Class Exercise

Session 1: Problems inside Evaluation Teams

Please read the following short description about the inner workings of one evaluation team and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

Session 1, Scenario 1: During the Team Planning Meeting for an evaluation, the team leader for an evaluation team dominates technical discussions and he takes the lead in defining an approach to the study and developing and submitting a schedule for field work to USAID. His responses in discussions about roles and responsibilities, however, are vague, suggesting that responsibilities will be worked out collaboratively. When field work begins, the Team Leader continues in this leadership style. He sets up meetings and brings the entire team along, but he leads the interviews. When team members ask what he expects of them, he says that they do their work, do what they are good at and make contributions. After a while the other team members workout with each other ideas about where they can contribute and they start gathering and writing up information drawing on their various skills. They submit what they draft to the Team Leader, but are not sure what happens to it. When the field work has ended and the team meets with the USAID Evaluation Project Manager, one team member announces that she is going to leave early because she has no role on the team as far as she knows. Sensing a team crisis, the EM calls for a break in the meeting and speaks individually to each team member. After these discussions, the EM is convinced that the Team Leader is simply ignoring his team and is conducting an evaluation virtually on his own.

Questions for Discussion:

- Based on this description, how would you as the Program Officer proceed? Would you do something – or do nothing?

- What could have been done by USAID to prevent this situation from occurring?

- What options or opportunities do the team members have for altering the team dynamics in a situation of this sort?
Please read the following short description about a problem that has arisen between an evaluation’s team leader and M & E Technical Advisor and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

Session 1, Scenario 2:  USAID has received a draft evaluation report from a team whose Team Leader is a technical expert in agriculture and has worked on several other USAID evaluations in other Missions. The evaluation expert on the team was younger, but has considerable evaluation experience, including experience on USAID evaluation teams. The report includes a statement of a dissenting view submitted by the M & E Technical Advisor. In their dissenting view, the M & E Technical Advisor states that the evaluation report overstates what can be concluded from the evaluation team’s findings. The dissenting view statement indicates that the conclusions rely heavily on the experience of the technical specialist in other countries and that those experience may not be relevant in this situation. Had the conclusions presented been based solely on the facts the team assembled in country concerning the project, the dissenting view submission asserts, one would have to conclude that its performance is relatively weak; that would have suggested different recommendations.

The dissenting view submission has already been circulated within the Mission and you have been asked, as the Program Officer, to address the issues raised. Ideally, the Mission would like to see the issues resolved – and have a final version of the evaluation report come in without dissent.

Questions for Discussion:

- Are there any policies or standards with which you are familiar that can help you resolve this situation?
- What actions do you envision taking to address the issues raised in the dissenting view submission?

Session 2: Problems in USAID and with Stakeholder Organizations
Please read the following short description about a problem that has arisen at the planning stage of an evaluation and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

Session 2, Scenario 1: Over a year ago, the Mission scheduled one of its health projects for an evaluation. The project is in its third year and it was expected that an evaluation would help the Mission make decisions about how to follow-up on this project. Six months ago, USAID’s Inspector General conducted an audit of this project, which came as a surprise to the Mission. The IG’s did not look at project performance, but did find irregularities in the way project funds were being handled; multiple recommendations emerged from that audit, only half of which have been closed. During the Mission’s portfolio review, the Program Office recommended going ahead with the substantive evaluation of this project as planned and the Deputy Director concurred. You were named the Program Officer. In trying to schedule work on this evaluation, including meetings with relevant USAID staff and the implementing partner team you have begun to run into problems. No one wants to meet with you. Everyone is hostile to the upcoming evaluation. Both the USAID activity manager and the implementing partner act as if the evaluation is a threat – it is being undertaken to find reasons to terminate the project ahead of schedule.

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you propose to proceed given stakeholder fear of the upcoming evaluation? Try to fix it? Ignore it?

- Are there specific steps you can take gain stakeholder cooperation in the development of a SOW?

Session 2: Problems in USAID and with Stakeholder Organizations
Please read the following short description about a problem that has arisen about an evaluation’s draft report and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

**Session 2, Scenario 2:** An evaluation of a USAID project that is teaching conservation practices was recently carried out and the draft report was receive a month ago. No comments on the report have yet been provided by the technical office that oversees the project. Several requests for the office’s comments have been sent by the program office, which is responsible for ensuring that evaluations are finalized and sent to the DEC. You are the Program Officer. Unofficially you have heard that the technical office is upset about the evaluation which includes some negative findings. You suspect that they are stalling on providing comments hoping that the evaluation will never become public.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- Since two requests for comments have already been ignored by the technical office, what action do you propose to take to move the evaluation process along to completion?

- Given what you are hearing about the technical office’s view of this evaluation, what might you do now to help ensure that the evaluation’s recommendations are considered seriously, accepted if acceptance is merited, and then implemented?
Session 3: Problems between Teams and Stakeholder Organizations

Please read the following short description about a problem that has arisen in a joint evaluation and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

Session 3, Scenario 1: USAID has hired a firm to carry out an intervention aimed at enhancing literacy rates of children in primary school. Because they will be using an innovative approach, USAID has also issued a separate, parallel contracting mechanism through which an evaluation organization will conduct a randomized control trial (RCT) of the intervention to test whether or not the program was effective in creating change for the targeted population. Both 4-year contracts are signed, and you as a Program Officer will be managing the impact evaluation; while your colleague in the technical office will be managing the implementation of the intervention itself. The implementers have stated that they are unwilling to choose school districts randomly because their cost estimates were based on choosing schools closest to their headquarters. In some cases, they have existing relationships with communities and do not wish to do a random selection. In addition, they want to start the program as soon as possible, and do not want to wait until the evaluator generates a list of treatment and control schools. The evaluators are worried the implementers are going to choose participants without consultation with the evaluation team; and therefore the rigorous RCT will be impossible.

Questions for Discussion:

- What options do you have for dealing with the current tensions between the implementation and evaluation of the intervention?

- What might USAID have done earlier in this evaluation to have avoided the problem described in this scenario?
**Session 3: Problems between Teams and Stakeholder Organizations**

Please read the following short description about a problem that has arisen in a joint evaluation and make a few notes on the questions we will discuss at the end of this exercise.

**Session 3, Scenario 2:** USAID has completed an evaluation of a project it is carrying out with Parliament. The findings are somewhat critical of the way in which the office in Parliament the project assists does its business and it is also critical of the implementing partner, stating that this implementing partner is going along with practices in Parliament that involve favoritism and special treatment. USAID’s technical office wants to treat the evaluation report as if it is “top secret”. It does not want to share the report with Parliament or the implementing partner, nor does it want the report sent to the DEC, even if it agrees with what the report says. To this end, the technical office has not formally accepted the report; as a result the evaluation team has not received its final payment. The technical team has the support of the Deputy Director about not sharing the evaluation, as the Deputy Director is concerned about what might end up in the newspapers. USAID/Washington is aware of this situation and is saying that times have changed and the Administrator wants USAID to be much more transparent and discuss evaluation findings like these with the government.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- The Program Officer has asked you – as the Program Officer – to write a memorandum for the Mission Director that summarizes the key points in this situation and USAID policy on evaluation disclosure, including recent speeches by the Administrator and the Presidential Directive on Global Development – and make recommendations about actions to be taken. What recommendations to you plan to make and why?

**Session 3: Synthesizing Problem Solving-Intervention Strategies**

**Exercise:** Participants work in small groups to identify patterns of problems and solutions across the three types of scenarios encountered (problems inside Evaluation Teams, problems within USAID and Stakeholder Organizations, and problems between Teams and Stakeholder Organizations)