

Western Cape M&E Community of Practice

Meeting Highlights 18 August 2022

Online: Zoom.US

PRESENTATIONS

1	Title	Thinking evaluatively about social issues
	Presenter	Mark Abrahams
	Organisation	Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP)
	Key Theme	Evaluative Thinking
2	Title	SAMEA Announcements
	Presenter	Eleanor Hazell
	Organisation	SAMEA & JET Education Services
	Key Theme	Resources and tool sharing

Number of participants: 16

Useful Resources Shared

Intro Brain Teaser Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2eINI4WXkc>
 Critical thinking video: [Five simple strategies to sharpen your critical thinking | BBC Ideas - YouTube](#)
 Archibald video clip explainer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0faM_PIEh04
 Archibald blog post: <https://www.eval4action.org/post/critical-and-evaluative-thinking-skills-for-transformative-evaluation>
 Evaluation hub: [Evaluative Thinking questions – Evaluation Hub \(education.govt.nz\)](#)
 SAMEA Conference: <https://sameaconferenceevent.co.za/>
 SAMEA Conference Hashtag: #SAMEAConf2022
 Western Cape SAMEA Network blog site: <https://sameawcsite.wordpress.com/>
 SAMEA: talk@www.samea.org.za
 Twitter: @SAMEA_ZA
 LinkedIn: SAMEA
 SAMEA LinkedIn group: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2827202/>



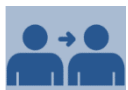
SCENE SETTING

Anniza De Wet, the Western Cape (WC) Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Community of Practice (CoP) facilitator, welcomed participants to the second WC M&E CoP of the year, which looked at 'Evaluative Thinking'. Anniza kicked off the session with an ice breaker asking participants where they think they are in their M&E journey? She went on to recap the previous session, which was on 'using technology for data collection', and highlighted how 'evaluative thinking' was chosen as a theme through a poll asking CoP members what skills they believe M&E practitioners need.



The aim of the CoP is about coming together to share expertise, knowledge and skills. It is about coming together as a network to share resources and collectively work together to achieve change by influencing the sophistication of M&E in the Western Cape.

Anniza went on to quote evaluative thinking as 'a disciplined approach to inquiry and reflective practice that helps us make sound judgment, using good evidence as a matter of habit.' Meaning that evaluative thinking is not just something that we do, but something that we constantly practice as part of our being and habits. To access Anniza's full presentation, click [here](#).



PRESENTATIONS: Mark Abrahams - Programme Lead for Monitoring & Evaluation – Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP)



Mark Abrahams, the Programme Lead for M&E at the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), which generates collaborative responses to systemic shocks, building resilient communities that can withstand and anticipate similar events through adaptive governance, shared a presentation on 'thinking evaluatively about social issues'.

Mark pointed out that evaluative thinking is not the same as evaluation but is an aspect of evaluation, and that the level of competency in evaluative thinking and thinking about evaluation may be the problem. He went on to say that it is very important that when we talk about evaluative thinking that we link it to context.

What is evaluative thinking?

According to Mark, the discussion around evaluative thinking elevates the technical aspect of monitoring and evaluation.

What is Evaluative Thinking?

- Is an **activity** involving the posing of questions of substance and determining what data are needed to address the questions ...
- Evaluative thinking is a type of systematic reflective practice aimed at improving performance. It involves: **identifying assumptions; posing thoughtful questions; pursuing deeper understanding** through evidence gathering, **reflection** and perspective taking; and **making informed decisions** in preparation for action.

Slide from presentation

It is about developing questions of substance, and determining what data is needed to address those questions. It is an activity of thinking about what do I ask, how to ask it and who to ask it to. Making evaluative thinking a type of systematic practice aimed at improving performance by asking questions on why am I thinking the way that I am thinking, by engaging in thinking activity leading to actions.

Thinking about what?

- Why do intervention fail?
- Why do interventions succeed?
- Why do we have interventions?
- What is an intervention?



Slide from presentation

M&E comes in to provide guidance by making sure that our solutions are more directed, objective and are more focused in addressing the kind of problems we are dealing with.

Mark used an example of how many years ago the Amazon Jungle had a deforestation problem stemming from people living around the forest needing wood to cook their food to keep warm and so on. So, to solve the problem people were provided with paraffin lamps and stoves. As a result, people stopped cutting down trees and the forest was okay, but people also started suffering from lung diseases and dying. What was meant to be a solution to one problem led to another.

The sector has to deal with the professionalisation of M&E and skills development in the era of fake news, where even the truth is challenged. This makes it difficult to have absolute truths therefore making evaluative thinking important. Most of the times NGO's, civil society and government deal with complex problems, where a simple solution may not be the answer.

It is important to note that most problems are complex issues, complex because they involve human interaction, human understanding, histories, and all kinds of social concerns. This is where evaluative thinking can assist, by thinking more systematically about how to deal with issues.

Guidelines to think about when looking at the principles of evaluative thinking:

- Evaluative thinking is not a born-in skill; it must be intentionally practiced, and does not depend on a certain educational background
- Evaluative thinking must be applied and practiced in multiple contexts alongside peers and colleagues because what served one well two months ago may not serve them today
- Evaluative thinkers must be aware of—and work to overcome—assumptions and belief preservation, because sometimes we hold onto things so tightly it becomes a stumbling block for us to move forward
- Learning to think evaluatively (and practicing ET) must be intrinsically motivated and experienced incrementally, where evaluative thinkers and people in M&E need to think about what are the actual gains and from what activity and feel the need to want to think differently. It is about 'knowing what you know and what you do not know' and being comfortable with it

As an evaluative thinker one needs to be able to work in an uncertain space to create a level of certainty.

How can this be done? What are the approaches?

- Utilitarian approach/pragmatic
- Rights approach – which says that we all have equal rights, and that we have human rights. Therefore, we need to think in a particular way, by thinking of the rights of different people
- Common good approach – says how do we all benefit
- The virtue approach – asks how do we bring ethics to the floor. It says people with virtue must speak out. However, people who speak out, aren't always virtuous

It is about mapping a way forward and not just thinking of the abstract.

Some of the concerns with M&E:

- As we build the capacity in competencies, M&E becomes increasingly viewed as a collection of practical guides and tool kits for data collection. We need all of these things, but that is not the end all of M&E.
- Another concern is that it becomes defined primarily by its role and function of a bureaucratic management system. A need to measure and mark off, to make sure that everything is according to some performance standards.
- M&E becomes the province of the technician who relies on procedures or scripts to correctly apply methods. The challenge is how do we make sure it goes beyond the technical exercises.

*"Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation motive, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness, and a belief in the value of evidence that involves skills such as identifying assumptions, posing these thoughtful, hard questions, pursuing a deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking and making informed decisions in preparation for action." **Thomas Archibald***

Ways to address the concerns raised is by posing relevant questions like:

- What are the intellectual and practical (moral and political) commitments that I am capable of and competent to perform when it comes to conducting studies of the value of social programs and discussing the meaning of evaluation with a variety of different stakeholders (including clients, program staff, beneficiaries, the public)? So how is what I find relevant to beneficiaries, the public and politicians? How is it relevant to all, and not just one set of actors?
- Where do I stand on the matter of how evaluations serve democratic aims and social justice?
- How should the evaluation results that I produce play a role in decisions about social policy and social programming? How do we affect policy and change in the broader setting?

Before you speak....

THINK!

T - is it true?

h - is it helpful?

i - is it inspiring?

n - is it necessary?

k - is it kind?

FREE YOUR MIND and THINK

The central issue is how aspiring evaluators will learn both to ask and to develop answers to questions such as these, while, at the same time are acquiring necessary technical knowledge and skills. It is about being thoughtful on how and what you do.

Evaluative thinking is about us engaging with our social environment. Presenting findings with the human in us and not just the technical.

Learning from failure:

Mark shared a video by David Damberger available on the following [link](#), which looked at 'what happens when an NGO admits to failure'. It talks about how admitting failure is actually quite hard and how talking about failure can unearth a lot of mistakes and lessons learned. It is where organisations can start to change and innovate. By firstly understanding that problems are not merely

hardware problems, but are mostly on the software side of things. It delves into the power of having a discussion around failure as an organisation in order to address actual problems.


Evaluation Matters:

Mark shared the following exercise as a means to help think through problem solving in evaluation:

1. What are the <u>MATTERS in</u> evaluation?	6. What <u>kinds</u> of evaluation matter?
2. What are the <u>MATTERS for</u> evaluation?	7. What kinds of evaluation matter for <u>whom</u> and <u>why</u> ?
3. <u>What</u> matters most in evaluation?	8. What are the <u>VALUES</u> embedded in certain evaluation matters?
4. <u>Who</u> matters most in evaluation?	9. How are evaluation <u>matters addressed</u> in Africa?
5. <u>Who decides</u> what matters most in evaluation?	10. How do evaluation matters affect the work I do?

It is important to look at how evaluation matters are addressed in Africa as it affects the work we do. The abovementioned questions are all building blocks in which to think about evaluative thinking.

The following slide details disciplines of evaluative thinking according to Valcare:



DISCIPLINES OF EVALUATIVE THINKING

curiosity - we are willing to ask questions that might not have easy answers

ambition - we continually work to improve our processes and our impact

courage - we question and challenge existing practice in ourselves and others

humility - recognising that insight can come from a wide range of sources and there is always more to learn

honesty - where we do not seek to bend the facts to suit ourselves or cover up 'inconvenient truths'

Eleanor Hazell - South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) Updates

For Eleanor's full presentation, click [here](#).

- It is election time at SAMEA – online voting is 12 – 21 September; results will be announced at the AGM 22 September, which will be taking place during the conference. Please note that you need to be a fully paid up SAMEA member in order to nominate someone or to stand for election and also to vote.

Five board positions available, looking for support in the following areas:

- Treasurer.
- Workshops and Conference.
- A variety of SA provinces.
- Public sector representatives.
- Individuals who can advance critical and emerging areas in M&E: impact measurement; adaptive management, planning, M&E; Tech-enabled M&E; environment, social and governance measurement, management and reporting.
- Upcoming is the 8th Biennial SAMEA Conference which will be held at the Hilton Hotel, Sandton, Gauteng and online from 21 – 23 Sep. 2022. SAMEA is encouraging as much face to face participation as possible.

Conference strands, which will be running concurrently are as follows:

1. Planning, M&E to address systemic crises and for a Just Transition
2. Made in Africa evaluation
3. M&E evidence for adaptive management
4. Monitoring & Data Management
5. Tech-enabled M&E
6. M&E Capacity Building & Emerging Evaluators



LEARN
how to apply M&E approaches, methods & tools



NETWORK
with 600+ delegates involved in monitoring & evaluation



ENGAGE
in discussions & debates about the future of M&E



LISTEN
to world-renowned speakers about their experiences



DISCUSS
new developments in the field of M&E



INTERACT
with thought leaders & speakers on topical issues

6 great reasons why YOU should attend the SAMEA 8th Biennial Conference taking place from 21-23 September 2022 in-person and online



<https://sameaconferenceevent.co.za/>



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q. How did your journey with evaluative thinking start? Was there an 'aha' moment? Or was it something you've kind of been working on for a long time, that you didn't necessarily call it that?

A. Mark - It was informed by questioning, why am I doing what I'm doing? Having a question and disposition not critical in the sense of negative thinking, but on how do I develop questions, so that I can be a bit clearer and more confident about what I'm doing? So why am I doing what I'm doing? How can I improve on that? Why am I doing what I'm doing in terms of the bigger picture? Questions that keep you awake sometimes, but allows you to think, and then emerge from there with a little bit more clarity. Without there ever being absolute certainty.



COMMENTS

“M&E should not only be for compliance, but it should be that intrinsic motivation that we as staff have to take part in those processes. It is a culture that we have to foster in an organisation.”

Video takeaway: “Having COURAGE to be honest and communicating why. Most people (including donors) are rational beings who could understand and accept failure if it is unpacked and learned from.”



CLOSING AND CHECKOUT

Closing off the session Anniza noted that ‘it is possible to evaluate without evaluative thinking, but it will be painful and pointless’.

Thank you for attending our Western Cape Monitoring & Evaluation Community of Practice on the 18th August 2022, which focused on Evaluative Thinking, presented by Mark Abrahams.

As Monitoring & Evaluation is critical to our organization, we would love to hear your feedback so that we can improve our future CoP's.

We would also love to hear what you, as a valued CoP member would like to hear at one of our upcoming events. Let us know any themes or topics you would like us to cover and we will do our best to include it. The feedback form can be found at the following [link](#).



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Surname	Organisation
Anniza	De Wet	Valcare
Bridget	Rosser	The Lefika Foundation
Charles	Vandyck	Rise to Inspire Africa initiative
Dena	Lomofsky	Southern Hemisphere
Eleanor	Hazell	Jet Education Services/SAMEA
Firdous	Khan	ELRU
Herman	Meyer	LEAP
Ilanie	Groenewald	Walking on Water ministry NPC
Jessica	Horler	UCT
Jessica	Ronaasen	The Do More Foundation
Johannes	Erasmus	Inceba Trust
Kerry	White	Western Cape Primary Science Programme (PSP)
Khosi	Nkambule	BRIDGE

Lungiswa	Zibi	DSI
Mark	Abrahams	WC Economic Development Partnership
Oupa Munashe	Muchenga	Valcare NPC
Tshireletso	Sekotlo	Eluthandweni community kitchen and development Center
Tumi	Erasmus	BRIDGE
Vincent	Nteta	Mbeko Eco Club

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE's knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE's Knowledge Hub, as are any other specific knowledge products relevant to M&E. [Here](#) is the link to this.