CECAN Webinar:
Redefining Evaluation to Support System Change: Theoretical and Practical Insights

Thursday 9th December 2021, 13:00 – 14:00 GMT

Presenter: Emily F. Gates (facilitated by Pete Barbrook-Johnson)

Welcome to our CECAN Webinar.

All participants are muted. Only the Presenters & CECAN Host can speak. The webinar will start at 13:00 GMT.

Emily will speak for around 45 minutes and will answer questions at the end.

Please submit your questions at any point during the webinar via the Q&A box in the Zoom webinar control panel.

Today’s webinar will be recorded and made available on the CECAN website.

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Redefining Evaluation to Support System Change

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Outline

Background
Key Questions
Theoretical & Practical Insights
Implications
Q&A
(Gates, 2016, 2017, 2018)

(Schwandt & Gates, 2021)

(Schwandt & Gates, 2021)

(Gates, Walton, & Vidueira, 2021)
“The world has changed significantly in the past decade...There is a need for a bolder evaluation agenda, recognizing the evaluators' role in contributing to change...”

BARNETT & EAGER, 2017, P. 294
Post-normal evaluation?

Thomas A. Schwandt
University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign, USA
What **role should evaluation play** in systems change and transformation?

How must we **rethink evaluation itself** to adapt to this role?
“At its core it involves tackling the root causes of a social problem...” (Mehta & Zakaras, 2020)

“Fundamental change in policies, processes, relationships, and power structures, as well as deeply held values and norms” (Gopal & Kania, 2015)

“Improves performance within existing rules” versus “creates previously unimagined possibilities and new ways of thinking through visioning, experimentation, and invention” (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2019)
Expert Judge
Determining Value

Co-Learner
Developing Value
Theoretical Insights
“A frame... deals with the perspective by which we see reality and act on it...”

(Rein, 1983, P. 96)

“There is a less visible foundation—an ‘assumptional basis’--that lies beneath the more visible surface of language or behavior, determining its boundaries and giving it coherence”

(Rein & Schön, 1996, p. 88)
Conventional Frame

Evaluating as Applied Social Science Research to **Determine Effectiveness of an Intervention**
Expert Judge
Determining Effectiveness

Commissioners as primary stakeholders

Interventions as solutions to solvable problems

Questions address performance against goals/objectives

Technical and expert-driven role for evaluators

Apply the right research methodology well

Evaluative judgments as determinations based on results
Expanded Frame

Evaluating as Logical, Step-wise Process to Determine Value via Criteria

Figure 4.1. Evaluating using the four-step logic (Schwandt & Gates, 2021, p. 92)
Expert Judge
Determining Value

Stakeholders include those involved and affected

Address broader questions and evaluative criteria

Use of performance standards (benchmarks, indicators)

Technical and facilitative role for evaluators

Evaluative judgment as multi-faceted, single determination
Evaluating as Situated Practical Reasoning About Value

Emerging Alternative Frame

Figure 5.3. Evaluating as situated practical reasoning (Schwandt & Gates, 2021, p. 136)
Focus on problematic situations and systems change – ongoing, not solvable

Differing stakeholder perspectives and values

Evidence amidst uncertainty and change

Inform co-learning about what we are doing and inform what we should do next

Evaluative judgments as unstable, time-bound, and variable across levels of situation or system

Focus on learning more than judgment
Story of

Governing question:
How to design a better system and figure out what it takes to make that happen?

https://rethinkhealth.org/

Bobby Milstein
Director of System Strategy

Jane Erickson
Director of Learning and Impact
How does Rippel/ReThink Health

• **Envision** system change?
• **Support** system change at different scales?
• **Evaluate and learn** from its efforts?
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Reframe Problems

FROM HEALTHCARE TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING
SEPARATE AND FRAGMENTED TO INTERCONNECTED
MARGINAL OUTCOMES TO SYSTEM REDESIGN

(1) Reframe Problems
“Focusing on improvements of outcomes within a current system may provide clear results in the short term. But, ‘the trouble is that those may not be the results that you’re most proud of because of the constraints you’re accepting as unchangeable, and the time horizon for how long those impacts last...Those impacts tend to plateau or erode over time, precisely because they get washed away by other forces in the prevailing system that you hadn’t dealt with’ (Staff interview)”

(Gates & Fils-Aime, 2021, p. 128)
(2) Cultivate Stewardship

Seeing the system(s) of interest

Visualizing how to change these systems

Stewarding change – working together to influence changes
(3) Use Adapted and New Methods
Intended Users

- Project-level, place-based stewards
- Internal staff
- Board
- Broader field

Action Learning Questions

**What does it take...**

To be a steward in today’s world?

For stewards to reallocate resources to improve their regional health ecosystem?

(4) Fuel Learning and Accountability
“Yesterday’s learning is input into tomorrow’s hypothesizing” (Staff interview)

(Gates & Fils-Aime, 2021, p. 130)
(5) Iteratively Develop a Theory of System Change
Assess Changes to System Conditions
- What is business as usual?
- What is the emerging practice?
- How does ReThink Health make a difference?
- What other factors affect the emergence of the practice?

**Emerging Practices**

At this midpoint, we observed five emerging practices that seem especially important for strengthening shared stewardship.

**Practice 1: Expanding Aspirations**
Seeing and stepping into a “whole system” so that strategies, projects, and initiatives become clearly oriented toward well-being and justice.

**Practice 2: Embracing Interdependence**
Distinguishing unique yet interdependent roles to enable closer alignment, deeper working relationships, and stronger mutual accountability among individuals and organizations.
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**Implications**

**EVALUATORS**
- Broaden theoretical and methodological skillsets
- Focus less on evaluations and more on evaluative processes \(\text{Schwandt, 2018}\)
- Share authority and work with intended users

**COMMISSIONERS AND LEADERS**
- Partner early with evaluators and find ongoing support
- Co-craft learning agendas
- Frame initiatives within action-learning cycles

**WIDER FIELD**
- Move beyond results-based management
- Develop practice-based theories of system change and stewardship
- Support interdisciplinary and cross-sector learning
Thank You

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🐦 @emilyfgates

References


