining overall purposes or functions of communication, defining audiences, engaging with those audiences to confirm their preferred methods and media; developing clear objectives so that target outcomes can be planned for and measured. Like ECB, the goal is to create a communication way of thinking, one that can be made to fit with each different context.

> *"Until now it has been difficult to put into words a vague notion that for some, seeing the world through a communication lens has become in and of itself a form of thought. When confronted with a complicated project or program, for example we tend to automatically start asking: WHAT are you trying to do? WHO are the people that you are trying to do this with? and HOW do you plan to work together to make it happen? These are very simple and straightforward questions that are not that difficult to answer and in that, may rest the problem. They are so simple and straight forward that some may think them too simple to warrant attention. We have a tendency to complicate things with words and concepts that may in the end be much simpler than most would have us believe."* (Ramírez et al. 2015: 3-4)

In our practice, we often guide learners through a sequence of communication planning steps. Once a project hits the ground, things often change and everyone must scramble to adapt prescribed steps, frequently moving them into a different, and possibly a more effective, order. This adaptation brings to mind the famous saying attributed to Helmuth von Moltke, when commenting on an intricate set of battle plans, observed that "*...no plan survives contact with the enemy*".[6]

In our approach, mentoring allows trainees to witness a flexible "juggling" of steps. This exposure provides them with the confidence to make their own future adaptations in their practice. They understand that while the original steps remain a good guide, they are addressed differently every time they are applied. Mentoring is the means of enabling trainees to learn, test, course-correct and gain confidence in improvisation.

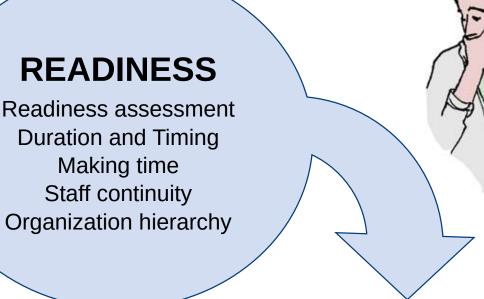**AN EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION HYBRID**

Our case studies show how evaluation designs often address several uses in tandem. Examples of uses include: the verification of achievements, a reflection on processes or methods, the effectiveness of networking, and the extent to which outcomes or results were accomplished. Similarly, the communication strategies can address complementary purposes, such as stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange through networks or between individuals, promoting an initiative, dissemination of findings among diverse audiences, knowledge management for influencing policies, etc. In most of our cases, opportunities have emerged to weave together both fields.

Beyond the shared agendas of both disciplines, there is scope for further integration. The notion of 'utilization-focused communication' proposes a shared vision of both fields (Ramírez, 2011). For example, UFE offers methodological contributions that are useful in supporting the field of Communication for Development. One of the final steps of UFE is about investing time and effort in facilitating the use of the evaluation's findings and process. In the communication area, this step calls for a systematic reflection on the extent to which the communication objectives were achieved, the validity of the social media and other media processes that were used, and/or the assessment of the internal systems and roles of the communication teams within the partner project or organizations (Ramírez & Quarry, 2019).

The combination of evaluation and communication processes becomes more demanding when capacity building takes place with separate staff members, some in evaluation, others in communication often with inadequate interaction between the two. Our practice to deal with this situation is to be sure that both the person responsible for evaluation and the one for communication are always on the same mentoring call together (although this does not always happen). Even if we are focusing for a time on one or the other topic, both get to hear and experience the thinking that lies behind the process. We have found natural linkages, as well, such as evaluating a communication strategy or how communication plays a role in the use of evaluation. In some cases, the evaluation and communication choice of KEQs has worked in parallel, and in other cases one has led the other (i.e., the evaluation use has triggered a communication related purpose and questions). We have worked on different points of intersections between evaluation and communication capacity building always guided by the unique requirements of the institution and project.

CAPACITY BUILDING FACILITATION FRAMEWORK

READINESS

Readiness assessment
Duration and Timing
Making time
Staff continuity
Organization hierarchy

ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

Cast of characters
Facilitation skills
Practical wisdom
Starting where people "are at"
Competency domains

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FACILITATION FRAMEWORK ——————

This framework provides the structure for the following sections of this Guide.

READINESS

We use the term 'readiness' to address all the preparatory discussions to confirm that a minimum set of conditions exist for a mentor-mentee agreement to create capacity in an organization. We have developed a 'Readiness Self-Assessment tool" (Annex 1) for partners to review the following

1. Senior management buy-in to work with DECI as a learning partner

2. Designation of staff persons/team available for mentoring in evaluation and research communication

3. Allocation of a budget to cover evaluation and communication plan development

4. Commitment of time by relevant staff to learning and/or strengthening evaluation and communication capacity

5. Openness of staff & management to adaptation of structures, strategies, and Theory of Change

6. Interest in sustaining organizational engagement with DECI

7. Willingness to learn, share, document, and report with DECI

We have learned that readiness is not a one-off condition. Instead, it requires ongoing examination and fostering (Ramírez et al., 2018). It is also common that not all of these conditions are in place at the start of the process, and some will need nurturing. Notwithstanding early commitments and good will, partners operate with other unrelated pressures, and organizational learning easily slips to a lower priority.

> *"One thing I have realized is managing "readiness", i.e. the willingness and commitment of the intended users to be with you, (as the evaluator), right from the beginning and throughout the evaluation journey. Especially time-wise. Many times, they all back into the traditional role of commissioners and would rather wait for the final evaluation results."*
> *(Email from DECI team member Julius Nyangaga, 17 Nov. 2021)*

Early on, we have developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish our relationship with the partners. The MoU sets out the nature of the partnership, its goals, the roles, and the emphasis on documenting and learning from the process. It is worth explaining that the IDRC-funded partners join DECI voluntarily; our shared funder does not require them to do so. As noted earlier, DECI is more than a capacity building project; it

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THE PRACTICE AND PROCESS

The HOW - Teamwork - Just-in-time mentoring
Experiential learning
Process outcomes

is also a research project in capacity building in evaluation and communication. Partners join DECI aware of its dual purpose: we provide them with training and support; and alert them that they are also the subjects of our learning research – part of a living experiential lab. In other words, part of this preparatory readiness stage has to do with an internal reflection by our partner staff members about the nature of their role in the mentor-mentee relationship, as well as the project or organizational structure. Sometimes, we have found that this step works more in theory than in practice given the ever-fluctuating nature of the DECI partners' institutional make-ups. In addition, our partners' themselves are often locked into unrelated deliverables and deadlines set by funders' requirements. These complications can affect the pace of the mentoring process regardless of everyone's best intentions.

We feel that the nature of our project is central to the type of partnership we can propose. We share the same funder as our partners and have the same reporting obligations. In this sense, we are peers. Yet, we are different in that we are a service provider, and the other projects choose to collaborate with us at no financial cost. Our dual role of trainer/mentor and researcher is made clear to them from the start.

The notion of organizational readiness has been around for a while, often with emphasis on the extent to which an organization or project team is able to gain evaluative capacity (Preskill & Torres, 1999). In our experience, several challenges have arisen with our partnerships: time and timing; continuity of personnel; and hierarchy. For some projects, there are actions that we can contribute to minimize the barriers, for others, we simply need to be mindful of their existence and to accommodate as best we can. We are also aware that for partners, signing up for mentoring in both evaluation and communication can feel onerous in terms of their time commitments. In addition, the fact that our common funder encourages, but does not require that partners work with DECI makes the relationship an option that they need to discuss and agree upon internally.

Readiness assessment is an ongoing process. It begins during the first round of discussions about the MoU. At times, it is clear that readiness is incomplete and more time is needed. This situation is often the case when working with partners facing huge workloads as they launch a new initiative. Often, there are sincere intentions expressed by senior management and staff, yet time constraints can also create delays. For the mentoring team, this situation means maintaining patience and choosing moments to send reminders - like a gentle nudge. Or, when all else fails, simply moving on and hoping that the time will come when the organization is ready and able to participate.

DURATION AND TIMING

During previous phases of the DECI project, we enjoyed a longer project duration relative to that of our partners'. This space allowed us the time to stand-by and find ways to help increase readiness at the most appropriate time. Having time not to rush into a training agreement, which is an add-on to the partners' original obligations, has been a major enabling factor.

> *"The evaluator has to fight for time and resoures to allow for such a learning procedure (even if there is a contract)."*
> *(Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2005: 96)*

Timing is just as important. Experiential education is about learning when the learner is ready; we think of it as having the velcro for new insights to get traction.   For this reason, we focus on 'just-in-time mentoring' to accompany the partner and find moments when the relevant planning steps can become part of their work plan. Having sufficient time is a luxury in this age of short-term project commitments; it is something that we have discussed at the start of a project phase with IDRC, our funder.

MAKING TIME

With almost all our partners, finding or making time for interactive dialogue has been a challenge. We are working with small teams burdened with huge workloads. No matter what we have agreed to in an MoU, finding time for regular mentoring remains a challenge. We suspect this reflects the intensification of work associated with short-term funding that creates enormous pressures on research teams to start-up rapidly and to become sustainable.

DECI STAFF CONTINUITY

Within the DECI team a significant core group of mentors has been involved with this journey since 2009. We are an international team of independent consultants and researchers for whom DECI has become a learning lab for professional development. What brings us together is the opportunity to do action-research in real world contexts as part of a team. We have been able to take our experience into other settings and we feel that this has strengthened our facilitation role.

PARTNER STAFF CONTINUITY

The same continuity is not the norm amongst our partners; in several cases there has been significant staff turnover. This lack of staff continuity has slowed the down the progress with several of our five partners. Those projects which have been able to retain staff sufficiently long to collaborate with DECI have benefitted the most. Their individual competency gains have enabled some form of organizational learning (more about this in the section on Outcomes). While, on the one hand, this staffing situation has slowed individual capacity building. On the other hand, in all cases, this has been compensated for by a relentless commitment by 'ready' or 'committed' senior managers to capacity building in evaluation and communication. "*The constant presence of the research manager at CIPIT as the glue that initiated, supported and maintained the team member participation has also been of great help.*" (DECI-CIPIT case study). With LIRNEasia, the fact that the evaluator was in close contact with the communication manager made a difference both in terms of integration and in helping train a new communication manager.

> *On Novemver 5th, 2021, we brought together the evaluation contact persons from LIRNEasia (Sri Lanka) and Derechos Digitales (Chile) to share experiences. Both had been researchers with their organization for a few years and stayed with the DECI project throughout the mentoring. This continuity allowed for deeper learning and for a rich exchange on the institutionalization of evaluation in each organization.*

ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHY

While our Readiness Self-Assessment Tool does not address the organizational hierarchy within our partner organizations, we have discovered that it has important implications. We have always engaged early on with executive directors and senior managers during the readiness discussions, especially as their buy-in is essential. However, in most cases, we have then focused our capacity building on staff responsible for evaluation and communication functions. We have witnessed how their performance inside the organization is affected by their relative standing in the hierarchy.

On the positive side, we have had evaluation contact persons who were high in the hierarchy and have taken up the training with zest, which in turn allowed them to become effective ambassadors internally, cases in point are RIA, CLD, LIRNEasia and DD. However, the opposite has also happened, where senior researchers felt that evaluation and communication planning was outside their area of responsibility, and consequently saw it as less important. In several cases, our evaluation and communication contact persons were mid-level staff members, yet they brought or developed sufficient confidence to effectively engage with (and keep on board) senior staff.

> *During DECI-2 we witnessed an unusually effective internal learning environment where the principal investigator, her administrative assistant, the communication, and evaluation staff all worked as equals. This was the case with the Open Education Resources for Development ROER4D project.*

The ROER4D case was unique, and very instructive. Perhaps this contribution was possible because the initiative was project based, as opposed to being institutionally focused. This status meant that the capacity gains mainly benefitted individuals and specific project objectives, rather than their parent institutions.

ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

To make sense of our capacity building facilitation work, we have looked at the literature across several professions:

TAKE HOME LESSONS
READINESS

STEP ZERO:

For those familiar with the steps of UFE, think about these early preparations for readiness as Step Zero (a notion coined by Sonal Zaveri of DECI). It emphasized reflectiong on the nature of the project or organization that is interested in capacity building in evaluation and communication. It meant considering to what extent are you, as the facilitator, in a position to be able to accommodate the flexibility required or mentoring at the pace of the partner, as well as what obligations and deadlines are part and parcel of the project funding commitment?

READINESS ASSESSMENT:

Develop a tool to guide a readiness discussion with the partners; encourage having each element reviewed within the organization.

FORMALIZE AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT:

The MoU strikes a balance between formalizing roles and purposes, while seeking to make it more of a touch stone and less of a contract. It is the discussion that takes place ahead of the signatures that matters the most to set the tone of the partneship. In the DECI case, the fact that the partnership is voluntary may have meant that we have engaged with particularly keen partners.

UNDERSTAND THE PARTNER:

Prior to the COVID lockdowns, we visited each partner to better understand their context, the organizational structure, the hierarchy, the personalities; we think of this step as an ethnographic snapshot of the project organization. It contributed to the development of a trusting relationship.

RESOURCING:

Review the partner's resource allocation (staff time, budget for data collection and materials production) to ensure implementation is viable.

facilitation, evaluation capacity building, communication capacity building, systems thinking, and organizational learning. The summary of roles and competencies below brings together elements from these four areas of practice; it is not meant to be comprehensive. Our intent is to signal the importance of the roles and competencies that we feel are the most relevant and practical for other practitioners.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The DECI project provides a team of at least two mentors who work directly with each partner. In turn, the partner provides an evaluation contact person, and a communication contact person; we refer to them as mentees. In some cases, we have had a single person taking on both roles, especially when working with small projects. These contact persons in turn work with the partner's staff members. In UFE, some staff members become the primary intended users (PIUs) of the evaluation: they take responsibility and ownership of the evaluation design. In research communication, it can be the communication manager, (often this is the communication contact person) plus the lead researcher for a project given the need for relationship building with policy makers as part of the communication process. The DECI mentors facilitate the work of the mentees, and the mentees facilitate the evaluation and communication planning steps with their team members and senior managers.

In our DECI project, we work as teams, most often including a facilitator from the geographic area of the project partner. This approach allows for relationship building where cultural and contextual knowledge can be essential. (We explore knowledge facilitation in the last section of the Guide.)

CRITICAL FACILITATION CAPABILITIES

Birney (2021) listed a number of facilitation capabilities that mirror our own experiences as we help our partners:

- Noticing and reflecting patterns and unfolding directions that emerge
- "*Finding the wisdom and potential*" to move a process
- Bringing awareness of what is happening
- Noticing disturbances
- Framing
- Witnessing and listening
- Being aware of power dynamics
- Showing alternative views
- Bringing multiple dimensions of knowing and learning together

PRACTICAL WISDOM

We note the reference to "*finding the wisdom*" as the notion of 'practical wisdom' which has been central to our own reflection about our practice. Finding patterns, acknowledging power dynamics, and helping frame emerging challenges, are all part of facilitating systems thinking. The magic seems to be in how we bring in these capabilities, when, and with what tone; we have learned to listen and do this intuitively and it is now intentional. We work in teams, and we observe how the other mentor jumps in - out of the blue with a useful insight - so often it seems to hit the mark and without warning, creates an "A*ha moment*".

For Birney (2021), facilitation knowledge refers to the critical skill of helping participants "*to see the whole of their collective wisdom.*" Doing this work well requires practical wisdom: the ability 'to do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason' (Bradshaw 2009, book subtitle). It is a term that refers to the acquired skill of knowing "*how to do the right thing, in the right way, with this person, in this situation*" (Schwartz & Sharpe 2010, 85). Practical wisdom gives a name to the capacity development outcomes we so often seek in communication: practitioners who can adjust methods, media and strategy to ever- changing contexts. We hope to train practitioners who can find solutions from a menu of options, without having to follow a checklist. We have learned that the intuition we seek to nurture emerges over time, through trial and error (Ramírez et al., 2015; Ramírez et al., 2022).

STARTING WHERE PEOPLE "ARE AT"

We find that our work is based on the principles of adult education and community development. We always start with where the learners "*are at*" in their own context. We engage partners on their terms and help them to discover and own the learning process. We were inspired by the notion of "*handing over the stick*" as a metaphor for "*putting the last first*" (Chambers, 1997). Robert Chambers referred to giving a voice to the poor and engaging those who understand their own context as "*owners*" of any inquiry. This concept guides our work. It is not a new idea; it is part of the principles of adult education: having learners in charge of designing their own learning plans (Brookfield, 1983; Knowles, 1975). The same intent can be said about participatory approaches that are committed to creating knowledge outside the monopoly of experts (Fals-Borda, 1981; Freire, 1970; Hall et al., 1982).

Starting where "*people are at*" means asking evaluation users to take charge of the design of their evaluation, on their terms, and for their own purposes. In our experience, the very process of facilitating this type of participatory process requires humility, flexibility, and adaptation to context. In other words, it is the exercise of practical wisdom Ramírez et al., 2022).

> *"A good coach or mentor is needed to articulate and conceptualize practice so that the learner can understand and apply the reasons for his actions…In order for the teacher to convey his/her knowledge to the learner, that knowledge must be made explicit through a process of exposure, reflection, conceptualization, and documentation. Once that is out in the open, the teacher and the learner can through through a process of mentoring, of joint and guided discovery and experience to transform that knowledge into explicit, and finally tacit knowledge on the part of the learner/novice."*
> *(Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003: 251-252)*

COMPETENCY DOMAINS

In organizational development, the term "*partnership*" has been carefully chosen to emphasize mutual respect for expertise between the evaluator and the program professionals (Buckley et al., 2021). For Buckley et al. (2021), the role of the evaluator in a partnership is: "*…to ask the right questions at the right time to enable the program team to make their own decisions about what they need to achieve optimum evaluation "fit." The role of the program staff is to use their expertise about the program and its context to make the best decisions about what and how to evaluate, weighing the considerations offered by their evaluation partner*" (p. 48). We make special note of the mention of the right questions at the right time; deciding what constitutes 'right' is a feature of practical wisdom. In our context, our role combines the above facilitation competencies with those of an evaluator (see text box below).

> *While the "mentoring" may sound flat to an outsider, what makes it effective is the quality of the dialogue and the timing. The mentors catch words and statements, give comments on them, perhaps also pre-empting tasks and issues that are around the corner, or elevating the meaning of some statements or providing "triggers" for more questions. Much of this intangible dialogue process depends upon the practical wisdom of mentors and the investment in the mentoring prices. (DECI-LIRNEasia Case Study).*

We have developed a comparable set of domains in communication planning that are available on the DECI project website.[7]

So far, we have tested the self- assessment tools only in English, and we have made significant revisions for future use. However, we also feel that this tool for documenting competencies is incomplete: it misses the insights of practical wisdom, and it pays limited attention to the enabling conditions, such as the nature of the organization or project where the facilitator is located (as an in-house evaluator), the readiness conditions, and the nature of the partnership. We have also come to realize the importance of agility to allow for adaptive management responses; these are competencies that are not emphasized in the five domains. In future, we suggest combining the tool with interviews or focus groups to understand why and how changes in competencies were possible and to appreciate partners motivation to improve their knowledge and skills.

For the Canadian Evaluation Society, the essential competencies of an evaluator fall into the following domains (CES, 2018):

1. Reflective Practice competencies
focus on the evaluator's knowledge of evaluation theory and practice; application of evaluation standards, guidelines, and ethics; and awareness of self, including reflection on one's practice and the need for continuous learning and professional growth.

2.0 Technical Practice competencies focus on the strategic, methodological, and interpretive decisions required to conduct an evaluation.

3.0 Situational Practice competencies focus on understanding, analyzing, and attending to the many circumstances that make every evaluation unique, including culture, stakeholders, and context.

4.0 Management Practice competencies focus on applying sound project management skills throughout the evaluation project.

5.0 Interpersonal Practice competencies focus on the social and personal skills required to communicate and interact effectively with all stakeholders.

TAKE HOME LESSONS
COMPETENCIES & ROLES

ROLES:
A facilitator of learning pays attention to context, to organizational culture and hierarchy, to windows of opportunity, to creating an environment of trust.

PRACTICAL WISDOM - A practice and a goal:
This notion underlies the practice of facilitation, and it also gives a name to the capacity building outcomes we seek to nurture. Practical wisdom is what we hope our partners achieve through the mentoring in evaluation planning and communication strategies: knowing what to do and how, utilizing unique moments and circumstances. It is through the mentoring process that we hope the practical wisdom we have acquired also becomes part of the mentee's way of being.

COMPETENCY DOMAINS & BEYOND:
There are overlaps in the competencies provided by the fields of facilitation, evaluation capacity building, communication capacity building, systems thinking and organizational development. What matters most is not the inventory, but the way they are exercised: the tone, timing and blending, sense making, and relevance.

STARTING WHERE PEOPLE "ARE AT":
Shows respect and conveys a commitment to listen and understand each unique context.

CAPACITY BUILDING FACILITATION FRAMEWORK

READINESS

Readiness assessment
Duration and Timing
Making time
Staff continuity
Organization hierarchy

ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

Cast of characters
Facilitation skills
Practical wisdom
Starting where people "are at"
Competency domains

THE PRACTICE AND PROCESS

The HOW - Teamwork - Just-in-time mentoring
Experiential learning
Process outcomes

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Individual & organizational: Evaluation & communicative thinking
Leadership - Organizational culture - Institutionalization
Adaptive management
Evaluation & communication: natural allies

CHAPTER **3**

THE PRACTICE & PROCESS

THE HOW ————————————————————————————————

Evaluation and communication go hand in hand and are most effective when planned jointly early on in a project or program. Communication planning pushes for clarity about inter-connections with stakeholders, engagement, networking, exchanges, dissemination, and behaviour change; while evaluation calls for clarity of purposes, specific objectives, sharing findings and learning. We start with one of the two and inevitably braid in the other: an important evaluation finding will always need sharing; and an effective communication strategy will always need metrics.

Despite this experience, we have come to understand that evaluation and communication are not always given the same weight in some organizations. The power dynamics and hierarchy, for example, between someone who is head of a research program and a person responsible for communication are often not equal. Here we draw attention to the need for head researchers to take on responsibility for building relationships with policy makers (and their networks) to be ready when a 'window of opportunity' may arrive. This proce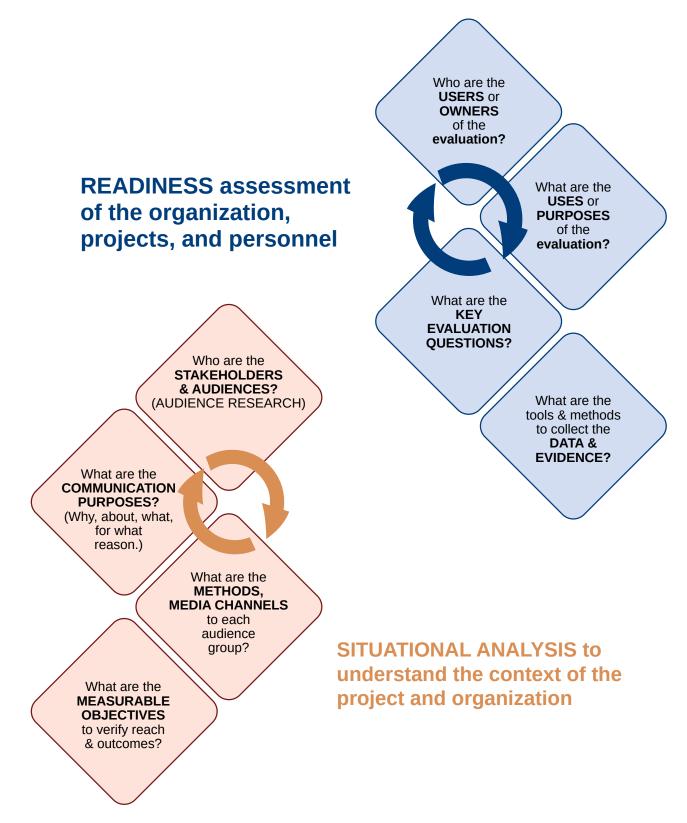ss will often require the backup of the communication person (team) to use their media contacts to keep a particular issue in the news and draw the public's attention to government action (or inaction).

The parallel and interconnected steps are shown in the figure on page 20. This chart gives us, as well as our partners, a map of where we are going. The figure shows arrows that emphasize the iterations among the key steps in evaluation and communication design. Since we have walked this path before as facilitators, we have the critical knowledge about the "moments of truth" where our partners are faced with decisions that end up shaping their own learning.

We work with research projects that are often opening new fields of applied research where the outcomes can be difficult to identify early on. Take the example of research on the impacts of artificial intelligence where the data is incomplete and emergent, and where policy makers and regulators lag behind the explosion of the technology. How can a project undertake evaluation on such a moving target, how can it plan its communication strategy? These researchers are often learning by doing, and as such, in supporting them, we lean on the practice of

> *"A lot of the work in DE is convening people to think and co-create together. Facilitation in DE is not about trying to lead people to a pre-determined outcome, rather it's about supporting people to think and create their own pathways towards achieving their shared purpose. The possibilities for action emerge from the interaction of diverse perspectives and often differing values, and developmental evaluators play an important role in bringing some coherence to this complexity."* (**Gamble et al., 2021: 30**).

The HOW:

Mentoring STEPS in EVALUATION & COMMUNICATION Planning

READINESS assessment of the organization, projects, and personnel

Who are the **USERS** or **OWNERS** of the **evaluation?**

What are the **USES** or **PURPOSES** of the **evaluation?**

What are the **KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS?**

What are the tools & methods to collect the **DATA & EVIDENCE?**

Who are the **STAKEHOLDERS & AUDIENCES?** (AUDIENCE RESEARCH)

What are the **COMMUNICATION PURPOSES?** (Why, about, what, for what reason.)

What are the **METHODS, MEDIA CHANNELS** to each audience group?

What are the **MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES** to verify reach & outcomes?

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS to understand the context of the project and organization

Developmental Evaluation that is appropriate for such dynamic and rapidly evolving situations.

Gamble and his co-authors of the 2021 "DE Companion", talk about a core activity being to help partners who are innovating and developing initiatives to work with and interpret the data they already have. They add that often the data is still emerging and incomplete and its quality tends to be imperfect. This situation calls for the DE facilitator to help collate and synthesize the data and help partners make sense of it in their decision-making.

TEAMWORK

In our mentoring, we work in teams of two which enables us to more effectively make suggestions, ask questions, or bring examples as a way of responding to complex and dynamic conversations which are intense. Having a second person observing and at other times contributing, encourages discussion of more ideas, and the use of different styles of facilitation. We have learned to work with diverse teams. We know each other's strengths. Some of us are quicker to nudge; others are more patient. We debate and debrief after each call to reflect on and document the process, the outcomes, and the next steps.

JUST-IN-TIME MENTORING.

We have coined the term "just in time" mentoring, which has a timeliness component built into it. The steps illustrated in Figure 1 can happen in a matter of weeks or more often over several months. We work at the pace of the partner, at times pushing for more action; other times awaiting their invitation. We have been tempted to push for stricter scheduling but have not pursued it.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We have often argued about the benefits and weaknesses of providing examples. In our mentoring, we ask that partners first come up with draft evaluation uses, with lists of target audiences, with possible key evaluation questions, with draft communication objectives, etc. We witness how hard this work can be since it challenges very accomplished professionals [in other fields] to think differently; hence our reference to 'participatory suffering'. The point is that we are all in this together and it is sometimes hard for experienced researchers to be called upon to rethink their ways of addressing an issue. We find it tempting to push people forward but have learned to be patient and let them take the driver's seat. Some authors refer to this as "…the art of the nudge" (Langlois et al., 2013). Once partners have undertaken their first attempts, we do 'nudge' them. One effective nudge has been to share the relevant work of other partners [with their prior consent]. This practice has often unblocked a stalemate amongst project stakeholders. We have learned to take great care in waiting until enough efforts have been undertaken. Also, the challenges need to be understood and dealt with before sharing the experiences of others undergoing the same or a similar process.

REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS OUTCOMES

Making our practice visible, is best done through stories and examples collected from our case studies.

- **Trust leads to confidence**. While working with LIRNEasia, the DECI mentors were invited to listen in during a group meeting between the evaluation and the communication contact persons and the primary interested users. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this gathering was the first time that the PIUs had met virtually as a group to discuss evaluation uses. We witnessed the evaluator's ability to engage with the users, respond to their queries, and manage the different opinions with confidence. The elvaluator was able to work with PIUs who were at the highest level in the organization and challenge the group to settle on common purposes. We, the DECI mentors, did not say a word throughout the call. It was an impressive example of his facilitation skills and subsequently, he indicated that our DECI support had given him added confidence; he emphasized the trust we had built as an important contributing factor.

- **A gradient of outcomes.** Outcome Mappings gradient of outcome results - expect-to-see, like-to-see, love-to-see - has been an important part of our mentoring, especially in communication planning. This gradient of outcomes was introduced into the communication planning table by Centro Latam Digital (CLD). With their permission, we shared the design with two other IDRC projects – LIRNEasia and Derechos Digitales. The notion of a gradient of outcomes allowed them to unpack their communication objectives into

a realistic trajectory of change. Later we shared the DD communication strategy with RIA which sparked the RIA communication manager to deepen the details of the already existing strategy.

- **Mentoring:** a space for reflection. More than once, we have heard from our project partners that the mentoring process creates a place to pause and reflect. One RIA communication manager commented, *"What was so powerful about DECI and what it does is that it gave me the chance to think - it provided a space for reflection, and it was the only space where I could go and think about communication"* (reference - communication with DECI mentor October 2021). On two occasions, we heard the same from two different communication coordinators at CLD, who were seeking to hire an assistant to help them find the time to look at the bigger picture.

> *"I plan to explain how creating a hierarchy of outcomes allows us to FOCUS comms evaluation, and really come up with measurables. I'm really excited at the opportunity this opens up for us to (even partially) address a perpetual problem - policy impact is nearly impossible to predict and measure. To me, being able to create this hierarchy really adds value."*
> (**LIRNEasia communication coordinator, email of Jan. 16, 2020.**)

- **Internal presentations to share learning with staff.** On several separate occasions, the staff who are leaving have been pressured to share the learning they had acquired with the rest of the team (note the two examples in the box). This debriefing happened with CLD, and RIA. In the other cases, this practice happened without the staff person departing; it provided a space for internal learning (case of DD and LIRNEasia). In all cases, the impact of these internal presentations was huge in terms of bolstering their evaluation or communication credibility; they were the words of trusted staff as opposed to the observations of outside mentors.

- **Windows of opportunity.** The DECI team often spoke of windows of opportunity as those unique moments when the policy world was open to listening to evidence from research. For example, with LIRNEasia, a senior member described a "home-run"while in Delhi. After a LIRNEasia workshop, the presenter came across an article in the newspaper that mentioned how, following the event, the government had sent staff for training on the topic that had been presented. This action demonstrated an immediate change in behaviour that could be attributed to the workshop; an example of direct attribution that is unusual. In another case, also with LIRNEasia, a senior researcher had approached the Sri Lanka Dept. of Census as part of a Big Data project. At the time, their relationship did not seem to progress much. However, sometime later, the researcher was invited to join one of their departmental committees looking at the modernization of the census process. We commented on how this constituted a positive, yet unexpected outcome. Somehow a window of opportunity had opened, and a timely response had been available.

- **Moving beyond the short term.** While working with the CIPIT team, the DECI mentors encouraged the team to look beyond immediate outputs and towards assessing higher level outcomes or impact results (their 'love-to-see' changes). For example, this meant looking beyond simply submitting a response to the government policy requests on time [an output that the team achieves on a regular basis] to attempting to track possible outcomes in the form of influence on policy or the policy makers.

INTERNAL PRESENTATIONS BY STAFF

Ruiz del Río, A. (2020). - Intro to UFE.
Centro Latam Digital. Powerpoint (in Spanish) used as hand-over notes.

Calandro, E. (2020). DECI Workshop.
Research ICT Africa. Powerpoint used as hand-over notes.

Velasco, P. (2021). Proyecto DECI. Derechos Digitales.
Powerpoint (in Spanish) shared with staff during March annual retreat.

Samaratunga, S. & Premawardhana, N. (2021) Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE) of selected LIRNEasia projects. Powerpoint presentation.

TAKE HOME LESSONS
STRUCTURE

STEPS AND PRINCIPLES:
Having a clear set of steps provides structure. However, we have learned to use the steps as guides - as opposed to a checklist. We almost always must go back and revisit steps; the process is iterative. We find a second guide is our principles (noted elsewhere).

TEAMWORK:
Facilitation works best in teams; two minds that do not think alike can often have differing suggestions that are complementary; the tension between mentors' styles is helpful.

JUST-IN-TIME MENTORING:
In contrast with pre-designed workshop formats, mentoring that happens at a pace that matches the partner's progress allows for more learning, more sense making and greater ownership of the outputs.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:
Action-research and learning from experience ensures that the partner confronts the design challenges head on; the facilitators create the conditions for this discussion process to be safe. It is often frustrating, but as the saying goes, "no pain - no gain".

CAPACITY BUILDING FACILITATION FRAMEWORK

READINESS

Readiness assessment
Duration and Timing
Making time
Staff continuity
Organization hierarchy

ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

Cast of characters
Facilitation skills
Practical wisdom
Starting where people "are at"
Competency domains

THE PRACTICE AND PROCESS

The HOW - Teamwork - Just-in-time mentoring
Experiential learning
Process outcomes
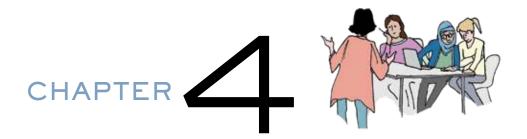
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Individual & organizational: Evaluation & communicative thinking
Leadership - Organizational culture - Institutionalization
Adaptive management - Evaluation & communication: natural allies

ACQUIRING FACILITATION COMPETENCIES

Facilitation knowledge
Interpersonal practice
Flexibility, understanding of context, care ethics

CHAPTER 4

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY OUTCOMES

Labin (2014) proposed an integrated evaluation capacity building model with outcomes at the individual and organizational level. At the individual level, there is mention of attitudes towards evaluation, as well as knowledge skills, and behaviour. Most important in our context is instilling evaluation and communication thinking. It is a different way to see the world. In order to measure individual learning outcomes among the partners' staff that worked with DECI, we used the five domains identified by the Canadian Evaluation Society (2018) to group competencies: Reflective Practice; Technical Practice; Situational Practice; Management Practice; and Interpersonal Practice. We also used the five domains to group communication competencies that we collected from numerous resources. (The competency self-assessment tools are available from the knowledge base of the DECI project website .) [8]

> *"Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action."* (Buckley et al., 2015, p. 378)

The competency self-assessment forms provided a partial picture of individual staff members' reflection on their acquired skills. Unfortunately, we did not conduct this exercise earlier to set a baseline for comparisons; but we will do so going forward. Nevertheless, we were able to document positive changes in competencies in all the domains. In one instance, we received a form from an outgoing communication staff member with whom we had worked closely, and from her replacement. The responses confirmed the relative gains by the outgoing staff member - a form of verification of the tool. Further and possibly more compelling evidence of their achievement exists in the form of presentations prepared by staff assigned to evaluation and communication roles for internal knowledge sharing. A stand-alone summary of the competency assessments is available from the DECI website.

At the organizational level, Labin (2014) proposes four types of competency outcomes: leadership; organizational culture; evaluation organizational capacity; and mainstreaming evaluation capacity. We use these four headings below to summarize the types of changes we observed in both evaluation and communication outcomes at the organizational level:

LEADERSHIP

In many of the DECI cases, staff members representing the organizational leadership were involved directly in the evaluation and communication processes as primary intended users. This positioning gave them first-hand experience. We witnessed the leadership becoming more aware of the importance of evaluation and communication design; most

of the leaders became champions and encouraged the organization to dedicate time and in some cases resources to the mentoring. RIA's Alison Gillwald stressed the importance of finding a way to evaluate the quality of the research while many encouraged further institutionalization of the process.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In several of our case studies, there are examples of organizations adopting the principles of utilization-focused evaluation and research communication into some projects that were about to begin.   In the case of DD, they created a new position to address Monitoring, Evaluation and Methodology - an example of a change in policy, structure, and practice. At LIRNEasia, they also put emphasis on institutionalizing evaluation throughout the programming. They now seek to design the evaluation plan and communication strategy from the start of a project. They also strive to engage policy makers (a main target audience) in the original design.

A US-based study of Evaluation Capacity Building documented the benefits gained by partners in the Partnerships for Advancing Character Program Evaluation (PACE) as follows, in order of importance. (**Hargraves et al. 2021: Table2**)

- *Program Planning*
- *Evaluation Advocacy*
- *Shared Work Practices and Values*
- *Program Understanding*
- *Personal Resonance*
- *Better/More Useful Evaluation*
- *Communication about the Program*
- *Organization Evaluation Culture*
- *Grant-writing/Fundraising*
- *Staff Management*
- *Valuing Evaluation*
- *Evaluation Confidence*
- *Program Promotion*
- *Capacity for Immediate Program Impact*
- *Personal Satisfaction*
- *Organization-level Decision-making*

They concluded "… that the tools, concepts, and skills people often respond to most positively - such as Pathway Modeling, program Boundary Analysis, Evaluative Thinking, program Lifecycle Analysis - have benefits beyond participants' evaluation responsibilities because they contribute to other, non-evaluation aspects of their work lives." (**Hargraves et al. 2021: 98**)

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Among the outcomes at the organizational level demonstrated by DECI partners, there was an increase in making adaptive management explicit. The DECI partners were working on action-research in new areas. The possible relevance of the research findings to policy makers was difficult to grasp and the possible audience(s) that may find them interesting were not always defined at the start. The process was ever-changing and the capacity to adapt became a very important competency to build and/or reinforce.

"*Adaptive management will be appropriate in circumstances of uncertainty and ongoing unpredictable change.*" (Rogers & Macfalan, 2020:3). The authors suggest that what distinguishes adaptive management from everyday

adaptation is the use of model-informed adaptation - which is understood to be the adoption of significant new perspectives - that includes changes in the types of activities, the strategies, even the intended outcomes and how a theory of change is understood and needs to evolve.

> *"The issue of organizational learning draws a great deal of interest both in academia and in practice. Organizations that do not learn cannot progress because they continue to behave the same way as before, practicing behaviours that are no longer adequate to meet new challenges. In order to learn and adapt to new situations, organizations must focus on information, knowledge, and knowledge processing in real time and, where possible, in advance of events."* **(Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2005: 83-84)**

Rogers and Mcfarlan (2020) point to key elements of adaptive management:

- the importance of design and experimentation,
- the crucial role of learning from policy experiments,
- the iterative link between knowledge and action,
- the integration and legitimacy of knowledge from various sources, and
- the need for responsive institutions." (p.4)

The types of questions that are posed during the DECI mentoring in evaluation and communication create a place for reflection, course correction and adaptation. We see evaluation and communication as a Trojan horse for adaptive management; both have a concrete role and purpose at the start that gives us an entry point for organizational learning which reaches well beyond these two areas.

Rogers and Mcfarlan (2020) suggest three different types of adaptive management:

- Changing intended causal pathways (and hence actions), but not goals
- Changing both intended causal pathways and goals
- Changing intended causal pathways, goals, and the understanding of the problem

> *On November 8, 2021, we held a virtual session with the evaluation contact persons at LIRNEasia and DD to share experiences about institutionalization. Both evaluators had been with their own organization as researchers and took on the additional evaluation tasks. In the case of DD, this researcher has now become the coordinator of a new position covering Monitoring, Evaluation and Methodology. In both cases, they are now integrating evaluation planning from the start of every project and bringing in their communication coordinators early on. Among the points exchanged were details on the strategies employed to streamline evaluation and communication into existing project formulation meetings. These are examples of new structures and practices that each organization is creating.*
>
> *In both instances, the primary intended users had been senior managers and one was an ED. In one case, the two senior managers have moved up to become co-EDs. The level of understanding that they achieved via the experiential learning was conducive to their buy-in and support to institutionalize these practices.*

EVALUATION & COMMUNICATION: NATURAL ALLIES

Rogers and Macflan (2020) emphasize how explicit theories of change are an effective means of bringing stakeholders together. The debates and collective design of a theory of change is a foundation for adaptive management. They also emphasize the enabling factors of such behaviours using the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2012) that points at capacity (human capital, skills, knowledge, social and organizational capital); motivation (incentives and disincentives); and opportunity (recognizing barriers and removing them).

The COM-B model has also been flagged by evaluators interested in behaviour change ToC models (Mayne, 2019): "*The COM-B model is a framework for understanding behaviour change; which is one of the goals of much communication work. The COM-B ToC model has proven very useful for building robust nested ToCs and for undertaking contribution analysis, because it is quite intuitive and is based on a synthesis of empirical evidence on behaviour change. It is especially helpful in explaining how behaviour changes were brought about.*" (p.179) Since so much of our communication mentoring focuses on the research to policy linkage, this reference confirms our experience where evaluation and communication have multiple interconnections.

TAKE HOME LESSONS
OUTCOMES

PROCESS OUTCOMES:

These are examples of reflections that have given us a sense of achievement: trust leads to confidence; a gradient of outcomes is useful; mentoring as a space for reflection is valuable; internal presentations to share learning with staff are learning opportunities; windows of opportunity open doors for policy change; moving beyond the short term is essential; selecting projects for the mentoring in evaluation and communication is an intentional process.

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES:

The two levels are intertwined and we have much to learn to support the shift from individual to organizational outcomes, or institutionalization.

MAINSTREAMING EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION

becomes a vehicle for adaptive management in the context of quickly evolving projects.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

is relevant with partners working on action-research in new areas, where the relevance of the research findings is emergent, as are the possible audiences that may be interested in them. The process is ever-changing and the capacity to adapt becomes a priority.

EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION: NATURAL ALLIES

The evaluation world is discovering "behaviour change" - something that has been central in communication for advocacy. We are not alone in exploring the interconnections between these two fields, as part of organizational capacity building.

CAPACITY BUILDING FACILITATION FRAMEWORK

ROLES AND COMPETENCIES
Cast of characters
Facilitation skills
Practical wisdom
Starting where people "are at"
Competency domains

READINESS
Readiness assessment
Duration and Timing
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CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES
Individual & organizational: Evaluation & communicative thinking
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ACQUIRING FACILITATION COMPETENCIES
Facilitation knowledge
Interpersonal practice
Flexibility, understanding of context, care ethics

INFORMING NEXT PRACTICE

CHAPTER 5

ACQUIRING FACILITATION COMPETENCIES

FACILITATION KNOWLEDGE

The facilitation of knowledge towards practical wisdom is not a skill that is learnt in one session or situation. Instead, it is *"…the most complex of all systems practices as it is about bringing people together, (building) frameworks, (clarifying) intentions, (galvanizing) energies and so on."* Birney (2021)

How then do professionals become facilitators of capacity building? In the DECI initiative, our team is made up of individuals who combine good listening skills, patience, a sense of humour, humility, and flexibility. Without doubt, we also bring familiarity with evaluation and communication approaches, and multiple experiences working in a variety of settings. What we have gained through our decade of practice, however, and what we feel matters the most is practical wisdom. Acquiring practical wisdom is only possible, in our experience, from practice. And when that practice is a project that has an inbuilt learning component, then there is the space to improvise, reflect, learn from mistakes, evolve and co-design solutions with partners.

> *"This study points to the benefit of an evaluator having experience in organizational development, whole-systems change, pattern recognition, interpersonal dynamics, conflict management, and facilitation - all skills that are crucial for helping innovators know when and how to use data and feedback to adapt strategies as they go."* **(Langlois et al., 2013: 55)**

For example, we invited a new colleague to join our team. She has previous experience as a PIU within a UFE mentoring process. We had a hunch that she had many of the above attributes, in addition to expertise in the field - including a master's thesis on the topic of evaluation use. By having her join our mentoring sessions, we have witnessed her quality as a capacity building facilitator. She seems to have the desirable mix of skills, attitudes, timing and charisma.

"Capacity development has moved from being a simple transfer of knowledge to an adaptive process of looking at challenges from multiple perspectives and developing co-designed solutions that not only strengthen the use of evidence but also transform the environments where change happens." (Hayler, 2021)

INTERPERSONAL PRACTICE

Within the domain of "Interpersonal Practice" the Canadian Evaluation Society lists several competencies that overlap with communication:

- Using communication strategies appropriate to the cultural, linguistic, social, and political context.
- Demonstrating effective and appropriate written and visual communication skills;
- Demonstrating effective, appropriate, and respectful verbal and non- verbal communication skills. using a variety of processes that result in mutually negotiated agreements as well as shared understandings and consensus building; and
- Building partnerships within the evaluation context.

> *"In addition to academic skills, good evaluation work requires personal skills such as building and maintaining trust, engaging in productive dialogue, ability to reflect, patience, ability to cope with obscurity and ability to be there when needed and not there when not needed. The development of personal skills involves all types of learning and teaching. Personal skills are evident in explicit knowledge of theory and philosophy, practical experiences, conceptualization of the practical experiences, and tacit knowledge acquired through experience and mentoring…*
> *The challenge in this area involves creating the flexibility required to apply new personal skills to old contexts and to apply already existing personal skills to new ones."*
> **(Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003: 254)**

FLEXIBILITY, UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT, CARE ETHICS

Smith (2021) observed that each competency involves our ability to be flexible, responsive to the communication behaviours of collaborators and partners, and understanding the uniqueness of each context. In addition, Smith emphasizes assertiveness (determination, confidence) and emotional responsiveness (awareness of one's emotions and appropriate response and expression). In our experience these behaviours have allowed us to gain trust and this has been a major contributor to the mentoring process. This lesson indicates that if the facilitator exhibits empathy, what others refer to 'care ethics' in evaluation, then the process is more likely to be productive.

> *Care ethics as a normative orientation for evaluation stretches beyond professional codes of conduct, and rule - or principled-based behaviour. It is part of everything we do or not do, how we interact with others, and what kinds of relationships we forge in our practice."*
> **(Abma et al., 2020: 131)**

PROMPTS FOR FACILITATORS

The mentor must be open to his/her own learning – we know that we have our own version as to how UFE and how strategic communication should be planned and put in place. We don't want to get stuck there. There have been several times when, during a conversation, the so-called mentees have made us step back and open our minds to new understanding. For instance, those of us mentoring in communication are steeped in participatory communication approaches and research to policy initiatives, but by working with different mentees, we have learned to listen ourselves and recognize the importance of other communication aspects: the need for social media, the role of a newsletter, a new website etc. We have learned that these should/could be put in place before other aspects of more interactive communication, or research to policy communication be considered. We now think of these initiatives as the scaffolding for a communication strategy.

These reflections have led us to the following prompts for facilitators:

- Work in pairs to bring two sets of ears and two voices to the table (listening and telling)
- Spend time with organization to assess organization's 'readiness' to take on this mentoring

- Be prepared to wait if the 'readiness' factor is not present, i.e. make sure you have another job so you won't starve while you wait

- Do your best to start where people are "at" - where possible let them determine what they want to start with and where they want to go with it

- Move at the mentees pace - from time to time this may require a 'nudge' but not a push

- Listen hard - try to have the mentee ask the questions - move the dialogue and talk about what they want to learn

- Be patient - and wait until the next move presents itself (rather than push the agenda)

- Be prepared to 'push the agenda' sometimes if things appear to be stalled

- There are times when the mentor needs to ask some questions and try to elicit stories from the mentee that will reveal their thinking

- Have a goal in mind but make it flexible

- Gauge when the time might be right to suggest that the mentor show an example from another client such that the example might illustrate the issue better than conversation

- Know your stuff yourself but not be rigid - be prepared to learn from the mentee and accept that your knowledge of the subject may require new thinking

Labin, S. N.

TAKE HOME LESSONS
ACQUIRING COMPETENCIES

FACILITATION KNOWLEDGE
is gained through practice, especially during an apprenticeship.

A DEMANDING COMBINATION OF ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS:
Capacity building requires personal skills including building and maintaining trust, engaging in productive dialogue, reflecting, patience, ability to cope with uncertainty, and timing: and the ability to be there when needed and not there when not needed.

FLEXIBILITY & UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:
Essential to our work is the ability to be flexible, responsive to the communication behaviours of collaborators and partners, and should have the capacity and understanding of the uniqueness of each context.

EMPATHY
Gaining trust is central to mentoring and achieving this condition requires a care ethic.

PRACTICAL WISDOM
Acquiring practical wisdom is only possible, in our experience, from practice. And when that practice is a project that has an inbuilt learning component, then there is the space to improvise, reflect, learn from mistakes, and co-design solutions with partners.

CHAPTER 6

CLOSING COMMENTS

You have just read the highlights of our decade-long DECI story with emphasis on the last four years. It speaks to what we, as a team have done and what we have learned. We have had the unique opportunity to work closely with numerous project and organizational partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They have been generous with their time and been open to our ideas. Our learning journey continues to be a work in progress and has benefitted enormously from the continuity, which the support of IDRC has enabled. We feel privileged to be able to share it with you and look forward to working with new partners in new settings.

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ANNEX 1

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
1. Senior management buy-in to work with DECI as a learning partner	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
2. Designation of staff persons/team available for mentoring in evaluation and research communication	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
3. Allocation of a budget to cover evaluation and communication plan development	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
4. Commitment of time by relevant staff to learning and/or strengthening evaluation and communication capacity	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
5. Openness of staff and management to adaptation of structures, strategies and Theory of Change	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
6. Interest in sustaining organizational engagement with DECI Team	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

READINESS	CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY/READINESS
7. Willingness to learn, share, document and report with DECI	Comments:

1 low	2	3	4	5 high

FOOTNOTES

1   Cambridge Dictionary. (Pg 2)

2   We acknowledge the great privilege given to us by IDRC who supported the project over such a long period. (Pg 3)

3   We have noted similarities with the principles of local capacity development advanced by USAID (2021): 1. Start with the local system; 2. Develop diverse capacities through diverse approaches; 3. Align capacity development with local priorities; 4. Appreciate and build on existing capacities; 5. Be mindful of and mitigate the unintended consequences of our capacity development; 6. Practice mutuality with local actors, and 7. Measure performance improvement in collaboration with local actors. (Pg 4)

4   For a review of family trees in evaluation and communication theory and approaches refer to Ramírez, R. & Quarry, W. (2019). Communication for social change: Seldom a stand-along and rarely verified. Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation 15(32): 1-16. (Pg 5)

5   Outcome mapping (Earl et al., 2003) is a project design that uses targeted social actor changes results to guide implementation strategies. The results are categorized into 'expect to see' (targeted actors' immediate and easy to achieve reactions), 'like to see' (the actors' more ambitious and harder to achieve changes) and 'love to see' (the actors' most desired and ultimate transformation) (Pg 5)

6   Attributed to Helmuth von Moltke the elder, a German Field Marshal born in 1800, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth_von_Moltke_the_Elder (Pg 6)

7   https://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net/knowledgebase/ (Pg 15)

This guide is meant for facilitators of capacity development and organizational learning. The group includes professionals from various fields, including evaluation, communication, organizational learning, adaptive management, and multi-stakeholder planning. Those with a background in evaluation and in communication will find it most relevant.

We share the story of how our mentoring in evaluation and communication with selected research groups across Latin America, Asia, and Africa, unfolded over a four-year time frame. We are part of the DECI Project (Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact), a combined technical support and research project supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Our partners have included applied research projects, community based social innovators, and non-profit groups working to support social and environmental change in different countries.

The guide is available free of charge in English, French and Spanish from the publication section of our website: https://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net

Our website includes a Contact section and we look forward to hearing feedback from readers.

DESIGNING EVALUATION AND
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