Communication, commitment, and collaboration

A perspective on ethical reflection in evaluation practice in multiactor networks

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The aim of my study is to suggest guidelines for collaborative ethical reflection in evaluation practice in multiactor networks, in which there is a need for cooperation in order to fit together multiple points of view, traditions, and interests; to resolve eventual conflicts in interactional context. In the first article I illustrated the complexity of composing framework that can ensure clear guidelines for ethical evaluation practice in specific contextual situations and in a complex operational environment with conflicting role expectations. For this purpose, I studied, applying philosophical analysis, (a) the discourse ethical perspective, which emphasizes the normative features of the use of language (Searle, Habermas); (b) Newman and Brown’s heuristic model for ethical reflection in evaluation, which draws attention to a range of sources an evaluator may need to integrate to inform ethical decisions; and (c) a postmodern framework designed to serve as a description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. The fourth article connects the findings of the first article to the argumentative perspective of evaluation. The results indicate that from speech acts it may be impossible either to logically derive moral duties or obligations to act, or to present idealising suppositions of such rules for dialogical situations as would ensure the production of universal norms for participants in a conversation. However, the argumentation process is fruitful especially when the participants can set mutual understanding as a goal and commit to aspiring to that goal—although it will be impossible to reach it perfectly in practice. Neither using extensive principles nor reflecting on several theories can ensure a clear view of the situation. The ethics of evaluation is mostly concerned with balancing conflicting principles and values. Therefore, in ethical reflection, the focus should be on commitment to a certain reflective, professional way of life in which the identifying and acquiring professional virtues have an important role.

In the second article, the perspective is extended by analyzing the dynamics of the development of cooperation in multiactor networks from the viewpoint of the third generation of activity theory, which gives a constructive perspective on how contradictions can be a driving force behind interorganizational learning and development. In the third article, this approach is applied in analyzing the results of a case study of the contradictory position of evaluators in situations where cooperational
relationships and professional networks are close. This perspective is then extended by applying the postmodern model for ethical reflection discussed in the first article. From the activity theoretical perspective, the ethical issues reflect contradictions, which can be a starting point for development, if the actors can become collectively oriented in the analysis of a contradictory situation, and in the modeling, implementation, and examination of a new solution. In this endeavor, the multivoiced character of the network of interacting activity systems in the evaluation process needs to be taken into consideration. For example, the people involved in the evaluation process could create a collaborative forum in which different essential perspectives can be taken into account in order to solve ethical problems. In this kind of process, it is possible to apply the postmodern model for ethical reflection in order to obtain a shared construction of the essential operational principles and their balance in the evaluation process.
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Introduction

1. Ethical challenges, argumentation, and interorganizational learning

Evaluation differs from research in its explicit, indeed required, determination of the merit, worth, or value of what is researched (Scriven, 1991; Wolf et al., 2009, p. 171). It provides usable information to support decisions about program or policy operations and effectiveness (Wolf et al., 2009). Therefore, it plays an important role in the choice of the public policy instruments with which governmental authorities wield their power when attempting to ensure support and to effect social change (e.g. Bemelmans-Videc & Vedung, 2003; House, 2006; Simons, 2006; Schwandt, 2007). Evaluation is inherently political due to the interactions of various stakeholders in evaluation, as they articulate their interests from different positions of power, influence, and authority (e.g. Datta, 2011). The operational context of evaluation is ethically challenging. As Simons (2006, p. 243) depicts:

Drawing attention to the interdependence of politics and ethics and conflicts among principles, highlights the unique nature of the evaluation task and the key responsibilities of the evaluation role. Evaluation involves at least four levels of social-political interaction - with government and other agency policy makers who commission evaluation; with participants in the programmes, policies and institutions evaluated; with the evaluation profession; and with the wider audiences to whom evaluators in a democratic society have a responsibility to report. Evaluation has to operate in this multilayered context of different interests, providing information to inform decisions while remaining independent of the policies and programmes themselves. In such a context it is not surprising that ethical dilemmas arise as to which is the best course of action to take.

The situations of evaluation are inevitably complex and various, often involving conflicts between ethical principles as well as among the aims or claims of stakeholders (Schweigert, 2007). Addressing the competing and often conflicting values of different members of an evaluation audience is a necessary and difficult task in evaluation (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007, p. 13, p. 21). In this task, the principles, standards, and codes designed to facilitate ethical professional practice are important guidelines.1

1 Ethical rules are specific statements about ethical behavior; ethical codes are compilations of ethical rules. Ethical standards can be synonymous with ethical rules and codes but may go beyond that definition to suggest model behavior. Ethical principles are broader than rules and
However, it is argued that there is no context-free abstract set of standards or principles that can be applied to guide ethical decision making in evaluation. In practice, evaluators encounter ethical dilemmas, where they have to make complex judgments, choices between alternative courses of action, taking into account a myriad of factors - social, personal, political, cultural - that are pertinent in the particular context (House, 1980; Lincoln, 1990; Mabry, 1999; Pring, 2000; Simons, 2006). The evaluators have to make decisions case by case regarding the applicability and appropriate balance of the principles of the applied use of research methods (Goodyear, 2007; Schweigert, 2007, Wolf et al., 2009).

The challenging context of ethical decision making in evaluation has motivated various research activities. Picciotto (2005) for one has proposed an assessment framework for rating evaluation standards and suggests a participatory elaboration of global evaluation standards. Virtanen and Laitinen (2004) have designed a framework designed to serve as a description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. Schweigert (2007) has provided a framework of justice to guide practitioners in clarifying the conflicts between ethical principles and among the aims of stakeholders. There is also empirical research on the ethical challenges that evaluators face in practice. Morris and Clark (2009), Morris and Jacobs (2000), and Turner (2003), for example, have done empirical research that identifies and explores the ethical challenges encountered by evaluators during the various phases of an evaluation. Wolf et al. (2009) have done exploratory research that presents composite pictures of the various ways evaluators think about ethics in their practices. Also, research that serve as the foundation for codes. Principles stand as models of behaviour and practice, providing and encompassing not only situational rules but also serving as guides for unspecified practice (Newman & Brown, 1996, p. 22). Many evaluation associations, such as those in France, Germany, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, have developed national standards or guides for evaluation practice that are significantly geared to ethical matters (Picciotto, 2005; Wolf et al., 2009). In practice, some evaluation societies have set standards to judge the quality of the evaluation and the product. For example, the Joint Committee on Standards has published the second and third editions of the Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994; Yarbrough et al., 2011). Others prefer more general statements of principle for the conduct of evaluation (e.g. Australasian Evaluation Society, Canadian Evaluation Society), accompanied in some cases by guidelines for interpreting the principles in practice. One example is the five principles (systematic inquiry, competence, integrity/honesty, respect for people, and responsibilities for general and public welfare) listed by the American Evaluation Association’s (1995, 2004) Guiding Principles for Evaluators. Yet others are couched in terms of more regulative rules or codes which promote and protect the profession and the public and to which members of a society must subscribe. (See Simons, 2006.)
compares evaluators’ and other stakeholders’ perceptions of ethical concerns has been
done (e.g. Alexander & Richman, 2008; Morris, 2007; see Morris, 2011). Furthermore,
there are guideline developmental activities that reflect a shift in emphasis from
technical issues of competent research practice to wider social and professional
considerations. An example of this is the revised version of the Program Evaluation
Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011), which illustrates a wider view of evaluator
responsibilities, reflecting interest in issues surrounding the commissioning of
evaluation and the nature of stakeholder involvement in setting evaluation parameters as
well as concerns about how evaluation results are used and how they fit into the ‘bigger
picture’ of social change (see Wolf et al., 2009).

These research activities provide important perspectives on this challenging field.
In order to meet the challenges of ethical decision making in evaluation, we need a
participatory elaboration of common guidelines as well as frameworks that take into
account different ethical perspectives as well as conflicts between ethical principles and
among the aims of stakeholders.

This study focuses on sketching guidelines for ethical reflection in evaluation in a
multilayered context of different interests where evaluators have to address competing
and even conflicting values and principles. Firstly, I illustrated the complexity of
composing a framework that can ensure clear guidelines for ethical evaluation practice
in specific contextual situations and in a complex operational environment with
conflicting role expectations. For this purpose I studied, applying philosophical
analysis, (a) the discourse ethical perspective, which emphasizes the normative features
of the use of language (Searle, Habermas); (b) Newman and Brown’s (1996) heuristic
framework for ethical reflection in evaluation, which draws attention to a range of
sources that evaluators may need to integrate in order to inform ethical decisions; and
(c) a postmodern framework designed to serve as a description of the ethical
perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible (Laitinen, 2002; Virtanen &
Laitinen, 2004; Laitinen, 2008). Secondly, I extended the perspective on the
contradictory position of evaluators using activity theory, which gives a constructive
perspective on how contradictions can be a driving force behind interorganizational
learning and development in multiactor networks. The activity theoretical perspective is
applied in analyzing the results of a case study of an agency evaluation and in
suggesting guidelines for collaborative ethical reflection.
The starting point is that in governmental evaluation markets, evaluators are acting in a complex operational environment, in multiactor networks, in which they have to take various roles, including those of a consultant/administrator, a data...
collector/researcher, a reporter, a member of the evaluation profession, a member of the same professional network as the evaluand, and a member of society. The complexity of assuming these multiple roles and meeting their demands frequently creates conflicts for the evaluator and results in ethical dilemmas – situations involving choices between equally unsatisfactory alternatives. The practical morality of evaluators has to do with making choices among conflicting values and principles (e.g. Newman & Brown, 1996). Skolits et al. (2009) have pointed out that typical evaluation activities create functional demands on evaluators, and that evaluators respond to these demands through a limited number of specified evaluator roles: manager, detective, designer, negotiator, diplomat, researcher, judge, reporter, use advocate, and learner (Figure 1). Also they maintain that “given the number, complexity, continued occurrence of multiple evaluator roles (primary and secondary roles) -- , there is an extremely strong potential for multiple role conflicts during an evaluation process” (Skolits et al., 2009, p. 293).

As Laitinen (2008) depicts, when the utilization of evaluation is emphasized, the focus is on that evaluator’s action presupposes a readiness to meet conflicting or different preconceived notions about the roles. For example, in situations where evaluation demands high level expertise, the members of evaluation peer groups may come from the same professional network as the evaluands – it may not be possible to find completely external experts who know the field well enough to be evaluators (Valovirta, 2000; Article III). In such a situation, an administrator who belongs to the same professional network as the evaluands - being a member of the evaluation peer group - may face a challenge to search for a balance between the ethical ideals attached to his or her role a) as an external evaluator (professional ethics), b) as a representative of his or her own organization competing for the same resources with the evaluand (administrative ethics), and c) as a partner in the same network as the evaluand (personal ethics) (Article III).

The complexity of this situation can be depicted from the viewpoint of Lundquist’s (1991) model (Figure 2), which illustrates how the ideals and the regulative norms form networks of conflicting principles that need to be balanced in practice. ² According to the

² The main values of administrative operations include, in addition to a shared advantage, the responsibility of the official for the legality of his actions, economic values (economy, efficiency, effectiveness), the principle of good service (customer orientation), the general principles of administrative law (being bound to the purpose of administration, objectivity, relativity, and equality), the principles of good administrative practice (the principles of right of access and transparency), human rights (the Declaration of Human Rights, the European Agreement of
model, the administrators must, all at the same time, be loyal to their superiors, obey the laws, and consider the views of their clients. Similarly to all administrators, they should share the general ethics of public administration as a consequence of the publicity of official positions. In addition, the administrator’s ethical consideration also includes professional and personal ethics as well as various other values. Additionally, the role of evaluator brings more ideals and norms.

Law

Supranational legislation
EU legislation
National legislation

Obedience

- Responsibility of an official for the legality of his actions
- Economy, efficiency, effectiveness
- General principles of administrative law
- Principles of good administrative practice
- Human rights
- Environmental considerations

Politicians

Higher administrators

Administrative ethics
- Professional ethics
- Personal ethics

Loyalty

Consideration

Shared advantage
- Client's advantage
- Special advantage

Members of society

Figure 2. The main components of administrative ethics in the changing operational context (Lundquist, 1991; Moilanen, 1999; Huotari, 2001, Article I)
It must be noticed that the role of evaluation is contextual. Valovirta (2000, 2002) has recognized that two dimensions, the degree of pressure for change and the relation between conflict and consensus, seem to profoundly affect the role that evaluations play within the management environment of agencies (Figure 3).

On the one hand, the relations between stakeholders may be consensual: there is agreement about aims and general satisfaction with the existing structures. On the other hand, the relations may be conflict-laden: stakeholders disagree fundamentally about the necessary course of action and even the definition of the problem. This consensus–conflict dimension is one characteristic of the evaluation context. Another important dimension runs between the poles of low and high pressure for change and reform. People may be extremely conscious that the situation should not be as it is, but this has not led to change. Or there may be low pressure for change because people have not encountered any real problems or have not felt any need for change. (Valovirta, 2002, p. 76)

Figure 3. Explaining the role of evaluation by its context (Valovirta, 2002)

Especially when the context where evaluation takes place is conflict laden with high expectations of channeling the existing pressures for change in the organization, the evaluator may feel challenged to take controversies and problems into account. The evaluator may be drawn into the middle of disputes and power struggles (Valovirta, 2000, 2002; Article III).
In his study, Valovirta (2002) applies the argumentative approach used in policy analysis to clarify the argumentative role of the analyst and to develop interactive approaches that facilitate dialogue among analysts and participants (Fischer & Forester 1993; Fischer 2003). The argumentative approach, heavily influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas, seeks to theoretically and practically integrate methodological and substantive policy issues with institutional and political practices. In the process, it illuminates the ways policy analysts make practical arguments to diverse professional and political audiences. Employing concepts from rhetoric and communications theory, it examines how such arguments can be persuasive in ways that can potentially generate new capacity-giving consensus (Fischer, 2003, pp. 182-183).

The goal is to improve policy argumentation by illuminating contentious questions, identifying the strengths and limitations of supporting evidence, and elucidating the political implications of contending positions. In the process, the task is to increase communicative competencies, deliberative capacities and social learning. (Fischer, 2003, pp. 201-202)

From the argumentative perspective, evaluation consists of different kinds of statements, which become matters of individual interpretation, collective argumentation, and decision making in interactional contexts. The reasoning process in evaluation produces arguments that are communicated as text and speech for evaluation users. These arguments then become part of the social processes of discussion, dialogue, and negotiations, which may lead to decisions and other kinds of effects (Valovirta, 2002).

According to Valovirta (2002, 68), an evaluation utilization process comprises four phases (Figure 4). First, people participate in an evaluation process and read the evaluation reports, the substance of which they interpret on their own. The presented

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3 As Fischer and Forester (1993, p. 14) sum up, the argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning represents practical, theoretical, and political advances in the field. Practically, the focus on argumentation makes it possible to closely examine the communicative and rhetorical strategies that planners and analysts use to direct attention to the problems and options that they are assessing. Theoretically, the focus on argumentation enables recognition of the complex ways analysts not only solve but formulate problems, the ways their arguments express or resist broader relations of power and belief, and the ways their practical arguments are inescapably both normative and descriptive. Finally, the focus on argumentation can reveal both the micro politics of planners’ and analysts’ agenda setting, selective representations, and claims, and the macro politics of analysts’ participation in larger discourses, whether those are articulated in relatively organized discourse coalitions or through more diffuse, if perhaps more subtly influential, ideologies and systems of political belief.
arguments are re-evaluated, leading to new and transformed comprehensions, the confirmation of existing beliefs, or refutation. In policy making and organizational action, these individual interpretations also become the subject of collective deliberation and decision making, where argumentation by persuasion, legitimization, criticism, and defense plays the central role. Finally, these interactions may result in decisions and actions, new shared understandings, and a new level of legitimacy.

In his approach, Valovirta (2002, p. 63) emphasizes argumentation as a particular kind of language-driven interaction where contradictions open up possibilities from learning from others’ viewpoints.

The second meaning of argument refers to argumentation as a particular kind of language-driven interaction among people. Billig (1987) differentiates it from 'the pretty company’, where ‘everyone agrees with each other’ (p. 83), which leaves no room for new comprehensions and insights to emerge. The shift from polite, harmonious discussion into an argumentative one takes place through contradiction (Billig, 1987: 85). Contradiction does not, however, necessarily ‘imply ill-will or loss of temper’ (Billig, 1987: 84). Instead, it opens up possibilities for learning from others’ viewpoints. It consists of arguments and counterarguments, thus constituting a ‘natural dialect’ (Huff, 1998), where gaining greater understanding and new comprehensions by collective deliberation is possible.
The central role of contradictions as a driving force behind change and development can be understood more profoundly from the perspective of activity theory. The approach permits human activity to be defined as a self-directing system that develops by resolving internal contradictions and external contradictions between the system and the environment. Contradictions are not the same as problems or conflicts; they are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. On the one hand, contradictions appear in the work as disturbances, breaks, and dilemmas, and on the other hand, as innovations - attempts to resolve the contradictions of human activity individually or together in a new way (Engeström, 1987, 1995, 2005; Article II).

Activity systems move through relatively long cycles of expansive learning (Figure 5). As the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated, some participants begin to question and deviate from its established norms. In some cases, this escalates into cooperative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort. A cycle of expansive learning is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the former mode of the activity. A full cycle of expansive learning may be understood as a

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4 Disturbances are discoordinations appearing in the course of activity and interaction. They are involuntary anomalies in the normal course of the work process assumed in planning, regulations, or tradition (‘manuscript’). Disturbances appear between a person and the material environment (for example, machines and appliances) or between persons. The disturbances in human interaction are usually difficulties in mutual comprehension, disagreements, rejections, and counterarguments between the participants.

A break is a barrier, a gap in mutual understanding and information between two or more participants. In actual communication situations they appear as silence or passivity. The breaks often end in explicit disturbances, misunderstandings, and disagreements.

A dilemma is a contradiction influential in the activity, speech, and thoughts of participants. It appears as hesitation, reservation, fluctuations between two possibilities, inconsistent attitudes, and even self-disputation. In speech they usually are manifested as hesitations and reservations, with several “but” words and negatives. Dilemmas do not necessarily end in disturbances, but they demonstrate tensions and contradictions in an activity system.

Innovations are more or less conscious initiatives to exceed the manuscript (the current activity) in order to produce a novel idea or solution. Implementation, transmission, and entrenchment usually require that the initiative is accepted in the work community – otherwise it remains an innovation attempt. A successful innovation is realized in a new instrument or procedure, which is put into action. It is sometimes impossible to determine the difference between innovation and disturbance; both of them are deviations from the manuscript. One worker’s innovation may be experienced as a disturbance, and correspondingly, a disturbance may result in innovation. (Engeström, 1995, pp. 65-67)
collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity, which is the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to a ‘double bind’ potentially embedded in everyday actions (Engeström, 1987, 2001, 2005).

For example, the developmental dynamics of a research activity can be analyzed as cycles of expansion in which the emerging problems and contradictions of the activity are resolved. Each phase in an evolving research activity raises basic problems and challenges that the group or laboratory group leader must resolve in constructing a research agenda or doing “alignment work” (Saari & Miettinen, 2001, p. 304).

In evaluation research, the activity theoretical perspective is applied in developmental impact evaluation (Saari & Kallio, 2011), which resembles the participatory, developmental, and empowerment evaluation approaches (e.g. Dart & Davies, 2003; Fetterman, 2001; Friedman, 2001; Garaway, 1995; Greene, 1997; Patton, 1994, 1997, 2010; Torres & Preskill, 2001) that contend that learning from evaluations is possible if different stakeholders are involved. In developmental impact evaluation, the process is used explicitly as a basis for learning and for constructing new plans (Saari & Kallio, 2011).

Figure 5. A cycle of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001, 2005)
It needs to be noted, however, that by focusing on local activity systems the approach cannot address the macro-social and political processes that shape and inform the elements of local activity systems (e.g. Avis, 2009; Peim, 2009). The participants may not have equal opportunities to participate in questioning, learning and decision making in local activity systems. Despite this limitation, the approach provides a valuable framework for analyzing interorganizational learning processes. Expansive learning theory considers the phenomenon of organizational learning to be something that takes place not only inside an organization but also between organizations. It sees learning not as restricted to the knowledge acquisition of the individual mind (the traditional perspective), or as a process of becoming an active participator in cultural practices (the sociocultural perspective), but conceptualizes learning as knowledge creation, which refers to the innovative and explorative processes of co-creating something that does not yet exist (see Engeström, 2004; Paavola et al., 2010; Saari & Kallio, 2011).

2. Aim and method

The aim of my study is to suggest guidelines for collaborative ethical reflection in evaluation practice in multiactor networks, in which evaluators have to meet conflicting or different preconceived notions about their roles and cooperate in order to reconcile multiple points of view, traditions, and interests; to resolve eventual conflicts in the interactional context. In the first article, I illustrated the complexity of composing a framework that can ensure clear guidelines for ethical evaluation practice in specific contextual situations and in complex operational environment with conflicting role expectations. For this purpose, I studied, applying philosophical analysis, (a) the discourse ethical perspective, which emphasizes the normative features of the use of language (Searle, Habermas); (b) Newman and Brown’s (1996) heuristic model for ethical reflection in evaluation, which draws attention to a range of sources that evaluators may need to integrate to inform their ethical decisions; and (c) a postmodern framework designed to serve as a description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible (Laitinen 2002, Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004; Laitinen
The fourth article connects the findings of the first article to the argumentative perspective of evaluation.

In the second article, the perspective is extended by analyzing the dynamics of the development of cooperation in multiactor networks from the viewpoint of the third generation of activity theory, which gives a constructive perspective on how contradictions can be a driving force behind interorganizational learning and development in multiactor networks. This approach is then applied in the third article in analyzing the results of a case study (Huotari, 2003) on a contradictory position of evaluators in situations where co-operational relationships and professional networks are close. The case study addressed an agency-level institutional evaluation in Finland. In the case study, 21 people who were involved in the production of evaluation information (1998-2001) were interviewed after the evaluation process in 2002. The snowball sampling method was used in order to ensure that different viewpoints were heard—those of representatives of (a) the orderer of the evaluation, (b) the evaluators, (c) the heads of units during the evaluation, and (d) the members of the agency’s management group. The main themes in the interviews were (1) the main ethical problems and dilemmas in the external evaluation of the agency, and (2) evaluation as an instrument of the management. In the article, the activity theoretical perspective is then extended by applying the postmodern model for ethical reflection discussed in the first article.

3. The main results and implications

3.1. Communication and commitment

Communication is an essential element in the evaluation process. Therefore, from an ethical perspective, the question of the illocutionary force of utterances is important: does the use of language itself have normative features? The study of the approaches of Searle and Habermas, however, indicate that from speech acts it is impossible either to logically derive value propositions, moral duties, or obligations to act, or to present the idealizing suppositions of such rules for dialogical situations as would ensure the production of universal norms for participants in a conversation. The use of language
itself has normative features only when the speaker at the same time commits to take the promise seriously (Articles I & IV).

Searle (1969, 1979, 1999) has endeavored to explain how the speech act of promising creates a moral obligation. According to Searle, the speech act of promising is an institutional fact pertaining to a certain institutional context, from which it is possible to logically derive an obligation to act, the value proposition.

In making the utterance, the speaker commits himself to acting in such a way so that his future behavior will come to match the prepositional content of the utterance. (Searle, 1999; 2008, p. 175)

However, Mackie (1977) has argued that it is not possible to derive a moral duty in the way Searle proposes; institutional facts are not ordinary facts. The uttering of a promise constitutes an obligation only when the speaker at the same time commits to take the promise seriously. It is possible to speak about duties without making them one’s moral burden. The promise given earnestly is quite a different matter than the mention of a promise (Mackie, 1977; Airaksinen, 1993). It seems impossible to attempt to logically derive an obligation to act from speech acts. The above attempt, however, makes it clear that the concept of commitment should be an essential theme of ethical reflection in evaluation.

The emphasis of the speech act theory on the illocutionary force of utterances, i.e. on the notion that in saying something the speaker also does something, is regarded as fruitful by Habermas, too. His definition of illocutionary force follows from this view: illocutionary force consists of a speech act’s capacity to motivate the hearer to act on the premise that the commitment signaled by the speaker is seriously meant (Cooke, 1998).

In his theory, Habermas (1981, 1983) attempts to reconstruct the universal competencies that are involved when social actors interact with the aim of achieving mutual understanding (‘Verständigung’). By applying his social theory it is possible to seek ways of creating consensus through so-called communicative action. The attempt to achieve mutual understanding in a discussion may help to define those moral norms which enable one to assume that the consequences and side effects caused by the common observance of those rules for anyone’s private interests are, taking into
account the effects of known alternative means of regulation, acceptable to all the persons concerned.

Habermas presents certain idealizing suppositions to guide this process of argumentation: openness to the public, inclusiveness, equal rights of participation, immunization against external or inherent compulsion, and an orientation of the participants towards reaching an understanding (i.e. the sincere expression of utterances). Furthermore, the statements uttered must be true, the speakers must believe in their own arguments, and any linguistically argued positions must have jointly accepted justification (Alexy, 1978; Habermas, 1983; 1998a, p. 367).

Applying Habermas’ view, as did Picciotto (2005) in his text on the participatory elaboration of global evaluation standards, it is possible to emphasize that the role of rational discourse among principled individuals is the only way to generate sound standards for knowledge creation. In Habermas’ words:

Representations and descriptions are never independent of standards. And the choice of these standards is based on attitudes that require critical consideration by means of arguments, because they cannot be either logically deduced or empirically demonstrated. (Habermas 1971, p. 312)

However, it is stated that the mutual understanding achieved by communication can be local only (Lyotard, 1979, 1984). Also, there is good reason to ask whether the exact rules set to the nature of speech situations are too idealistic and whether the universalism masks part of its own ideals: freedom, self-realization, and creativity. Furthermore, it is not self-evident that the participants in communication will actually choose an orientation towards reaching understanding as their goal and refrain from using power. Additionally, the essential question here is to what extent the actors, who are professionally committed to strategic action, can also commit to the communicative use of language, in which “the participating actors must conduct themselves cooperatively and attempt to harmonize their plans with one another (within the horizon of a shared life world) on the basis of common (or sufficiently overlapping) interpretations of the situation” (Habermas, 1998b, p. 299).

This criticism does not prevent one from thinking, however, that the argumentation process is fruitful especially when the participants can set mutual understanding as a goal and commit to aspiring to that goal – although it will be impossible to reach it
perfectly in practice. Normatively it is possible to set inevitable but general conditions for such communicative everyday practice and discursive will-formation as might place the persons concerned in a situation in which they were able, on their own initiative and according to their own needs and views, to realize some concrete opportunities for a better and safer life (Habermas, 1985).

### 3.2. Ethical decision making and virtues

However, in the evaluation process, it is not only the organizing of different views and action plans so as to reach a mutual understanding that advances the utilization of evaluation through argumentation. It is, above all, complicated to compose a framework that can ensure clear guidelines for ethical evaluation practice in specific contextual situations and in a complex operational environment with conflicting role expectations. Neither the application of extensive principles nor reflection on several theories can ensure a clear view of the situation. This challenges evaluators to commit themselves to a certain reflective, professional way of life in which developing ethical skills and identifying and acquiring professional virtues have an important role (Articles I & IV).

As Newman and Brown (1996) have depicted, the standards and ethical codes and theories are useful but will always be insufficient in themselves as guidelines for ethical practice when rules conflict and when specific contextual situations demand unique responses. However, also Newman and Brown’s own framework, with its emphasis on five principles, has its own weaknesses with regard to taking into account multiple perspectives at the same time. Newman and Brown (1996, pp. 37-52) recommend that ethical decision making should involve the application of the five principles presented by Beauchamp and Childress (1983) and by Kitchener (1984) - autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice and fidelity - which “are broader than specific rules, and they provide helpful, although not absolute, guidance when rules conflict and when specific contextual situations demand unique responses” (Newman and Brown, 1996, p. 191). These five principles play a key role in Newman and Brown’s (1996, pp. 101-119) flowchart (see Article I, figure 1), which is meant as a heuristic tool for ethical decision making in program evaluation. The starting point is an intuitive feeling of potential ethical conflict, followed by an attempt to find whether there is a specific rule
that suits the situation. If necessary, one then conducts an analysis on the basis of ethical principles and criteria (theories), and reflects on the solution with respect to one’s own set of values.

It needs to be noted, however, that these principles (autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity) may conflict with each other. From whose point of view, then, are the actions more just, more beneficial, or more faithful? When should we give preference to professional autonomy over fidelity or beneficence? In what situations are choices seriously affected by the evaluator’s own beliefs and values? Applying the principlist view, one may appeal to ethical theory as a useful heuristic aid in making an ethical decision about how to resolve such conflicts between ethical principles, “but ethical theory does not deductively support a univocal decision about which principle takes preeminence” (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009, p. 19). The solutions offered by different moral theories (criteria) may also lead to conflicting value judgments, which is a serious problem. As Virtanen (2004, p. 18) depicts, in ethics the “different paradigms and schools of thought compete, utilitarian theories with deontological theories, utilitarian and deontological theories with virtue theories, egalitarian theories of justice with libertarian theories, and so forth.” However, an attempt can be made to balance the criteria to obtain the best overall combination, or they can be differentially emphasized, and in this process the evaluator’s personal ethics play an important role. When the different criteria applied to the situation do not conflict, it is possible to obtain a diversified view. (See Airaksinen, 1993, p. 24; Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009, p. 19.)

As Simons (2006) argues, while Newman and Brown’s (1996) framework “may appear overly rationalistic, given the uncertainty, complexity and finely tuned professional judgment we have to make in the ‘ethical moment’, it draws our attention to a range of sources that we may need to integrate to inform the ethical decisions we make.” The different definitions and theories are indeed useful in their own places and functions. By analyzing matters from many viewpoints, without a commitment to one single moral concept system, it is possible to try to avoid the problems of moral consideration: no one ethical framework is strong enough to resolve the issue on its own. (See Airaksinen, 1993, pp. 23-24, p. 112, p. 218.)

The importance and challenges of analyzing matters from many viewpoints can be clearly seen through a postmodern model designed by the Finnish Evaluation Society (FES) to initiate discussion about the principles of evaluation, and to serve as a
description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. The starting point in this endeavor was that although the current evaluation standards can be used to illustrate a good evaluation process, they have limited applicability (Virtanen 2004, Virtanen & Laitinen 2004, Virtanen 2007). Evaluation standards can contribute to spreading knowledge about professional conduct in the field of evaluation, they have been used for educational purposes in training and as a benchmark for quality in carrying out evaluation studies, and they have also fostered a common language between evaluators and those commissioning evaluations (Virtanen, 2004, p. 27, 2007). However, by following the guidelines set out in various standards, one cannot be sure that evaluation is automatically of good quality and ethically of “high class”.

Evaluation standards as they currently exist, actually express very little with regard to values, and even where they do, the content of these values remain obscure. This means that standards remain as lists of proposed good practice. Related to the previous point, it would be naïve to assume that ethical codes as such could exist in a way that everybody conceives or interprets them in the same manner. Evaluation standards cannot provide ‘miracle’ solutions. By following the guidelines set out in various standards we cannot be sure that the evaluation at hand is automatically of good quality and ethically of acceptable standards. (Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004, pp. 12-13)

The standards ought to relate to a good value theory that should be a sum of the descriptive, prescriptive, and metatheoretical value approaches, combining their best elements and neglecting the worst shortcomings.\(^5\)

\(^5\) According to Shadish et al. (1991), a better theory of this value component consists of the following elements.

- Firstly, it should “describe all of the elements laid down in descriptive, prescriptive and metatheoretical approaches.” Descriptive valuing is a description of stakeholder values without claiming that one is the best in comparison to other values. Prescriptive ethical theories, then, advocate the primacy of particular values. Metatheory refers to the study of the nature of valuing and to the analysis of justification for valuing. It describes how and why value statements are constructed, underlines the structure or logic of valuing, and tries to reveal the nature of justifications for values.
- Secondly, it should “recognize clearly that no prescriptive theory is widely accepted as best - all prescriptive ethics are unjustified and selecting one immediately involves trade-offs - and that prescriptive theories suffer from inconsistency, since today’s society is based on fostering pluralism of values, competing against each other.”
- Therefore, thirdly, it should “clearly state its priorities about which kinds of values to attend and to address, and why” (Virtanen, 2004, p. 19).
Furthermore, Virtanen (2004) argued that due to counter-intentional and unconscious biases in our behavior (implicit forms of prejudice, bias that favors one’s own group, conflicts of interest, and a tendency to over claim credit), one can ask whether it is possible to control the quality of evaluation through standards at all. Additionally, from the constructive perspective, “meaning and knowledge (including evaluation values and norms) are constructed and not ‘found’ in things and events. These worlds are constructed in the minds of evaluators in concrete places at specific times, under the constraints present in those times and places, and they build new constraints for other places and new times. Evaluation standards and ethical guidelines provide advice that is not salient enough to be evaluated from a constructive perspective.” (Virtanen, 2004, p. 23) The use of standards and guidelines is highly personal and individual, and practical applications vary greatly; they vary from one situation to another and do not transcend time and place. The standards and ethical guidelines do not provide ethical advice in the changing situations that an evaluator encounters in carrying out her or his evaluation mission (Virtanen, 2004, pp. 23-24).

Virtanen and Laitinen (2004) also considered the current nature of postmodern morality and ethics in order to understand the limits of the applicability of evaluation standards. They argued that if Bauman (1995, 1997) is right in arguing that morality and ethics are not universal today in the same way that they perhaps used to be, no logically coherent ethical code can ‘fit’ the essentially ambivalent condition of postmodernity. “Moral phenomena are today inherently ‘non-rational’ in the sense that they are not regular, repetitive, monotonous and predictable in a way that would allow them to be represented as rule guided. This kind of reasoning does not leave much room for any codes of ethics in evaluation practice, at least as they are available today” (Virtanen, 2004, p. 24).

The Finnish Evaluation Society (FES) has confronted the vital need for ethical guidelines and self-oversight of the evaluation community by developing the current evaluation standards and raising ethical perspectives on evaluation (Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004). This model, using Wolf’s et al. (2009, p. 173) words, “starts with the main ‘aggregates’ in any evaluation and deduces a key principle for each. The four aggregate-principle pairs are the evaluator (the principle of truth), the object of evaluation (‘justness’), the process (ability), and the community (responsibility).”
**Evaluator—Truth**

The value field of being is attached to the ethics of will and to the idea of man. The main theoretical questions in this value field include the question of individual consciousness and its nature, of the freedom and the choices of the individual, and of his or her motives and aims. The model subsumes, as value dimensions pertaining to its idea of man, the conceptions of *freedom, equality, honesty, good faith, and justice* (Laitinen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). From this perspective, good evaluation practice refers not only to value-based evaluation practices, but also to the way of perceiving the evaluator’s rights and responsibilities. The evaluator must have free access to information and the freedom to seek the truth.

**Object of Evaluation—Justness**

The value field of interaction is attached to the morals of right and wrong action in terms of the ethics of coexistence and reciprocity. The ethics of the social space, coexistence, are concerned with the reciprocal and sincere meeting of the subjects. The values of these ethics are caring, justice, and solidarity. In this connection, reciprocity means the ability to put oneself in the situation of less advantaged people (Laitinen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

Thus, the fair treatment of evaluation participants means taking into consideration their rights and treating them in a righteous manner (Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
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<td>Process</td>
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**Evaluation Process—Ability**

The value field of doing is attached to the morals of right and wrong and to the ethics of action. The essential value principles in this field are capability (including the mastery of processes and methods), responsibility, veracity, and impartiality (Laitinen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

The evaluator is expected to rely on valid evaluation methods and procedures, this being the core of an evaluator’s professional ability. Evaluation is also always a product of cooperation and is thus attached to the surrounding community, at least indirectly. The premise here is that integrity and fairness are realized in the evaluation process and that the process provides socially relevant information (Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004).

**Community—Responsibility**

The value field of having is attached to virtues and ideals that are to be sought because of their validity, community benefit, or intrinsic value. When acting in society as part of the natural environment and the world of participation of people, no one is protected from questions concerning oneself and the future. The essential value dimensions emerging in this field are security, socially and ecologically sustainable development, caring for people, human dignity, human treatment, and compliance with laws and statutes (Laitinen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). In this, the main theme is the responsibility for the results and the entitlement of the actions. The evaluator, the evaluation object, and the commissioner of an evaluation are always part of their surrounding community, and thus are neither independent nor self-sufficient (Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004).

Figure 6. The FES’s framework for ethical reflection
In the model (Figure 6), the essential value fields are derived from four ontological categories based on Allardt’s (1972, 1973, 1976) application of Maslow’s (1943) need classification scheme: being, having, interaction, and doing. Being is attached to the resources of the Balanced Score Card’s systemic circle, having to outcomes and effects, interaction to regeneration, and doing to processes (Laitinen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004).

Laitinen (2008) has developed the FES’s framework for values by connecting it to an existential-phenomenological model of authentic ethics that emphasizes an increased awareness of the self and behavior in encounters and situations. At the center of authentic evaluation ethics, there is a person who makes choices. In the evaluation process in the postmodern world, the other elements and conditions change, but the evaluator is always more than just his or her professional role. The evaluator is a person who encounters and possibly conciliates conflicts as an authentic self, who must bear the responsibility for the process and must aspire to find the truth. The fountain of authentic ethics is that person, the authentic self (Laitinen, 2008, p. 143).

The authenticity of the person is the freedom in relation to objectification and definitions. The individual can give meanings to definitions from his or her own position. This means authentic and real being for oneself regardless of the context and the situation. No individual is similar to descriptions of himself or herself or the roles attached to him or her. Even though an attribute or a role has been defined for the person, individual freedom means that she or he gives the meaning to that role and decides how to act in relation to that objectification (Laitinen, 2008, pp. 156-157).

In social constructions, individual existence is a continuing tension between the authenticity of self and that social construction. An individual belongs to some social construction and, accordant with individual freedom, is at a distance from it. According to authenticity, the individual exists differently from anyone else in that social group. In social construction, the individual’s authentic existence forms interactively with the others of the group as a continuous identity construction which is both free and a process. Because others objectificate me in exactly this way, my authentic existence is a distance from those attributes, and I am primarily faithful to my own authentic self (Laitinen, 2008, pp. 158-159).

According to authentic evaluation ethics, the evaluator acts as persona, an authentic self, throughout the evaluation process. At the same time, he or she has an evaluator’s role in which he or she is a member of a scientific community and a professional
community, and encounters other subjects and the beneficial needs of a community or society. If the evaluator can, during the process or afterwards, evaluate and approve his or her decisions as a person and according to the terms of the role, balancing all the value dimensions simultaneously, he or she fulfills the requirements of the model. In other words, the evaluator can approve his or her decisions as a person (an authentic self) a) in terms of scientific veracity, b) methodological mastery and competence, c) the integrity of the object of evaluation, and d) social responsibility and the usefulness of the evaluation (Laitinen, 2008, pp. 174-175).

It needs to be noted, however, that the values themselves may conflict with each other (e.g. research freedom versus securing the inviolability of communal rights). Thus, the value dimensions must be differently emphasized. Furthermore, as Virtanen and Laitinen (2004, p. 11) emphasize, the way the moral responsibility is carried at the end is always an evaluator’s individual choice. The emphasis is still on the evaluator’s personal commitment. Despite these limitations, the model offers a concrete description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. It can also give a framework for a discussion of values, which may lead to a shared construction of essential values and their balance.

The flowchart outlined by Newman and Brown (1996) and the postmodern framework (Laitinen, 2002, 2008; Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004) are explicitly heuristic tools—they do not give ready-made solutions but leave room for personal ethics. They help us to understand that it is necessary to develop our personal ethical reflection. The models also help us to realize that personal ethics is mostly concerned with balancing conflicting principles and values. Newman and Brown (1996, pp. 191–192) emphasize that making ethical choices is a cognitive process—even though it involves personal values—and can be enhanced through thinking, reading, discussion, and practice. They also think that being ethical is more than just making good ethical decisions regarding isolated incidents or situations; it is a professional way of life that neither removes conflict and stress nor provides a rulebook answer to all dilemmas. According to them, it necessitates a certain professional virtue: courage that “must be coupled with the humble acceptance that we will not always make the best decision or the best choice, but we will keep trying, and we trust our colleagues and clients will help us by providing constructive criticisms” (Newman & Brown, 1996, p. 192).

This interesting theme of the professional virtues of the evaluator could be studied empirically using af Ursin’s (2007) application of MacIntyre’s (1985) approach.
Following MacIntyre’s theory, for example, the professional virtues of management consultants can be generated on three different levels or contexts, which are 1) the personal life story of a management consultant, 2) the practice of consulting, and 3) the moral inheritance and ethical discourse of the consultants’ professional society. In his analysis, af Ursin (2007) found ten different professional virtues for management consultant: the identity of management consultant, helpfulness, independence, objectivity, disinterestedness, loyalty to the agreement with the client, competence-aware flexibility, process reticence, trustworthiness, and integrity with the client. In order to outline particularly evaluator’s professional virtues, it is possible to supplement this approach with the postmodern model (Laitinen, 2002, 2008; Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004) that outlines the ethical perspectives of which an evaluator is morally responsible (see Figure 6). From this perspective, we can ask what professional virtues make it possible to fulfill the challenges of the elementary value dimensions in the different evaluator roles – such as in the roles of manager, detective, designer, negotiator, diplomat, researcher, judge, reporter, use advocate, and learner (Skolits et al., 2009).

3.3. Towards an activity theoretical reflection model

The dynamics of the multiactor network of evaluation – the context where the ethical frameworks are applied - can be understood more profoundly from the perspective of the third generation of activity theory, which gives a constructive perspective on the challenges and possibilities in interorganizational learning in multiactor networks. From this perspective, the ethical issues reflect contradictions, which can be a starting point for development, if the actors can be collectively oriented in the analysis of a

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6 According to MacIntyre (1985), virtue is an acquired human quality whose possession and use enables one to reach such good things as have an inner relation to the practice and the lack of which prevents one even from gaining any corresponding value. It must be, however, noted that MacIntyre’s reasoning needs the support of the view that our social reality contains enough such extensive and significant ways of life and life plans that depend on acquired qualities, i.e. virtues, for their realization. This granted, life then consists of a number of social institutions and a number of virtues required for the effective functioning of those institutions. (See Airaksinen, 1993.) The postmodern condition places into question the possibility of realizing the meaning of human life so that it provides us with an integrated whole from which virtues can be derived. However, there are at least specific tasks and relationships – such as the different roles of the evaluator, which serve as a context in which to realize virtues.
contradictory situation, and in the modeling, implementation, and evaluation of a new solution (Article III).

From the viewpoint of activity theory, an evaluation process can be depicted as a network of activity systems that transforms gradually through the solution of contradictions. The theory permits human activity to be defined as a system where the main elements are subjects, instruments, objects (and outcomes), community, rules, and the division of labor. The subjects refer to individuals or sub-groups whose point of view is used to analyze the activity. The objects refer to the problem space or ‘raw material’ at which the activity is directed and which is molded or transformed into outcomes by means of external and instrumental tools (mediating instruments and signs). The community comprises multiple individuals and/or sub-groups who share the same general objects. The division of labor refers to both the community and the vertical division of power and status. Rules refer to the explicit and implicit regulations, norms, and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity systems (Engeström, 1987, 1995, 2001, 2007; Articles II & III).

From the viewpoint of activity theory, the external evaluation process of the agency studied in the case can be depicted as a network of the interacting activity systems of the orderer of the evaluation, the evaluator, and the evaluand (Figure 7). In the figure, the outcome of the evaluation process also contains the unintended outcome - the ethical issues that reflect structural tensions between different intentions of the evaluation. According to the interviewed persons involved in the production of the evaluation information, there were three main ethical issues in the evaluation process (Article III):

*The dilemma between the autonomy of data acquisition/production and expertise in the choice of evaluators.* The selection of the evaluators was seen as problematic, because it was not possible to find completely external experts who knew the field well enough to be evaluators.

*The surface nature of the data acquisition.* According to this view, the time allocated to the evaluators remained too short, and thus the approach was superficial: At first the unit’s own report, then the discussions, after which came far-reaching conclusions.

*The use of the evaluation as a reform agent to legitimate and to expedite changes that had already been accepted as necessary.*
Figure 7. The network of activity systems in the evaluation process of the agency (Article III)
From the viewpoint of activity theory, the ethical issues of the evaluation process reflect *contradictions*, which are the *driving force of development to new solutions*. The proper resolving of contradictions, however, is a relatively long process of expansive learning where the participants should become collectively oriented 1) in the profound analysis of the contradictory situation, 2) in the modeling of the new solution to the contradictions and the implementation of the new mode, and 3) in the evaluation of the new solution (Figure 8).

Figure 8. A cycle of expansive learning (Engeström, 1995; Saari et al., 2008; Kajamaa et al., 2009; Saari & Kallio, 2011)
In an actual-empirical analysis, the contradictions are identified, and ideation and argumentation are used in order to discover a first idea, a ‘springboard’, which makes new solutions possible. In order to more profoundly understand the problems and potentials of activity systems, an analysis of the history of the activity and its objects as well as the history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity is needed. After enough profound analyses, it is possible for the participants to model a new solution for the contradictions of the contemporary phase. At this phase, they also develop and examine the new strategic tools, as well as the new forms of division of labor and collaboration (Engeström, 1995, p. 90, 2001, pp. 136-137, p. 152, 2005, p. 64, 84; Articles II & III).

After this, the new mode of activity can be gradually implemented in everyday work. In this phase, there may arise so-called tertiary contradictions between the former and new mode of action, resistance to change. The solution of these contradictions in practice ends in the change of the new model of activity. Compromises and retreat, as well as new insights and practical solutions can be done. With the help of the assertion and evaluation of the new mode of activity, the collective moves into a phase where the new practices are systematically followed (Engeström, 1995, p. 9; Articles II & III).

When searching for a solution to ethical issues in the evaluation process, it must be noticed that the network of interacting activity systems in the evaluation process is always multivoiced: it is a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests.

The division of labor in an activity creates different positions for the participants, the participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artifacts, rules and conventions. The multivoicedness is multiplied in networks of interacting activity systems. It is a source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation. (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

In order to take this polyphony into account, the people involved in the evaluation process should create some kind of collaborative forum where different essential perspectives can be taken into consideration. In this kind of process of collaborative ethical reflection, the ideal is that in a network of interacting activity systems (Figure 9) the object moves from an initial state of unreflected, situationally given ‘raw material’ (object 1; e.g. the ethical issues in the agency evaluation) to a collectively meaningful
object constructed by the activity system (object 2, e.g. an outlook on the essential principles of evaluation), and to a potentially shared or jointly constructed object (object 3; e.g. a collaboratively constructed understanding about the central principles of the evaluation) (Engeström, 2001, p. 136, 2005, p. 63; Articles II & III).

**Figure 9. Interacting activity systems in collaborative ethical reflection**  
(see Engeström, 2005, p. 63)
In the process of collaborative ethical reflection, it is important to find a shared construction of the essential value dimensions in the evaluation process. Here it is possible to apply the FES’s framework designed to initiate discussion about the principles of evaluation and to serve as a description of the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. Despite its limitations, the model can be applied as a heuristic framework for collaborative ethical reflection in the multivoiced network of the people involved in the evaluation process in order to outline a shared construction of the essential operational principles and their balance in the evaluation. Using this framework, it is possible to outline collaboratively the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. The activity of the evaluator can be examined through balancing the value dimensions; the ideal is that the activity of the evaluator can be approved in terms of (a) scientific veracity, (b) methodological mastery and competence, (c) the integrity of the object of evaluation, and (d) social responsibility and the usefulness of the evaluation (Laitinen, 2008).

Although the FES’s framework has a postmodern emphasis, in collaborative ethical reflection the model is applied in a constructivist context where consensus is sought in order to support and expedite the decision process. Stake (1983, 2004, p. 210), for example, in his responsive evaluation approach follows the postmodern line that dismisses the possibility and desirability of unifying the values and judgments of different stakeholders. As Stake (2004, p. 210) states, the responsive evaluation “is respectful of multiple, even sometimes contradictory, standards held by different individuals and groups, with a reluctance to push for consensus.” The collaborative ethical reflection model accords rather with the constructivist approach advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1989) that aims to engage a truly representative group of stakeholders, to accord equal influence to each member, to assist the stakeholders in considering alternative values, and subsequently to aid them to reach consensus on and apply their preferred values (Lincoln & Guba, 2004; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007, 437).

It must be noticed that the relations among stakeholders in a participatory evaluation process can be asymmetric, as power and conflict may hinder equal and genuine communication about the value of the practices evaluated. According to Baur et al. (2010) asymmetric relations can be dealt with constructively, focusing on the inclusion of marginalized groups, mutual learning, and good dialogue. In this task, the competences that the evaluator requires, in addition to more traditional social scientific
skills in data collection and analysis, are knowledge of and sensitivity to social dynamics, intensive engagement, reciprocity, and the capacity to change roles and respond actively to the dynamics of the process.  

Another essential challenge in collaborative ethical reflection may be that evaluators and other stakeholders can differ in their conceptualization of ethical issues (e.g. Alexander & Richman, 2008) and in their interpretation of “episodes” of ethical conflict (e.g. Morris, 2007). The collaborative ethical reflection presupposes that the evaluator is ready to confront and mediate between the countering views and arguments of stakeholders - to deal “with judgments, which to a significant degree lend their existence to some implicitly or explicitly established value criteria”, and which therefore are “always potentially debatable” (Valovirta, 2002, p. 65). Moreover, the possible achieved consensus that exceeds the countering arguments can also be debated, and therefore it cannot become indisputable knowledge.

Furthermore, it should be noted that evaluators may exhibit an array of views on the purpose of evaluation and their own relationships and responsibilities to clients, program participants, groups within society, and the public at large - as the empirical research of Wolf et al. (2009) suggests. There are also differences in evaluators’ ability to identify the ethical issues when they analyze ethically challenging behavior (Desautels & Jacob, 2012). The way the evaluator perceives the ethical challenges is a

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7 Baur et al. (2010) have used a particular interpretation of responsive evaluation, linking the responsive evaluation paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stake, 1975) to insights into the inclusion of marginalized or vulnerable stakeholder groups, narratives, storytelling, and ongoing dialogues in evaluation (e.g. Abma & Widdershoven, 2005; Widdershoven, 2001). The approach “uses hermeneutic dialogue to engage stakeholders in a learning process to help them better understand themselves and each other, and hence put their own viewpoints into perspective. In this way stakeholders gain a better understanding of a given practice through the combination and amalgamation of various different perspectives” (Baur et al., 2010, p. 235).

This interpretation of responsive evaluation shares a number of basic concepts with participatory and empowerment evaluation approaches (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman et al., 1996; Greene, 2006; King, 2007) but can be distinguished by its conceptual and practical focus on hermeneutic dialogue (Widdershoven, 2001; Widdershoven & Abma, 2007). “If some stakeholder groups are in a vulnerable or marginalized position, the interactive techniques of participatory and empowerment evaluation can be used to give them ‘a say’ in the responsive evaluation process. The empowerment of all stakeholder groups, including those in vulnerable positions, follows from a good dialogical process in which all stakeholders involved change during the process by gaining mutual understanding of each others’ perspectives and mutual learning” (Baur et al., 2010, p. 235).

8 Desautels and Jacob (2012) suggest that an evaluator’s ability to identify ethical issues is partially explained by his or her tendency to place a greater importance either on humanistic and collective perspective (altruistic) or on a sponsor’s demands or the respect of norms related to confidentiality (corporatist). According to them, this ability also depends on other factors such
personal construction and, as Virtanen and Laitinen (2004) emphasize, the way the moral responsibility is carried at the end is always an evaluator’s individual choice. Also, in collaborative ethical reflection the emphasis is still on the evaluator’s personal commitment, although the ideal still is that valuing should take place within the context of understanding the “subjective meaningfulness” of the evaluation information – with the fundamental perspective that “reality is an ongoing, dynamic process and a truth is always relative to some particular frame of reference” (see Christie & Alkin, 2012, p. 31; Carden & Alkin, 2012, p. 104).

Applying Datta’s (2011) perspective on the politics of evaluation, collaborative ethical reflection represents “a political toolkit” that emphasizes e.g. extensive stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and social justice. Therefore, it more closely represents the “populist visions” of evaluation and politics with its appreciation of the diversity of interests and of the multiplicity of hopes and fears in a democracy, a commitment to evaluation as part of deliberative democracy, and a sense of evaluators as taking these multiple voices into account. However, at the same time this type of reflection shares a belief in the public interest or common good that transcends diversity, and a role for evaluators as sources of unbiased, fair information relating to this interest.

as knowledge of the prescriptive norms in ethical matters, experience conducting evaluations, and the milieu and the working conditions within which he or she operate.

9 Datta (2011) describes how the 1960s and 1970s realization that evaluation is inherently political has led to at least two families of stances: populist and public interest. By “populist” Datta means an appreciation of the diversity of interests and of the multiplicity of hopes and fears in a democracy such as the United States, a commitment to evaluation as part of deliberative democracy, and a sense of evaluators as taking these multiple voices into account, including (for some evaluators) being advocates for the most disenfranchised. By “public interest” Datta means a belief in the public interest or common good as the highest common denominator transcending diversity and a role for evaluators as sources of unbiased, fair information relating to this interest. The “populist” stances embraced the politics of extensive stakeholder involvement, democratic deliberation, collaboration, social justice, and the empowerment of the disenfranchised. The public-interest stances continued to explore strategies for carrying out evaluations of high-stakes, controversial, large-scale national policy issues, while being wary of political bias in any form and from any source. Datta argues that these communalties could form a necessary political toolkit to join our methodological knowledge. As an example, in the US, according to Datta (2011, pp. 289-290), “among the predominant ideas are developmental, democratic, participatory, empowerment, and collaborative evaluation, social justice, indigenous ownership of evaluation, and organizational capacity building, all representing more populist visions of evaluation and politics”; while “the current of public interest evaluations also run strong and deep, particularly among our thought leaders associated with the organizations carrying out national evaluations of policies such as welfare reform, energy independence, agricultural sustainability --."
3.4. Conclusions

Because the aspect of the exercise of power is always connected with evaluation, ethics is a standard input and is the basis for establishing evaluation competence and skills and the development of procedures. The complexity of the position of evaluators in the government evaluation market challenges us to search for ethical guidelines. For this purpose, we need metaevaluations focusing on the ethical problems and dilemmas in evaluation practice.

In this study, the complex nature of evaluation practice in multiactor networks is the starting point of the sketching of guidelines for ethical reflection. To this end, we have considered different approaches which have their strong and weak points. Communication can be seen as an essential element in the evaluation process. However, it seems that from speech acts it is impossible either to logically derive value propositions, moral duties, or obligations to act, or to present idealizing suppositions of such rules for dialogical situations as would ensure the production of universal norms for participants in a conversation. Still, normatively it is possible to set inevitable but general conditions for such communicative everyday practice and discursive will-formation as might place the persons concerned in a situation in which they were able, on their own initiative and according to their own needs and views, to realize some concrete opportunities for a better and safer life (Habermas, 1985). Thus, it seems that the argumentation process is fruitful especially when the participants can set mutual understanding as a goal and commit to aspiring to that goal—although it will be impossible to reach it perfectly in practice.

In the evaluation process, it is not only the organization of different views and action plans so as to reach a mutual understanding that advances evaluation utilization through argumentation. It is particularly complicated to compose a framework that can ensure clear guidelines for ethical evaluation practice in specific contextual situations and in a complex operational environment with conflicting role expectations. The use of neither extensive principles nor reflection on several theories can ensure a clear view of the situation. The ethics of evaluation is mostly concerned with balancing conflicting principles and values. In order to face this challenge, we need to commit ourselves to developing our skills in identifying, analyzing, and solving ethical problems and dilemmas. In this reflective, professional way of life — which neither removes conflict
and stress nor provides a rulebook answer to all dilemmas—we also need to commit ourselves to identifying and acquiring of professional virtues that make it possible to balance the essential value dimensions of evaluation.

From the activity theoretical perspective, the ethical issues reflect contradictions, which are a moving force behind the change and the development of the activity system. The development, however, requires that the actors should become collectively oriented in the history of the activity and its objects, in the resolution of contradictions, and in the modeling, implementation, and examination of a new solution. In this endeavor, the multivoiced character of the network of interacting activity systems in the evaluation process needs to be taken into consideration. For example, the people involved in the evaluation process could create a collaborative forum where different essential perspectives can be taken into account in order to solve ethical problems. In this kind of process, it is possible to apply the analyzed model for ethical reflection in order to obtain a shared construction of the essential operational principles and their balance in the evaluation process.

It must be noticed, however, that the cooperational construction of the value dimension cannot ensure a clear view of the situation. Although the model gives a heuristic framework with which to outline a shared construction of the essential principles and their balance in the evaluation process, the emphasis is still on the evaluator’s personal commitment. How the moral responsibility is carried at the end is always an evaluator’s individual choice. In the search for ethical guidelines, the evaluator may need many frameworks for ethical reflection—theories, standards, principles, the cooperational construction of value dimensions—as well as collegial and professional support in identifying, analyzing, and solving ethical problems and dilemmas. Supporting evaluators in their ethical reflection is still a considerable challenge.

The approach construed in my study has pragmatic validity if it proves to be useful in evaluation research when depicting corresponding processes, in supporting professionals in their occupational reflections, and in developing cooperation in multiactor contexts. It also has communicative validity (Lyotard, 1979, 1984) if it creates new ideas, new differentiations, and new rules for the discourse of evaluation ethics. More empirical research is needed to explore how this activity theoretical model for collaborative ethical reflection could take into account the different perspectives in the multiactor networks of people involved in the evaluation processes.
Further study could be carried out through case studies on the application of the model for ethical reflection in an activity theoretically oriented evaluation process, where organizational change projects are evaluated taking the consequences of developmental effort and organizational learning as the starting point (see Kajamaa et al., 2009; Kallio & Saari, 2009; Saari et al., 2008; Saari & Kallio, 2011). In this way, the collaborative ethical reflection could be connected to the different phases of the cycle of expansive learning through evaluation.

In order to more profoundly understand the problem field, the central role of the evaluator’s moral choices must also be considered. Therefore, it is important to study empirically the appearance of the themes of professional virtues, moral commitment, moral motivation, and prudentiality in the argumentation of evaluation. In order to outline evaluator’s professional virtues, it is possible to apply af Ursin’s (2007) approach, supplementing it with the FES’s model (Laitinen, 2002, 2008; Virtanen & Laitinen, 2004), which outlines the ethical perspectives for which an evaluator is morally responsible. From this perspective, we can ask what professional virtues make it possible to fulfill the challenges of the elementary value dimensions in the different evaluator roles – such as in the roles of manager, detective, designer, negotiator, diplomat, researcher, judge, reporter, use advocate, and learner (Skolits et al., 2009).

It must be noted, however, that this kind of metaevaluation is in fact a continuation of the process it studies. Metaevaluation is also an instrument of the evaluation support to the central government; it is a part of the same management system in which evaluation plays an important role in the choice of public policy instruments by which governmental authorities wield their power when attempting to ensure support and effect social change. The awareness of this pragmatic function of metaevaluation affects the construction of the information in interviews.
References


