

Planning and Evaluation: Two Sides of the Same Coin

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Planners and Evaluators: Members of the same Team?

Setting the scene

Evaluation is learning from experience in order to improve future project, program and policy work.

There will certainly be many evaluation professionals who will want to modify this definition, bringing in certain aspects they think are important, but by and large, this wording should not provoke any violent disagreements and will be recognized to capture the essentials. It is understood that, in this definition, evaluation will not exclusively comprise entire projects, programs or policies but also parts of these interventions, as for instance certain activities and procedures, whole organizations or certain of their departments or staff, given products or services and so on. All of these different endeavors (that should exhaust all of the different possibilities) will, however, have to serve the improvement of future work.

Yet, there might be more outspoken opposition to the idea, vigorously as well as convincingly defended by Reidar Dale (2004a, 2004b), of closely linking evaluation to planning, as evaluators are known to be very jealous of their independence and have a tendency to keep themselves to themselves. It appears necessary, therefore, to place this idea into a somewhat larger context:

If a worker in country C reaches out for a shovel with the intention to load sand onto a truck that will then be driven to the construction site of a well to be used as building material, this is, of course, a gesture that could hardly be simpler. The worker will first of all, imagine—or “plan”—this gesture, and then he will carry it out. He will not pause conscientiously to ask himself whether he has, indeed, reached out for the shovel; that is he will not “evaluate” the execution of his intention. But he will not be able to go on working if he has not followed up with practical action to his intention to reach out for the shovel. Since that is the case, however, he will simply

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start and go on shoveling until the truck is loaded. Planning and action will coincide 100% as evaluating the action will show. Planning security will be *almost* 100%, almost because there is still the remote possibility that the poor man might be flattened by a stroke just at the moment when trying to grab the shovel. The thin line dividing *past* and *future* will be *present* even during the one second space dividing the worker's intention to reach for the shovel and the subsequent action. It is worthwhile to pause for just a moment to ask why planning security in this case is, for all intents and purposes, 100%. It is because in this case:

- The time space between planning and evaluation is short, about a second;
- The geographical space of the action is limited, say one square meter;
- The number of people involved is low: just one;

Since action corresponds 100% to intention, in other words since planning and evaluation show a seamless match, nothing is to be learned from evaluation in this case, or so one would think. Not so! Evaluation should not only check the match between planning and action/achievement but also the quality of the planning! Is it not possible that the worker's grab for the shovel from a slightly different angle than the one he planned might have used up less energy and time, say three quarters of a second instead of one? It is! And this might not be a joke either, as the Taylor's well-known studies have shown with small lights fixed to the limbs of shoveling workers to ascertain the optimum (shortest) sequence of movements that would use up the least time and energy. Only if our worker would have made his grab for the shovel according to the Taylorian minimum effort would there have been nothing for evaluation to suggest as:

- Planning was optimum, and
- Action matched planning 100%.

True? Not so! Evaluation might suggest that according to country C's water policy loading the truck with sand for the construction of a well didn't make sense in the first place, as building wells was to be considered less advantageous than, say, the drilling of boreholes. Planning would then have had to be done all over again.

Summing up:

- The worker plans, executes and evaluates his grab for the shovel and finds they match 100%.
- Evaluating the worker's action from the outside, standing back 10 meters from the scene, Engineer Taylor evaluates the worker's grab for the shovel and compares it to the optimum grab. There's a difference. Engineer Taylor suggests the correct angle for the grab. The worker agrees and forthwith uses the correct angle. The grab is now optimum and can no longer be improved.
- The Evaluator in the Ministry of Natural Resources talks to the Minister and underlines that his/her evaluation of the technical solutions proposed by Planning has led him/her to

conclude that building wells fits less well within the national resources policy (considered adequate by all) than drilling boreholes. The Minister orders Planning to be resumed.

Please, dear reader, don't laugh too much, as you will realize presently how useful the analysis of the grab for the shovel will prove!

Beyond the grab for the shovel

Assuming the evaluator had found that the construction of wells, contrary to the above assumption, *did* fit the National Water Policy perfectly, then the sinking of wells will be the option to be pursued. Coming back to the above example, the truck will be loaded, will be driven to the building site and the sand will be used for the construction of the well as planned. Again, planning security will be extremely high, close to 100%, but less so than for the worker's grab for the shovel. The truck might have a flat tire en route. The filling station might have run out of gas. The driver might have a heart attack or run the truck onto a tree. Well-building workers might declare a national strike. But, of course, all will be arranged in time and the well will be built. *The match between planning and execution, however, will no longer be seamless; planning security will be slightly less than 100%*. Evaluators (in this case they will be called monitors as will become clear later) *will have improvements to suggest*, concerning, say, the routine maintenance of trucks, the organization of spare parts management, and the minimum qualifications of truck drivers, among others.

The well in question will be just one of a considerable number of wells that will have to be planned and built. But building wells will, in and of itself, help nobody to lead better lives. Wells will have to be maintained by people who know their job. Housewives will have to be trained in the use of clean water for consumption and how to avoid waterborne diseases for themselves and for members of their families. Maintenance and animation teams will have to be organized and will have to start routine work, and so forth.

What about planning security now? From sad experience, we know that it will have dropped sharply: the match between planning, implementation and achievements will no longer be entirely satisfactory and may even have become disastrously unbalanced. People might have refused to organize and pay for well repair work; housewives might refuse to admit the link between polluted water and disease; civil disturbances might have wrought havoc during project implementation and functioning. Evaluators will have plenty of work to do analyzing the situation, imagining ways to improve implementation as well as planning, how to minimize risk and how to increase planning security. Yet, and in spite of the best of intentions on all parts (which in real life, alas, does not often exist) the ideal of optimum planning and execution according to plan will no longer be possible. Life is simply too complicated for that. So, the achievable second best has to suffice. How "second best" is good enough?

Before answering that question, there should be a short pause for further thought:

Grabbing a shovel, as an isolated gesture, makes no sense, as will be evident to anybody. But driving a truck full of sand to a construction site; building a well; building a whole series of wells; studying the social and geographical details of the area concerned; all this will, in and of

itself, be perfectly useless. When, then, will it start to make sense? It will as of the moment when a certain number of people start consuming, for many years to come, potable water, thus satisfying their nutritional needs concerning adequate hydration of their bodies and avoiding to contract waterborne diseases. No more, no less: these people will draw a flow of sustainable benefits from these water points as they provide potable water and are instrumental in limiting disease. This intervention, although already rather complicated, exemplifies the simplest projects making sense in terms of improving the living standard of the people of the region served. Planning security will still be relatively high but far from complete. Risk will be all but negligible. But this is the price that must be paid for that tiny contribution to development this kind of investment will yield. I suggest that such intervention should be called a *project*. Interventions that stay below the threshold of yielding sustainable benefits for the target group should not have a claim to that expression. And how difficult it is to avoid all those useless interventions that were called, inappropriately, “projects” but never helped anybody to lead a better life, will be well known to all those who have any experience in development cooperation and are familiar with those sad “cathedrals in the desert” (also known as “white elephants”) which litter developing countries around the globe and which were never of any use to anybody other than those who were paid for these “investments.” This does not mean that true projects will present no problems of proper long term functioning and maintenance. They do, and will therefore require permanent attention to further improvement. But they *do* have the enormous advantage of being useful from the start, and that is what should be recognized as the achievable “second best” that’s “good enough.”

Returning to the progression from the “grab for the shovel” to the smallest kind of investment to be considered useful and therefore entitled to be called a “project,” the road ahead will be long and littered with ever more serious and ever faster growing obstacles. Well construction and functioning in region R of country C alone will not be acceptable in terms of social equity. Well construction and use may therefore have to be extended to the other regions in C. Such extension will thus consist in a whole “series of projects” commonly called a “*program*”. Wells will not be the only sources of water in C. In certain areas, the drilling of boreholes may prove more effective. Surface water resources will also have to be considered, especially as to their influence on the changes in the level and abundance of subterranean water tables. All of these factors and many others will have to be analyzed, subsequently to be included into C’s water policy, to be implemented by means of a number of programs. The inclusion of entire river systems in such policy will make it necessary to go beyond the borders of C. Furthermore, changing precipitation patterns and climatic changes will lead to the need to also include some global considerations.

Of course, water use and management will not be the only preoccupation in C. There are public health, education, agriculture and industry and a host of other sectors requiring attention and active intervention in the form of projects, programs and policies. These will require cross-border attention and will often be characterized by global implications as well, just as illustrated by the water sector case mentioned above. Furthermore, all other countries will face similar problems to those of C, requiring project, program and policy action. Moving fast into World Utopia by now, one can describe the ultimate objective to be reached by such worldwide action as: “*Human Dignity for All*”, an ideal that is way beyond human ingenuity to ever be reached in real life.

The Feasible Ground

Looking back at the *continuum* spanning all the way from a grab for a shovel to human dignity for all (HDA), it may be useful to consider the extremes before moving onto “feasible” ground: As to the time dimension, the “grab” requires a second or (hopefully) less. The pursuit of HDA will last as long as humans exist. The geographical space of the grab is one square meter. The one for HDA comprises the planet. And the number of people involved is one for the “grab” and the world’s population for HDA. Planning security for the grab is 100%, for HDA 0%. HDA combines maximum usefulness with zero feasibility. The “grab” combines total feasibility with entire uselessness. So we have, alas, to forget both and look for what may appear feasible along the line traced by the continuum.

Starting from below, that is, from the “grab” extreme, the first feasible *and* useful intervention was defined above as a “project” that should be as simple as possible but that will have to produce sustainable benefits for the target group. A well in the backyard of a farmer in the Sahel from which he and his family (the target group) can draw potable water for thirty years would be a case in point. Feasibility will score high for this case, usefulness low but positive. Moving up the line of the continuum, more complicated projects will come next, then simple programs, followed by more complicated programs, then the entire range of policies from local, via international, to global ones. Usefulness will grow along this line but feasibility will diminish. Where should the line be drawn on the road toward towards HDA? Hard to tell!

“Global Development Goals” as recently discussed and formulated in UN circles (education, health, poverty alleviation, etc.) may constitute the limit, or maybe just beyond, as feasibility reaches very low levels indeed at this point along the road of growing difficulties. Yet, for certain kinds of pressing problems that may threaten human existence itself, like climate change, rising sea levels and global warming, there are simply no other solutions than global ones that seem beyond the reach of feasibility for the moment and that may require global catastrophes to occur before the international community can muster enough determination and discipline to react. Thus, the upper limit is hard to determine, but it will be a long distance from HDA. It is this practical range of interventions with growing usefulness and diminishing feasibility that will come under review in the following sections, with planning and evaluation in the driving seat.

The Arrow of Time

All of us live in the past. In physical terms, the present does not exist and is simply an illusion, a trick played by our brains, as the inexorable “Now” drives us from split second to split second; and even those split seconds are nothing but the start, morsel by infinitesimal morsel, of the past. The arrow of time, pictured as an infinite horizontal line, with its feathered butt reaching to an unfathomable past and its arrow head to an unfathomable future, is crossed by the thin, immaterial line of the “now” to which all of us are relentlessly glued, dragging us, second by second, towards the future. True, the “sleight of hand,” played on us by our brains, is useful as well as agreeable for us, otherwise love, trust and friendship, the glory of sun-rise and the mystery of sun-set would not “exist.” How sad that would be!

But all our memories, all we snatch from fleeting impressions and *all we ever learned* are firmly rooted within the past, irremovable, unchangeable and frozen. They become tiny splinters of space-time that we know, since Einstein, will never ever change again. It is true, thank God, that we can reshuffle, reassemble, recombine all those uncountable building blocks, great and small, that we are gathering as we go through life and that we commit to that vast building site where we dream about, fantasize, pre-create our future. But all of these new shapes and colors will immediately share the fate of the rest of our dreams and inventions: to be relegated, irrevocably, unceremoniously, unchangeably to the past. And in a small corner of that fascinating theatre we call life, two players, twin brothers, go about their unspectacular routine. Their names: evaluation and planning. The flashlight will be on them as of now.

The Twin Brothers

Evaluation is looking back at the past and tries to make sense of experience. There is no way for evaluation to do anything else but that, ever. The term “ex-ante evaluation” is a misnomer. It is like saying that fire is water. And there is absolutely no reason for employing that kind of awkward, multi-syllable, confusing mouthful since we have a perfectly simple, straightforward and therefore much better word for it: “planning.” “Ex-post evaluation” is also a misnomer, although not quite as bad as “ex-ante evaluation.” It is simply repeating the same thing and that’s once too many. It is like saying that water is water, or that fire is fire. So, why not do without the superfluous and simply talk of evaluation (period!)? Critics might object that terms, expressions, definitions are simply social conventions designed to cover meanings that are, in turn, social conventions, and that therefore one word is as good as another. That sounds correct. But is it reasonable? Here is a perfectly absurd but quite illustrative reflection on the issue:

Imagine that society were to “convene” to abolish the term “fire”—as sounding too dangerous—and to replace it by the term “water-minus.” So as to avoid confusion, the term “water” would be replaced by the term “water-plus.” Now imagine the frantic phone-calls to the fire fighters’ station by desperate residents of a burning apartment block:

“Hello, hello, water-minus fighters’ station???! Our building is on water-minus! Water-plus pressure is very low, so we can’t fight the water-minus by ourselves! Please come ASAP and don’t forget to carry an extra charge of water-plus!”

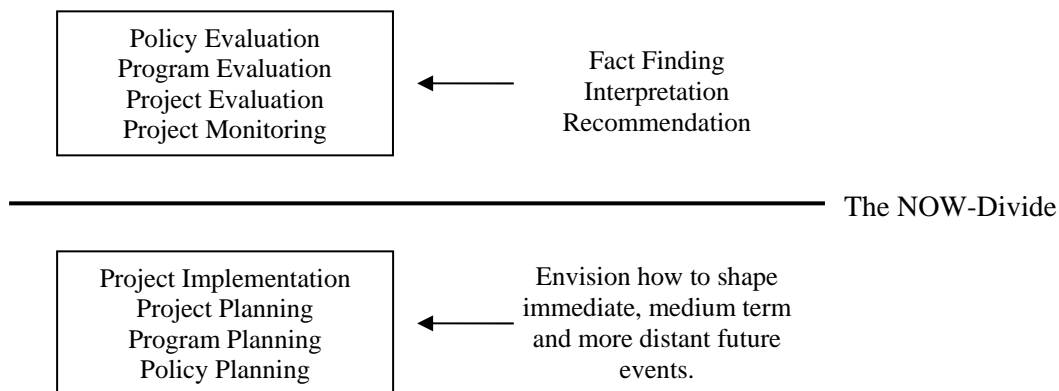
Of course, evaluation and planning are both constructed “now,” which means that they are instantly being relegated to the past. The big difference between the two, however, is that evaluation tries to *understand the past* while planning tries to *imagine the future*. Both endeavors are part and parcel of everyday life, of course, but planning and evaluation are concentrating on projects, programs and policies as presented in the preceding section. Policies are the most comprehensive of the three in terms of time horizons and scope, and they are the furthest removed from practical action. A cluster of programs will be conceived that will move them towards realization, detailing sectors and geographical areas concerned. And finally, each program will be split into a series of projects which will define, in turn, the “outputs” to be produced, the “inputs” necessary towards that end, the “activities” allowing inputs to be transformed into outputs and, finally, the budget that will be required to buy those inputs. Policies, programs and projects will all be geared towards the production of *certain benefits* to

certain people, called the “target group” or the “intended beneficiaries.” So, budgets, inputs, activities and outputs will be at the cutting edge on the road from intention to realization.

The sequence of measures to be taken prior to the complete execution of a project, that is prior to the point in time when it will start (in case it is successful) to produce sustainable benefits for its target group, is called “implementation” which is being controlled, step by step, by “monitoring.” Implementation, like planning, is *always* future-oriented, and monitoring, like evaluation, is *always* past-oriented. Implementation covers, thus, a specific range of short term planning, and monitoring a specific range of short-term evaluation (Cracknell, 2000).

Please note that evaluators and monitors may also engage in planning and/or implementation and that planners and implementers may also engage in evaluation and/or monitoring, although this will be the exception rather than the rule. There are cases, however, when it seems not only permissible but positively recommendable to step across the fence and graze (or play) on the other side of the pasture, as is the case, for instance, of “self-evaluation” by stakeholders of an ongoing or finished intervention. Actors involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation can, and sometimes should, participate in several or all of these activities. Often, such way of proceeding will make for more realistic interventions and will strengthen common purpose and consensus. There are *only two absolute impossibilities: evaluate the future and plan the past.*

Summing up and dividing up the concepts mentioned above according to whether they are located on the “past” or on the “future” side of the time divide called “Now,” there are policy, program, and project evaluation as well as monitoring followed by the “NOW-divide,” and then project implementation, project, program, and policy planning (see Figure below).



Everything above the “now-divide” is concerned with fact finding, interpretation and with recommendations, and everything below that divide is concerned with imagining how to shape immediate, medium term and more distant future events. All of these activities can proceed irrespective of the distance of each of the above mentioned categories from the now-divide

(which means that all eight can, and often will, go on simultaneously as implementation, projects, programs and policies overlap).

Consulting the past to shape the future

What happens when doing Evaluation? Well, the evaluator will “go back”, through data-gathering and fact finding, using existing documentation as well as stakeholders’ memories among other sources of evidence, to the beginning of each of the subjects of the evaluation, the “evaluands”, in this case policies, programs, projects, implementations or parts of any of these.

They will, *first*, trace what happened between that start of events and the “Now”, trying to understand the cause-to-effect relations linking these events one to the other (or the others). Doing that, they will have the inestimable advantage of hindsight: they will be looking at *facts* that are, as Einstein taught us, fixed unchangeably, for all eternity to come, within that tiny slab of space-time where and when they happened. True, evaluators will not be able to ascertain *all* of these events, and they will not identify *all* of the cause-to-effect relations between them; life being simply too complicated for that. But they will analyze facts frozen in space-time, not “facts” planners hope to shape in the future, aptly described by popular wisdom as “pie in the sky.”

Next, evaluators will go back to the start of the evaluand and will imagine that the “now” has, mysteriously, jumped back to that point in time, and then they will put themselves in the shoes of planners and start planning of the evaluand all over again. True, they’ll cheat just a bit by having the occasional look at the facts frozen in space-time and trying to avoid planners’ errors, and by thus proceeding they will paint an improved (although imaginary) picture of an improved, although fictitious “reality” comparing “what might have happened”—that creation of the imagination—to “what really happened.” The differences between the real and the imaginary chain of events will be spelled out in their conclusions and will serve planners, *or so we hope*, to do a better job next time around.

Does that mean that evaluation should serve planning (in the widest sense of the word)? It does. Exclusively? Yes (Chelimsky, 1997; Patton, 1997). Does it mean that evaluation that fails to serve planning is useless? It does (Eggers & Chelimsky, 1999). I know that many evaluators, especially those who have that uncanny knack of keeping themselves to themselves and refuse to get involved with any management team, will be in violent disagreement with these conclusions. So, I’ll try to substantiate them.

An apple a day...

Anglophones will have learned it in nursery school, and for the rest of us, it will have cropped up in one of our first English lessons: “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Simple as it may appear, it contains the up-shot of hard-earned and long-standing experience and as such it can lay claim to presenting an evaluation conclusion. It is not necessary to go to the extreme of constituting a treatment and a control group, the first having the privilege of consuming an apple per head every day, and the second receiving a glass of water instead, with the number of visits by doctors per group being counted as the “objectively verifiable indicator” (OVI), no. This

nursery jingle is much better understood if one interprets it as an invitation to preserve one's health by consuming more fresh fruit and vegetables and less animal fats. The reality of such health benefits has been confirmed by countless studies and observations, and there can thus be no doubt that these benefits exist.

So, the above mentioned invitation, by the nursery jingle, to change one's eating habits is to be considered the "recommendation" of the evaluation studies that lead to the said conclusion, and it is obvious that many people did indeed (a) resolve ("plan") to consume more fruit/vegetables and less animal fats, and that they (b) then started to practice ("implement") the new habit. Could there have been any other benefits subsequent to the "evaluation recommendation"? No. The influence on "planning and implementation" is the *only* positive repercussion imaginable! If people would have chosen to ignore the evaluation message, there would not have been any reduction in doctors' visits. The evaluation results would not have been used and thus the evaluations would have been just what that term implies: useless.

Evaluation objectives

Broadening the discussion on the usefulness of evaluation studies, contemplate, first of all, the two categories closest to the "Now-divide," that is, implementation and monitoring. These could also be called short-term planning and short-term evaluation. Both feature, among their standard working instruments, time-bound work-plans and the distribution of responsibilities for their execution: implementation prospectively and monitoring retrospectively. As everyone will admit, monitoring serves to improve implementation. Monitoring has the additional advantage of informing longer-term evaluations that include the evaluation of monitored projects. But that will be all monitoring can do.

The relationship between program evaluation and program planning as well as that between policy evaluation and policy planning should be similar to, or at least inspired by that between monitoring and implementation (Cracknell, 2000). Of course, things will get increasingly complicated as one moves along the "project-program-policy continuum," and easy solutions will become more and more of a rarity. Moreover, conflict may start to undermine the sense of common purpose underlying all concerted action which is indispensable when pursuing objectives that should be acceptable to all stakeholders involved. Coming back to the example of water supply projects, programs, and policies that will eventually comprise whole watershed systems irrespective of whether these are located within national borders or not, one cannot avoid being worried: Futurologists have argued convincingly that armed conflicts for water (not oil!) are among the scenarios to be seriously considered as possible or even probable in the decades to come. So, the dialogue between evaluators and planners, but also that between planners and evaluators among themselves and with other stakeholders, may become ever more difficult, and once that dreaded armed conflict will have started it will be clear for everyone to see that all dialogue will have failed miserably. But what is the alternative to the search for consensus and the pursuit of common objectives to be reached through a concerted effort of all, if not worse projects, programs and policies, if not unimproved planning and useless evaluations?

Therefore, planning and evaluation should be pursuing the same common objective: the creation of sustainable benefits for the target groups of projects, programs, and policies. Again, there will be dissenting voices, but maybe less strident than opposition to the thesis that evaluation should exclusively serve the improvement of planning.

What is there to be said against evaluation being concerned with merit, worth, and significance (Scriven, 2006)? Nothing, it seems. It's just that the story cannot end there. If a project has merit, it should surely serve given people to lead better lives. If it has worth, then the benefits to be created will have to be of higher value than that of the means devoted to such benefit creation. And the entire enterprise should be geared towards the solution of significant problems, otherwise it will be lacking in relevance.

What is there to be said against evaluation being summative or formative? Nothing, it seems. But if it is decided to end a project, a program, or a policy, then it should be because the intervention in question does not create sustainable benefits for the target group, that is, does not have merit, worth, and/or significance. And if it is found that project/program/policy procedures, mechanisms, success indicators should be improved, then that should be done with a view to improving the outcomes in terms of enhancing people's living standards.

What is there to be said against evaluation to find out what works for whom in which circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997)? Nothing, it seems. But if such evaluation implies systematically re-inventing the "theory" followed by planners, one might be entitled to ask why the creative imagination of evaluators had not been concentrated on the theory (even if not spelled out in every detail) applied by planners in the first place.

What is there to be said against evaluations having to serve improving accountability, transparency or "enlightenment"? Nothing it seems. But again, these things cannot be ends in themselves, and eventually they will have to serve to improve *people's lives*.

What is there to be said against efforts to rid oneself of any prejudice, ignoring planners' needs analysis and objectives, and engage in an independent review, called "goal-free evaluation" (Scriven, 1974), of the needs to be satisfied by an intervention and of the events that took place with or without a view of satisfying them? Nothing, it seems. But if the results of such evaluation are not put to use for the improvement of given peoples' living standards, as might be the case, their usefulness should be questioned. Fortunately, however, goal-free evaluation (GFE) can be conceived as an add-on to goal-bound evaluation (GBE), and that would be satisfactory even to simple, "positivist" minds.

Common Structures for Planning and Evaluation?

There seems to be just one way out of all these dilemmas (Eggers, 2002), and that is to adopt:

- A common objective for both, planning and evaluation, namely the creation of sustainable benefits for the target groups of interventions, and therefore

- A common approach to the structuring, notably to the formulation of the terms of reference for both.

Some years ago, evaluators representing Member States for their discipline at the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), Paris, agreed on a certain number of fundamental criteria to be included in any evaluation (OECD-DAC, 1991). They were, summarily defined, the following:

- Relevance (tackle problems that are worthwhile to be solved)
- Economy (buy inputs at best value for money)
- Effectiveness (do the right things)
- Efficiency (do things right)
- Sustainability (durability)
- Impact (go for goal achievement).

The formulation of these six criteria were the result of many years of hard-earned experience, and so one would have expected that planners would have picked them up immediately and would have included them into the concept of and thus the terms of reference for any future intervention. Surprise, surprise! They didn't. Instead they go on as they always did: inventing "ad hoc" the terms of reference for any new intervention or, worse still, launching interventions without any serious previous planning. This doesn't seem to bother evaluators who go on as they always did and as, of course, they are free to do: structuring their evaluations on ad hoc terms of reference including, or not, the above six basic criteria, and "re-inventing" planners' theory the way they think it might, or should, have been (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), instead of insisting on the imperative need for planners to plan, first and foremost, for the future realization of interventions according to those six criteria. Why this should be so is anyone's guess and would be well worth thorough research.

Unintended impact is another important field of incomprehension between planners and evaluators: the latter come across such "side-effects" (Gysen, Bruyninckx & Bachus, 2006) almost systematically as they have the inestimable advantage of hindsight. Again, one would have expected evaluators to draw the attention of planners to the need of checking systematically for the possible future occurrence of unintended impact, with a view to making those impacts or effects "anticipated" in all the measure possible. Between them they might have reduced this phenomenon in cases where such impact is negative (as there are also many cases where it is desirable, for instance where rising living standards of the target group—the intended impact—lead to increased income of those that count members of the target group among their clients; indeed, these clients will, hopefully, have an increased income to spend). Yet, there does not seem to be any systematic check, on the part of planners, for possible future unintended negative impact, which would certainly have served to reduce its occurrence. But what else would one

expect in a world where evaluators and planners seem to live on different planets and refuse to cooperate as members of the same team pursuing common objectives?!

Is there a practical approach closely combining planning and evaluation, geared towards the creation of sustainable benefits for target groups of projects, programs, and policies? This is what will be explored in the second part of this article, proposing “Project Cycle Management” (PCM) to this end. This methodological approach was conceived for International Development Cooperation, and the following presentation will keep closely in line with its relevance to this particular field of interest. PCM can, however, be adapted to any other area requiring systematically prepared action, as its basic logic applies to projects, programs and policies everywhere.

Project Cycle Management (PCM)

Nature and Origin of the Approach

PCM is a methodological approach integrating planning/implementation and evaluation/monitoring, with a view to improving the success of projects, programs and policies in terms of the creation of sustainable benefits for intended beneficiaries. (the target group) It was conceived in the area of development cooperation between the European Communities (today the European Union) and partner developing countries around the world.

If it is true that the design of PCM took its origin as of the mid-eighties, when I was the head of the evaluation division within the Directorate General for Development of the European Commission (then DG VIII), this fact is rather incidental as the approach might have come from any other development cooperation organization/agency as well: *All had similar problems to cope with. All will have to continue to learn together* (Eggers, 2002). So, it is not surprising that the acronym “PCM” that I coined and introduced into the debate has been taken over worldwide today. The origin of the acronym dates back to September 1987 when I discussed the approach with my boss, the Deputy Director General of DG VIII who, quite spontaneously as I recall, qualified it as “the integrated approach”. That was, quite adequate, I thought, as we had made a systematic effort to integrate programming, planning, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation into one overall concept. But then, I asked myself to precisely *what* this was an “integrated approach,” and so I called it the “Integrated Approach to Project Cycle Management.” As that was quite a mouthful, finally only the last three terms survived, and that turned out to be, indeed, the most practical solution.

Three Fundamental Weaknesses of Development Cooperation

In 1985, the Evaluation Division of DG VIII proceeded to a revision of the effectiveness of the DG’s work during the 25 years it had been active in development cooperation with the “ACP States”, that is, the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries associated with the European Communities. The Evaluation Division reviewed its own already substantial evaluation work and also the numerous reports of the European Court of Auditors concerning development cooperation with the ACPs. As only orders of magnitude were sought, a rather crude scoring

system was applied to this voluminous documentation. The results were sobering: one third of the projects/programs considered were judged to have been overall successful, the second third showed important flaws, and the last third was unceremoniously judged unsuccessful. Reference to the work done by other development cooperation agencies showed that they had obtained more or less similarly disappointing results. To be sure, one could not say, as did many detractors of development cooperation work, that this work had entirely failed, but it was equally certain that it had not been overall successful. The truth was that its results were, to put it mildly, unsatisfactory and in urgent need of improvement. What was to be done?

As a first step, the Evaluation Division went back to the documentation it had reviewed in order to identify the reasons responsible for the mediocre outcome mentioned. A first conclusion asserted itself immediately: errors had accumulated for each program/project judged problematic or bad *from the beginning up to the end of the entire project/program cycle, that is to say as of the programming phase, via project/program planning and implementation up to project/program monitoring and evaluation.* The Evaluation Division tried to pinpoint these weaknesses with greater precision and eventually, with the help of professional colleagues around the world, identified what were judged the three major root causes for the unsatisfactory outcomes of the DG's (as well as the other agencies') work. These *three fundamental weaknesses* subsequently proved to be of major importance for PCM since they were to be turned into its *three fundamental principles*: They are the following:

(i) Confusion between “beneficiaries” and “project”.

Example: “Construction of a water supply system in region “R” instead of: “Due to the construction and functioning of a water supply system in Region “R”, people in “R” enjoy the consumption of a sufficient quantity of potable water (...l/pers.) during 30 years as of date ‘d’”.

Indeed, the “engineer’s thinking” seemed to combine with the “businessman’s” and the “politician’s thinking” to consider the construction of a road, of a hospital, of a school and even the supply of a tractor or a truck, a good thing in itself, irrespective of the needs of the beneficiaries.

I recall a particularly drastic case back in the early sixties when one of the Member States, six at the time, of the “European Economic Community” delivered a dozen heavy trucks to a West African country, to be used for “development purposes.” After one month, half of the vehicles making up that “fleet” had ended their short and violent careers, along with those of their drivers, landing in ditches or crashing into trees, while the rest had come to an unceremonious standstill, for lack of spare parts, in various remote corners of the Sahelian bush.

The thinking behind such “projects,” although no longer leading to the absurd extremes illustrated in this last mentioned case, still remains deeply ingrained in the way the development cooperation enterprise functions today, as it permits us to channel development finance in a predetermined way so as to impress administrations, parliaments and the public at large in donor as well as recipient countries. This “fund-channeling” without much concern for the ultimate outcome of the interventions in question, is a shortcut to project failure.

- (ii) “Forgetting” one or several essential aspects in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Example: No analysis of socio-cultural aspects in a water supply project; the intended beneficiaries might think that water is a gift from God that does not need to be paid for.

Socio-cultural aspects are just one among others each of which is essential for project success. It will suffice to overlook *even a single one of* them to jeopardize a positive project/program outcome, to make it impossible for the intervention to solve the existing problems, and thus to ensure project/program *relevance and a satisfactory outcome/impact*.

And finally:

- (iii) Failing to respect a sound decision making discipline all along the project cycle, when passing from a given project phase to the next.

Example: A financing decision is taken without the prior establishment of a feasibility study.

Those familiar with the realities in financing agencies know how powerful pressure can become to commit and spend given amounts during given periods. They will also be familiar with political pressures being brought to bear on these agencies by political leaders in recipient countries who are eager to demonstrate to their electorates that their wish to construct a road, a hospital, a plantation, is followed by immediate action. It is all the more surprising that the danger of these pressures for project success is so little recognized or, if it is, so little is done to resist them.

These three fundamental weaknesses were, thus, the up-shot of numerous evaluation studies all over the world, they were the concentrated expression of hard-earned *experience*. The definition of “evaluation” at the beginning of this article as “learning from experience in order to improve future project, program and policy work” should now be put to the proof. How, then, was the substance of that experience to be integrated into the fundamental structure of *planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation?* This integration proved, finally, rather straightforward.

Three Fundamental Principles of PCM: Concepts and Tools

The evaluation division converted these three “capital errors” into three “fundamental principles.” This exercise consisted simply of turning the “don’ts” into “do’s”, the negatives into positives. But before turning to the substance of these principles, the scope of their application should be recalled.

If there were not a real risk of sounding like a stutter, one could call PCM also PPPCM. *It applies, indeed, to projects, programs, and policies as defined in part 1 above.*

Projects and programs are sometimes hard or even impossible to disentangle one from the other. If the construction of an individual well, for instance, can certainly be viewed as a small project in its own right, the satisfaction of a country's needs in well construction will probably be called a "program." At which number of wells will a "project" turn into a "program?" Hard to tell and depending on each concrete case! A program is always made up of a cluster of projects, and programs will thus eventually be implemented as a series of interconnected projects. In any case, there are no clear cut limits.

A *policy* usually will, when implemented, turn out to consist of a combination of programs and projects, for example, the drinking water policy in country C. It will normally (at least in democracies) be geared to capturing and channeling a growing swell of public preferences and opinions. In any case, a serious policy will not stop at an enunciation of intentions, but will also indicate the measures to be taken in terms of concrete programs.

All told, the application modalities of PCM will require constant adaptation as one moves from projects via programs towards policies. Emphasis will shift from detail to strategy, objectives will broaden, and implementation mechanics will require diminishing attention. But the rigor of the first PCM principle will be applicable to the entire continuum in equal measure. It will be the "yeast" that penetrates the entire system and ensures the mutually reinforcing quality of its different components.

Here, then, are the three PCM principles, that is, the "positive" version of the three fundamental weaknesses mentioned earlier:

The First PCM Principle: Sustainable Benefits for Intended Beneficiaries

The Specific Objective (or the Purpose) of Development Projects, Programs and Policies must always be expressed in terms of Sustainable Benefits for the "Intended Beneficiaries" (or "Target Groups").

This principle is *the only rigid element* of PCM. It is its *master principle*. If one cannot express one's project/program/policy objectives in terms of **who** is to benefit and **how**, then something must be seriously wrong indeed with one's intentions. Surely, there cannot be many dissenting voices who would not accept that development cooperation should serve to improve the living standards of the people for whom the entire effort is being organized. What else is "help to self-help" meant to mean? If this is so, then the first PCM principle should command massive support by donors and recipients alike. Everything in PCM is "debatable" with the exception of this principle. If there are dissenting voices in that respect—and there always could be—then it is difficult to imagine how these could be included in an exchange of views on PCM. PCM simply will not be for them.

There is a very useful grammatical rule to express this concern for rigidity as to the creation of sustainable benefits for the target group, a rule that will help stakeholders to submit to the necessary discipline:

Start with the words “Due to,” followed by the title of the project/program/policy, then specify the intended beneficiaries followed by the verb “enjoy,” always using the present tense, third person, plural of that verb, followed by the enunciation of the specific benefits to be created and, if considered useful, a rough idea of how long these benefits are to flow, i.e., what one might consider to be “sustainable” benefits.

Don't let yourself be trapped by the reaction that this must be the whim of a grammar freak! It isn't! Either you have a clear idea as to what should happen so as to achieve your objective of ensuring an improved quality of life for the target group, through the creation of specific benefits to be enjoyed by them, or else you don't. If you do, then you will be able, without as much as a single exception, to formulate the project/program/policy objective that way. If you don't, then you should clarify the substance of your intentions until you do.

Yet, in practical development cooperation, there is widespread use, when enunciating the project/program purpose, of the *perfect tense*: e.g., “capacity strengthened,” “yields increased,” “quality upgraded,” or even of the infinitive: “construct a road,” “build a school,” “train agricultural extension staff,” thus, confusing outputs and activities with objectives. So, far from being grammatical gimmickry, this issue is at the very heart of project/program success or failure.

Example:

Wrong: “Install Democratic Institutions in Country C”

Correct: “Due to the installation and functioning of Democratic Institutions in Country C, Citizens of C enjoy democratic rights”.

Only the rigidity of the first PCM Principle will make sure that confusion as to what is intended by an intervention is being excluded from the outset and that it is made clear (a) who (target group) should benefit from it and (b) what is the improvement sought (by specifying the nature of the benefits). This clarification indicates, at the same time, the double limitation that will characterize any project, program, or policy: It should affect (a) only a specified group of people (the “intended beneficiaries” or “target group”), and it should (b) procure benefits of a certain nature. If, over and above achieving this purpose, the intervention causes other “unintended” benefits for people other than the target group, for instance positive knock-on effects, so much the better! If these unintended indirect outcomes are negative (as subsequent evaluation may reveal), then these would have to be compared to the (positive) benefits and might well have a bearing on their “sustainability”. This is all one can achieve when moving along the “practical portion” of the continuum between the “shoveling worker” and HDA, as presented earlier.

There is nothing difficult or mysterious about a correct understanding of project success in terms of the first PCM principle. For such understanding, one does not even have to know how to read and to write, as any of the old farmers of the Sahel will tell you. For them, for instance, a good well is a well that will provide enough clean water for their families, for themselves and their

livestock for many, many years. Who cares about setting the scope for “PPPCM,” defining sustainable benefits, and the Master PCM Principle after that?

The Tool of the First PCM Principle: The Logical Framework Matrix

Each of the three PCM Principles corresponds to a specific tool. The tool for the First PCM Principle is an instrument that has been around for several decades: it is the “Logical Framework Matrix” developed by a US consultancy firm, “Practical Concepts Inc.,” around 1970 for the American bilateral aid agency “US-AID.” Its “vertical logic” links inputs to outputs, outputs to the project purpose, and the project purpose to the overall goal. Its “horizontal logic” links the categories just mentioned to indicators, their sources of verification, and corresponding assumptions.

The Logical Framework	Intervention Logic	Objectively verifiable Indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Overall Objective	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4) (void)
Project Purpose	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Outputs	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Activities	(13)	<u>(14)Means (Inputs)</u>	<u>(15)Costs</u>	<u>(16)Preconditions</u>

However, PCM uses the “logframe” much less as a project design instrument than initially intended (experience shows that it has important weaknesses in that respect). In PCM, the logframe serves as a tool for checking the project logic and for summing up project content. According to the first PCM principle, the text to appear in the square reserved in the logframe for the enunciation of the project *purpose must always be formulated in terms of the creation of sustainable benefits for the target group*. The preceding discussion has shown how this concern can and should find its “grammatical” expression. But a grammatical rule is not only useful for the formulation of the project purpose. Such rule should also apply to the formulation of the outputs and to that of the activities:

As to the *outputs*, one should distinguish between (a) the period between the beginning and the end of the construction of the initial investment and (b) the period of functioning of that investment between the latter mentioned point in time (i.e., after the initial investment is finished) and the beginning of the time after reaching the break even point, i.e., as of the moment when the “hardware” installed starts producing the goods/services planned according to the “software,” covering all current functioning, maintenance, and depreciation costs. Such covering of current costs will apply to marketable as well as to public goods and services. In the first case, market prices (e.g., for palm oil) will have to be sufficient for cost coverage whereas in the second case (e.g., for internal and external security, public transport, education etc.) cost coverage will involve total or partial financing through tax financed public subsidies. Total financial involvement of donor and recipient, for the production of marketable as well as of public goods and services, will have to extend to both periods: (a) and (b). Only then, i.e., after the end of periods (a) *and* (b), will the project be able to “run under its own steam,” starting to produce sustainable benefits for its target group.

The end of the “hardware” investment should be indicated using the *perfect tense*, for instance: “Oil Palm Plantation and Palm Oil Factory *installed*,” “Drinking Water and Sewerage Systems *constructed*,” “School Building S *erected*,” etc. The end of the “software” investment and the time thereafter should be marked using the gerund: “Plantation and Factory *functioning*, *selling* palm oil *covering* costs,” “Drinking Water and Sewerage Systems *functioning while covering* costs,” “School S *working* normally,” etc. Activities, finally, should be specified using the infinitive, for instance: “*Construct* the school building,” “*train* the teachers,” “*inform* parents,” and so on.

Practical experience shows how helpful such “grammatical discipline” can be when it comes to avoiding muddled thinking. What about the second and third PCM principles and the tools corresponding to them?

The Second PCM Principle and its Tool: Consideration of Essential Criteria

All of the essential criteria for successful project/program/policy preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, as taught by experience, should be considered.

Again, the main stress is on the solidity of practical experience, as underlined in the first part above, providing the underlying structure (or criteria) to both Planning/Implementation *and* Monitoring/Evaluation. Making sure that professional wisdom guided the choice of these criteria, the DG VIII Evaluation Division set out to learn all it could concerning the most important project/program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation criteria that had necessarily to be taken into consideration with a view to avoiding project/program failure. It asked the members of the OECD DAC Working Group on Aid Evaluation to provide their manuals/handbooks containing these criteria. It took on board the results of two years’ work of the Group on sustainability. Most of the inputs as well as the fundamental concepts that made this work possible came, thus, from the Group. Drawing together the knowledge accumulated in this way, the Evaluation Division drafted the “Basic Format” that was henceforth to guide the establishment of the “Terms of Reference” (ToR) for the studies and the other routine

documentation pertaining to each phase of the project cycle, and notably to *planning and evaluation*. The “Basic Format” was to combine top quality with extreme conciseness: concentration on the essentials seemed, indeed, vital as it would guarantee that at least the really important aspects were never neglected. The resulting format was included in the “Manual on Project Cycle Management, Integrated Approach and Logical Framework, Commission of the European Communities, February 1993”. A revised version of this text is displayed below. The revisions were included subsequent to the results of the ongoing professional debate on the issues in question up to the present. Later periodic revisions should allow keeping in step with new insights as they become available, and a concrete possibility in that respect might be the consultation of Scriven’s *Key Evaluation Checklist* (2006) The present “2006 version” of the “Basic Format,” as presented below, is accordingly the basic instrument or tool considered up to date, corresponding to the second PCM principle.

The PCM Basic Format

- 1. Summary**
- 2. Background**
 - 2.1. Government/sectoral policy - Donor policy: coherence/complementarity
 - 2.2. Democracy - Human Rights - Good governance
 - 2.3. Features of sector
 - 2.4. Beneficiaries and other stakeholders
 - 2.5. Problems and opportunities to be addressed (Relevance)
 - 2.6. Other interventions, cooperation with other donors
 - 2.7. Documents available, i.a. evaluations
 - 2.8. Project/program history, including past, present and future application of PCM
- 3. Intervention (intended and unintended results)**
 - 3.1. Overall objectives (Impact)
 - 3.2. Outcome: Project/program purpose (Effectiveness)
 - 3.3. Outputs (Efficiency)
 - 3.4. Inputs and activities (Economy)
- 4. Assumptions**
 - 4.1. Assumptions at different intervention levels
 - 4.2. Risks and flexibility
- 5. Implementation**
 - 5.1. Physical and non physical means
 - 5.2. Organization - procedures - transparency
 - 5.3. Timetable
 - 5.4. Cost estimate and financing plan
 - 5.5. Special conditions: accompanying measures taken by Government
- 6. Quality Factors ensuring Sustainability**
 - 6.1. Policy support

- 6.2. Appropriate technology
 - 6.3. Environmental protection
 - 6.4. Socio-cultural aspects: - Gender issues -
 - 6.5. participation - empowerment - ownership
 - 6.6. Institutional and management capacity, public and private; decentralization of responsibilities: subsidiarity
- 7. Economic and financial viability**
- 8. Monitoring and evaluation**
- 8.1. Monitoring plan and indicators
 - 8.2. Reviews / evaluations
- 9. Conclusions and proposals**
(Including overall sustainability assessment)

The Third PCM Principle and its Tool: Sound Decision Making

There should be sound decision making discipline all along the project/program cycle.

Decision making not geared towards the creation of sustainable benefits for the target group was recognized by the Evaluation Division of DG VIII as one of the major reasons for project failure. Political pressure on both the donor and the recipient sides was found to be mainly responsible for this situation.

In an atmosphere where staff in funding agencies and in recipient countries are judged predominantly by the speed of their “financial throughput,” it becomes exceedingly difficult to care for and to achieve the creation of sustainable benefits for target groups who tend to be forgotten in spite of the fact that the entire enterprise should exclusively serve their ends and interests. Converting outputs into outcomes becomes less important than converting inputs into outputs, and in turn, converting money into inputs becomes more important than converting inputs into outputs, and that will be the end of any rational project/program work.

An application of the third PCM principle will make this haphazard (while opportunistic!) decision making impossible. Its corresponding “tool” is the “Format of Phases and Decisions,” included below. If not applied, this Format is just another piece of paper, and it must be admitted, of course, that it will not be easy to convince political decision makers to change their ways and to put target group interests first (which cannot be served by the usual “quick-and-dirty approaches”). But it does not seem impossible. Often, these decision makers have perfectly respectable intentions and simply do not know any better. If they care to, they will quickly understand the rules of sound PCM decision making as spelt out in the Format. They will be all the more willing to learn when they realize that the third PCM principle, far from curtailing their prerogatives to spell out the political choices and priorities, actually help them to achieve their (legitimate) political goals. The six project/program phases defined in the Format have indeed been chosen in such a way that the decisions to be taken (when passing from a given phase to the

next or within a given phase) represent the decisive junctures that condition project success in terms of the creation of sustainable benefits for the target group. It is clear that the formulation of these goals have to be arrived at in a democratic process.

The Format of Phases and Decisions	
Phases	Decisions
1. Project Idea: According to program within framework of a pre-determined policy	Does this idea correspond to the predetermined policy? <u>YES</u> : Execute the pre-feasibility study <u>NO</u> : Abandon the project
2. Project Identification: pre-feasibility study	Should Project Formulation take place? <u>YES, because the project seems relevant</u> : Undertake the feasibility study <u>NO, because the project does not seem relevant</u> : Abandon the project
3. Project Formulation: feasibility study	Is the Project feasible? <u>YES, because project sustainability appears ensured</u> : Establish the formal financing documents <u>NO, because project sustainability appears doubtful</u> : Abandon the project
4. Financing: formal financing documents	Should the formal financing documents be signed? <u>YES, because they correspond to project formulation according to point 3</u> : Sign the formal financing documents <u>NO, because they do not correspond as yet to project formulation according to point 3</u> : Correct the financing documents, then sign
5. Implementation: monitoring reports	Should the project be adapted without changing the project purpose? <u>YES, if not, the achievement of the project purpose seems improbable</u> : Adapt the project <u>NO, because the achievement of the project purpose continues to appear probable</u> : Continue implementation as before
6. Evaluations: evaluation reports	Should the project be reoriented? <u>YES, because the project purpose might have to be changed</u> : Proceed with the re-orientation <u>NO, because the project purpose still appears realistic</u> : Continue implementation as before In any case, apply lessons learned to future projects.

So these are the three principles and the three corresponding tools of PCM. Apart from these six, there are three more “cardinal points,” the “Three Main PCM Practices.” They constitute the bridge between theory and hands-on practice.

The First Main PCM Practice: Concentrate on Essentials

To begin with, the essential message conveyed by the three PCM principles and its three tools should be familiar to *all* of the agents bearing responsibility along the chain of delivery of development cooperation projects and programs, no matter whether that responsibility pertains to policy setting, to technical, to financial or to any other operational or management functions, and irrespective of whether these agents belong to donor or recipient countries. Voluminous handbooks will not be able to transmit this essential message: many people, who should, will simply not read them, even less absorb their contents and still less apply them. So, if the complex development cooperation machinery is to speak with one voice and to pursue a common purpose, the “creation of sustainable benefits for the target groups,” then concentration on the essentials is a “sine qua non”. The PCM principles, tools, and practices can be summed up on less than five pages.

This is what I underlined when giving a seminar on PCM, some years ago, to employees of the biggest Spanish non-governmental development cooperation agency, called “Manos Unidas.” There was a young man who held up his hand and said: “I can express this message not on five pages but in five words: ‘Beneficios Sostenibles para Grupos Destinatarios.’” There was a moment’s silence, and then there was a young lady who held up her hand and said: “I can express this message not in five words but in five letters: ‘BESOS’ (BE neficios SOS tenibles),” which means, of course, KISSES, (and this is the reason why this mnemotechnical gimmick works in Spanish only). There was another little pause, and then someone started to sing: “Besame, besame mucho...” with the whole group joining in. So much for the first main PCM Practice: concentration on the essentials.

The Second Main PCM Practice: Terms of Reference

However, and that goes really without saying, real life situations are so complex, so unpredictable, so utterly elusive that even a million pages won’t do justice to them, let alone five. Therefore, there must be a way to bridge the gulf between the essential message of PCM, on the one hand, and operational real life practice, on the other. That bridge is provided by the second main PCM Practice, the “Terms of Reference” (ToR). Each project, each program, each policy is a unique case that has never existed before, will never exist again, and, moreover, will change constantly all along its cycle: it will be different today from what it was yesterday; it will be different tomorrow from what it is today. The formulation of the ToR for each individual project/program at each phase of the cycle, to fit the uniqueness of each case at each moment in time, is thus an operational necessity that will ensure the practical relevance of PCM. The ToR will specify the detailed criteria to be observed as well as the specific decision making modalities to be chosen for each concrete intervention. The enunciation of these criteria and of these modalities, structured according to the two “Formats” mentioned above and checked by a proper “Logical Framework Analysis” (LFA), will be the result of a thorough problems and possibilities analysis to be undertaken, involving all interested stakeholders, notably the intended beneficiaries. To be sure, there may, and usually there will be differences of opinion among stakeholders, and often there will be outright opposition to the very project idea on the part of some of those. In a democratic environment, this situation is not only legitimate, it is downright normal. But as normal is the solution that has to be found if stalemate is to be avoided: the democratic, majority-led way of decision making that should reflect the interests of the target

group. The ToR can thus be thought of as the commented table of contents of each of the routine documents accompanying the project/program cycle, notably project/program identification sheets, pre-feasibility studies, feasibility studies, formal financing documents like financing proposals and conventions, monitoring and progress reports and, last but not least, evaluation reports.

The ToR are thus the bridge connecting intentions (the future) to realizations (the past). More specifically, they are the links, always to be kept up to date and directed at the specific tasks at hand at each given moment, that link Planning to Evaluation in the medium and long-term and Implementation to Monitoring in the short term. Irrespective of whether they pertain to the future or to the past, their structure will always be essentially the same.

It seems worthwhile to come back, at this point, to some of the main reflections presented in the first part of this article: Planners' and evaluators' thinking should be inspired by a single, common concern: create sustainable benefits for the target group. Uniqueness of purpose should go to such lengths as to allow picturing this thinking to go on in one and the same head: One can imagine this head as that of the two-faced Roman God Janus, glued to and dragged along by the insubstantial NOW line, like the rest of the world. The backward looking face is that of evaluation, trying to feed that unique head with all of the relevant experience made in the past. The questions asked to explore the past will be those suggested by past reality as it is frozen for all eternity, slice by slice, in space-time. Experience will have molded these questions into a certain pattern of cause to effect, and this pattern is reflected, as far as development cooperation is concerned, in the "Basic Format." Remember that this format is the up-shot of uncounted thousands of years of professional experience. Yet, the backward looking part of the Janus head will never accept the format as it is, but will always question and challenge it with a view to have it reflect, as accurately as possible and taking on board any new development as it appears, reality as it unfolds along the arrow of time. New questions will be added and old ones dropped if no longer relevant. The latest version as constructed and up-dated with the help of the backward looking face of the Janus head will inspire the forward looking part of the head that will imagine the ways and means of how to shape the future on the other side of the time divide. The forward looking part of the Janus head will decide on future action, not the backward looking one: Evaluation will have to serve planning, and that may be a bitter toad to swallow by evaluators. They would have to accept that evaluation can never be a "stand-alone" endeavor and that it should be entirely integrated within the project/program/policy cycle. Not only does it share with the project planning and implementation phases the application of the Basic Format, but the techniques of the elaboration of the Terms of Reference and the decision making discipline as well. Under PCM, it would not make much sense, therefore, to refine the degree of sophistication concerning evaluation methodologies in a situation marked by superficial pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, for example, or by "political" decision making. Only if equal care is devoted to project planning, implementation/monitoring and evaluation will the latter pay dividends in terms of the creation of sustainable benefits for target groups. But then it will be of decisive importance for project/program/policy success, too. So, good planning and serious evaluation are twin brothers in PCM (although it should also be recognized that the first is the "big" brother and that the "little" one should support him).

The Third Main PCM Practice: How to employ PCM to its own Introduction

Concerning the third of the three main PCM practices, it is important to recall, first of all, a fundamental lesson taught long ago by logical framework analysis: given certain assumptions, each output is due to a series of activities, and the project purpose is in its turn achieved through a series of outputs. It should, thus, be well understood that it is not sufficient to *teach* PCM. Training, indeed, is only one of the necessary activities leading to one of the necessary outputs, to wit the acquisition of the required project/program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation skills: *necessary* but *not sufficient*. The most promising procedure of introducing PCM into the operational practice of an organization or several cooperating organizations would therefore require that such introduction be treated as a “project” in its own right and not just as another training exercise. In other words, PCM has to be applied to the “project” of its own introduction into development cooperation organizations, grounded on its own three Principles, guided by its own three tools and rendered operational by its own three main practices. As such project would be “people-focused”, i.e., of a “software” rather than of a “hardware” nature, a “process approach” rather than a “blue-print approach” would be adequate for project preparation, implementation and evaluation. This means that participation, dialogue, mutual learning, constant willingness to challenge and to improve PCM itself, would be the dominating elements of this process.

An operational application of PCM by participating organizations in donor and partner countries alike would lead to a common thrust of their activities, giving rise to a visible, general improvement of development cooperation effectiveness and to a considerable easing of the administrative burden to be borne by recipient countries’ administrations. An ongoing exchange of views conducted in a spirit of a creative debate among such organizations could, moreover, be instrumental in achieving further improvements in PCM, enriching it by important new insights already gained or becoming available in the future, flowing from common endeavor and mutual learning. That would give PCM the dynamic nature it needs to be and to remain relevant for successful development cooperation. But, admittedly, the application of PCM has not as yet reached that ambitious intention.

How far, indeed, has PCM known such operational application until today? PCM was officially introduced within the Directorate General for Development (DG VIII) of the EU Commission, by circular letter of its Director General, in January 1991, and in 1993 the method was “codified,” by means of an official PCM Manual that was distributed in all of the major EEC languages in thousands of copies to as many recipients all over the world. In 1996, an independent consultancy firm proceeded to an evaluation of the application of PCM in the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (“ACP”) countries, the EEC’s partner countries under the “Lomé”—and follow-up—Conventions. This evaluation concluded that PCM was exceedingly well received by the EU Commission services as well as (and above all!) in the ACP countries, where the emphasis on the interests of the target groups was particularly appreciated. The evaluation concluded as well, however, that so far there were only a couple of “bridgeheads,” in Brussels and in the ACP, that were trying to apply PCM to their daily work, and that it would take time for the approach to really start dominating practical ACP/EEC development cooperation. It was necessary, the evaluators said, with that aim in mind, to apply PCM to its

own introduction. This observation was made almost in passing. But for my understanding—and this conviction has asserted itself ever more strongly in my mind during countless discussions over recent years—this is the crucial point that will determine the ultimate fate of this methodological approach. This was the “*conditio sine qua non*” I tried to underline when talking of the last of the three “main PCM practices” as mentioned earlier. As long as official circles in development cooperation think that it is enough to teach PCM and that it is not necessary to insist, for example, on the need for a thorough involvement of senior administrators and of politicians, on the need to eliminate spending pressures as budget deadlines draw near, on the need to review the entire documentation accompanying the project/program cycle, concentrating on the creation of sustainable benefits for target groups, as long the potential of PCM will not be fully realized, and that remains as true in 2006 as it was in 1996.

Constant Improvement of PCM

The “latest cry” in an effort, by the EU Commission, to keep PCM up to date, is contained in a Commission document called: “Project Cycle Management Guidelines, Supporting effective implementation of EC External Assistance, March 2004.” It reflects the essential substance of PCM as treated in the present article, but it does not mention the “Three Main Practices” described above and thus lacks what I consider the decisive link between theory and practice. This seems to be the main reason for the lack of real progress in the operational application of PCM that appears to be observable until today.

Apart from the filling of this important gap, the effort of steady further improvement of PCM should go on unabated. Two aspects seem to stand out in this context:

- (a) a systematic attention to questions of responsibility (“who should do what?”) and
- (b) the establishment of a systematic documentation on how to deal with given development sectors, instruments and themes in different parts of the world.

Ad (a): Nothing gets done without well motivated and competent people on the donor as well as on the recipient side, a fact that is so obvious that it does not require extra emphasis. A rule, however, that does seem worthy of special attention is linked to a concern that might be called the “principle of subsidiarity” in the allocation of responsibilities: All that can be done at lower hierarchical levels of organizations involved should be left there and should not be moved up to higher levels. This rule of decentralization will do more for the promotion of “ownership” and professional drive and motivation than many a sophisticated “incitement” scheme. This aspect has already been incorporated into the Second PCM Instrument, the Basic Format, where it was lacking up to recently.

Ad (b): The question of how to ensure effective organizational learning, making sure lessons learned are heeded, absorbed and not “lost” (especially those learned from evaluations), has always exercised the professional minds of those involved in development cooperation but has not yet found a really satisfactory answer. One could fill whole libraries with evaluation reports gathering dust in forgotten filing cabinets without having been put to operational use. Is there a

solution to this intractable problem of the lack of systematic, long-lasting feedback? There might be in the following way:

The PCM Data Base

To start with, review the “basic format” for its application to each of the major *development sectors* of infrastructure, industry, agriculture, public health, education, and so on. and then adapt each of the resulting “formats” to the specific conditions of given regions and/or countries. Write extensive “comments” to each of these sector formats. Proceed similarly with the major *development instruments*, like stabilization mechanisms for counterbalancing price oscillations on world markets for primary products exported by developing countries; like trade promotion operations; like co-financings with non-governmental organizations; for example. Proceed similarly with important “cross-cutting” *development themes*, like: “environment,” “gender issues,” “good governance,” and so forth. per sector and region/country, with assorted extensive “comments.” It is clear that this process will lead to the creation of an extensive “development cooperation library” that today, of course, will assume the form of a worldwide “e-Forum” or database, to be established, compared, reviewed, and shared among organizations interested.

This Forum would have to be managed by specialists of the different sectors, instruments and themes in question who would have to make sure that it is kept up to date, incorporating evaluation results as they become available and also making sure they receive due attention in the planning, the implementation/monitoring and evaluation of new development cooperation interventions. That might be an effective guarantee against systematic “forgetting” of “lessons learned.”

Periodic up-dating would also have to include revisions of the very structure of the Material included in the “e-Forum.” If, for instance (as has happened in recent years), price and other stabilization mechanisms go “out of fashion,” to be replaced by, say, “Partnership Global Budget Support,” the e-Forum structure would have to reflect such important change. That way, the Forum would resemble more a living and evolving organism rather than a cold and rigid machine.

The establishment and periodic review of this Forum or Database would also allow submitting PCM itself to constant challenging by professional debate and by evaluations and thus lead to its systematic improvement. It would be a treasure of knowledge to be created, to be kept up to date and to be exploited by all. Together with the “three PCM principles”, the “three PCM instruments” and the “three PCM practices” it would become the method’s tenth cardinal point and a “point” of impressive dimensions it would be: the “PCM Database.”

Introducing the above mentioned improvements would constitute an important step forward. There are, however, weaknesses that even the best methodological approaches cannot ward off.

Limits and Potential of PCM

First of all, PCM cannot replace good workmanship: if data collection and treatment are unprofessional, if the wrong choice of indicators lead to “proof” of phenomena that don’t exist or

that are irrelevant, if complex interventions for the development of human resources are treated as though they could be squeezed into blue-prints, then the mere use of the PCM “label” won’t be able to lead to any progress. Bad projects, programs, and policies cannot be turned into good ones that way. Neither can PCM replace lack of motivation and shaky morals: Those who really don’t care about the outcome of their work for anybody but themselves and those who confuse public interest with private gain will not be swayed by PCM to do an honest job in favor of poor people. However both, the bad technician as well as the corrupt official or politician, will prefer working outside the framework of PCM as the approach makes it less easy to “cheat.” If PCM is “officially” applicable, then they will have to “explain” (invent!) all the time why their way of acting will lead to the creation of sustainable benefits for the target group rather than to meeting their own ends according to their hidden agendas. That will be extremely awkward for them. So, PCM might seriously damage if not the health, at least the peace of mind of such people.

All told, I do not think that there is any possible case or that there are any special circumstances in project/program/policy work where the application of PCM would not lead to an improvement. PCM is compatible with any of the methodologies that have proven their worth so far: Quantitative as well as qualitative methods, any of the well known methods and tools of economic and financial analysis, positivist up to constructivist stances, the whole range from blue-print to process approaches, from “experiments” to “case studies,” they are all compatible with PCM.

PCM is, moreover, applicable to areas other than development cooperation. It is applicable to any project, to any program, to any policy, always and anywhere, but to substantiate this allegation would require another extensive presentation.

Summing up, I would say: are there limitations to what PCM can do? Of course! But none of them are specific to that approach. There is always “added value” to be gained by its application to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects, programs, and policies.

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