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F i n S o c n e w s

A society based on evaluation and measurement?

Newsletter of the Finsoc – Finnish Evaluation Unit for Social Services 2002



The expansion of evaluation and measurement is an indication of profound changes in the welfare state.

WHY IS EVALUATION ON THE INCREASE?

The development of the welfare state previously depended on political ideologies, whereas nowadays

argumentation is increasingly often grounded in the outcomes of evaluation. There was a time when bureaucratic monitoring was enough, but now seemingly more intellectual evaluation is what the doctor ordered. The decisions made by experts were once trusted, but now their activities are controlled and influenced by evaluation. Evaluation constitutes a turning point

from political-bureaucratic-professionalistic management of welfare services to what is known as “the New Public Management.”

Evaluation is also emerging as a core activity in development work. It is no longer possible to justify a major development project without preproject, parallel and/or postproject evaluation. We have entered a new wave of development work, “evaluation-oriented development.”

It also seems that evaluation serves a key role in reshaping the relationship between the professions and research in the welfare state. According to a traditional view, this relationship was built on free scientific research and the related academic model of education, but this model is no longer trusted without the presence of evaluation. Special activities are required to establish better interaction between research and professional practice. One such idea is “evidence-based practice” – evidence-based medicine, evidence-based nursing, evidence-based social work and even evidence-based policy. And it is not just a question of making research evidence available, but also about new mechanisms to assess professional practices.



There is an international trend to develop methods to evaluate professions externally and internally, through mechanisms of management, control and promotion based on so-called self-evaluation. From the viewpoint of the professions, it is a question of making the most critical choices in evaluation: is evaluation controlled by the profession's own elite or are professions controlled by outsiders through new institutions of evaluation? To give an example, are recommendations for "good care" given by the national medical society or will an Institute of Clinical Standards be established, where economists, sociologists, nursing scientists and lawyers – perhaps even patients' organisations – are experts as relevant as the profession itself. And how does one determine standards for the most effective methods in social work – under supervision of the social workers' union and professors in the field or by a state agency, such as FinSOC at STAKES, steered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health?

Evaluation is of course a phenomenon also fuelled by supply. Evaluation provides almost boundless opportunities for researchers and ex-consultants to find employment or self-employment. All you have to do is convince potential purchasers of evaluation services that evaluation is necessary and worthwhile. Evaluation can be turned into a lucrative business. Perhaps it will never become a global cluster like Arthur Andersen in business consultancy and audit, but it provides a fertile ground for extensive small and mid-sized business activity.

LEGITIMACY THROUGH MEASUREMENT

"How long do the warlords think a Finnish soldier can survive on these rations, Vanhala said.

Pissed off even more than the others, Lahtinen barked contemptuously: - 'Think! They don't think, they know. They've counted the calories, or what the hell you

call 'em, supposed to be in there. If you complain that you're hungry, they'll produce calculations showing there's no way you can be hungry..."

(Väinö Linna, *The Unknown Soldier*)

In the above excerpt from the famous Finnish war novel, *The Unknown Soldier* by Väinö Linna, Corporal Lahtinen describes one possible function of evaluation. Evaluation produces information about how things really are, knowledge that is superior to individual experiences. By the same token, an 80-per cent customer satisfaction rating makes it possible to label each isolated expression of dissatisfaction as an exception to what is generally a rather agreeable service.

Evaluation and measurement can also enhance the legitimacy of the welfare state by involving the workers in managing themselves. Especially effective in this respect are evaluation strategies underlining self-evaluation and self-measurement. Self-measurement is undoubtedly more profound and conclusions drawn as a result of self-evaluation are more irrefutable than norms and orders coming from the top of the hierarchic ladder.

Moreover, evaluation and measurement create new layers of reality. Every self-respecting measurer will hasten to point out that crude indicators can never embrace the whole truth but only the measured fractions of it. What can be measured or evaluated is, however, a different kind of reality from the one which is beyond measurement or evaluation.

If the evaluators are far away from their targets or from those who have commissioned evaluation, they will also form an evaluators' community with inherent values and evaluation criteria. The evaluators can also be close to the experts under evaluation and far away from the political decision-makers who have hired them. In the latter case, we can witness the emergence of a joint value community between the evalua-

tors and subjects. The result is a tight expert culture that is harder for the political decision-maker to penetrate. If on the other hand the evaluators and their employers are close to each other and distant from the subjects, the grassroots-level experts have to bear the brunt of a harsh economic culture.

WHERE TO FIND 'A THIRD WAY'?

Evaluation is typically needed when the decision-maker – the client – does not trust that the implementer of the decision – the agent – will live up to his or her commitments. Evaluation may reinforce this trust, if it shows that the agent is acting as promised or if it helps to construct an evaluation community bonding the client and agent. It can also have the opposite effect, if the launch of an evaluation is a signal of distrust, alienating the client from the agent.

In many respects, evaluation seems to constitute an activity that once again makes it necessary to find a 'third way'. Social work has traditionally looked for such a way in order to overcome incompatibility between control and help. In politics, an effort was made to find it between capitalism and socialism or between social democracy and neoliberalism. In a welfare state challenged by evaluation and measurement, it may be needed as a third alternative to "evidence-based" and "opinion-based" practices, in order to overcome the duality of evaluation steered at the top or grassroots level, in order to fill the void between what can and what cannot be measured, between profession-based self-evaluation and economic-administrative external evaluation...

There is nothing wrong with evaluation or measurement as such. The third way, however, is hard to find.

JUHANI LEHTO

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Self-deception as a stumbling block to self-evaluation

How honest can a person be? The older I have become, the less I trust the accuracy of self-evaluation. Most of us are masters of self-deception, which seems to be our only way to cope with the banalities of life. Would it really benefit us to be exposed to all the criticism levelled at us in an evaluation? I don't think so. When I conducted interviews among some former service users, I heard a wide range of comments about the actions taken by professionals. Some comments were so offensive that I had to forget about them, as it would have served no purpose to include them in the report.

We are dealing with people when we evaluate services provided for and by people. People, especially professionals, should trust themselves and the work they are doing. The findings of most studies on the effectiveness of working methods requiring a therapeutic approach and interactive skills can be crystallised into one sentence: effective results will emerge, when the therapists or workers believe in their methods. Belief in one's capacity for being a good worker should not be shattered by criticism.

ALL-IMPORTANT TRUTH?

Discussing the issue, I have found a bewildering array of views on it. Some people are great believers in absolute honesty, while others disagree, saying that positive feedback spurs people on better than negative. In a magazine interview, Therapist and Trainer Ben Furman describes the havoc caused by work climate measurements, which are based on malicious questions. He goes on by saying that having finally grasped the importance of a good work climate,



we got hold of the wrong end of the stick by using crude and inconsiderate methods. Comparisons make people feel guilty and lead to vicious circles. Things can always get a lot worse as a result of measurement alone.

Discussions about honesty and truth resemble the dispute between Scriven and Stake, the dinosaurs of evaluation, over what kind of information has the greatest weight. Scriven (1997) argues that the truth has the greatest weight in a conversation, while Stake (1997) considers that evaluation must at least in part incorporate an element of advocacy.

This controversy can be tackled by asking what is the informative need that evaluation is supposed to serve. What is the evaluation question? If we are concerned with accountability, self-evaluation is a questionable method because an evaluator should be as independent as possible (Chelimsky 1997). In development-oriented evaluation, the relationship between the evaluator and evaluatee can be quite close; Chelimsky aptly termed an evaluator “a critical friend”. Coming from a friend, criticism is acceptable because it is not understood as malicious. Friends can also use their common sense as to the type of feedback they give, making it possible to deal with difficult issues without denial.

SELF-EVALUATION AS PART OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

It is common that external evaluation requires some kind of self-evaluation as well. For example, the provision of material is often a phase where the

data are supplied by the evaluatee. It is very tempting to select information that portrays the project in a favourable light. The temptation is even more irresistible when one realises that the project's continuation hinges on the evaluation. If it were a question of, say, project funding, it would be downright naïve to trust solely the material provided by the evaluatee. Even the most rudimentary information, such as how many participants actually finished the course or what was their attendance, may vary depending on who compiled it. However, it is only human that professionals should feel sympathy towards their clients. For example, the harsh indicators of an employment project – what was the percentage at any given time – will give too ‘robust’ a picture of the project's effectiveness. When they personally witness great changes in the participants' lives in general, professionals will naturally do their best to ensure that the activities will continue.

If I know that my work is being evaluated, I feel inclined to describe it as positively as possible. Being evaluated is not a very enviable experience and if the process goes on for long, it may turn out to be painful as well. The evaluatees often think that all the wrong criteria are used in assessing them and their efforts and that their voice is not heard in matters important to them.

WHAT IF YOU ARE TOO SELF-CRITICAL?

The accuracy of self-evaluation may also be offset by excess self-criticism. In the social sciences, criticism is held in high regard and viewed as an important aspect of research. Academician

Erik Allardt called the social sciences as ‘the irritating social sciences’. When the University of Helsinki started to evaluate its education in the late 1990s, it transpired that the self-evaluation of the Faculty of Social Sciences was not compatible with the other faculties – it was too self-critical. As evaluators, social scientists are occasionally plagued by the same excessive criticalness. I am no exception to this rule and this may be the reason why I take a critical stance on the feasibility of self-evaluation.

TUIJA LINDQVIST

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The Challenges of Social Services Evaluation in Finland

An awareness of the need for social services evaluation is now beginning to emerge in Finland too. Although there was some discussion in the early 1990s about the effectiveness of social services, the promising early developments in evaluating effectiveness became buried under the quality debate as the 1990s progressed. Evaluation issues began to resurface in the debate after about 1997, spurred on in part by the STAKES FinSoc project (Finnish Evaluation Unit for Social Services) and by the interest of other parties.

The question of the effectiveness of social services was cautiously raised again at the end of the 1990s. Evaluation is still a problematic issue for many professionals in the field. This is why the FinSoc project tries to emphasise the multifarious nature of the evaluation concept.

INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON EVALUATION

In recent years the international debate on evaluation has focused on at least two different areas. As public services have been required to produce evidence-based results and to demonstrate value for money, great hopes have been placed on the ability of evaluation to produce improvements in efficiency. The other area of emphasis has been the view that evaluation guarantees democracy: evaluation is seen as a mechanism for promoting democratic development and service provision in society. These issues have often become entangled, causing confusion among those working in the field.

Is social services evaluation now viewed as a more focused means of achieving a level of service provision

that better meets the needs of citizens? This is certainly the conclusion reached by Evert Vedung, a prominent researcher on evaluation, in a new work 'Democracy and client-oriented evaluation', published in Swedish with Magnus Dahlberg.

The emphasis given to different values is evident throughout the choices made in the evaluation process. The culture of evaluation is also being moulded by external influences on the field. The parties at present seeking to promote evaluation are the European Union, various funding agencies and increasingly also lawmakers, with their concern for reforms and resource allocation.

EVALUATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

The EU emphasises the adoption and propagation of good practice. This is a difficult and complex matter, because social services are often closely tied to the constraints of their own operating environment. The emphasis on reflexive evaluation in the research tradition also questions the very idea of transferability. Furthermore, elements of good practice used as an operating model will become outmoded sooner or later. They should instead be used as a basis for developing more general operating methods which can be applied as new local solutions are developed (Mannila et al. 2001).

WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE?

Viewpoints with a strong scientific foundation will tend to require evidence mainly in the form of 'hard' scientific evidence, whereas others may rely more on a knowledge-based approach,

arranging services on the basis of the best available information. Comparisons of research information reveal that the best form of information is considered to be meta-analysis from randomised control trials. Next are randomised control trials and well-conducted cohort studies. These are followed by case studies and the consensus emerging from meetings of experts or from peer evaluation, and, last of all, information derived from practitioner experience. (Davies & Nutley, 2000)

In the social services field there is very little information based on evidence from trials. Activities are based on daily work experience, tacit knowledge and evidence from practical situations. Hence the FinSoc project's use of the concept of knowledge-based practice.

RIITTA HAVERINEN

PEKKA KARJALAINEN

TUIJA LINDQVIST

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FinSoc promotes evaluation in Finland

The FinSoc unit (Finnish Evaluation Unit for Social Services) was initially set up as a three-year STAKES project whose operating components and totality were evaluated by an external evaluation group. Since the start of 2000, FinSoc has been an independent group composed of up to 10 experts.

As set out in its guiding principles, FinSoc aims to promote social services evaluation, the use of evaluation information in service production, and evaluation expertise in the daily work of professionals in the social welfare field. In collaboration with partners in Finland and abroad, the unit produces, processes and disseminates information on social services evaluations and on the methods used.

The following key approaches have been defined as the focus of FinSoc's work: 1) Development of methods for evaluating social services, i.e. identification, documentation, assessment and networking of good practice. Partners in this work have been the universities, other educational establishments, researchers and research groups in the field. National and international Cupertino networks have also been used to produce innovative results. 2) FinSoc conducts evaluation research in areas of national importance, either itself or by commissioning work from outside researchers. 3) Making full use of communications facilities to ensure that information on evaluation can benefit decision-makers, researchers, development staff and professionals in the field, as well as social services providers and users and the educational and training sector.



To ensure that social services providers understand the opportunities afforded by evaluation research, it will be necessary to establish a variety of different forums, training courses and national and international collaborative ventures with universities, researchers, evaluation clients and users, professionals and customers.

Examples of projects

FinSoc has contributed to many different evaluation projects in the capacity of researcher, consultant and educator. Many Finnish social workers already regard evaluation as an integral part of their work. Since the 1980s it has been possible to take a Master's degree in social work, which includes a Master's thesis, an essential element of which is the application of a research method. Training in Finland thus differs in this respect from the general training of social workers in most other countries.

Good opportunities therefore exist for developing research-based evaluation during the studies. So far, however, evaluation has not formed part of the working practices within social work itself.

Interesting developments are nevertheless occurring all the time in social work. FinSoc experts have been involved in some of these as researchers, educators or consultants, and have found them to provide a valuable link with the daily work in the field. These collaborative projects have sought to promote the wider adoption of interesting new perspectives and methods. Different types of project are presented below.

FinSoc is part of STAKES.
STAKES takes its bearings from the strategic policies of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Korso Case Study

The Korso social welfare office of the City of Vantaa has traditionally been quite active in pursuing new developments, which means that evaluation has been easier to adopt here than elsewhere. The entire office took part in evaluation training sessions, after which thought was given to the main development priorities and the role of evaluation in these areas.

When new child welfare methods were sought, a British model was initially followed, which stressed the need to guarantee the safety of the child in difficult family situations. Evaluation of the new working method was integrated with the normal work process, so that evaluation would not remain an isolated area. Digital evaluation forms are being developed for completion as part of the normal work routine. The work on this application is still in progress and hopes are high.

RIITTA HAVERINEN
TUIJA LINDQVIST

Nuotta Case Study

The Nuotta project in Joensuu aims to promote the situation of young people by using a multidisciplinary method that includes specific individual actions. The project is supported by the European Social Fund. It is aimed at young people under the age of 25 whose study and work motivation is poor and are thus in danger of being marginalised.

Thousands of projects have already been organised for young people in Finland, in addition to the workshop activities. It is essential to gather and maintain all this information and conduct meta-evaluations, in addition to evaluating individual projects. Cumulative evaluation data can be of use as 'source material' in new projects, in processes which are already in progress and as building blocks for the programme theory used to guide action programmes.

Evaluation of the Nuotta project takes into account the following three dimensions. (i) Summative function: the project is evaluated using the parameters of output evaluation (implementation, performance and impact). Attention is also given to the sustainability of impacts after the extra resources for the activity have been used up. (ii) Formative function: evaluation supports development of the project by providing self-evaluation tools and concrete guidance tools. (iii) Relevance function: the project's appropriateness is examined in relation to the operating environment and young people's lifestyles. Attention is also focused on the application of different indicators, methods of information gathering and the deficiencies of monitoring methods.

PEKKA KARJALAINEN



Evaluation study of the activation (workfare) reform in Finland

The project for the evaluation of the Act on Rehabilitative Work Experience, which entered into force on September 1, 2001, is being prepared and implemented by a research team at STAKES & the Rehabilitation Foundation. As the preparation of the Act generated a lot of debate, the Finnish Parliament requires a preliminary report on the implementation of the Act as early as by the end of 2002.

The evaluation project will examine the implementation of the Act on Rehabilitative Work Experience and its impacts on clients' welfare and employment situation/resources using a sample (57 municipalities) representative of the Finnish municipalities. A panel design will be used at two stages (T1 at the same time as the activation plan is drawn up; T2 after 6 months) to ask the clients about, for example, changes in their welfare and employment situation and their plans for the future in a variety of ways through a questionnaire. The survey will be conducted simultaneously among the workers engaged in drawing up the activation plan.

This extensive survey will be carried out both among those having participated in drawing up an activation plan and those who have not yet participated. In other words, we also collect data from a comparison group (13 municipalities), which receives the same kind of questionnaire. The data will also enable a wide range of mutual comparisons. In addition to a traditional statistical analysis, it is possible to analyse the data based on the idea of realistic evaluation – "what works: for whom and under which circumstances?"

ELSA KESKITALO & TUIJA LINDQVIST

EU-projects

PROCARE – providing integrated health and social care for older persons, issues, problems, solutions

Procare is to help in defining the new concept of an integrated health and social care for older persons in need of care by comparing and evaluating different modes of care delivery. The project will identify structural, organisational, economic and social-cultural factors and actors that constitute an integrated care system with enhanced outcomes for all actors involved.

Thus, performance and quality indicators for use in evidence-based policy making, planning, quality assurance and controlling of social and health services will be developed, based on individual interviews with clients and their carers, and focus group discussions with all stakeholders involved in integrated care delivery systems.

The dissemination of good practice by involving professionals and various organisations from 9 EU Member States will promote the development of a European understanding of integrated care, and shared views of definitions and approaches.

RIITTA HAVERINEN

PD-program as a promotor in the evaluation of social services

One of the ways FinSoc, STAKES' Evaluation Unit for Social Services, supports expertise in the evaluation of social services is by developing relevant education and training.

In autumn 1999, a special study programme on the evaluation of social services was launched at the University of Tampere. The impetus for the study programme came from FinSoc, and the programme was developed in co-operation with the University's Department of Social Policy and Social Work and Department of Administrative Sciences. In addition, a wide range of experts were consulted at the planning stage. The study programme aims to improve

understanding of the demanding and diverse nature of social work to facilitate the evaluation of social services.

This Professional Development (PD) programme on social service evaluation consists of 40 credits. The evaluation studies were started in spring 1999, and the students are to finish all parts of the programme by the end of 2002. All lectures were completed at the end of 2001. At present the students work on their research reports and optional studies.

While evaluation courses usually consist of short lecture series, this novel study programme is extensive even by international standards. In addition to

Finnish top experts, lecturers include many international evaluation experts, such as Professor Frans Leeuw, Professor Evert Vedung and Director Mansoor Kazi.

The participants are professionals versed in social welfare services and have a high level of expertise. They work as developers, teachers and researchers in the public and private sectors. Many of them are postgraduate students at different universities.

MAISA MAANIITU



FinSoc's publications supporting the evaluation of social services

FINSOC HAS THREE PUBLICATION CHANNELS

- FinSoc News bulletin published 2–3 times a year. The paper contains topical information on different issues such as new, important publications and surveys, and coming seminars and conferences. It also features broader articles and other topics discussing the evaluation of social services. The paper can also be published as a theme issue, which have been drawn up on topics such as responsive evaluation and self-evaluation. The authors include university researchers, social work developers and social workers engaged in field duties.
- FinSoc Evaluation Reports publication series that features reports on empirical evaluation research into social work and social services. The emphasis in selecting the reports is that they should be of use to people making and planning evaluations. They are concerned with important issues and describe different methods in a way that one can learn of when planning evaluation research.
- FinSoc Working Paper publication series discusses issues concerning the evaluation of social services.

The target group of FinSoc's publications is people who need evaluation data. We have noticed that many of our publications are also used as study material in vocational training in social education establishments and in evaluation courses.

The reports discuss evaluation in dif-

ferent social service sectors such as rehabilitation. They evaluate the effects of the working method used and essentially add to people's basic knowledge of evaluation. Evaluation has become a major tool in developing public services and working methods and in guiding operations. Decision-makers and professionals engaged in the field more often need a basic knowledge of evaluation issues in their work. FinSoc has also published a report entitled "Evaluation in Social Services. A Review of Basic Evaluation Issues" (in Finnish). The report discusses the duties, opportunities and limits of evaluation.

It also takes up the issue of the ethics of evaluation, with a separate view to the ethic choices made by the party having commissioned the evaluation, the compiler of the evaluation, and the person deciding on social services. The above report discusses the host of different approaches and methods that evaluation involves. The popularity of the report has indicated that people need basic information on evaluation. With this in mind, we have also published material translated into Finnish.

MAISA MAANIITTU

Evaluation research meetings and forums as forms of collaboration and disseminating information

FinSoc's evaluation research meeting is an established venue of co-operation. Part of interactive communications, the occasions are open to anyone who needs information on evaluation methods in his work. Dealing with topical evaluation projects that have been drawn up by different actors and that take up important evaluation issues connected with social services, the occasions also feature interesting methods and applications that offer a wealth of opportunities.

Promoting evaluation essentially calls for co-operation between different actors, i.e. social workers, other social service employees, directors, researchers and decision-makers. Evaluation research meetings serve as a means of promoting collaboration and the setting up of networks between people interested in similar questions.

MAISA MAANIITTU

The forum – as a method of developing client-oriented services and services for older people

A client-oriented approach in social welfare and health-care services requires new practices adjusted to this principle. Forum working is a democratic and participatory method of working. It means creating open opportunities in which the participants discuss various experiences, data and theories. Forum is a method which enables reflection, evaluation, learning and development.

CITIZENS' RESPONSE PROVIDED THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

A forum provides a client-oriented method for developing services for older people, and derives from citizen response. The voices of older people have been heard through citizens' channels set up by STAKES in 1998. The information acquired suggested that it was necessary to revise existing methods and to develop new practices to meet the citizens' needs.

ARENA FOR VOICING OPINIONS

As a method, a forum offers an opportunity and an arena to express a wide range of views. The aim of the forum is to get together a variety of experts, infor-

mation and views. Those invited to attend the forum to share their views, skills and expertise include ordinary citizens, representatives of NGOs, workers, managers, teachers, researchers and policy makers. The first session of the forum introduces the audiences to the information and research basis of the subject.

The information acquired provides individual participants with material for personal reflection, recognition of tacit knowledge and self-evaluation (Argyris et al. 1985)

DIALOGICAL GROUP WORK

After the theory, the forum engages in dialogical group work in which individual participants have the opportunity to take part in discussions and examine the issues at hand, to air their experiences and thoughts.

NEW PRACTICES

With the new knowledge gained from working together the participants can set off to their own workplaces where they can produce new working practices and operating models, on the basis of what they have learnt. A critical

evaluation of the new practices and learning acquired from the experiences gained can then be introduced as material at new forums for further development.

What is important in forum working is that the persons in charge create a permissive and constructive atmosphere. A positive and safe atmosphere helps participants to produce new ideas and look for new associations of ideas (figure 1).

Routines, financial values and hard agendas must be gradually replaced by empowering, tailored solutions (Fetterman 1996).

MAISA MAANIITTU

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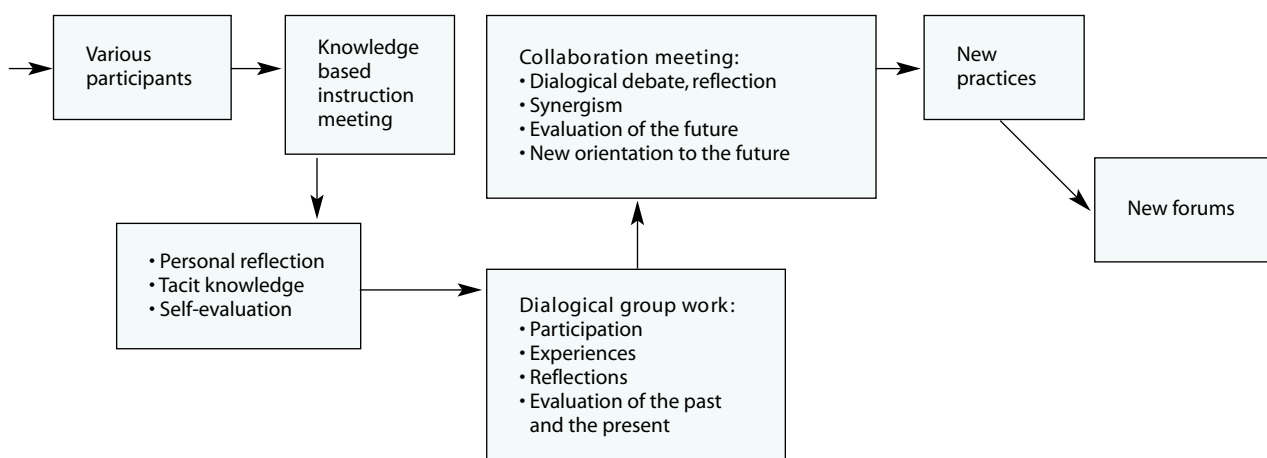


Figure 1. Forum as the method of reflection, evaluation, learning and development

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