Programme Implementers' Experiences of Process Use Types in Three Evaluation Contexts in Northern Ghana

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Abstract: *This article seeks to illustrate how the understanding of process use can be enhanced by the use of Q methodology. It explores the subjectivity in the experiences of programme implementers of process use in three evaluation contexts in Northern Ghana. Three main perspectives emerged on the process use types—organisational learning and programme strengthening; evaluation capacity building; and integrative. The study found that Q methodology contributes significantly to process use in three main ways: It reduces the wide range of perspectives on process use to a few manageable perspectives thereby enabling them to be looked at holistically; it brings together the components in a perspective enabling a coherent story to be told of a perspective; and it affirms constructivist learning as underpinning process use. Q methodology was also found to provide an exciting and insightful experience for the programme evaluation participants, students and academic researchers, even though knowledge and skills in Africa on the methodology was very scant. The Q community should therefore reach out to some universities in Africa in order to promote the methodology, which has so much potential to contribute to societal development.*

Introduction

In the last two decades, various attempts have been made to expand the evaluation use literature (Patton, 1997, 2008; Kirkhart, 2000; Mark & Henry, 2004). Patton (1997), one of those to recognise the uses entirely associated with the evaluation process and not the findings, coined 'process use' as a sensitizing concept (Patton, 2008, 1997; Harner & Preskill, 2007; Henry & Mark, 2003; Amo & Cousins, 2007; Podems, 2007), while Kirkhart (2000) tried to broaden the concept 'use' by introducing 'influence' as its replacement (Henry & Mark, 2003).

Patton (1997) revealed that the process of preparing for and being part of an evaluation can be beneficial to the participants, programmes and their organisations in several ways. The various benefits connected to participating in an evaluation were labelled process use. Since then, a lot of interest has been shown in process use because of its potential to optimise the use of evaluation (Amo & Cousins, 2007; King, 2007; Harner & Preskill, 2007; Podems, 2007). This interest has mainly come from the West. In 2008, Patton expanded the definition of process use, stating that process use occurs when those involved in the evaluation learn from the evaluation process itself or make programme changes based on the evaluation process rather than just on the evaluation's findings:

Process use then includes cognitive, attitudinal and behavior changes in individuals, and program or organizational changes resulting, either directly or indirectly, from engagement in the evaluation process and learning to think evaluatively (e.g., increased evaluation capacity, integrating evaluation into the program, goals clarification, conceptualizing the program's logic model, setting evaluation priorities, improving outcomes measurement). (Patton, 2008, p. 156)

This article is aligned to Patton's (2008) expanded definition of process use. Process use is conceived here to refer to occurrences that result in programme enhancement, individual learning, and organisational learning as a consequence of programme participants' participation and learning from the evaluation process. It is indicated by changes in individuals' knowledge and behaviour, changes in programme design and operations and changes in organisational procedures resulting directly from evaluation process and not from the evaluation findings.

Process use is thus distinct from process evaluation. Process use is a description of an effect of evaluation while process evaluation is a type of evaluation that is primarily concerned with an assessment of the a programme's implementation process with the view to identifying success and failure factors during programme implementation. Thus while one is a type of evaluation, the other is a type of effect of an evaluation.

Process use has been viewed as a long-term measure for building organisational capacity for undertaking evaluations that are used (King, 2007; Carden & Earl, 2007; Preskill, Zuckerman, & Matthews, 2003; Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Patton, 2008). It mobilizes staff around a course of action (Greene, 1988; Turnbull, 1999; Smits & Champagne, 2008) and makes evaluation become part of the treatment of a problem rather than just being an independent assessment of effects

of a programme (Forss, Rebien & Carlsson, 2002). It strengthens understandings and the ownership of results and leads, eventually, to a greater sense of obligation to follow through on the results (Smits & Champagne, 2008; Greene, 1988; Preskill et al., 2003), and it is a cost-effective way of strengthening the overall utility of an evaluation.

In spite of the significance of process use to organisational learning and evaluation capacity building, various studies note that process use has not been adequately put to empirical test (Amo & Cousins, 2007; Harnar & Preskill, 2007; Forss et al., 2002). This paper contributes the perspectives of programme implementers in a developing country context to the process use literature, which has been noted to be scant in the evaluation-use literature (Alkin, 2004 in Cornachione, Trombetta & Casa-Nova, 2010; McDonald, 1999).

Literature Review

This section briefly outlines the research that has taken place on process use as well as the approaches adopted for studying process use.

There has always been interest in knowing the contribution of evaluation to programme goals (Hyyrylainen & Viinamaki, 2008). Evaluation use, defined in this study as the direct effect or benefit of the evaluation findings and or process to a programme, organisation and actors involved in the evaluation has occupied a major part of the evaluation research and literature and it continues to be a major concern of development practitioners (Smits & Champagne, 2008; Christie, 2007; Johnson, Greensei, Toal, King, Lawrenz, & Volkov, 2009; Cousins et al., 2004; Henry & Mark, 2003). Evaluators in particular are unanimous that evaluation should be judged by its use (Patton, 2008; Henry & Mark, 2003; Preskill & Caracelli, 1997), that is, in terms of its contribution to addressing the problems programmes have been designed to address (Henry & Mark, 2003).

However, what constitutes evaluation use and how evaluation use should be facilitated has been a matter of debate (Donaldson, Patton, Fetterman, & Scriven, 2010; Patton, 2008; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Besides, evaluation use has for a long time been limited to the use of findings and recommendations contained in evaluation reports (Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Hyyrylainen & Viinamaki, 2008; Amo & Cousins, 2007; Forss et al., 2002; Weiss, 1998). Consequently, most studies on evaluation use in the 70s and 80s were concerned about the various ways in which evaluation findings were used.

The emergence of process use was, according to Shulha and Cousins (1997), the most innovative thinking around evaluation use as at their time of writing. Works by Ayes (1987); Greene (1988); Cousins (1995, 1996); Patton (1994) and Preskill (1994) were cited by Shulha and Cousins (1997) as foundations for the discussions on process use.

Greene (1988), for example, illustrated a participatory evaluation process as encompassing four elements, namely iteration, continuous communication and dialogue, substantive stakeholder involvement in decision-making, and diversity of stakeholder participation. A participatory evaluation process is conceived as offering three dimensions of experience to stakeholders: cognitive, affective, and political (Greene, 1988; Shulha & Cousins, 1997; Smits & Champagne, 2008). These experiences, especially the cognitive and affective experiences, produce consequences as learning more about the programme or agency and about evaluation. The knowledge gained about the programme and about evaluation results in greater understanding, acceptance and ownership of the results of the evaluation, and a sense of responsibility to follow through on the results.

Greene's work addressed the type of the benefits attributable to the evaluation process (process use) and the effect these benefits have on the overall use of evaluation findings. Her work has provided sound foundation for much of the subsequent work that has taken place on process use.

Following Greene, Patton has been acknowledged as one of the significant contributors to process use (Shulha & Cousins, 1997) and his work has informed much of the current work on process use (Amo & Cousins, 2007; Harnar & Preskill, 2007; King, 2007; Carden & Earl, 2007, Baptiste, 2010). His work presented process use as strengthening communication within an organization and assisting in the improvement of programmes. It is a means of engagement with programme participants and the benefits of process use go beyond the individual level to the programme and organisational levels (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Following Patton's work in 1997 in which he described process use as the various uses that accrue to evaluation as a result of the evaluation process and not the findings and recommendations contained in the evaluation report, an influx of work has been undertaken on the subject.

Shulha and Cousins (1997) reviewed and synthesized work done on evaluation use since 1986. They particularly underscored the emergence of process use as a significant consequence of evaluative action. Forss and colleagues' (Forss et al., 2002) work is among the prominent works on process use that flowed from Patton's 1997 work. They explored process use using two specific case studies, the Nordic Development Fund and Swedish Museums. They interviewed staff about the benefits and problems concerned with their involvement in evaluation to find out whether this was a worthwhile activity, or whether the evaluation would be equally effective if out-sourced. A careful analysis was carried out to ascertain what the staff members actually learned from the evaluation, and what benefits resulted from their involvement. There

was a deliberate attempt to verify whether the patterns of process use suggested by Patton (1997) were present or not. They concluded that besides the feedback processes that enable new knowledge to be mainstreamed in programmes or organizations, a lot more useful things take place during the evaluation process. They held the view that process use make up an equally important aspect of evaluation utility as the use of findings and recommendations. Hence, they found it imperative for more work to be undertaken in process use in order to know more about it and to verify its occurrence.

Another work related to process use is by Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee (2004). They explored the link between participatory evaluation and organisational learning and development. Their work was anchored in organisational learning. Process use was conceived as a continuum which strengthens the evaluative abilities of organizations and was at the same time strengthened by organisational capacity for evaluation.

Recently, Amo and Cousins (2007) examined the operationalisation of process use in the evaluation use literature as a basis for setting the agenda for research into it. They reviewed 18 empirical research studies published in journals and identified three broad types of process use: learning, changes in attitude, and others (including social justice, opportunity, and networking). They also found out that the occurrence of process use was mainly through observation by evaluators and self-reported statements of stakeholders captured by evaluators. These were found to be adequate in documenting the occurrence of process use but not enough to quantify the occurrence of process use by type, depth, range and amount or of its non-occurrence.

Harnar and Preskill (2007), pursuing the same objective as Amo and Cousins (2007), undertook a study to find out what evaluators knew about and define as process use. They found that a large proportion of respondents (39%) view process use as related to stakeholder involvement in the evaluation process. Fifty-seven percent perceive process use as what happens during the evaluation process while 34% view process use as an outcome of evaluation process manifested in changes in perspective about their programmes, changes in attitudes towards evaluation, or efforts by stakeholders to make programmatic improvements.

Baptiste (2010), in response to the call for more research on the operationalisation of process use, developed and applied a theoretical framework to understand how process use was perceived by evaluators. Her aim was to examine how different the concept of process use was from other use concepts in the evaluation literature and to provide evidence that could build the content validity of process use. She also applied a theoretical framework to analyse stakeholders' reflections of

their experiences with evaluation activities looking at variables such as the evaluation team's relationship with stakeholders, the relationships between and among stakeholders, the purpose of the evaluation, and the method of data collection. She concluded that process use exists across evaluations and is not limited to collaborative and participatory evaluation only and that process use looks different in different evaluation contexts.

As noted by Amo and Cousins (2007), many of the process use studies are based on evaluators' reflections on their experiences. Some have also involved the conduct of large-scale surveys among evaluators while others have involved meta-analysis. Few studies have explored process use from the subjectivity of programme implementers even though it has been recognized that the perspectives of programme implementers are vital to the use of evaluation (Leviton, 2003; Patton, 2008). The perspectives of programme implementers have largely been acknowledged to be scant in the evaluation use literature (Hyyrylainen & Viinamaki, 2008).

Design and Methods

A semi-structured questionnaire was first used to explore evaluation processes used by institutions implementing development programmes in the Upper West region of Ghana. The outcome of the analysis of this survey was used to select three programme evaluation contexts. Q methodology was used to explore evaluation participants' experiences of the different types of process use inherent in the three evaluations. The criteria used to select the three programme evaluations were that the programmes and projects must have been implemented between 2000 and 2010, must have had a lifespan of at least four years and must have gone through one form of evaluation within the period 2008 and 2011. This was to ensure that the experience of the evaluation was still fresh in the minds of respondents and to ensure that many of the participants were still available for the present study.

Evaluation case 1 constitutes the evaluation of a development intervention between 2004 and 2013, with a budget of USD 25 million. The programme supports the government of Ghana in its efforts to reduce poverty in the northern districts of Ghana through direct provision of funds to enable metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies to implement projects in selected areas of education, health, local governance, interior, water and sanitation. The programme went through two end-of-phase evaluations in 2006 and 2010. Four district assemblies in the Upper West region, two in the Upper East region and four in the Northern region participated in the 2010 evaluation including the debriefing sessions. The participating staff of these districts, consisting mainly of the district planning officers, budget

officers, coordinating directors, finance officers, as well as staff of the three regional economic planning units constituted the respondents in this evaluation case.

Evaluation case 2 consisted of the evaluation of a USD 4.8 million programme that took place in 2009. The programme started in March, 2006 and ended in February, 2010, and had the objectives of strengthening community participation in health planning and provision of services and strengthening monitoring and supervision at all levels of health services delivery.

Evaluation case 3 consisted of the evaluation of the second phase of a programme that commenced in November, 2004. The programme covered 73 communities in 42 districts across six administrative regions of Ghana, including the Upper West and East regions of Northern Ghana. The programme, which had an initial budget of USD 26 million, had three main components: community sub-projects, sector support and project management. The interest in this study is the evaluation of the community sub-projects component of the programme. The programme went through a programme completion evaluation in the first quarter of 2011. Twelve districts were part of the end of programme evaluation of which four were from Northern Ghana, specifically, Lawra and Wa districts in the Upper West region and Garu Tempane and Bongo districts in the Upper East region. Participants in this evaluation consisted of the management staff of the participating assemblies, the district water and sanitation teams, members of the Water Sanitation Development Boards and beneficiary communities.

In all the three evaluation cases, evaluation was conceived as a process of generating and feeding information into decision-making processes of programmes for their improvement. Learning for programme improvement is a key purpose of process use. Consequently, all the three cases provided enough bases for exploring process use.

Q methodology was adopted for the study because of its unique advantages including its ability to generate and categorise a range of ideas about the topic under investigation (Danielson, 2009; Brown, 1980; Amin, 2000), its suitability for small respondent numbers without causing validity and reliability problems (Watts & Stenner, 2005; Brown, 1980), and above all its conformity with constructivist learning theory upon which the study is based (Boroş, Visu-Petra & Cheie, 2007).

Following the selection of the three evaluation cases, a Q-methodology procedure involving the following sequential stages was used: generation of ideas about the research topic (concourse), generation of Q sample and generation of person samples (van Exel & de Graaf 2005; Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). The concourse for this research consisted mainly of reported statements of what constitutes

process use in evaluation as found in peer-reviewed journal articles and books on evaluation. However, as part of the process of generating the Q sample, provision was made for additional statements to be obtained from programme implementers. Participants mostly identified themselves with the 62 statements generated from the literature while an additional five statements were added from participants bringing the concourse to 67 statements. The Q sample was generated by subjecting the concourse statements to field test among 15 programme implementers to find out how the statements represented the perception of evaluation stakeholders. The field test helped to identify all statements that were duplicating each other as well as those which were not very clear. These statements were edited to ensure accuracy in grammar as a way of increasing face validity. In the field testing, four themes or categories emerged, and provided a basis for selecting the statements for the Q sample. These themes were programme strengthening, enhancing shared understanding, developing evaluation capacity and organisational development.

Following the advice of Brown (1980) and using Fisher's balanced block design, nine statements were taken from each block. An additional statement was randomly picked from among the remaining statements in order to allow for the attainment of a –4 to +4 distribution. Thirty-seven (37) statements make up the final Q sample (see Appendix).

Three person samples (P sets) were created to correspond to the number of evaluation cases studied. All participants involved in the evaluation of these three programmes were targeted to be interviewed. Hence, no specific sampling procedure was used to select respondents. In all 41 valid respondents were received. These respondents came from diverse backgrounds including development studies, engineering, public administration and health. Those from development studies accounted for 56% of respondents. The average time spent working on programmes by respondents was five years while the mean number of evaluations respondents participated in was three. Thus respondents had ample experience of the subject matter under investigation to enable them reveal their individual experiences of the evaluation process. It was observed from the results that a perspective associated with a respondent could not be immediately linked to a certain background characteristic. In order words, no unique pattern was observed between a perspective and background of respondents. Once the Q sample was developed, it was administered to individual participants in a solo setting because it was practically not possible to get all respondents to converge as a group. The Q sample was administered face-to-face in order to aid the understanding of the results better and consequently aid a more penetrating interpretation of the factors (van Exel & de Graaf 2005). Respondents were to fill the Q

sort grid based upon their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements on the cards. The condition of instruction was 'Based upon your experience of the evaluation you participated in, which of the following statements is most like or most unlike process use to you?' Ample space was provided below the Q sort to allow participants to write their comments on why they placed cards the way they did. These comments were found to be very helpful during factor interpretation as they provided deeper insight into the perspectives contained in the factors.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) within PQMethod was used to analyse the data. PCA was used because of its wider appeal and use beyond the Q community. It was also much easier to use especially for beginners because much of the analytical results were automatically generated and required minimal contribution of the researcher. Among eight factors with eigenvalues above 1, three were retained on the basis that each had at least two clear and significant loaders. The post-sort interviews with individual participants who loaded significantly on a factor confirmed that the participants' constructions of process use were adequately represented by the factors.

Results

Three different perspectives emerged from the analysis of the process use types inherent in the evaluations: organisational/programme learning; integrative/hybrid; and evaluation capacity building.

Organisational Learning Group

The thrust of this perspective is that process use enhances organisational learning and development and programme strengthening. The group's perspective is reflected in the statements contained in Table 1, which are derived from the distinguishing statements for the factor and the normalised factor score tables.

The group's perspective is that process use provides opportunities for organisations to learn and develop. Organisations or programmes develop when they are able to both capture learning-success factors and constrain unproductive factors during the life of the programme. Through this learning, they are able to mitigate the constraining factors while the best practices are scaled up to enhance the performance of the programme. During the evaluation process, staff also connect with evaluators or other staff from different units of the programme or organisation. These people become readily available to assist in resolving work-related problems, thereby expanding the organisational human capacity to resolve problems. Process use also generates interest and mobilises staff around organisation activities as a direct result of staff's increased sense of worth and belonging as nurtured by the evaluation process. Consequently staff commitment to

the organisation's activities is increased leading to enhanced performance of the programme or organisation. Staff participation in the evaluation stimulates them to think more logically about the links between programme activities, outputs and impacts, provides clarity on grey areas of the programmes and builds consensus among programme implementers.

Table 1: Statements Illustrating Organisational Learning Group

No	Statement	Rank
25	It became obvious to us that evaluation is a key capacity if we are to be both a learning organisation and one that is built to last.	3
29	The different stakeholders or participants we met during the evaluation turned out to be useful contacts for resolving work-related issues.	2
37	Staff participation in the evaluations increased their commitment to the organisation and its activities.	2
19	Process use should be the focus of any evaluation that intends to achieve use.	2
5	New skills as collaboration or survey techniques are learned through participation in evaluation.	4
8	Participation in the evaluation process stimulates individuals to think more about the programme and their expectations of its outcomes.	4
13	Engaging in the evaluation was one way to strengthen organisational learning.	3
35	We gained a broader perspective of the programme from the issues that emerged during the evaluation process.	3

Profiling of process use becomes of essence to organisational development as well as programme strengthening. Comments taken from respondents that elucidate their views on the perspective are:

Process use provokes thinking especially on current and existing structures and actions and this gives an indication for reform where necessary.

The evaluation process keeps the implementers informed on what went wrong and what went well. New issues are also learnt during the evaluation process thereby creating room to address gaps in future project implementation.

Evaluation and its process bring out best practices and pitfalls for improvement in the life of a project/programme.

Evaluation helps in restructuring or initiating reforms that can help an organisation attain its set objectives or goals.

The evaluation process strongly provoked thinking in the existing order and revealed certain practices that were inimical to the implementation of the project.

Evaluations are intended to make organisations more effective in the execution and pursuit of their visions and missions.

Most organisations did not know that they were operating wrongly until the outcomes of evaluation. Verily, a lot of organisations are back on track due to evaluation reports on the part of those set ups: corrections were made, ignorance is no longer in existence with those organisations.

The group least agreed with statements that link process use to direct influence in decision-making in programmes or organisations. Consequently, statements on reorganisation of programmes, increased level of involvement of senior level management in evaluation activities, the strengthening of staff morale and the integration of data collection in programme and organisational activities, implementation changes in programme arrangements as a result of initial evaluation findings, evaluation process feeding advice directly to decision-makers were ranked low by the group.

Post-analysis interview revealed that the low consideration of these statements by the group stems from lack of institutionalisation of process in evaluation. Consequently, staff and programme management still looked forward to the final evaluation report as the basis for informing decisions on their programmes.

Integrative or Hybrid Group

This factor's perspective portrays the multi-dimensional nature of process use. It illustrates process use as all-encompassing and includes organisational development, evaluation capacity building, programme strengthening, shared understanding, and morale boosting. Table 2 illustrates the statements that contain the group's perspective. During the post-sorting interview, respondents emphasised the learning, capacity building, organisational and or programme reform inherent in process use to support their perspective. One of them, for instance, commented: 'Evaluation is both a learning and corrective measure for organisational success. Evaluation also builds capacity of staff and eliminates errors'. Another member of the group said the following in order to buttress the integrative perspective held by the group: 'Periodic evaluations are necessary to identify lapses in an entity's operations which when corrected put the organisation on a better footing. Besides, when awareness is created, people have the tendency to function better'.

Table 2: Statements Illustrating Integrative/Hybrid Perspective

No	Statement	Rank
24	Organisational learning and discovery occurs through the steps of gathering and producing the evaluation report.	4
32	Different levels of staff across programme areas now collaborate to complete reports about lessons learned during implementation.	4
28	The evaluation helped us understand each other's motives and to some extent also respect our differences.	2
23	A number of people became exposed to the value of data for making policy decisions and began to take the programme data more seriously.	2
33	We were encouraged during the evaluation process because we realised that we are doing things the way they should be done.	2
35	We gained a broader perspective of the programme from the issues that emerged during the evaluation process.	3
30	The evaluation process fed advice directly to decision makers resulting in a change in certain actions.	3
27	The evaluation process provoked thinking on existing order and the need to reform.	3
15	The director implemented small but important changes to the programme as a direct result of initial evaluation findings.	1
31	The programme components were reorganised and became better connected before the final evaluation report.	1

However the group disagrees with some specific categories of these uses especially those relating to evaluation capacity building, such as the use of the evaluation framework as a tool for work planning, learning of survey techniques, the acceptance of evaluation as a regular part of programme and the idea that participation in an evaluation stimulates individuals to think more about the programme and its outcomes, and engaging in an evaluation as a means of strengthening organisational learning and the fact that evaluation is no longer a threatening activity.

Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) Group

This factor's perspective is that process use is a way of institutionalising evaluation capacity in organisations and programmes. In other words, the perspective of the group is that process use is a way of creating an

environment in which evaluation and thinking evaluatively is mainstreamed in organisations. Senior leadership become keen on evaluation resulting in the profiling of evaluation as fundamental to organisational learning and programme strengthening. Consequently, data collection becomes an integral part of a programme or organisation's activities. Skills in collaboration and survey techniques are entrenched in the programme or organisation while staff now think more evaluatively, that is, they think more deeply on the logical link between programme activities and outputs and outcomes. Table 3 illustrates the evaluative capacity building perspective of the group.

Table 3: Statements Illustrating ECB Perspective

No	Statement	Rank
10	Corrective action thinking that leads to improvement in practice was triggered by the questions asked.	2
9	Evaluation steps have become an accepted and regular part of the programme or initiative.	2
22	Data collection has now been integrated into ongoing monitoring and oversight functions of the organisation.	1
3	As we move into the next phase of evaluation, senior leadership is likely to become a major player in evaluation activities.	1
35	We gained a broader perspective of the programme from the issues that emerged during the evaluation process.	1
24	Organisational learning and discovery occurs through the steps of gathering and producing the evaluation report.	1
27	The evaluation process provoked thinking on existing order and the need to reform.	4
5	New skills, such as collaboration or survey techniques, are learned through participation in evaluation.	4
8	Participation in the evaluation process stimulates individuals to think more about the programme and their expectations of its outcomes.	3
13	Engaging in the evaluation was one way to strengthen organisational learning.	3

Some benefits recounted by participant in the evaluation process to substantiate this perspective included the insight they gained from the evaluation process regarding the logical link (programme theory) between programme inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes and how these should be organised to ensure the desired changed envisaged by programmes are achieved. Two members of the group captured the perspective of the group in the following ways:

The evaluation process improved our knowledge about how programmes should be organised, taking into consideration its expectations and outcomes.

The evaluation process built our capacity in the programme which was reflected in the next planning phase of the programme.

Statements as stirring up things and getting people involved, enhancing shared understanding, reorganisation of programme, changes in staff attitudes were least recognised by this factor.

Consensus Statements

Table 4 depicts statements on which there was consensus across the three main perspectives that emerged from the study.

Table 4: Consensus Statements

		Factors		
No	Statement	1	2	3
1	Process use is a by-product of evaluations and deserves no attention.	−4	−4	−4
2	The evaluation process resulted in waste of the precious time of organisations and their staff.	−4	−4	−4
6	Process use is an attempt to justify evaluations in view of disappointments with their contribution to programme goals and objectives.	−2	−2	−3
16	Regular decision making processes and procedures have been adjusted to ensure improvement in programme functioning.	0	1	0
35	We gained a broader perspective of the programme from the issues that emerged during the evaluation process.	3	3	1

It can be observed that there is unanimously strong disagreement across the three factors on statement 1, 2 and 6. These three statements reflect the view that process use does not deserve any special attention in evaluation, because it will occur in any evaluation without any special effort. Focusing on it will take the precious time of staff and organisations and can result in delays in the availability of evaluation findings for critical decision making; increases cost of undertaking evaluation; and that it is a concept that has been carved out to justify the need for evaluations. The general disagreement across the three factors of this view of process use shows the strong interest among programme implementers in process use. These views were not expected especially from programme implementers, who have been perceived and tagged as

not very receptive to evaluation. The rejection of the views is rather an indication of the important place evaluation occupy in the minds of programme staff, and therefore a potential for collaboration with them to maximise the utility of evaluation.

The recognition that process use needs to be facilitated in order to derive maximum benefits from it is indicative of the need for collaboration between evaluators and non-evaluators. Some benefits recounted by respondents in support of their views included for instance, the recognition that process use guarantees the availability of quality and reliable data, which can serve as a basis for making appropriate recommendations; ensures the early identification of shortfalls and their quick resolution; and facilitates healthy interaction between evaluators on one hand and implementers on the other leading to shared understanding of issues and for appropriate recommendations to be made. Further light on these statements by some respondents are shown here:

> The opportunity to validate and clarify issues brought about the appropriate understanding of the issues raised by the evaluators and their appreciation of the challenges in the programme and for appropriate recommendations to be made. This would have been missed leading to wrong recommendations.

> The quality of output generated from the evaluation depends on how confident and comfortable as well as secure the respondents feel. A poor administering of the process would lead to misleading responses that would mar the integrity of the evaluation.

> Not much information on performance gaps are identified in reports. But when an evaluation is done with process use in mind, a lot of issues come up which helps with the solutions to the problems.

> Evaluation is an important measure and ensures that the programme is on track. Shortfalls are identified early and addressed. Hence it is not a waste but a means to strategize for improvement.

> Process use rather than increasing cost and time spent in evaluations, ensures that things are done right and cost and delays are decreased.

> Process use deserves some attention since it aims at improvements in evaluations. The fact that evaluation will come after every project or work schedule is enough to change attitudes.

> Without evaluation, there can be no process use to improve programme and organisational functioning. The purpose of evaluation is to determine whether or not the programme is

moving towards achieving its goals and objectives, and if not, what are the factors/issues derailing it and what can be the corrective measures. This is significant for programme success.

There is nearly a neutral opinion on statement 16, which conveys information on the ability of process to directly affect decision-making. The lack of a strong voice or opinion especially in agreement with the statement shows a weakness of process use, which is unanticipated. The strength in the argument for process use is that it is a mechanism that ensures that evaluations are used (Podems, 2007). Respondents' inability to establish a strong opinion on this statement is a reflection that process use may be able to bring out the issues clearly during the evaluation process but that may not be enough to provide a basis for decision-making if it is not consciously adopted as a strategy for ensuring the use of evaluation.

Statement 35 which expresses the idea that process use enhances shared understanding received the highest level of agreement across the three factors. Process use enhances understanding of programme by both evaluators and programme implementers as exclaimed by one respondent. 'I now have a better understanding of the programme'.

When evaluators and programme implementers are at the same level of understanding of the programme, a way is paved for a positive interaction and exchange among them leading to formulation of recommendations that are implementable. The consensus in agreement on this statement indicates the potential process use has in providing clarity on programmes whose implementation arrangements may be unconventional as is the case of innovative programmes. When such programmes employ process use evaluation at the initial stages of programme implementation, programme staff have opportunities to learn more about the programme and therefore are in a better position to implement the programme more confidently and successfully.

Discussion

The use of Q methodology to explore the experience of programme implementers of process use has brought to the fore how the study of subjectivity can contribute to the enhancement of evaluation research and practice. It has added to the tools available for capturing experiences of people involved in evaluation. The most widely used method of capturing experiences of process use has been through self-reported statements of evaluators and large-scale surveys. This approach has resulted in creating a wide array of process use types making it very difficult when it comes to policy decision-making on which process use types to vigorously pursue or not. The systematic study of subjectivity as revealed in this study allows for the creation of a manageable list of perspectives from wide range of process use types in

the extant literature thereby allowing the manageable list to be looked at holistically. Starting with eight perspectives encompassing: enhancing shared understanding, supporting and reinforcing the programme intervention, infusing evaluative thinking into the organisational culture, instrumentation effects and reactivity, increasing engagement, self-determination and ownership; programme and organisational development (Patton, 2008), development of networks, learning to learn, boosting morale (Forss *et al.*, 2002), the Q-sample development process reduced these to four thematic areas. Q-sort analysis further reduced perspectives on process use to three, allowing for a comprehensive analysis to be made on them and for easy and quicker decision-making.

Another area of contribution of Q methodology to programme evaluation use is that it has demonstrated that subjectivity is not always synonymous with diversity and that subjectivity when appropriately studied demonstrates some convergences. All issues hinge on a hook or key point. The systematic study of subjectivity therefore allows the spirit of a wide range of ideas on an issue to be uncovered for a coherent story to be revealed from the different components inherent in a perspective. For instance, it was realised that developing networks, creating shared understanding, increasing participants' sense of engagement and self-determination do not stand on their own as different and unrelated types of process use but tell a story of programme strengthening and organisational development as depicted by Factor 1.

The study also revealed the potential Q methodology has in contributing to constructivist learning. In constructivist learning when individuals are engaged in an intense interaction as a group, they individually and collectively construct knowledge for themselves. From an organisational learning perspective, such individuals singly and as a collective group, come to a better knowledge of one another, the organisation with which they are involved and ultimately the essential features underlying the phenomena that brought them together (Suarez et al., 2009; Forss et al., 2002; Preskill et al., 2003; Torres & Preskill, 2001). The result of such individual and collective learning is an improvement in the organisational capacity to enhance performance (Preskill, 2005, in Amo & Cousins, 2007).

Q methodology was found to provide such a learning experience for the study participants. The process of sorting the cards coupled with the interaction that takes place between the statements on the cards were found to provide insights for participants thereby enabling them to refine and expand their existing stock of knowledge. The request by respondents to keep the cards for personal use affirms the learning that they gained from the card-sorting process. Q methodology is thus seen as a way of advancing constructivist learning without necessarily

requiring the different individuals to physically meet and exchange ideas. The interaction of the ideas takes place through ranking and comparing the statements containing divergent perspectives on the cards.

Conclusion

Q methodology contributes to process use through providing limited perspectives to be comprehensively looked into and for easy and quicker decision-making. It allows for a coherent story to be told of the many components in a perspective and therefore for the cardinal point inherent in a perspective to be uncovered. The methodology provides an exciting and insightful experience for participants in the study. It is appealing to programme implementers, students of development studies and academic researchers, even though knowledge and skills in Africa on the methodology are very scant. A major challenge, therefore, in the conduct of the study was accessibility to knowledge and technical guidance on Q methodology. The Q discussion group (Q-method@listserv.kent.edu) and webpage (www.qmethod.org) were, however, readily available and were heavily relied upon in the design, conduct, analysis and writing of the paper. The Q community should reach out to some universities in Africa in order to promote the methodology, which has so much potential to contribute to societal development.

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Appendix: Q Sample and Factor Scores

	Statements	1	2	3
1	Process use is a by-product of evaluations and deserves no attention.	−4	−4	−4
2	The evaluation process resulted in waste of the precious time of organisations and their staff.	−4	−4	−4
3	As we move into the next phase of evaluation, senior leadership is likely to become a major player in evaluation activities.	−2	−3	1
4	Staff attitude to work changed even before the final report was released.	−1	−2	−1
5	New skills, such as collaboration or survey techniques, are learned through participating in evaluations.	4	−3	4
6	Process use is an attempt to justify evaluations because of disappointments with their contribution to programme goals/objectives.	−3	−2	−3
7	The programme staff use the evaluation design as a framework for planning work.	0	−3	0
8	Participation in the evaluation stimulates individuals to think more about the programme and their expectations of its outcomes.	4	−3	3
9	Evaluation steps have become an accepted and regular part of the programme.	0	−2	2
10	Corrective action thinking that leads to improvement in practice was triggered by the questions asked.	0	0	2
11	Changes are made in the normal course of business based on what has been learned from the evaluation process.	1	0	2
12	Evaluation is no longer perceived as a threatening activity.	1	−1	1
13	Engaging in the evaluation was a way to strengthen organisational learning.	3	−1	3
14	Process use increases evaluation costs and delays in evaluation findings.	−2	−1	−3
15	The director implemented small but important changes to the programme as a direct result of initial evaluation findings.	−1	1	0

	Statements	**1**	**2**	**3**
16	Regular decision making processes and procedures have been adjusted to ensure improvement in programme functioning.	0	1	0
17	Learning to learn, to organise a systematic inquiry, to patiently search for questions, facts and evidence of impact have become important to staff.	1	0	−1
18	Certain concerns and issues raised during the evaluation give legitimacy to our thoughts and intentions about how the programme should be organised.	2	0	1
19	Staff participation in the evaluations increased their commitment to the organisation and its activities.	2	−1	−1
20	Staff are now willingly participating in the evaluation to intentionally learn evaluation skills.	−1	0	−2
21	The evaluation stirred things up and got people involved again.	1	0	−1
22	Data collection has now been integrated into ongoing monitoring and oversight functions of the organisation.	−2	−1	1
23	People became exposed to the value of data for making policy decisions and began to take the programme data more seriously.	1	2	0
24	Organisational learning and discovery occurs through the steps of gathering and producing the evaluation report.	0	4	1
25	It became obvious to us that evaluation is a key capacity if we are to be both a learning organisation and one that is built to last.	3	0	2
26	We learned to assess one another and to search for reasons why people profess certain opinions about the programme.	1	1	−2
27	The evaluation process provoked thinking on existing order and the need to reform.	−1	3	4
28	The evaluation helped us understand each other's motives and to some extent also respect our differences.	0	2	−2
29	The different stakeholders or participants we met during the evaluation turned out to be useful contacts for resolving work-related issues.	2	−1	−2
30	The evaluation process fed advice directly to decision makers resulting in a change in certain actions.	−1	3	3
31	The programme components were reorganised and became better connected before the final evaluation report.	−3	1	−1

Statements	1	2	3
32 Different levels of staff across programme areas now collaborate to complete reports about lessons learned during implementation.	−1	4	−1
33 We were encouraged during the evaluation process because we realised that we are doing things the way they should be done.	−2	2	0
34 Best practices and pitfalls in programme implementation were already identified before the evaluation report was ready.	−3	2	0
35 We gained a broader perspective of the programme from the issues that emerged during the evaluation process	3	3	1
36 Many of the lessons of the evaluation came from the evaluation process and not the report because the report was not adequate to inform decision making.	0	1	−3
37 Process use should be the focus of any evaluation that intends to achieve use.	2	1	0