

Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations: Learnings from the field

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Abstract

Participatory evaluation and participatory action research (PAR) are increasingly used in community-based programs and projects. These methodologies emphasise knowledge generated and constructed through lived experience rather than through social science (Vanderplaat 1995). The scientific ideal of objectivity is usually rejected in favour of a holistic approach that openly acknowledges and takes into account the diverse perspectives, values and interpretations of participants, stakeholders and evaluation professionals. However, evaluation rigour need not be lost in this approach. Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations and PAR increases the likelihood that results are seen as credible and are used to continually improve programs and projects.

Drawing on learnings and critical reflections about the use of feminist and participatory forms of evaluation and PAR over a ten year period, valuable sources of rigour identified include:

- Participation and communication methods that develop relations of mutual trust and open communication.
- Using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods of data collection.
- Ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection.
- Critically assessing the intended and unintended impacts of evaluations using relevant theoretical models.
- Using rigorous data analysis and reporting processes.
- Participant reviews of evaluation case studies and reports.

Introduction

Participatory forms of evaluation and participatory action research (PAR) are increasingly used in community-based programs and projects, sometimes in combination. These methodologies have been successfully used in a range of fields such as widening participation in further and higher education (Thomas 2000), preventative drug use programs (Dugan 1996) and rural community IT projects (Lennie et al 2004).

Participatory evaluation methodologies emerged from the extension of PAR to evaluation (Garaway 1995) and the growing interest in evaluation as an action learning and capacity building process. Collaborative or participatory forms of evaluation are seen as particularly useful in assessing the impacts of 'more complex system change and comprehensive community initiatives' (WK Kellogg Foundation 1998, p.5). Other reported benefits include that they enable community members and other stakeholders to collaboratively plan and conduct evaluations that assist in developing more effective and sustainable solutions to local problems and issues, to continually learn about what's working and what's not working so well, and thus to improve programs in ways that better meet community needs and goals. Diez (2001 p. 907) goes so far as to suggest that participatory evaluation can be a useful tool to 'mobilise communities for regional action, empower local agents and enhance learning capacity'.

However, given the often complex nature of community-based programs and initiatives and participatory research and evaluation processes, these methodologies can produce unintended and contradictory effects (Gregory 2000; Lennie 2005; McKie 2003). For example, participants can experience both empowerment and disempowerment as a result of factors such as differences in knowledge and the power relations among those involved (Lennie, Hatcher & Morgan 2003). Methods are therefore required that enable rigorous analysis and

assessment of both the intended and unintended outcomes and impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects in order to develop more effective strategies for community participation and empowerment.

In PAR projects and participatory evaluations, the emphasis is mainly on knowledge generated and constructed through lived experience rather than through social science (Vanderplaat 1995). The scientific ideal of objectivity is usually rejected in favour of a holistic approach that incorporates the diverse perspectives, values, agendas and interpretations of participants, stakeholders and evaluation professionals. However, as Dick (1992 and 1999), Guba and Lincoln (1989), Thomas (2000) and others suggest, rigour need not be lost in this approach.

Guba and Lincoln (1989 p.233) argue that the criteria of 'trustworthiness' is more appropriate than traditional scientific criteria for assessing the quality of their more participatory 'fourth generation evaluation'. This evaluation methodology is underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy and a constructivist framework in which evaluation is seen as leading to social action and change. Their trustworthiness criteria, which parallel the conventional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln 1989 pp. 236-243). A second approach to assessing the quality of fourth generation evaluation is the 'authenticity criteria' which are based on the assumptions of constructivism (see Guba & Lincoln 1989, pp. 245-250).

Dick (1999) suggests that as well as the many sources of rigour found in qualitative approaches (multiple methodologies and information sources, multiple data collection and analysis methods etc.), attention to the processes associated with the cyclical and action-oriented nature of action research (and of most participatory evaluations) can strengthen the rigour of this approach.

Using various criteria and strategies that increase the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations and PAR projects is important for the following reasons:

- to improve the quality and effectiveness of the methods and processes used and the outcomes of the program and its evaluation;
- to increase the likelihood that evaluation results, case studies and reports are seen as credible and that participatory evaluations are used to continually improve community-based programs and projects;
- to critically assess the impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects on different participant and stakeholder groups and organisations;
- to develop more practical and useful theories of community participation and empowerment; and
- to counter criticisms from some quarters that participatory evaluations and PAR lack objectivity and that their results are therefore biased and unreliable.

This paper draws on my learnings and critical reflections about the use of feminist and participatory forms of evaluation and PAR over a ten year period and relevant literature on these methodologies. Following a discussion about the key aims and philosophy of participatory forms of evaluation and PAR and the issues raised by these approaches, various strategies and processes that were found effective in increasing the rigor and trustworthiness of evaluation outcomes from various projects conducted with participants in Queensland rural communities and government partners are outlined.

Aims and philosophy of participatory evaluation and PAR

Important aims of PAR and most forms of participatory evaluation are to develop equal partnerships between participants, stakeholders and researchers or evaluation professionals and to create knowledge that leads to action and positive social change. Knowledge is seen as related to power and power is related to change. PAR projects seek to include and involve community members, to enhance democracy and individual, group and community empowerment (McTaggart 1991). PAR is a political process because it involves people making changes together that affect others (McTaggart 1991, p.177). Critical reflection is an important source of rigour in each PAR cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

PAR encourages the active involvement of participants and stakeholders in designing and conducting projects and supports capacity building processes. It can be a valuable method for involving a diversity of people in projects, generating appropriate action, new ideas and long term visions, fostering ongoing change and improvement, and regularly reflecting on outcomes (McTaggart 1991). Thomas (2000, p. 112) argues that PAR

'challenges the hegemony of orthodox evaluation research methods' and therefore offers more opportunity to develop and evaluate long-term strategies for widening participation in education and lifelong learning.

Three main reasons have been put forward for increasing the involvement of community participants and other stakeholders in evaluations:

(1) to increase utilisation of evaluation results; (2) to represent the values and concerns of the multiple groups involved in decision-making; (3) to promote the empowerment of disenfranchised stakeholder groups previously left out of the process (Papineau & Kiely 1996, p. 81).

Different forms of participatory evaluation emphasise different levels of participation. Empowerment evaluation is notable in that it encourages active involvement of a diversity of stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation and has a number of clearly articulated principles, including improvement, democratic participation, organisational learning, accountability, and using evidence-based strategies (Fetterman & Wandersman 2005).

Participatory feminist evaluation methodologies and feminist PAR are openly political approaches which are often underpinned by praxis feminist theories and methods. These methods seek to understand, give voice to and validate women's needs, values and lived experiences and to take the macro and micro contexts into account (Lather 1991; Lennie 2002b). The evaluation usually aims to improve programs in ways that better meet women's diverse needs and agendas and to bring gender differences and issues to the fore. While gender differences are a key focus, other differences such as age, ethnicity, educational level and occupation are also taken into account. In its more critical forms, feminist PAR and evaluation also includes analysis of the gendered power relations involved in a program and the contradictory outcomes of the use of participatory methodologies that can often be overlooked (Lennie et al. 2003).

The methods and underlying philosophies of various forms of participatory research and evaluation thus contrast markedly with traditional program evaluation methods such as quasi-experimental impact assessments. In traditional approaches, the evaluator is expected to adopt an impartial and objective perspective, and program activities are reduced to measurable indicators (Vanderplaat 1995). In contrast, participant-oriented forms of evaluation tend to use more 'naturalistic' inquiry methods that aim to reflect 'the complexities of everyday reality and the different perspectives of those engaged in providing services' (Worthen, Sanders & Fitzpatrick 1997, p. 154). However, while such approaches are often more openly political, there are numerous ways in which the rigour and trustworthiness of the methods, findings and outcomes of participatory evaluations and PAR projects can be increased.

Issues raised by participatory evaluation and PAR

The use of participatory research and evaluation methodologies raises many complex theoretical, methodological and ethical issues that have implications for the quality of the evaluation and the trustworthiness of the findings and outcomes. They include:

- The need to ensure stakeholder representativeness. Several studies have highlighted the barriers and issues that arise when researchers and evaluators attempt to involve a broad diversity of participants and stakeholders which need to be addressed (Lennie, 2002b; Mathie & Greene 1997; O'Meara, Chester & Han 2004).
- The potential that the conflicting agendas and perspectives of various stakeholder groups will hinder the success of the evaluation. However, while power is a central issue in participatory forms of evaluation, it is often ignored (Gregory, 2000). As McKie (2003) argues, there is a need to focus on the communicative and relational dimensions of participatory evaluations which can affect their outcomes in unintended ways. Rigorous assessment of the empowering and potentially disempowering impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects is therefore required.
- The need to critique the concepts of empowerment and participation when assessing the impacts of participatory research and evaluation. Idealistic or naïve assumptions are sometimes made that community participation will automatically lead to empowerment. However, Humphries (1994) points out that the concept of empowerment can be used to justify oppressive practices; while the forms of participation identified range from co-optation to collective action (Martin 2000 p. 200).

- The time, energy and resources required to build evaluation capacity, plan and conduct evaluations, and develop relationships based on trust and open communication. To be effective, participatory evaluations require significant amounts of time and resources, particularly in the early stages where some participants or stakeholders may be unfamiliar with participatory methods or may see evaluation as a judgemental process that could affect their program funding or jobs.
- The need to demystify evaluation and encourage participants to think in an evaluative way. As McKie (2003) points out, evaluation has a language and methods that can be excluding. There is a need to consider the appropriateness of the language used and the value and relevance of evaluation to those involved. The methods used to build evaluation capacity and understanding therefore require careful design, implementation and use.

Increasing rigour and trustworthiness: Learnings from the field

Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations clearly requires the use of methods, criteria and strategies that are appropriate to those involved in a particular program or project and the skills, knowledge and resources available. The ideal is that rigour is incorporated into all stages of the evaluation and that the theories and assumptions of evaluation professionals and others are continually questioned.

Through my work on feminist PAR and participatory evaluation projects with people in rural and regional Queensland communities and diverse government and industry partners over the past ten years and my reviews of the literature in this field, I have identified a number of strategies that can increase the rigour and trustworthiness of each stage in participatory research and evaluation projects. These strategies include:

- Community participation, engagement and communication methods that develop relations of mutual trust and open communication.
- Using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods of data collection.
- Ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection.
- Critically assessing the intended and unintended impacts of evaluations using relevant theoretical models.
- Using rigorous data analysis and reporting processes.
- Participant reviews of evaluation case studies, data analysis and reports.

Community participation and engagement processes

Rebien (1996 p.169) argues that stakeholder analysis is critical to identifying all of the stakeholder groups that could potentially be involved in participatory evaluations and to improving the evaluation. In programs and projects that seek the participation of a broad diversity of community members in wide-spread locations (such as in rural and remote Queensland) over a number of years, effective participation and ongoing communication methods are also required to improve the quality and trustworthiness of the evaluation.

Strategies for more effective and inclusive community participation and engagement include:

- Asking program staff or representatives of project partners to develop lists of people and organisations that could be invited to participate and personally inviting key people to participate. Staff members with strong links and long-term relationships with a broad diversity of organisations and groups in a community and to key community members are particularly useful here. Such people include program coordinators, community development officers and community health and education workers.
- Using multiple methods for ongoing communication and participation. Both face to face communication and communication via technologies such as email and conferencing systems are valuable when projects involve distant participants. However, relationships need to be built through face to face meetings and workshops before technologies can be effectively used for significant evaluation activities. An interesting outcome of a recent PAR project that I managed was that some rural participants felt more empowered to make critical comments on the project in the critical reflection workshops that used interactive conferencing technology to link up the two participating communities with the research team and project partners (Lennie et al. 2004).
- Building mutual trust and open communication through actively listening to participants in an empathetic way, facilitating discussion and gathering continuous feedback on the evaluation process through face to face

meetings and workshops and via technologies and using this feedback to improve the processes used. The development of relationships based on mutual trust and open communication is vital to achieving high quality outcomes and more trustworthy and richer data as well as valuable feedback on the analysis and interpretation of evaluation data.

- Using processes that aim to be inclusive and empowering for a diversity of participants. This requires a sufficient understanding of participants' needs, issues and agendas, the relationships between those involved, and high level facilitation and negotiation skills. It also requires an awareness of the gendered power relations that may arise and the potentially disempowering effects of participation for some people.
- Gathering relevant data on the characteristics and backgrounds of participants (i.e. gender, age, occupation, ethnicity etc) to enable more accurate assessment of the inclusiveness of the evaluation and the diversity of participants.

Using multiple theories, methods and data sources

Triangulation is considered by many involved in action research, feminist research and qualitative research as an important means of obtaining richer and more rigorous data and better understanding research or evaluation questions and their context (Dick 1992; Lather 1991; Staley & Shockley-Zalabak 1989). Staley and Shockley-Zalabak (1989, p.250) describe triangulation as 'the use of multiple and diverse data sources and collection techniques to study a single research question or understand complex phenomena'.

Staley and Shockley-Zalabak (1989, p.253) argue that 'multilevel triangulation' is useful in feminist research as it encourages use of the researcher's complex personal experiences, enables a contextual portrayal of participants, and 'encourages a view of subjects as active participants who help define research agendas, provide data, and verify data interpretation'. However, Lather (1991, p.67) suggests that triangulation needs to be expanded beyond the use of multiple measures to include 'multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes', and argues that researchers 'must consciously utilise designs which seek counter patterns as well as convergence if data are to be credible'.

Findings from the evaluations of various community-based projects and programs I have worked on demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach that uses multiple theoretical and methodological frameworks and multiple data collection methods and sources of data can greatly increase the trustworthiness and rigour of the evaluation and its outcomes. For example, the evaluation and impact assessment of the methods and activities implemented in the feminist PAR project 'Enhancing Rural Women's Access to Interactive Communication Technologies' (Lennie 2001; The Rural Women and ICTs Research Team 1999)¹ employed two distinctive methodologies, multiple methods and multiple sources of data. The two methodologies were: a participatory feminist evaluation methodology based on praxis feminist theories and a methodology labelled 'feminist deconstructive ethnography' which incorporated feminist poststructuralist theories and discourse analysis methods. The methods used in the participatory evaluation and impact assessment included:

- Qualitative methods such as individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions conducted via teleconference, participant observations of workshops, online conversation groups and other activities, recording these observations in a fieldwork diary, feedback questionnaires with open ended questions, analysis of diaries kept by participants and email messages from participants, and case studies of the impacts of the project on four diverse participants.
- Quantitative methods such as feedback questionnaires with fixed answer questions, statistical analysis of data on participants' age, residential location, occupation and ethnicity, participation in community organisations and experience with using various communication technologies, and calculation of the number and percentage of women in different groups (including high and low profile farming women and professional town-based women) who had various needs identified in the analysis and how well they were met.
- Regular formal and informal critical reflections on the project with rural women participants, other members of the research team, and representatives of government and industry partner organisations.
- Coding and analysis of interview and focus group data using the computer-based data analysis program 'NUD*IST'.²

- Triangulation of the multiple sources of research data and the multiple theories, methodologies, methods and data sources that were used.

This approach enabled greater creativity and flexibility in the design, conduct and reporting of the evaluation, which I conducted as part of my doctoral research (Lennie 2001). Using multiple frameworks and methods enabled the richness and complexity of the data to be illustrated, a diversity of participants and stakeholders to be given voice, and analysis and interpretation of the data from different perspectives. I advocated adopting a pragmatic, pluralist, critical, open inquiry approach to participatory feminist evaluations.

Ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection

The quality and responsiveness of participatory evaluations is also enhanced by engaging in an ongoing process of meta-evaluation and critical reflection. This involves regularly collecting and analysing formal and informal feedback on the methods, processes and outcomes of participatory evaluations and individually and collaboratively engaging in 'critical reflexivity' on projects and initiatives.

Engaging in regular critical reflexivity is important to the validation of PAR and participatory evaluations as this process opens up these methods to critical scrutiny and assessment. Fonow and Cook (1991, p.2) define reflexivity as 'the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process'. This process is often advocated by feminists, action researchers and ethnographers as a means of achieving greater honesty and accountability in their research work. Critical reflection can also allow action researchers and evaluators to acknowledge the often contradictory agendas which underpin research and evaluation methods that aim to be empowering and inclusive.

A good example of an ongoing process of meta-evaluation is provided by the LEARNERS³ project which was conducted in collaboration with people in two rural Queensland communities, five public sector partners, and the research team members (Lennie et al 2004). Using PAR and participatory evaluation methodologies, a major objective of this project was to critically assess the use of the 'LEARNERS process'. One of the aims of this process was to build the capacities of rural participants in evaluating local community IT projects. Our ongoing meta-evaluation and critical analysis of the impacts of the project drew on multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data and used multiple data collection and analysis methods. This data included:

- responses to feedback questionnaires completed by participants at most workshops conducted in each community over the three years in which the project was conducted;
- transcripts of individual in-depth interviews conducted with eleven participants, selected to represent a diversity of participants in terms of level of participation, community organisation, gender and occupation;
- transcripts of three focus group discussions held with sixteen participants which provided valuable contextual information on local community networks and relationships and women's formal and information leadership;
- notes and transcripts from three critical reflection workshops held in each year of the project which involved key community participants, project partners and the research team, conducted both face to face and via conferencing technologies;
- email messages that provided feedback on project activities and revisions to the LEARNERS process;
- entries that I regularly made in a fieldwork diary; and
- responses to a questionnaire about project impacts completed by project partners.

Benefits and outcomes of our meta-evaluation and critical reflections on the LEARNERS project included:

- The ongoing feedback and critical reflections and suggested improvements from participants and others assisted in making continuous changes to the project and the methods used that better met the diverse needs and interests of the participants and stakeholders.
- The information shared in activities such as workshops and focus groups provided greater mutual understanding about the project, the issues affecting the communities involved, and the local contexts.
- The multiple sources of data, the multiple methods employed, the ongoing feedback from participants on draft reports and case studies and a summary of the impact assessment increased the rigour and trustworthiness of the final case studies and reports on the projects.

- The multiple methods of evaluation and critique used enabled a number of important communication and contextual issues to be raised. They included the need for the LEARNERS process, and the language used to explain the process, to be simplified to make it easier for some community members to understand. This feedback led to the creation of a user-friendly online resource called 'EvaluateIT' (www.evaluateit.org) that enables community groups to effectively plan and conduct participatory evaluations of local community IT projects, using an easy to understand four step process with key questions at each step.

Rigorous data analysis processes

Rigour in undertaking the data analysis and interpretation can be increased through:

- Taking a 'critical reference group perspective' (Wadsworth 1997, p.16). This involves the analysis and the incorporation into the analysis of participants' own understandings of their needs, the needs of familiar others, and key concepts relevant to the evaluation such as 'program sustainability' or 'women's empowerment'. This approach was found important in enabling a better understanding of the needs, values, interests and agendas of the various groups who participated in the Rural Women and ICTs project. It also assisted in producing more valid interpretations of the evaluation data. However, I also suggested that feminist evaluators need an awareness of their own assumptions about rural women's needs and the processes that rural women will find empowering (Lennie 2001). Such assumptions often use an 'expert needs' discourse (Fraser 1989) that tends to contradict the aim of empowering women.
- Using relevant theoretical models to frame the analysis, such as the various models of community participation, empowerment, community development and capacity building. An example of this was the development and use of a model of empowerment/disempowerment to critically assess the impacts of the Rural Women and ICTs project which was mentioned earlier. This model drew on an existing model of empowerment, various definitions of the term 'empowerment' provided by a diversity of rural women participants and other stakeholders, and a rigorous analysis of the relevant data collected, using the NUD*IST program. The model identified four forms of empowerment and disempowerment: *social*, *technological*, *political* and *psychological* which were used to assess the effects of the project and activities such as workshops and online conversation groups on participants (Lennie 2001, 2002a). This model was subsequently effectively used to undertake a rigorous assessment of the intended and unintended impacts of the LEARNERS project on individual participants and the community organisations and groups involved (Lennie et al 2004; Lennie 2005).
- Making use of computer-based data analysis programs such as NUD*IST and NVivo to code, manage and analyse large volumes of qualitative data.
- Developing sets of criteria for assessing the level of significance of program impacts, based on the number who indicated this impact on themselves or others.
- Developing rigorous criteria for selecting individual participants or particular groups of participants for the development of case studies.
- Where possible, stating the actual number of participants or interviewees who gave a particular type of response, rather than using vague terms such as 'some' or 'many' in the written analysis.

Participant review and reporting

In addition to some of the strategies already mentioned, a number of other strategies can be effectively used to increase the rigour and trustworthiness of case studies and reports on participatory evaluations. They include:

- Asking a representative selection of participants and stakeholders to critically assess and review preliminary analyses of data, and draft evaluation case studies and reports.
- Ensuring that a diversity of voices is represented in the evaluation report.

- Illustrating evaluation case studies and reports with rigorously selected examples of data such as verbatim quotations from interviews, focus groups and feedback questionnaires.

Critical reviews of preliminary data analysis and interpretation, draft case studies and evaluation reports by participants and other stakeholders is a significant means of obtaining face validity (Lather 1991). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.239) argue that the process of testing data, preliminary categories and interpretations with members of stakeholder groups (conducting 'member checks') is 'the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility'. They suggest that this process should take place continuously, during the data collection and analysis and again when the case study is prepared.

The following is an example of this process from the Rural Women and ICTs project. Drafts of the case studies about four participants were sent to each of these participants for comment, validation and reflection. All of them agreed that their experiences had been accurately represented and gave permission for personal details that may have identified them to be included. Drafts of a case study on a contentious online discussion about native title and reconciliation were also sent to interested participants and others for comment and discussion. This feedback, discussion and reflection were incorporated into the final analysis, case studies and reports, thus enhancing their trustworthiness.

Discussions about these case studies were considered to have contributed to the 'dialogical validity' (Sirotnik & Oakes 1990) of the evaluation. This is described as 'the capability of information to nurture, stimulate, or otherwise provoke rigorous discourse' (Sirotnik & Oakes 1990, p.46) and is considered highly relevant to evaluations based on social justice principles. This feedback and discussion process was assessed as having assisted in raising awareness of new concepts and issues related to rural women's participation and empowerment, and the power-knowledge relations enacted in the project, which some participants and stakeholders may not have previously considered.

A similar process of ongoing participant and stakeholder review was important to increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of case studies and evaluation reports produced as part of the LEARNERS project.

Conclusion

The holistic and interpretative approaches of most participatory evaluations, and their often openly political aims of community empowerment and inclusion, differ markedly from those of conventional evaluations. However, using multiple methodologies and methods and various other criteria and strategies that improve the rigor and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations and PAR projects increases the likelihood that results are seen as credible and are used to continually improve community-based programs and projects. Sources of rigour identified as effective included:

- Undertaking effective stakeholder analysis and using community participation, communication and engagement methods that enable relations of mutual trust and open communication to be developed.
- Using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources of data, multiple methods of data collection and analysis, and triangulation of multiple methodologies and data sources.
- Conducting an ongoing meta-evaluation and collaboratively engaging in regular critical reflections on the program or project and outcomes of the evaluation.
- Employing relevant theoretical models in the analysis such as the model of empowerment/disempowerment used to assess the impacts of the Rural Women and ICTs project and the LEARNERS project.
- Using rigorous data analysis processes, including the use of computer-based qualitative data analysis programs.
- Inviting participants and stakeholders to critically review draft evaluation case studies, data analysis and reports and illustrating reports with rigorously selected quotations.

In projects involving people in rural and regional communities, communication technologies such as interactive conferencing systems and email have proved valuable in obtaining more open and honest feedback on projects (Lennie et al 2004). However, relations need to be developed through face to face communication before such technologies can be used effectively.

A number of factors can obviously hinder implementation of the strategies and methods suggested in this paper, particularly lack of time, funding, resources, skills and knowledge. However, I hope that this paper increases awareness of the value of increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations, given the significant benefits that can arise, such as greater community inclusion and empowerment, organisational learning and program sustainability.

Notes

1. This project was conducted from 1996 – 1997 by a research team from the Faculties of Business and Education at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. It was funded by an Australian Research Council grant.
2. 'NUD*IST' stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. This program, and the NVivo program, was developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd.
3. 'LEARNERS' stands for Learning, Evaluation, Action & Reflection for New technologies, Empowerment and Rural Sustainability. This project was conducted from 2001 – 2004 by a research team from the Faculties of Business and Creative Industries at QUT. It was funded by grants from the Australian Research Council and the Office for Women, Queensland Government.

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