



EVALUATING TOGETHER:

Expanding Thinking and Strengthening Practice

Informal Data: Real Insights

Prepared by: Harry Cummings and Associates

> Ontario Council for International Cooperation

> > Funded by:



INTRODUCTIONS

- Harry Cummings and Associates (HCA)
 - HCA: Evaluation/planning firm since 1997 based in Guelph, ON
 - Over 200 consulting projects in Canada/international
 - Dr. Harry Cummings, PhD, RPP, Director of HCA & President of the Canadian Evaluation Society
 - David Lane, Consultant, HCA

Participant introductions

- Name
- Organization
- Role/title within organization

- 1. Build capacity and awareness of participants around the approaches and inclusion of informal data in monitoring and evaluation practice.
- 2. Assist participants in understanding how to gather, validate and incorporate informal data into their work and to use them to contribute to evidence-based findings and decision-making.

- To understand how "informal" data and data collection relates to more "formal" approaches
- To understand when and why informal approaches are beneficial and appropriate
- To understand a variety of approaches and key sources of informal data
- To understand the key data quality, ethical and methodological issues associated with informal data collection
- To understand the differing needs and capacities of stakeholders and research participants
- To understand where informal data fits in the evaluation context
- To understand approaches to analysing informal data and how it can be triangulated and validated with other data sources

FORMAL DATA SOURCES

- Quantitative and qualitative in nature
- Systematically and purposefully collected to provide evidence for pre-determined questions
- Traditional mixed-method data sources:
 - Literature (academic and grey literature)
 - Key informant interviews
 - Survey/questionnaires
 - Focus group discussions
 - Program monitoring and information management systems

INFORMAL DATA SOURCES

- Typically qualitative in nature (often can be quantified)
- Unplanned, often emergent, from sources that may be rooted in spontaneity or experience (empirical/phenomenological)
- Possible informal data sources:
 - Participant observation
 - Journaling
 - Photography
 - Unstructured discussions/meetings (lunches, walks, site visits)
 - Traditional knowledge
 - Alternative secondary data (media, social media, blogs)
 - Informal written communication (emails, chat discussion, mobile communication)

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

• Strengths:

- Open inquiry, unexpected outcomes (Michael Quinn Patton)
- Accessible in a variety of low capacity contexts
- Can validate evidence collected from other sources
- Can contribute meaning and context to findings

Challenges:

- Inclusive of a high degree of subjectivity & possible biases
- Sometimes difficult to validate with other evidence
- Interpretation may rely upon assumptions
- Inherently unpredictable

- Reliability the extent to which data can be replicated
 - Stability
 - Internal reliability
 - Inter-observer consistency
- Validity the extent to which the data is truly measuring (or describing) the phenomenon of interest
 - Face validity
 - Concurrent validity
 - Construct validity
 - Convergent validity

* Source: Bryman, A. & Teevan, J. (2005). Social Research Methods. Oxford University Press

- Please review the sample(s) of informal data and discuss in your group
- Consider the following questions:
 - What do you find particularly relevant/useful in this sample?
 - How might to test the reliability and/or validity of this data?



- Informed consent
- Confidentiality/anonymity
- Risks to participants
- Tri-Council Policy Statement on 'Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans' three core principles:
 - Respect for Persons
 - Concern for Welfare
 - Justice

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PARTICIPANT/RESEARCHER BIAS

Conflict of interest

Stakeholder stands to personally benefit from a specific outcome (usually financially)

Lack of knowledge/awareness

 Education and/or experience makes stakeholder unable to speak with depth/accuracy

Social or political pressure

 Fear and/or political interests drive the stakeholder to present selective and/or manipulated information

Competing agendas

Reliability of data is undermined by stakeholders with differing views and interests

BREAK OUT DISCUSSION

- Please review the Case Study and discuss in your group
- Consider the following questions:
 - In this context, what are some of the key social, political, environmental factors at play?
 - What are some of the informal data sources you might consider accessing when looking at this case?



- 1. Engage program staff and partners early in the evaluation process to discuss and agree on practical approaches , performance indicators and data collection methods.
- 2. Take the time to compile and 'mine' all available reports / documents / case files for evidence of outcomes .
- 3. Allow / plan for informal meetings with youth and service providers as a first step in gaining their confidence and trust... be an observer / participant in their activities... 'walk in their shoes' and see where the conversation goes.



Photo: Don Murray, CIRQINIQ Summer Camp, 2013

- Extensive use of observation
- Broad use of informal discussion and discovery exploration
- Secondary documents (i.e. instructor visit notes)
- Comprehensive review of Social Media (i.e. Facebook, YouTube)
- Snowball sampling
- Emergent design



Photo: Kativik Regional Government

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMAL DATA

- Pre-planned documentation vs. retrospective review
- Field reports
 - Dated journals, open ended site visit templates
- Archived communications
 - Meeting minutes, electronic correspondence, social media posts, public promotional/ communications materials
- Photographs
 - Informed consent, confidentiality/anonymity and intellectual property procedures must be considered
- Media/social media

FORMALIZING THE INFORMAL

- Building informal (unstructured) data collection into your design
 - Participant observation
 - Field journaling
 - Photo documentation
 - Review of informal documents
 - Open inquiry
- Reflecting and incorporating emergent informal sources into your evaluation
 - Snowball sampling
 - Discussions
 - Observations
 - Social media

ANALYSING INFORMAL DATA

- Data cleaning/quality assurance
 - Reviewing and formatting data into a format that protects data integrity, while collating it into a format that is digestible and sortable
- Preparing a sortable spreadsheet/file system
 - Input data into a program (i.e. Excel) in a fashion that can be sorted, by name, date, theme, etc.
 - Develop a filing system that will allow you to search and identify relevant data in an efficient fashion

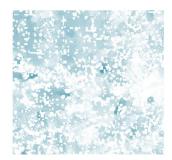
CONTENT ANALYSIS/CODING

- Data may be analyzed using standard quantitative/qualitative data analysis techniques
- **Coding:** transforming your data into a format that can be sorted and analyzed (usually by categorizing data by particular themes/characteristics of interest)
- **Content analysis:** the identification and/or quantification of words, ideas and concepts from a text document
- Identify most relevant and/or recurrent themes:
 - If a single significant finding is identified, it may be used as an 'impact story' or a 'mini case study' to exemplify program or contextual realities
 - If a recurrent theme emerges from informal data, it can be quantified or summarized and reported (particularly if corroborated from various sources)

TRIANGULATING/VALIDATING RESULTS

- Informal data are most meaningful when they are reinforced and validated by multiple data sources
- Recurrent themes/codes identified in informal data will provide the greatest base of evidence for your findings if they can also be identified and corroborated by other sources, such as:
 - Academic/grey literature
 - Secondary data
 - Expert testimony
 - A diversity of program stakeholders





CONTACT US

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