

How Critical Can You Be as an On-going Evaluator?

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This article discusses experiences of on-going evaluation within a project funded by the EU Structural Funds. A question that is particularly illustrated is how we, as on-going evaluators, have handled the dilemma between closeness and involvement in the project in relation to distance and a critical approach. This dilemma is standard within action- and interactive research, and becomes particularly evident in a concrete reality within a project. The problem is important to illustrate, especially considering the fact that the on-going evaluation task is politically governed, that is, the EU requires that the customary evaluation be replaced with an on-going evaluation. Furthermore, on-going evaluation finds itself in a developmental phase, where discussions are carried on about how to define the concept, and also on how the role as an on-going evaluator should be worked out. A possible outcome of this could be that the on-going evaluation becomes far too uncritical, or critical, and with that cannot come up to expectations. In this article the assumption is that the task of the on-going evaluator is to follow the development in a project, vis-à-vis established goals, with the purpose of creating practice-relevant knowledge. We also discuss the balancing that exists between being supportive of progress, giving constructive criticism, and not being regarded as far too critical. After having worked in an innovative development project for two years, we have been strengthened in our understanding that the interactive research approach, concept usage, theoretical connection and methodological knowledge constitute imperative demands, in order to handle the changes between closeness and distance.

Key words: on-going evaluation, interactive research, criticism