In Design, Monitoring And Evaluation For Conflict Transformation **ETHICS**

This section includes:

1. Discussion of unethical practices

2. Categories and strategies for dealing with common ethical issues
   - *Protection of people*
   - *Freedom from political interference*
   - *Quality data collection techniques*

3. What is informed consent?

4. Internal versus external evaluators and ethics

INTRODUCTION

"To enjoy the things we ought and to hate the things we ought has the greatest bearing on excellence of character."

- ARISTOTLE

This chapter discusses ethical issues in design, monitoring, and evaluation of peacebuilding projects. It begins by offering guidance on what constitutes an unethical practice and how such practices might arise at each stage of the project cycle. Not surprisingly, the ethical issues related to baselines and evaluations overlap in a number of areas, whereas the design stage has several unique ethical challenges of its own. Within each section, practical strategies for preventing and avoiding unethical choices are offered. The practice of informed consent is considered in relation to the realities of evaluation of peacebuilding. Finally, the chapter explores the different ethical issues faced by internal and external evaluators.

What is an unethical practice?

Not knowing what constitutes best practice is incompetence. Knowing what best practice is, but not knowing how to achieve it, may be inexperience. Knowingly not following best practices, when one knows how to achieve it, is unethical.[22]

There are many types of unethical practice in design, monitoring, and evaluation of conflict transformation programs. On one hand, there are ethical issues that commonly occur in DM&E of peacebuilding that generally have a "right" and a "wrong" answer. Changing data to represent a project in a more positive or negative light, for instance, is clearly wrong.

Conversely, an ethical dilemma often does not have a clear right or wrong answer, and because of this ambiguity, decisions should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The cultural norms, values, and experiences of those involved often play a significant role in the decision. An example of such an ethical dilemma can be seen in the decision about whether or not to insist on the equality of youth voices in decisionmaking as part of a participatory evaluation in a society that honors elders and the roles they play as key decisionmakers.

For some, what is discussed in this chapter may be viewed either as standard political actions to benefit one side or another or simply the lack

[22] Nick Smith, *An Analysis of Ethical Challenges in Evaluation,* American Journal of Evaluation, Volume 23, No. 2(2002)

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of application of best practices. Regardless of the label applied, if the action does not fall within appropriate principles of conduct for design, monitoring, and evaluation, it fits within this discussion on ethics.

What are the ethical challenges common in the design stage?

When discussing the development of a peacebuilding project, innumerable ethical challenges may arise. The four challenges discussed below, however, are those that are likely to apply in most situations.

First, practitioners have an ethical obligation to involve the parties to a conflict in determining the changes that will satisfy their respective interests. Although people in conflict may not always be able see how to transform their disputes at the outset of discussions, they ultimately make the final choices once additional options have been explored.

Second, practitioners have an ethical responsibility to consider any possible negative ramifications that may occur as a result of a project and to do everything feasible to eliminate them. Consider, for instance, a youth project in Israel that targeted teenage boys, ages 13-15, from politically hard-line families. The goal of the project was to change attitudes from supporting violence to a recognition that there are multiple ways beyond violence to resolve the political situation. As the project progressed, some of the participants started to challenge the adult members of their families in political discussions. In one case, this led a father to physically assault his son as punishment for what the father saw as the son's disloyal and disrespectful opinions. Such an unintended negative effect might have been prevented if, in the design stage of the project, this scenario had been identified and preventive measures adopted. These measures could have included engagement with parents or the incorporation of techniques for dealing constructively with families about sensitive issues so that the participants would be prepared for such a situation.

Third, practitioners have an ethical obligation to develop projects that maximize the opportunities for change. This maximization is determined on a situation-by-situation basis, but it broadly encompasses creating change among the most people, in the fastest way possible, for the greatest possible positive change, and with the least possible negative consequences. The ethical challenge arises when project designs that do not maximize the opportunities for change are seen as easier to implement or have more readily available sources of funding.

Finally, the development of indicators can be an ethical issue. For example, there may be indicators that reflect changes of less importance or that signal changes on issues that are not directly affected by the project but which present the work in a more positive light than would an accurate indicator.

In an attempt to address these ethical challenges, organizations can add a set of questions to their project design processes that they routinely review. These questions might include some of the following:

- If there were absolutely no restrictions in terms of capacity, time, or funds, how would we modify this project?

- Have discussions with the prospective donor taken place to explore options that may be more productive or beneficial to the stakeholders?

- Have the connections between the analysis and the proposed project been explicitly outlined?

- Can the stakeholder's perspective be seen in the final design?

- What are the potential negative results that could occur as a result of this project? What steps need to be taken to minimize the potential negative consequences to participants, staff, or the community?

- Are there other programs currently operating to which this project should be connected in order to maximize results?

- If the team members could only implement one project, which would they select as the most important, and would it make a difference?

- Were other options fully discussed based on the conflict assessment, particularly those not part of our regular activities?

What are some of the common ethical challenges for baselines and evaluations?

There are a number of ethical issues and dilemmas to consider when implementing baselines and evaluations. In some cases, the same issues apply to monitoring as well. The ethical challenges can be grouped into three broad categories: protection of people, freedom from political interference, and quality data collection techniques.

1. Protection of People

The ethical challenges related to the protection of people can be sub-divided into six major themes: avoiding personal duress, guaranteeing confidentiality, considering safety, setting realistic expectations, protecting the organization's credibility, and avoiding research subject fatigue.

This category (protection of people) spans all units of analysis, from the individual, to the implementing organization, to the target group as a whole (e.g., all Hutus or all ex-combatants).

AVOIDING PERSONAL DURESS: Data collectors should consider the potential negative consequences that could arise from delving into an individual's personal experience. For instance, silence can be a coping strategy for some victims of violent conflict; however, they may be asked to talk about their experiences as part of the evaluation process. This process therefore risks undermining the participants' coping strategy without offering the necessary support structure to provide assistance if it is needed.[23]

Evaluators should approach some groups in places of war, such as victims of rape or torture, with caution, and ideally consult with experts on the appropriate ways to engage with these groups, if at all. However, conflict zones are rife with individuals who have unhealed psychological wounds and trauma that are not apparent. Evaluators should therefore look for signals of duress, such as agitation or tears, in their subjects and be prepared to handle the situation appropriately. Seeking advice from experts on this issue, prior to data collection, is a prudent step for the professional evaluator.

GUARANTEEING CONFIDENTIALITY: It is important for individuals providing data for a baseline or evaluation, whether through surveys or in one-on-one interviews, to understand how their names will be used in connection with the information they provide. The evaluator must explain clearly how the information will be attributed in the final deliverable. In other words, will the person's name be used, along with her/his ideas, in a quote format or will attributes be used to provide a context for the comments (e.g., women in the village), or will the information simply stand alone?

In conflict settings, where speaking out against one's group or the government, for instance, may prove deadly, the norm is to guarantee confidentiality to all individuals who participate. In this case, not only does the evaluator need to explain that the data is confidential to each individual, she/he must do preparatory work to ensure that confidentiality can be guaranteed. More on this issue can be found later in the chapter under Informed Consent, page 198.

Special care is due when writing the baseline or evaluation report once confidentiality has been promised. In local settings or where people are assumed to hold particular views, even general attributes in connection with specific statements may be identifiable by the community. For instance, if there are only ten positions on the district council and six individuals have held their positions for years, attributing a statement to a new member to the district council is almost the same as using the

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[23] Cheyanne Church and Julie Shouldice, *Part II.*

person's name. This can become a difficult dilemma when the identity, position, or standing of a person inherently provides insights on her/his statements or opinions.

CONSIDERING SAFETY: In conflicts where communities are segregated, like Kosovo or Northern Ireland, being seen speaking to an outsider can be enough to cause suspicion within an individual's community. A number of questions might result: Who was the stranger? Why were they here? What did they want to know? What did you tell them? In a calm situation, suspicion may end with harmless gossip; however, if tensions rise or are already high, the suspicions could grow into more serious outcomes for the individual, such as expulsion or physical harm. Evaluators have an ethical responsibility both to consider the safety of the individuals who provide them with information and to plan their data collection efforts to minimize any possible risk. Where meetings take place, who introduces the evaluator to the individual, and who should be told about the evaluation and the purpose of the visits are all important considerations for an ethical evaluator.

Another safety dilemma can arise when an evaluation team hires members from the conflict setting. The members from the community may have greater freedom of movement in areas experiencing active conflict and often travel alone to these locations to collect data. What is the team's responsibility for the personal safety of these local team members when they enter high-risk areas? The dilemma lies in what constitutes too much risk. It may be useful to consider the following rule of thumb: If the team member from the area would not travel to the conflict area independently, regardless of the foreign vehicle or official trappings, other options should be considered for accessing the data being sought. (See the Evaluation Management chapter, page 168, for more information on accessing data in situations that are too dangerous to enter.) In addition, do not assume that a team member from the area is aware of the security concerns at the time the work is to be done.

SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Anyone collecting data for a baseline, monitoring, or evaluation should be careful not to set undue expectations during the data collection process. It is often the case that, in an effort to express thanks, generate excitement, or convince people to answer questions, the data collector inadvertently raises expectations unrealistically. Consider the following example.

A practitioner was monitoring the progress toward results of a program seeking to increase a community's knowledge of the city's grievance procedures. He wanted to speak to community members who were residents of government-subsidized housing in an area of violent crime because the project team felt that the data should be disaggregated for socio-economic standing. (See the Methods chapter, page 216, for more information on disaggregated data.)

Convincing residents of the housing project to speak with him was difficult, however. In an effort to entice more people to cooperate, he opened the conversation with the following statement: "If our group is going to be able to help people deal with crime in this area, we need people to answer a few questions." This led many of the residents to conclude that the NGO was going to work actively in their community to decrease crime. Arguably, knowing more about grievance procedures might help in this regard; however, the NGO's intention was never to directly address crime and violence. As a result, it set unrealistic expectations.

PROTECTING THE ORGANIZATION'S CREDIBILITY: Those collecting data should also be aware that their actions are often deemed to be an extension of the organization being evaluated. Consequently, if a team member behaves inappropriately it can harm the organization's reputation, and – in more serious cases – the inappropriate behavior may derail any progress achieved to date from the work.

Consider the following example from Northern Ireland. "[A]n evaluator… enters a tense conflict situation to evaluate a cross-community dialogue project with leaders of opposing communities. The evaluator is permitted to meet with the participants in the program because of the goodwill and trust established between the conflict parties and the implementing agency. However, if the evaluator does not operate within the norms of the communication established by the agency such as meeting with an equal number of representatives from each side, or is interpreted as being biased by one of the parties, this can severely damage the agency's credibility with the parties and constrain the dialogue process."[24]

AVOIDING RESEARCH SUBJECT FATIGUE: In areas where a great deal of research is done, there can be problems with beleaguered research subjects being asked repeatedly to offer information on similar themes in relatively short periods of time. Not only does such repetition steal valuable time from the individual, it also dilutes the authenticity of the answer since the person has been asked about the same subject so many times that her/his response becomes almost "pre-recorded."

Organizations considering an evaluation would therefore be prudent to ask other agencies working in the area or their donor if other evaluations are pending. Sometimes it is possible to combine evaluation or baseline projects. This not only shows respect for the research subjects but it can also decrease the cost of the research to the organization. Furthermore, professional evaluators should inquire about the possibility of cooperation with other organizations at the earliest stage possible within the evaluation since there may still be time to combine research with other efforts.

[24] Church and Shouldice, *Part II.*

2. Freedom from Political Interference

Evaluations should be conducted free from political interference from the implementing organization, the donor, the evaluation team, and the stakeholders. There are many ways, and many different reasons why, political pressure might be applied to an evaluation process. Implementing organizations may see the evaluation as a way to promote themselves to donors and, as a result, will steer the evaluator toward only those people who will speak positively about the organization. Donors may view an evaluation as a way to justify a decision to end funding to a sector or organization by requiring a methodology that misses many of the positive results. The evaluation team may wish to secure ongoing contracts with the implementing agency by presenting the agency in an unearned positive light. Stakeholders may see the evaluation as the only way to access additional resources for their community and, therefore, they may lobby the evaluator to make specific recommendations.

Evaluations provide far more opportunity for political interference than do baselines, though baselines are not exempt from meddling. Some of the more common political interferences can be found in the table below. An "X" indicates whether the political interference applies most commonly to baselines, evaluations, or both.

Common Political Interference in Baseines and Evaluations

Common Political Interference	Baseline	Evaluation
Implementing agency pressures the evaluation team to omit weaknesses from the final evaluation report.		X
Staff members ask the evaluation team to show them in a positive light.		X
Donors require the evaluator to use a methodology that is not optimal for the information being sought.	X	X
Staff pressure participants into being part of the study.	X	X
The implementing agency or donor already has an answer and writes the terms of reference in a way that sets up the evaluator to justify that answer.		X
Staff members coach project participants on the kinds of responses they want given to the evaluator.		X
Evaluators are pushed toward specific sets of people who are unusually positive or negative.	X	X
Not providing the evaluation team with reports that capture concerns or negative effects of the project.		X
Not including on participant lists those who have dropped out of the project.		X
Creating documents such as reports or project logs to meet the evaluation team request during the evaluation.		X

There are a number of strategies that can be adopted when there is political interference. Some of the most common strategies recommended by professional evaluators include:

FRAMING THE ISSUE OF CONCERN: Consider the attempted interference as a regular part of negotiations rather than as an unmanageable impediment to a quality evaluation process.[25] In this case, the evaluator should reframe the concern as an issue that requires additional negotiation with the party exerting the political interference. This technique is often combined with Communication & Education, which is described next.

COMMUNICATION & EDUCATION: Ensuring that all stakeholders understand the steps in the process and the rationale behind them will decrease opportunities for misunderstanding and potential malpractice. In the first stage of the evaluation, explicitly develop the principle of transparent communication, whereby all parties provide explanations of their requests and choices, and provide opportunities for discussion.

DETAILED & DOCUMENTED PLANNING: An evaluation plan and terms of reference that are well-thought through and documented can be very helpful for at least two reasons. First, they offer clear boundaries and decisions that are less open to interpretation. Second, they provide an historical reference that the evaluator can refer to later if inappropriate pressure arises during the evaluation process. A detailed contract with clearly defined grievance procedures can also be helpful if disagreements arise.

TIMELINESS: When actions occur or statements are made that seem intended to exert undue political pressure, they need to be faced immediately and directly.

INCREASE THE SEATS AT THE TABLE: The more stakeholders represented at the table, the more likely political interference will either not arise or will be handled in an appropriate manner.

CHECKS & BALANCES: Having an evaluation team rather than an individual evaluator can provide checks and balances when ethical challenges arise. In addition, if political pressure is at the heart of an issue, there is always more strength in numbers (i.e., as opposed to an individual evaluator on her/his own). Another good check and balance to put in place is an independent evaluation manager. See the Evaluation Management chapter for more information on the role of the evaluation manager, page 137.

CONSULT EXPERTS: If there is any uncertainty as to what is acceptable, consult an expert. If the organization has internal DM&E expertise, check to see if there are any norms that the organization has chosen

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[25] Nick Smith, *An Analysis of Ethical Challenges in Evaluation,* American Journal of Evaluation, Volume 23, No. 2 (2002).

to utilize or request guidance. If there are no internal resources, use evaluation network listservs to request input or contact academics in the evaluation field. If the question is brief, people are generally happy to provide their input.

ADHERENCE TO AND DISCUSSION ABOUT PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES: Professional associations increasingly issue principles or norms of ethical practice. National evaluation associations are no different; therefore, be sure to check if professional principles have been issued for the country in which the evaluation will be conducted. If none exist and/or there is no national evaluation association, a good alternative is the American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles below. These principles may need to be adapted somewhat to other settings, but they offer a useful point of reference for a discussion with stakeholders in an evaluation.

American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles

A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.

B. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

C. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

D. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.

E. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

HONOR YOUR OWN INTEGRITY: If you feel you are being asked to do something that does not "intuitively" feel right, raise the issue with the organization before you proceed. Some may call this the "Can I sleep at night?" measure.

3. Quality Data Collection Techniques

In addition to using best practice in data collection to ensure sound and credible inputs for analysis, evaluators also need to consider some ethical challenges that can affect data quality.

One such challenge is whether or not to reimburse people for the time they have given to provide information. In many peacebuilding programs, the average participant would qualify as being a member of the

world's poor. Taking two hours of time to participate in a focus group rather than earn money or gather food may have a substantial effect on the person's livelihood. Should they be reimbursed for their time, with money, transport, or food? Classic social science research would state that they should not be reimbursed since remunerating people for their opinions may cause them to alter their statements or responses to be unduly positive or supportive of the topic.

However, the rules of social science methodology were created in the "developed West" and often need to be adapted to non-Western contexts. If possible, it is always better to avoid providing material incentives since they can potentially skew the results. Nonetheless, this is not always the most ethical stance and, in certain cases, creatively identifying ways to reimburse people for their time is appropriate. Offering lunch, funds for transport, or a small item such as a bucket are potential examples. If such items are offered, assure each person that the reimbursement is guaranteed regardless of the information offered.

The second dilemma to consider is the balance between respecting local customs and advancing an agenda the organization or evaluation team deems important to the project. One of the most widely known illustrations of this is gender inclusion. It is commonplace for evaluators to want to engage men and women in their data collection, yet in some situations, accessing women's opinions may be counter to local customs. This can be particularly true if the evaluators are solely male and wish to speak to women without the presence of local men. Should the beliefs of the evaluation team override local customs? In these situations, it may be best to turn to the implementing organization for guidance.

What is Informed Consent?

Informed consent is the process of educating participants in the research about the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and alternatives to participation. In social science research at the academic level, informed consent is a standard and required part of any research project. It is seen as an ethical obligation of the researcher and as a key part of the protection of the people involved in the study. In these cases, consent needs to be obtained in written form from participants before they become involved in the research. It is far more than simply obtaining a signature on the consent document. It is about the individual's understanding and willingness to participate in the study.[26]

This standard of written consent is not yet the norm in international conflict transformation evaluation. Complying with the written documentation requirement may never be feasible because of illiteracy as well as confidentiality and security concerns in conflict settings. The essence of informed consent holds true, however, regardless of

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[26] Informed Consent Overview, Institutional Review Board, University of Minnesota, 1998 http://www. research.umn.edu.consent/modlsoc/modlsec1.html

the setting. Participants in an evaluation should be informed of the purpose, process, risks, and benefits of participation and be given the opportunity to decline to participate.

Are there different ethical dilemmas and issues for internal versus external evaluators?

Ethical challenges do not generally differ between internal and external evaluators. What does seem to differ is the way in which issues are resolved. One of the primary factors behind this difference is the different relationship to the organizational structure that each holds.

It is the nature of those relationships that is critical for considering ethical dilemmas. Internal evaluators are situated directly within the organization whereas externals are outside the organization and are related to many different entities at the same time. The organization that constitutes the most important relationship to an external evaluator is rarely the one she/he is evaluating. Yet for the internal evaluator, the focus of the evaluation – a project within her/his organization – is generally the most important relationship to the evaluator's professional position.

Ethical dilemmas therefore arise with people who the internal evaluator knows well and works for routinely. The internal evaluator often feels that she/he has fewer options in challenging situations. To foster a sense of belonging and long-term community, an internal evaluator may feel the need to be more conciliatory about challenging issues. External evaluators generally have more latitude because their connections to the group involve a particular project and they have been brought in for their expertise on that project.

This situation may mean internal evaluators are more vulnerable to poor practices exerted by the organization or donor which result from conflicting roles associated with being both a professional evaluator and a member of an organization. However, the personal relationships that consulting professionals develop with their clients, and the expectations engendered by clients' direct hiring and reimbursement of the professional, may also exacerbate ethical dilemmas. Due to the inherent power dynamic, it can appear against the consulting professional's best interest to pursue ethical norms that seem to conflict with a client's self-interest.

Further Reading

Brian English, "Conducting Ethical Evaluations with Disadvantaged and Minority Target Groups," *Evaluation Practice*, Volume 18, Number 1, 1997

Jody L. Fitzpatrick and Michael Morris (eds.), "Current and Emerging Ethical Issues in Evaluation," *New Directions for Evaluation*, Number 82, Summer 1999

Ethics, Canadian Evaluation Society http://evaluationcanada.ca

Guiding Principles, American Evaluation Association http://www.eval. org/Guiding%20Principles.htm