Promoting Development Effectiveness in Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs): Striking the right balance between Evaluation Independence and Operational Embeddedness

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Outline

1. Setting the stage
2. The objective of development evaluation
3. Independence of the evaluation function at MDBs
4. Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness.
5. Discussion
Setting the Stage
Development Evaluation = Enhanced Development Effectiveness
What development evaluation is not POLICING!
Independence in the Development Evaluation Function

What is evaluation independence?

- The evaluation function is independent when it is structurally independent from operational management and decision-making functions within an organization so that it is free from undue influence, more objective, and has full authority to submit reports directly to the appropriate levels of decision-making (UNDP 2016).

- *Formal independence* – can either enable/hinder evaluations.

- Substantial independence – ensures integrity, objectivity, impartiality.

*The independence of evaluation departments/offices should not translate to isolation from operations*
Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness

Problem Statement:

Although independence is necessary to ensure high-quality and objective (White 2014), it is not a guarantee for a quality evaluation product (ADB, 2008).

- Institutional independence does not necessarily safeguard against biases toward positive evaluation (poor quality evaluation designs, contract renewal bias, and ‘friends’ bias etc) World Bank (2003).
- These biases are best overcome by having a good quality assurance system

What degree of embeddedness with operations is required to improve evaluation quality and make evaluation recommendations more actionable?
Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness

Rationale for engaging with Operations/Embeddedness:
The BUSD-heuristic (betterment, undermining, support, distortion) Model of Influence

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<tr>
<th>Explicitness of Influence</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>Implicit, Indirect</th>
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<td><strong>Direction of Influence</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Destructive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Distortion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Undermining</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Negative Pressure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Negative Persuasion/Counsel</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Constructive</strong></td>
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Source: Pleger and Sager (2016)
Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness

Engagement with Operations - Current Practice:

- The Evaluator General is regularly invited to senior management meetings such as Senior Management Coordination Committee (SMCC), and the Operations Committee (OPSCOM), to ensure inclusion of the independent evaluation function, and support feedback of evaluation knowledge (AfDB, 2016).
- Capitalization Workshops, with 1-2 pages of Management Response to Committee on Operations and Development Effectiveness (CODE).
- Involvement from ToR, Reference Group, to Learning Events on Evaluations.
Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness

However, IDEV staff recuse themselves from evaluating:

- Any project, program, or activity that they worked on or had line responsibility for the work on, including preparation, appraisal, supervision, and completion reporting, or that they had a personal influence over, in a previous capacity either in the Bank or prior to joining the Bank (AfDB 2016, Annex 1).

- In contrast, the Independent Development Evaluation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) comments on and reviews important projects or programs and TA before approval (ADB 2008).

What degree of embeddedness is sufficient to maintain independence?
Striking the right balance between independence and embeddedness

My view:

- Review and Validate the Results Frameworks and Theory of Change of operations/projects, *ex ante*.
  - *The Office of Evaluation and Oversight at the Inter-American Development Bank* reviews the proposed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems of projects at the design stage, rather than waiting around to criticize them once the project is over (White 2014).

- Rotate Young Professionals and Low-Mid-level Evaluation Staff to Operational Departments for a few months, as part of onboarding.

*ADB encourages evaluation staff rotation – in principle.*

*Is Independence preferred over influence?*
Thank you for your time!
References


