EUROPEAN EVALUATION SOCIETY

10th EES Biennial Conference

EVALUATION IN THE NETWORKED SOCIETY: NEW CONCEPTS, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW SOLUTIONS

Evaluators are living in times of unprecedented challenge and opportunity at a critical time of evaluation's short history. The networked information environment is inducing fundamental changes in culture, politics and society. Whereas the industrial society was reliant on centralised, hierarchical, high cost information systems, the networked society is characterised by decentralised, voluntary and cheap information exchange.

The advent of social networking without borders will have fundamental implications for evaluation agendas and methods. First, it will redefine the value and legitimacy of evaluation in global social accountability networks and accelerate the internationalisation of evaluation. Second, evaluation cultures, structures and processes will have to deal with the limitless quantity, speed and accessibility of information generated by new technologies, e.g. drawing useful meaning from huge data bases, assessing the validity of an exploding number of rating systems, league tables, etc. in ways consistent with democratic values of freedom of expression and protection of privacy.

The new information technologies offer new ways of making authority responsible and accountable as well as bringing real time citizen involvement and reliable information to bear on public policy making. What are the implications of an information economy that allows instant connectivity to thousands of program beneficiaries suddenly able to make their voices heard? Will the spread of mobile telephony to the weakest and most vulnerable members of society and the rising power of social networks act as evaluative and recuperative mechanisms or will they merely aggravate social instability? What are the risks of network capture by single or special interest groups and cooptation of evaluation?

The rise of evaluation is inextricably linked to the values central to any democratic society. How will these values be protected in a context where weak links and increasing inequalities have created new fissures in society? How will evaluation independence be protected against the pressures of vested interests intent on retaining control over the commanding heights of society?

The Conference program will not be limited to these topics as it aims to explore all issues relevant to the prospects of evaluation in Europe and beyond. We hope that it will stimulate evaluators to share ideas, insights and opinions about a wide range of topics that will throw light on the future roles of evaluation in the networked society.

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