

Summer 2012

Independent Consulting TIG Newsletter

May The Polarities Be With You by Rita S. Fierro 2012 TIG Chair

I'm learning a lot of concepts in leadership development lately, but "managing polarities" feels like my personal best find (after chocolate, of course). "Polarities are competing values that need each other over time in order to achieve a greater purpose." Breathing in and out is a polarity. We can't have one without the other, though they are opposites. As facilitators, we often mention holding the dynamic tension between opposites in a conversation. People can become most creative by seeking out innovative ways to reconcile and welcome complexity instead of simply choosing one side over the other.

Though the term was new to me, the process is not. My whole branding process was about embracing my core polarities: intellectual artist, researcher, and Reiki practitioner. I'm developing a workshop from that process. The polarities taught me the common thread in all that I do: helping people (individuals, organizations, and communities) grow and be inspired.

Making peace with, and purpose in, my core polarities is allowing me to attract new areas of work where I am the best fit, because of my peculiar polarities. (Yes, I know I'm peculiar. Aren't we all?) So I'm about to launch a new partnership with an expanded company network of 20 consultants that bridges leadership development, community building, personal development, and creativity for small emerging businesses. Our clients use a triple-bottom line of profit, people, and

planet. I love using research results and understanding of interpersonal dynamics to help companies not only assess themselves and their work but also change their culture, focus, priorities to achieve their highest dream while creating sustainable communities in their workplace.

Yet there are some ongoing growing zones for me: the for-profit context, leadership development, and organizational development. The newest polarity is being clear and focused about myself and my consulting practice while still following the exploratory tide led by new work. This is the river flow I mentioned in the last newsletter.

I used to like being right. With all the new opportunities I see emerging, polarities may become my best friends (along with chocolate and salad!). May the polarities be with you, too!



Inside this issue:

- Interview: Sara Anne Tompkins **2**
- FAQs and What to Do about Them! by Gail V. Barrington **3**
- Overcoming Objections to Evaluation—continued **3**
- IC TIG 2012 Officers & Mission Statement **4**
- NEW: IC TIG Facebook page link **4**
- A Citizen's Right to Contribute versus an Evaluator's Conflict of Interest by Matthew Feldman **4**

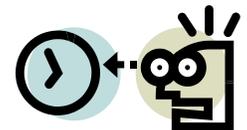
Overcoming Objections to Evaluation By Sheri Chaney Jones

"That is what every nonprofit needs, but can't afford"

- nonprofit director

This was said to me at a networking function when I was describing what I do for a living. This type of thinking frustrated me when I started my independent consulting business in 2009. There was an implicit understanding of the importance of evaluation, but in lean budget times it was difficult convincing decision-makers to invest in evaluation services.

My clients experienced amazing results and significant improvements when they invested in increasing their evaluation capacity and measurement culture. Despite this, questions from skeptics lingered. *Did the data-driven culture make a difference? Would they have received that \$200,000.00 grant, improved productivity by 60%, and increased staff satisfaction by 30% without the performance measures and evaluation systems?* To validate the return on investment of evaluation, I did what every good evaluator does – I conducted a study. [Continued on Page 3]



**Next newsletter
article deadline:
August 31**

Please send questions, submissions, or suggestions to the newsletter content editor Loretta Kelley at LKelley@kpacm.org



Meet an IC TIG Member

Each quarter we will feature an IC TIG member in this newsletter. Send your suggestions for future interviewees to Loretta Kelley LKelley@kpacm.org

Sara Anne Tompkins

"I am primarily quantitative...and am currently working on a solely qualitative paper...so this is more of a challenge for me, which is always good!"



Sara Anne Tompkins
Madipen, LLC

1. Please describe your independent consulting practice.

I am a sole proprietor. In addition to program planning, research, and evaluation, I also work at Colorado State University doing grant evaluation and adjunct teaching. I have recently started to collaborate with a larger local evaluation company and was subcontracted as a health psychologist. I typically work with not-for-profits who serve chronically diseased populations or on small grants or projects in the health arena.

2. What is your disciplinary background?

I have a Master's degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and a Ph.D. in Applied Social Psychology with a Health Emphasis. I did my post doc with a health psychologist evaluating a physical activity intervention.

3. How long have you been evaluating, and how long have you been an independent consultant?

I started evaluating grants with a not-for-profit during my dissertation work in 2006. I started my independent consulting business, Madipen LLC, in 2008.

4. Are you primarily qualitative, primarily quantitative, mixed methods? Which do you prefer?

I am primarily quantitative, although my evaluation approach is typically mixed methods. I prefer mixed methods and am currently working on a solely qualitative paper from a recent focus group I conducted. I wasn't primarily trained in qualitative so this is more of a challenge for me, which is always good!

5. What was your favorite evaluation experience?

With one of the not-for-profit organizations I work with, I have been able to attend some of the lifestyle empowerment programs they offer. This is always so rewarding – to be able to see the programs and people that benefit from proper evaluation. I am passionate about working for not-for-profits that see the value of evaluation.

6. What type of experience have you had that was less than ideal?

I was working on a grant with another not-for-profit; it was very specific to one of the many programs they offer. I asked one of the top executives what type of outcome evaluation they use with some of their other programs. She said, "We don't really do any of that type of evaluation, we just know that our programs work." It was a bit frustrating as I feel their other programs could benefit from outcomes-focused evaluation.

7. Have you had any comical experiences? Describe them.

I attended a program that I was evaluating and a few of the presenters were very worried that I would be taking notes about them. We all had breakfast together and I was constantly reassuring them that I wasn't there to take notes about their performances.

From then on, I never introduce myself as an "evaluator" – I say something to the effect of, "I am here to help the organization quantify the impact of this program."

8. What do you like to do when you're not evaluating?

I have 2 ½ year old twins and we are expecting a third child this fall. I am a busy Colorado twin mom who loves to be outdoors enjoying all that the state has to offer. I really enjoy running, hiking, and trying to spend as much time with the twins as I can.

9. Is there anything else you would like for your peers to know about you?

I joined the IC TIG and volunteered to be the table coordinator in order to try and meet other consultants and learn more about how to be a good IC. I am excited to become more involved in the future!



FAQs and What to Do About Them!

By Gail V. Barrington from Chapter 17 in her 2012 book
*Consulting Start-up & Management: A Guide for Evaluators
& Applied Researchers*. Los Angeles: SAGE

Question: What should I do with my files?

Answer: The longer you have been a consultant, the more serious the file management issue becomes. Thinking of all your papers, files, reports, and binders stacked in teetering columns on every surface in your office gives me nightmares. Why? Because eventually lack of organization will cost you time and money.

Where is that critical document you need for your current proposal? What did you do the last time you hired a research assistant? How can you develop an abstract for the upcoming conference by tomorrow? Filing is not about filing – it is about retrieval.

From project to project it may seem inconsequential, but managing your files (both electronic and paper) is an important way to preserve your own intellectual capital, retain your corporate memory, support good decision making, and provide an evidence trail. Think of this pedestrian task as knowledge generation, capture, retrieval, and translation. Develop your own

knowledge management system.

Suggestions:

- ◆ Organize your files into basic categories.
 - ◇ Financial records
 - ◇ Administrative files
 - ◇ Personnel records
 - ◇ Client/project files
 - ◇ Process knowledge and precedents
- ◆ Determine where to store each type of information for quick retrieval.
 - ◇ Store current project files on your computer and/or laptop and on flash drives.
 - ◇ Keep administrative records and recent projects on your server, portable back-up drives, or discs. Put these in your safety deposit box.
 - ◇ Centralize paper files, keep short-term documents on site for two years, then purge the non-essentials.
- ◇ Move essential long-term files to an off-site archive, not in your garage or attic.
- ◆ Determine how long to keep each type of file.
 - ◇ Store surveys in boxes marked “Shred after...” for one year.
 - ◇ Keep essential business information for 7 years (financial and tax records, leases, contracts, insurance records, licenses, and personnel files)
 - ◇ Client files have no real end date, but I use the 7-year rule. After that, I only keep files that are interesting for articles, workshop materials, or suitably adapted case studies.
- ◆ Keep an updated archive map on a spreadsheet.
- ◆ Reward yourself for you good business practice. You deserve it!

Overcoming Objections to Evaluation—continued from page 1

By Sheri Chaney Jones

[*Measurement Resources Company*](#)

Measurement Resources launched our Measurement Culture Survey in 2009. This survey assessed the type of data organizations are collecting, how often they conducted evaluations, and how they used data. In addition, the survey assessed the organization’s success with several organizational outcomes.

Currently we have 110 participating nonprofit and government agencies in the database. Sixty percent of the leaders surveyed reported frequently using performance measurement and evaluation systems for a majority of regular operational activities such as budgeting, managing programs, reporting accountability, strategic planning, and performance improvement. This is encouraging,

but it also means that 40 percent of the sample has much room for improvement.

Comparing organizations that frequently used evaluation data in decision-making with those that didn’t revealed significant differences. The more frequently and consistently organizations used performance measures in their management decisions, the more effective they were at

- ◆ Increasing revenues ($r=.56, p <.01$)
- ◆ Improving external relations ($r=.52, p =.01$)
- ◆ Improving internal relations ($r=.55, p <.01$)
- ◆ Increased organizational efficiencies ($r = .65, p < .01$)
- ◆ Strengthening organizational culture ($r=.77, p <.01$)
- ◆ Implementing organizational change ($r=.59, p <.01$)

Now, these results are key talking points with potential clients. Who doesn’t desire more money, more positive press, happier customers and employees, stronger organizational culture and the ability to successfully manage change? The next time you are writing a proposal or trying to overcome objections to the cost of evaluation, explain these benefits to get the decision-maker’s attention.

“One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.”

Milton Friedman

2012 TIG Chair**Rita S. Fierro**Independent Research and Evaluation
Consultantfierro_evaluation@gmail.com**2012 Chair-Elect****Randi K. Nelson**

Partners in Evaluation, LLC

eval.partners.nelson@gmail.com**2012 Program Co-Chairs****Deborah Levy**

SuccessLinks, LLC

deblevy@successlinks.biz**Stephen Maack**

Reap Change Consultants

consultant@reapchange.com**2012 Webmasters****Matt Feldman**

Goshen Education Consulting

mfeldman@goshenedu.com**Michelle B. Burd**

Burd's Eye View Research & Evaluation

michelle@burdseyeview.net

The Independent Consulting (IC) Topical Interest Group members are sole proprietors, or have formed limited liability companies, partnerships, or corporations who work alone, with small staffs, or "as needed" sub-contractors. Our backgrounds are as varied as most of AEA. What we share in common is collegial and friendly support of one another as independent evaluators.

IC TIG MISSION STATEMENT IN BRIEF

- *Foster a community of independent evaluators by reducing the isolation of being an independent consultant*
- *Promote independent consulting as an evaluation profession*
- *Increase the professionalism of independent consultants*

The complete text of the mission statement is on the IC TIG website below.

[Independent Consulting TIG website](#)

NEW: [IC TIG on Facebook](#)

A Citizen's Right to Contribute versus an Evaluator's Conflict of Interest

By **Matthew Feldman**

Goshen Education Consulting

This article considers a dilemma that I posed to the IC TIG eGroup concerning a request I received to financially support an evaluation client's political campaign.

BACKGROUND

My client is an elected superintendent of schools. I feel she is the right candidate for the position, but I am concerned a donation would impact my independence.

CONSIDERATION 1: Influence

Whether stated overtly or not, a political investment may affect an evaluator's influence with the client and may confound the evaluator's objectivity. Heidi Gegax replied that, "I make it a point not to donate to any active clients....I don't want it to appear that I have 'bought' my position."

CONSIDERATION 2: Perception

Donations to public elections are public and may come to haunt you if your candidate/client does not secure the

election. Melanie Hwalek wrote that, "Perception is everything. Not only good thoughts from (the client) but also negative thoughts from her opponent for whom you might want to work one day."

CONSIDERATION 3: Donation Source

If one chooses to donate, consider the source of the funds. A donation from the business or corporate entity clearly affects objectivity of the business; this overt support suggests that the evaluation company has a financial position in the candidate's success. Marilyn Ray wrote, "I think it is a very questionable and unwise practice...to give a donation to a political candidate from your consulting practice account." Other suggestions included a donation from a personal account or an anonymous donation. Becca Carsel countered that, she "would be careful about 'anonymous' donations," because where she lives in California "the news media reviews local candidate's donors and mentions larger ones in the newspaper."

CONCLUSION: Political Support Changes Evaluation Dynamics

I believe that my donation would not affect my ability to secure work with my client. That being said, I perceive that the dynamic will change. Through a donation of time or money I would become invested in my client's campaign. This change in dynamics would affect me and my client and the integrity of my evaluation. Item C from the American Evaluators Association Guiding Principles indicates that, "Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process..."

Given these considerations, I have chosen not to make a donation of time or money to my client.

