



2017 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENGINEERING, ARTS, MATHEMATICS & EDUCATION JUNE 8 - 10, 2017
HAWAII PRINCE HOTEL WAIKIKI, HONOLULU, HAWAII

THE FIFTH GENERATION OF EVALUATION: EVALUATING FOR QUALITY

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The Fifth Generation of Evaluation: Evaluating for Quality

Synopsis:

This paper is the summary of more than twenty years of work, search, inquiry, and passion for all aspects of evaluation in academic settings. The authors have always understood the “Fifth Generation of Evaluation” as “Evaluating for Quality.” When the authors think of the daring cognitive notion of advancing a “Fifth Generation of Evaluation”, it is not with the intention of disavowing or disqualify the prior four generations, on the contrary, the intention is to contribute, based upon our experiences, with useful elements of analysis that will allow us to find common venues to solidify future evaluation processes [Muñoz, 2010].

The Fifth Generation of Evaluation: Evaluating for Quality
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Abstract

This paper attempts to summarize a life-time work in the search for assessing the quality of the evaluation process in university academic settings. The authors' intention is to advance a Fifth Generation of Evaluation with the aim of thinking of evaluation as a process and not as an idea which, although filled with good intentions, in practical terms is definitively weak in most of its implementations. Evaluating for Quality encompass simultaneously a personal decision, a lifestyle, a professional endeavor, a permanent search and an exercise of personal freedom. We insist that evaluation is the cornerstone of change; the foundation of any planning, and a basic commodity in our life because, to evaluate others, we must be able to evaluate ourselves.

Introduction

This paper summarizes more than twenty years of work, search, inquiry, and passion for an idea: the quality of evaluation in academic settings. The authors have always understood the "Fifth Generation of Evaluation" as "Evaluating for Quality." When the authors think of the daring cognitive notion of advancing a "Fifth Generation of Evaluation", it is not with the intention of disavowing or disqualify the prior four generations [1], on the contrary, the intention is to contribute, based upon our experiences, with useful elements of analysis that will allow us to find common venues to think of evaluation as a "process" and not as prescribed and well-intentioned idea with many weaknesses in its implementation [2].

The search task for this work consisted in finding answers to questions such as Who evaluates? What do we evaluate for? How is evaluation carried out? When do we evaluate? What do we do with the results? What type of decisions should be taken and who takes them? [3]. The authors' experiences in national and international universities have allow us to solidify the ideas that we present in this paper.

The Fifth Generation of Evaluation

The Fifth Generation of Evaluation is called this way for two fundamental reasons: First, because there exists a Fourth Generation and the aim of our work is to continue expanding it while considering the positive aspects of all previous generations. The second reason, and the one that we deem the most relevant one, is related to the systemic conception that support our vision which, in turn, is in tune with Peter Senge's Fifth Discipline [4]. We believe that the Evaluation for Quality is realized when the participants of the evaluation process (evaluator and evaluatee) question, discuss

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and ask themselves, what is really to evaluate? And, act, based upon the answers to these questions, to make the necessary corrections and improvements. Notice that in this case, evaluation is an interactive process, not only we evaluate, we also need to be evaluated as well as co-evaluate. In this paper, what we are attempting is to find mechanisms that allow us to establish conceptual approximations between measure or evaluate, ponder or assess, and accredit or augment as we explain further below.

Fundamental Differences between the Fifth Generation of Evaluation and its Predecessors

If we were asked about the difference between what we propose in this paper with respect to the current evaluation approaches, we would answer that the Fifth Generation is centered in self-evaluation. We advocate that self-evaluation should be based on two fundamental concepts: accredit and augment. The former has been traditionally understood as a mere process of assigning a grade (quantification) or numeric value within a given range, which may vary from school to school or from nation to nation. Typical “grade values” commonly fall in ranges such as: 0 thru 5, 0 through 10, 0 through 20, or 0 through 100. This numeric value can also be expressed as a letter grade (A through F). The “grade” is “just that”; a quantitative factor sometimes accompanied with a particular but very imprecise interpretation where “A” or “100”, for example, may mean “excellent” and “D” may be understood as “good enough” to pass. In the Fifth Generation we state that, in addition to the quantitative factor, there is a need for a qualitative factor as well. This is where the “augmentation concept” comes into play. What do we mean by this? We advocate that the person being evaluated, if there is a clear set of rules, criteria, and established goals, needs to understand the reasons why a particular grade is given and, along with that, state, as explicitly as possible, the deficiencies that need to be corrected to achieve a pre-established goal [5]. It is important that the person being evaluated understands the “why” of his grade and what went wrong not only in terms of why “a solution” was not correct but also what was lacking for not getting it right. That is why we say that the qualitative factor is a true social search. The person evaluated must know where he stands and what needs to be done to better himself not only because of the grade, but also a part of a self-evaluation of what actions the person needs to perform to achieve his goal. We assume that once a person understands why he is where he is, he will also be self-motivated to act on his own initiative or under the direction of somebody else to attain his objective.

But what about the evaluator? One of the aims of the Fifth Generation is to have the evaluator go through similar process as that of the person being evaluated. As professors, teachers, or more generally as educators, we also must reflect on what we did and why the results we have obtained are what they are. We also propose that those whom we evaluate be “our evaluators” also based upon frank discussions and interchanges of ideas. This paper, due to its inherent length limitations, does not allow us to further elaborate on how these discussions and interchanges should occur, however, we acknowledge that a “one-size-fits-all” solution does not exist due to the unique circumstances of each pair evaluator-evaluated.

It is universally recognized that it is always easy to blame somebody else for not achieving our goals. Students may say things such as: “The professor does not like me, the book is hard to read, the explanations were pretty bad”. On the other hand, the professors may say “the students are too lazy, they don’t want to make the effort, or they don’t want to study.” Although, in certain

cases, these statements may be true, we want to think in general terms. That is why, we want to affirm our belief that the evaluation process is then a fundamentally personal decision where the aim is to distribute the evaluation process between the duo formed by evaluator-evaluated.

Evaluating for Quality

As indicated before, the Evaluating for Quality has self-evaluation as its cornerstone and most fundamental element. Through self-evaluation, each participant, as an actor in his own stage, should be able to identify his own strengths and weaknesses, and determine where he stands and what goals he wants to achieve. Each participant will assume his own responsibilities, reevaluate his achievements and how he has obtained them, and determine the direction of his long-term life's goals. Self-evaluation, as understood by the authors, must be accompanied by co-evaluation. The latter will allow us to complement our vision of life, as seen by others, who will help us to know, value, and understand situations, which, from our personal point of view, are invisible to us because do not know how to do it or fail to understand how to resolve them. We consider that these two elements are fundamentals for developing a culture for evaluating quality within the learning process.

Evaluating for Quality must be a **personal decision**. If we do not assume this, all what we have expressed before will not make sense. It's really a personal decision because we need to understand simultaneously the "why" and the "what for" of the change we must make. Maybe, the most difficult part is "to make the decision to change" not because we are not doing it "well" but because "we can do better." This is something that nobody can do for us; we own it. We have two options, we change for the better or else.

Evaluating for Quality is also a **lifestyle** because our capacity to make decisions is intimately associated with it. Any change we make is associated with how we envision the world and how we conduct ourselves in our journey through it; the authors firmly believe in the possibility of a continuous change. It is necessary to view Evaluating for Quality from this perspective to get out of our daily routine and comfort zone. Doing this will allow us to enrich our lives and achieve the improvements that we desire for ourselves.

Evaluating for Quality must be a **professional endeavor** because lifestyle and our profession are directly interrelated. The authors have learned that we assimilate better any change we undertake if it is related to our daily professional activities. In this sense, Evaluating for Quality is the fundamental tool for practicing and growing not only as a professional but also as a person as well.

The authors understand that Evaluating for Quality must be a **permanent research process** too. Here we assume that evaluate is to investigate, and that the evaluator acts as a social researcher. This process, obviously, is the concern of all its participants, evaluators and evaluated, where each one of them will assume his role in a continuous self-evaluation process as we have mentioned before.

Finally, Evaluating for Quality, will not be possible if we fail to see it as an **exercise in freedom**. Here the tenet "your freedom ends where mine begin" is fundamental. In this sense

Evaluating for Quality is a full exercise of freedom assuming we operate within mutually agreeable clear set of rules, criteria, and established goals. It is understood that, in this evaluation process, the duo evaluator-evaluated will respect each other without fear of ill-consequences by expressing what each one thinks about the other.

Conclusions

Although this paper has been written primarily for educators, the authors believe that Evaluating for Quality is applicable to any setting where an evaluation process must be in place. We insist that evaluation is the cornerstone of any change and planning because to evaluate others we must be able to evaluate ourselves.

The authors believe that as human beings we all need to learn, teach and share. Life is a constant evaluation. Through it we learn how well we are travelling through the different paths that life itself imposes on us [2]. We certainly agree with the assessment that Evaluating for Quality is not as “goal but a journey” which we invite you to travel with us so you can experience too all the joys it has to offer [6]. Our personal experiences in sharing this idea with professionals other than educators have taught us that the Evaluating for Quality is relevant in any environment where evaluation is required.

Finally, we want to express to all our readers that are or may be interested in the evaluation process, our desires to share our experiences with you and learn from yours as well.

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