WICKED PROBLEMS: PEACEBUILDING EVALUATION ETHICS

Determining What is Good and Right

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for the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium

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About the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium

The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC) is a project of Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) in partnership with CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Mercy Corps and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The project is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) and is field-wide effort to address the unique challenges to measuring and learning from peacebuilding programs. The PEC convenes donors, scholars, policymakers, local and international practitioners, and evaluation experts in an unprecedented open dialogue, exchange, and joint learning. It seeks to address the root causes of weak evaluation practices and disincentives for better learning by fostering field-wide change through three strategic and reinforcing initiatives: 1) Developing Methodological Rigor; 2) Improving the Culture of Evaluation and Shared Learning; and 3) Fostering the Use of Evidence to Inform Peacebuilding Policy.

About the Author

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Reina has an MA in Social Psychology (York University) and a PhD in International Relations (American University); she is trained in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Reina's current research focuses on field learning and explores the role of reflective practice in improved peacebuilding. She is also a member of the PEC Advisory Board.

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1. Introduction

> *"We want to know that our indicators are collecting data that will determine our impact,"* the senior administrator says. *"We really want to know if our peacebuilding model was effective so we can scale-up."*
>
> *"Right,"* says the project officer. *"And, our initiative is really about making a difference in people's lives in the community, so we don't want to just show impact, we want to have impact and understand how that happened so we continue to change things for the better. The youth and women's group leaders we are working with are terrific – they are really courageous, passionate and dedicated to building peace in their communities. The situation is volatile but we are responding as best we can."*
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> *"Great! We will also need to use that impact information to allocate our time and funding in this program area in the future, and develop a new proposal for when the project wraps up,"* responds the senior administrator.
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> *"Okay,"* replies the project officer, worrying about whether or not there is enough occurring in the participatory assessment that will constitute "impact" in the administrator's eyes – or in an external funder's eyes – and whether or not their current ideas about how to utilize evaluation data within the project will be undermined by the senior administrator's demands.

An exchange like this is common in organizations and can be frustrating. The project manager feels like he or she is being asked for data that will not help improve implementation in the community, although it might be important for management and therefore necessary. The administrator is trying to gather data to help justify organizational decisions, and likely feeling pressure from board members and funders to demonstrate impact.

The tension in the dialogue involves not only competing institutional demands but also competing moral claims – that is, **there are competing claims about what is good and right in peacebuilding as well as peacebuilding evaluation. The moral claims, however, are cloaked in language that makes them appear as if they are value-free decisions, which makes them hard to detect**. A common value-free assertion goes like this: if we collect the data then we will know what to do. This idea of being able to collect data that will simply tell us what to do is popular, and is rooted in a school of thought that espouses value-free social science as the way to answer management questions.

However, when we ask what constitutes good results or ask questions about what was determined as important in order to gather the data, we catch a glimpse of the moral values upon which claims are being made. For example, in the dialogue above, we see moral claims that evaluations are good and worthwhile *if*:

- they generate data on impact for scaling-up,
- the people involved in the initiative learn from, and make adaptations based on the evaluation data and process,
- they help the project officer make field-level decisions,
- they help administrators make decisions about allocating future funding, or
- they justify the program to external funders.

These various claims often exist side-by-side and can complement, or be in tension with each other when choosing evaluation approaches and methodologies.

Also nestled within this exchange are moral claims about what will constitute good ends within the peacebuilding initiative. That is, what the program should be evaluated upon in order to determine its worth or merit. These claims are signaled by words like **impact**, **effective**, **scaling-up**, **change things for the better**, **responsive**, **and by the characteristics of being courageous**, **dedicated or passionate**.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to support evaluators in producing good evaluations by helping to think about values and ethics consciously and carefully. To do this, we'll first look at the relationship between ethics and evaluation. We will then look at the big picture of *what* constitutes "good peacebuilding" or peacebuilding "done right." We will also explore ethical issues involved in *who* determines the values and criteria by which we judge programs. And, finally we will explore ethical issues involved in how evaluations are conducted – an area for which there tends to be more developed guidance available. The paper concludes with additional resource material for further exploration.

2. Values, Ethics and Evaluation

Evaluation involves making value judgements about what is good and right. We collect empirical data, analyze it and then interpret it in order to make judgements about "the worth, merit or value of something."[1] As Deborah Fournier notes in her definition of evaluation for the *Encyclopedia of Evaluation*, "It is the value feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology..." and so forth.[2] **The value feature of evaluation makes it, in part, ethical deliberation – weighing and choosing amongst what will be considered good and right, or worthy and of value, in a given peacebuilding initiative**.

When we think about evaluation training, however, our skill development tends to focus on techniques, methods and the business aspects of evaluation.[3] For example, writing or negotiating the terms of reference, developing focused lines of inquiry, gathering data and analyzing it using particular methodologies. These are important and, as will be noted below, also part of an ethical evaluator's practice. However, the skills for thinking about and weighing the ethical dimensions of evaluation – such as how to identify and weigh the value-based elements of an evaluation – are frequently missing even when recognized as important.[4]

Our lack of attention to ethics often feeds into problems in evaluations. Peacebuilding initiatives occur in environments with conflicted parties, divergent interests and needs, which peacebuilding initiatives are attempting to change. Evaluations involve knowledge generation and affect resource distribution amongst stakeholders and so stakeholders are very concerned about how "worth" is determined and how it will reflect on them.[5] Evaluations are commissioned by parties who want to fund work that makes a difference from their perspective (e.g. greatest impact). Those being evaluated have a stake in the evaluation and the conflict context – implementers want to do good work and get funds to continue, while community members want quality programs that support their vision for their community. When there are divergent values, they can contribute to conflict and the politicization of evaluations – particularly if those value differences coincide with conflict cleavages. We, as evaluators, may then unintentionally contribute to conflict and undermine the peacebuilding initiative we are evaluating if we are not attending to moral values as part of conflict and evaluation. But what are different ways of understanding what is good and right?

3. The *What*: Determining "Good" and "Right" Peacebuilding

[1] Mathison, "Value Judgment," 444.

[2] ibid., 140-1. Those who argue that empirical data can be gathered in order to inform rational decisions in a value-free way are rooted in contemporary social science thinking from Max Weber through to American Psychologist Donald T. Campbell and to today's "evidence-based" management systems; for an overview see Quinn Patton, *Utilization Focused Evaluation*.

[3] Ethics, when taught, tends to be relatively short or an add-on. For example, the American Evaluation Association has developed a 1.5-2 hour training on its ethics guidelines, which is available at http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=105. There are exceptions, such as Bush and Duggan, "Addressing Ethical and Political Challenges in Evaluation."

[4] For example, the African Evaluation Association's "African Evaluation Guidelines - Standards and Norms" document notes the importance of values identification in a sub-point under the discussion of the principle of utility. See African Evaluation Association, "African Evaluation Guidelines - Standards and Norms," 5.

[5] Michael Quinn Patton has a clear discussion of the politics of evaluation and how to manage the politics of evaluation in Chapter 14 of *Utilization Focused Evaluation*.

We tend to assume we or those designing the terms of reference know automatically what is good and right, and that we—evaluators, evaluands, and other stakeholders—all agree upon it. However, this is often not the case. I suspect one of the reasons that people don't like evaluations is because they feel the evaluations are judging them by criteria they don't think are appropriate and are not "good" or "right"— in other words, they feel like the evaluator does not understand or know their respective needs and values. How can we do better?

Evaluation involves asking big questions: "Was this initiative the right thing to do? Did good peacebuilding occur here? What changed? What is the evidence that good peacebuilding occurred?" The first two questions in this set demand ethical thinking.

When we think ethically, we make judgements about moral claims; it is the process of reasoning through and assessing what makes for good ends and right means given the legitimate needs and expectations of ourselves and others.[6] This is challenging work.

There is, however, a long tradition of moral philosophy that presents moral theories that can help evaluators explore a range of values that can be used to determine what is good and right in peacebuilding, and from which criteria and standards to judge empirical data can be drawn. In the section below, we'll briefly look at big ideas from four moral theory families to help evaluators identify different moral values that might be prioritized by stakeholders in evaluations: good ends, right means, embodying excellence as peacebuilders (and evaluators) and enacting caring relationships (as peacebuilders and evaluators). This list is not a complete list of all possible values of good, but a starting point for important considerations.

3.1 Good Ends: Consequences

Peacebuilding initiatives usually pursue peace as a good end–this may include stopping overt violence, addressing structural violence, and building peace with justice. These are "big ends" or goals that reflect the moral values that guide why we do peacebuilding work.

Feeding into the big ends are more specific moral values about ends and desired consequences that frame peacebuilding evaluations. These moral values appear in the way the terms of reference present the purpose of the evaluation as well as its objectives and the lines of inquiry that identify how an initiative should be judged. **Terms of reference usually emphasize the criteria and standards that align with the values of the group funding the evaluation**.

For example, terms of reference for peacebuilding evaluations often draw on the OECD-DAC criteria, which defines good peacebuilding in terms of its:

1. **relevance** to driving factors of conflict (as determined by a conflict analysis),
2. **effectiveness** vis-à-vis intended objectives and the degree to which results were achieved (outputs, outcomes and the connection to impacts),
3. **impact** in terms of intended and unintended positive or negative effects on the wider environment and conflict context,
4. **sustainability** or the "continuation of benefits" when funding is discontinued (can include things like community ownership and resilience in settings of conflict), and
5. **efficiency** in terms of how economically the resources that are put into an initiative produce results.[7]

Two additional OECD-DAC criteria that are mentioned, but not on equal footing as the preceding five, are coherence, and coordination amongst intervenors or funders to produce more effective results.

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[6] Weston, *A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox*, 86. For a careful exploration of values in evaluation see Schwandt, "The Landscape of Values in Evaluation: Charted Terrain and Unexplored Territory."
[7] OECD, "Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results," 65-71.

There is a strong, unifying moral claim behind these criteria: peacebuilding programs or projects are good if they achieve the greatest good for the most number of people or produce at least as great a good as any other course of action would produce. Our best action is therefore the one that achieves the best end. This moral claim is particularly important for the criteria of impact and the effects on the wider environment and context, but also key to the definitions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

In the exchange between the manager and the administrator (above), the administrator is emphasizing that the right thing to do is the one that produces the greatest impact – the greatest good for the most number, so it can be "scaled-up" and produce even greater good for more people. **This is ends-based consequentialist moral thinking**, and is in tension with the program staffer's thinking about process and people. The effort to scale-up can produce the "greatest good" by benefitting more people, yet also can undermine the quality and nature of the change process for those in the initial project (and still produce the "greatest good" because more people are involved who receive some benefit). **In consequentialist thinking some harms along the way – like over-stretched staff or field personnel and partners – are considered acceptable as long as the outcome is at least as good as any other course of action**.

The emphasis on ends is strongly represented in peacebuilding evaluation criteria such as the OECD-DAC criteria. When we ask questions about ends then we weigh the harms and the benefits and look to determine if the benefits together outweigh the harms vis-à-vis our criteria (e.g. was our impact overall positive? Was our initiative, overall, relevant?).

There are, however, other ways to think about what constitutes good peacebuilding (e.g. principles, character, relationships), which are sometimes in tension with ends-based thinking. And, as noted above, these differences can align with stakeholder groups and contribute to misunderstanding and conflict within an evaluation.

> ### EXAMPLE
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> *Evaluations of "Quick Impact" Projects (QIPs) reflect consequentialist reasoning. QIPs are often promoted in post-accord environments because they provide positive "peace dividend" benefits to many, such as rebuilt schools, which may help stabilize a community as a base for other interventions in a short period of time. These projects are therefore typically evaluated based on the speed and scale of the benefits (e.g. how many villages reached in a short period of time). Given this reasoning, they have been seen as producing a better overall consequence (more villages reached) than slow, intensive participatory processes that might rebuild a school in a community over a two-year period and generate greater community ownership, but due to its intensive nature does not reach as many people as quickly. Note, however, if the time-horizon of consequence changes, the assessment of benefits and harms shifts and so QIP evaluations may initially be positive but then become negative if short-term benefits did not produce long-term benefits.*

3.2 Right Means

While ends-based thinking may dominate evaluation discourse, it is nevertheless common for peacebuilders to think about the way in which we do our work as important, particularly important in terms of modelling what we hope to achieve. Pursuing "peace by peaceful means" is therefore a common phrase in the field – as well as the title of a book.[8]

Our means and the principles that guide our actions can be seen as good in and of themselves. For example, Immanuel Kant argued we should always treat people as ends and never as a means to an end. Any action following this principle was good in and of itself regardless of what happened as a result. People might recognize this as a formulation of "the golden rule" of reciprocity that appears in many religious traditions.[9] Respect everyone's human rights is an outgrowth of this imperative of Kant's. Other means that are emphasized in peacebuilding evaluation

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[8] Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*.
[9] Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

guidance is the principle that actions must "do no harm" or must promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive societies.[10]

If we – evaluators and those being evaluated – decide to focus on the "right means" that are defined by our principles and most important in determining whether a peacebuilding initiative was good, we examine the ways that the peacebuilding initiative was implemented. **Did the process "do no harm"? Did it treat people well throughout – always as ends and never as means to a desired end? Did it model human rights principles? Was the initiative participatory and inclusive? Was it gender-sensitive? Did the approach embody nonviolent principles?** This is quite a different set of questions than did it produce the greatest good for the most number of people because our evaluation questions include assessments of problematic actions that might have affected only a minority of people, or groups of people who have been seen as less important overall (e.g. gender-based violence has often been overlooked in peacebuilding projects that focus on demobilizing militants). When we shift to thinking about the right means and principles, then we alter our evaluation focus to include the process by which an initiative pursued its ends.[11]

> **EXAMPLE**
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> *Evaluation questions that focus on particular principles, such as whether or not gender equity was achieved in a community-based youth arts project, may look at levels of gender parity or increases in participation by young women in peacebuilding activities. Evaluations may also look at project staffing and whether or not the principle of gender equity was evident in the process of implementation.*

Note that at times, some principles may be at odds or in conflict. For example, valuing individuals and individual rights over communities and community rights can be problematic. In these situations, the evaluator may be making judgements based on disputed values, which is discussed further in section four (below).

There are two more perspectives on how to judge what constitutes good that are less common than the first two. Less common, however, does not mean that they do not have merit, particularly when thinking about peacebuilding. One is to think about the purpose of peacebuilding as defined by the pursuit of personal excellence. A second is to think about the purpose of peacebuilding as based on relationships–that is, thinking about a person being a person only through and with other people within a relational network, as occurs in Ubuntu or care ethics thinking.[12]

3.3 Virtues and Good Character

If we judge peacebuilding by its promotion of personal excellence, then we reframe our evaluation from focusing on activities that produced communal peace outcomes to looking at how peacebuilding initiatives supported character development and excellence within settings of conflict. This might be turned into outcomes and outputs, but if done mechanically it will defeat the central idea that excellence involves one's character. So, rather than

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[10] For example, Anderson, *Do No Harm: Supporting Capacities for Peace through Aid*. See also OECD, "Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results."

[11] There are some evaluation methods that were envisioned to draw more attention to means and process in evaluation, such as empowerment evaluation or transformative evaluation, which can be helpful. See for example Fetterman, Kaftwarian, and Wandersman, *Empowerment Evaluation*, or Mertens, *Transformative Research and Evaluation*.

[12] For an introduction to ethics of care see Held, "The Ethics of Care." For an overview of Ubuntu ethics see for example Munyaka and Motlhabi, "Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance."

emphasize the end or think about good virtues as a means to an end, **virtues thinking emphasizes a life well-lived and sees collective flourishing emerge as part-and-parcel of living lives well**.

Personal excellence is the focus of virtue ethics, and is present within a variety of religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism as well as in Aristotle's work. The particular virtues that are important in a given context and culture may vary. For instance, in the dialogue at the start of this paper, the program manger comments that the women and youth involved in the project possess particular character traits that she sees as excellent: the participants are passionate and dedicated. There are likely other virtues that are also important in this context that would be part of a life well-lived. If we were to think about placing an intentional focus on character development in our evaluations, we would look for virtues at the impacts level – which may seem counter-intuitive because we tend to think of personal change as a necessary step for other changes to occur, and therefore a lower-level output.[13]

EXAMPLE
Youth sports and peacebuilding projects often contain a strong focus on character development. This involves developing leadership skills, strength of character, respect, trust, empathy and so forth. This type of project model builds on the idea that character excellence is a necessary part of living well. Evaluations then correspondingly assess character virtues. Evaluations may also assess the character virtues of those implementing the projects and whether or not good character was modelled in implementation.

3.4 Relationality

Another way to think about judging good in peacebuilding involves seeing reconfigured relationships as moral goods themselves.[14] Conflict transformation approaches tend to assume this good. Relational ethics focuses on listening to voices of those with whom one's life is intertwined (near and far) and responding to those needs in ways that are received by the person being cared for (to avoid patronizing benevolence). This orientation is evident in Ubuntu ethics, which were part of the philosophy underpinning the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this type of assessment, our humanity is intertwined and so we become good only as we act with and respond to other's humanity.

If we judge peacebuilding by relationality, then we judge it by the ways in which people are cared for in and by the peacebuilding initiative – those working in the initiative, those receiving the initiative as well as those in the larger circles around the initiative. **Were their needs responded to? Were their voices heard?** Reframing our judgement of good to assess relationality requires the evaluation be conceptualized within a relational context as well. In other words, relationships are not assessed in terms of their social capital – which would make them means to an end – but rather as goods in and of themselves.

EXAMPLE
Restorative justice programs focus on building or restoring relationships between those considered victims and offenders. Youth victim-offender programs, for example, work in communities to restore relationships between youth who have committed crimes and those affected by the crimes. In these types of programs, restoration of relationships are highly valued goods and evaluation of these initiatives necessarily look to assess the nature and quality of the relationships built.

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[13] This is also an emphasis of the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, which prioritizes "greatest good" thinking in terms of systemic-level change, see Anderson and Olson, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners.*
[14] This approach is based on an ethic of care, and also figures prominently in Ubuntu ethics.

3.5 Skills to Work On: Identifying Moral Values in Evaluation

Expanding our thinking about what is good and right in peacebuilding helps us to recognize that when we go into evaluations we are necessarily making judgements about what is good among a range of different conceptions of the "good" and the "right"—which include many more than the four perspectives presented above. As evaluators are asked to make judgements of worth and merit, we can be more explicit and careful in identifying what is being valued, to enhance the likelihood that the evaluation itself is good and right.

Important skills for evaluators, then, include identifying moral values embedded in documents like the Terms of Reference (TOR) for an evaluation, and managing discussion of the values with stakeholders to ensure that people agree with the different moral values that are going to be used to judge the peacebuilding initiative. For example, if an evaluator identified the values in the conversation above, he or she would quickly see that there was a tension between what was valued as good by the administrator (impact, scaling-up) and what was valued as good by the program staffer (doing good work, supporting the community).   The community itself is not involved in this conversation, and likely would possess additional values. The evaluator doesn't need to pre-judge the values, but rather to help stakeholders identify and agree on what is most important, worthy and meritorious through dialogue, in order to conduct an evaluation that will be useful, good and contribute to learning (and perhaps even flourishing).

The following text-box contains questions to ask to help an evaluator think about moral values and what constitutes good and right in peacebuilding. These questions are mapped onto an evaluation cycle in Appendix 1, which includes the contracting and entry point of the evaluation, evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting stages.[15]

TEXTBOX 3.5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT WHAT CONSTITUTES GOOD AND RIGHT PEACEBUILDING

Here are some general questions to help evaluators think about the good and right in peacebuilding:

- How are people judging what is considered good and right in the TOR or in conversations? What is valued as morally good (e.g. ends, means, virtues, relationships)?

- Do all of the stakeholders agree with the values being used to judge the initiative?

- Are there tensions between values that different stakeholders possess? If so, what are they?

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4. The *Who*: Who Decides What is Good and Right?

In peacebuilding projects or programs that are funded by an external donor, there are typically three communities of stakeholders who are interested in the question of what constitutes good and right peacebuilding.[16] First, there is the community in conflict, in which the peacebuilding initiative occurs that is directly vested-in and affected-by the peacebuilding. Second, there is the implementing organization, which might be locally-based or internationally-based. And third, there is the funding organization or the funding community. An evaluator is typically connected directly to the second and/or third communities by virtue of their contract agreement, and only indirectly to the first community (unless it is the community itself that is commissioning the evaluation).

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[15] Thanks to Colleen Duggan for this suggestion. I extend Duggan and Bush's ethical questions in the Appendix illustrations for different considerations of the good and right in peacebuilding evaluation. For more detailed exploration, particularly around the how questions, see Bush and Duggan "Evaluation in Conflict Zones: Methodological and Ethical Challenges," 5-25; Bush and Duggan, "Addressing Ethical and Political Challenges in Evaluation"; and, Duggan and Bush, "The Ethical Tipping Points of Evaluators in Conflict Zones," 485-506.

[16] Fast, Neufeldt, and Schirch, "Toward Ethically Grounded Conflict Interventions: Reevaluating Challenges in the 21st Century," 185-207.

So, what role should each of these groups have in determining the good and the right? Is it fair and right for an outside funder to have the final say in what is "good peacebuilding?" Is it fair and right for the affected community to have the final say in what is "good peacebuilding?" Likewise, is it fair and right if it's the implementing organization? These are important ethical questions that evaluators may feel are outside of their control, especially if coming-in on a contract that seems to have limited flexibility. This dynamic of power amongst stakeholders in determining what is valued, however, can reinforce power differentials between funders and receivers, and is important to consider and address if we really do want to be ethical in our evaluation practice.

The American Evaluation Association speaks to the broad domain of values and the responsibility of evaluators to consider multiple stakeholder groups, including society as a whole, in their Guiding Principles for Evaluators under the topic heading of "responsibilities for general and public welfare."[17] The African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) similarly emphasizes the importance of recognizing and involving vulnerable groups as well as community participants in evaluation.[18] These are important considerations, particularly to address the moral critique that peacebuilding is a newer form of colonial domination.

How might evaluators address concerns around power differentials ethically within their own domain? One concrete way to do this is to set-up a reference group for the evaluation that includes all of the key stakeholders. For example, Michael Quinn Patton advocates a reference group model in *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* in order to ensure that the evaluator is not "some stakeholder's political puppet".[19] Patton's "Evaluation Task Forces" involve major stakeholders in helping to make decisions about the purpose and focus of an evaluation as well as the methods used. He notes that if structured well, such a group can help to increase transparency, involve diverse perspectives and values and increase openness to the evaluation process, among other things.[20] There are other forms of consultation that can also be utilized (using skills that are similar to those involved in mediation). One final note, reference groups or task forces need to be well-facilitated, to balance inputs, and involve stakeholders if they are to work well.

Another option for evaluators at the contracting stage is to find out if the key stakeholders are open to having their program theory of change and the values underlying it re-assessed. In this process, asking questions like "what does success mean" or "how do you know things are improving" can identify values that people hold in peacebuilding, and help identify ways to evaluate them. For example, are stakeholders willing to consider that good outcomes might mean moral character development rather than developing social capital. Reassessing values may also help implementers identify whether or not a theory of change that is in operation is itself accidently marginalizing people or groups, and can help make sure the evaluation process itself doesn't compound problems (e.g. by using communities or community members as an end to stability).

As evaluators think about how to structure evaluations ethically, the question of who decides key value-related questions are critical.

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[17] "AEA Guiding Principles Training Package," American Evaluation Association, accessed August 1, 2016, http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=105.
[18] African Evaluation Association, "African Evaluation Guidelines - Standards and Norms."
[19] Quinn Patton, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, 529.
[20] *Ibid.*, 537-9.

TEXTBOX 4.1. QUESTION TO ASK ABOUT WHO MAKES DECISIONS[21]

Here are some general questions to ask to help evaluators think about ethics related to the "who":

- Who are the major stakeholders? How are they involved in decision-making?

- Are the major stakeholders open to having their theory of change reassessed by a broad group of stakeholders?

- How can we structure a process that can identify and address significant moral value differences? Address power imbalances? Manage competing claims and interests?

- If we set up a reference group, who should be on it? What role will reference group members have? How will power differentials be managed in the reference group? Should some people be left off of the reference group because they hold inordinate power?

5. The *How*: How Do We Ensure Peacebuilding Evaluations Are Done Ethically?

A big concern for evaluators is ensuring the process by which we do evaluations is ethical. Being ethical in our conduct is a major focus of ethics guidance for peacebuilding evaluators. This section will be therefore shorter as there are ample materials available to explore these points in greater detail (see suggested resources at the end). However, concerns related to ensuring we are doing evaluations ethically are typically raised at three levels: 1) how are findings generated? 2) how does an evaluator conduct him or herself? and, 3) how sensitive is the evaluation process itself is to the conflict environment?

5.1 How Findings Are Generated

Gathering data and analyzing the findings is the central task for evaluations. In order for the evaluation to have integrity, the process by which findings are generated needs to have integrity. We can think about this in terms of the methods that are chosen to gather data and ask questions like: are the methods appropriate for the task at hand and is the evaluator capable of implementing the appropriate methods? Are there values implicit in the data-gathering methodology that conflict with values held by the stakeholders?

We can also think about the question of how we collect data in terms of diligence and trustworthiness, asking whether evaluators are thorough in their work (collecting and analyzing data), responsible and up-front with the evaluation's strengths and limits. Here questions to ask are: is the data trustworthy (collected and analyzed in ways that consider rigor and thoroughness that are appropriate to the methodology)? Am I making claims based on sufficient data? What are the limits of my data and inferences?

Finally, we need to think about how people and relationships are respected as part of the data-gathering process. Here we can ask questions like: does the evaluation process respect people? Does it respect relationships? Am I making sure I protect people (interviewees, assistants, stakeholders) in the process (e.g. do people feel safe? Is there any potential coercion occurring? Is confidentiality maintained?)? Am I taking steps to ensure no harms occur? Am I sharing my findings back with the communities and stakeholders involved in the project?

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[21] To see ways in which questions about "the who" can map onto the evaluation cycle see Appendix 1 (Box 2).

TEXT BOX 5.1. QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HOW AN EVALUATION IS CONDUCTED[22]

General questions to consider to ensure an evaluation is done ethically:

- Are there values implicit in the data-gathering methodology that conflict with values held by the stakeholders? Are there other methods that might be more appropriate?

- Is the data trustworthy? Are the limits of the data and inferences stated?

- Does the evaluation and post-evaluation reporting process respect people, relationships and the cultural context?

- Are people (interviewees, assistants, stakeholders) protected against coercion? Is confidentiality ensured?

- Am I embodying important personal and professional character virtues (e.g. honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, competence)? Who else can help me determine whether or not I am embodying these virtues?

- How might the evaluation contribute to harm in this context (e.g. worsened ethnic, political, socio-economic divisions)? Have I limited the possible harms?

- How can I do the evaluation in a way that contributes to good?

5.2 How an Evaluator Conducts Her- or Himself?

Ethics guidance for evaluators uniformly speaks to the importance of an evaluator's integrity, which involve both character excellence and a set of behaviors that result from having integrity or propriety. Behaviors typically include being honest, transparent, trustworthy, competent (with respect to communication skills and evaluation methodology), culturally sensitive, and declaring any personal conflicts of interest. [23] As an evaluator, the big questions to ask involve thinking through one's own conduct – individually or with mentors and advisors. Am I acting with integrity? Am I contributing to the overall social environment and public welfare (or at least not compromising it)?

5.3 How Sensitive the Evaluation Process is to the Conflict Environment

The third level of consideration for ensuring peacebuilding evaluations are ethical focuses on the context. Conflict contexts are volatile, peacebuilding addresses delicate issues and people are very vulnerable (physically and psychologically). This means it is very easy to contribute to harm in and through the evaluation process. To do good evaluation, therefore, requires considering the ways in which the evaluation process will do no harm by being conflict-sensitive. [24] This means being aware of ways in which the evaluation may feed into tensions or divisions within the conflict context and mitigating them. Conflict sensitive framing tends to focus on reducing negative consequences, however moral thinking pushes us to also consider the positive and also ask how the evaluation

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[22] See Appendix 1 (Box 3) for how all three of these sets of questions can be mapped onto the evaluation cycle.

[23] This list was generated from "Ethics," Canadian Evaluation Association, accessed August 1, 2016, http://www.evaluationcanada.ca/ethics; "American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators," accessed August 1, 2016, http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51; African Evaluation Association, *African Evaluation Guidelines - Standards and Norms*; Widmer, Landert, and Brachman "Evaluation Standards: of SEVAL, the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL STANDARDS)"; Société Française de l'Évaluation, "Charte de l'evaluation: des politiques publiques et des programmes publics"; and, Australasian Evaluation Society, "Code of Ethics."

[24] See, for example, OECD/DAC's guidance for how to be conflict sensitive in the evaluation process in OECD, "Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results". See also Jayawickrama, "'If They Can't Do Any Good, They Shouldn't Come:' Northern Evaluators in Southern Realities," 26-41. Other authors, such as Esser and Vanderkamp in "Comparable and Yet Context-Sensitive? Improving Evaluation in Violently Divided Societies Through Methodology," 42-56; and Kennedy-Chouane in "Developing OECD DAC Guidance on Evaluating in Settings of Violent Conflict and Fragility," 110-115 address related topics.

process might contribute to good, such as designing an evaluation itself in a way that contributes to constructive relationship building between groups that mistrust each other in a conflict setting.

6. Conclusion: Creating Space for Moral Values

To conclude, we'll go back to the beginning and our conversation between the program staff member and administrator and add an ethical evaluator:

> *"The data will tell us what to do," the administrator says confidently.*
>
> *"Not so fast" the evaluator interjects, "What you choose to do has to do with what you value, what you judge as mattering, and then how you interpret the data in making your choice. Let's have a conversation about what matters – to you, and to the other stakeholders."*

An ethical peacebuilding evaluator, just like an ethical evaluator more generally, develops reflexive skills in identifying and listening to the value judgements and claims that stakeholders are making. We recognize at the outset that evaluation involves making value judgements about things that matter to people. And there are layers of judgments that occur in peacebuilding evaluations, which require careful and open thinking, particularly as they often occur in fragile or divided settings.

As a skilled and ethical evaluator, being able to ask important questions and create the space to talk about what is valued as good and right in peacebuilding is critically important. This isn't a one-time event, but rather a perspective or set of muscles that are developed with use over time. The questions explored above about moral value perspectives, who decides what matters in an evaluation, and how to implement peacebuilding evaluations are intended to be a helpful starting place. It is, however, only a beginning.

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8. Appendix: Ethics Questions during an Evaluation Cycle

8.1. Questions on the What (What's Good and Right)

Entry/Contracting
- Are commissioners open to discussing what is considered good and right in the evaluation? (Is it an ends-only focus? Are considerations of means included? Virtues? Relationships?)
- Is "good" predetermined by those commissioning the evaluation?
- Do all stakeholders agree on the values being used to judge?
- Are there differences between what the commissioning organization values and what vulnerable populations in the initiative value? If so, what are they?

Utililization of Results

Evaluation Design
- Does the evaluation design reflect the range of values that will be used to judge good and right?
- Will there be methods limitations?
- Are the effects of culture and context taken into consideration vis-à-vis the good and right in the design?

- Do you anticipate any misuse of findings if there are diverse values included in the evaluation? How can you address this?

Communication of Results

Data Collection
- Are the data collection methodologies capturing the depth and range of considerations of good and right in the project by its diverse stakeholders (e.g. are you measuring relationships using an ends-based survey?)
- Are the effects of culture and context taken into consideration vis-à-vis the good and right?

- Do your evaluation products (written and verbal) reflect the range of considerations of good and right based on the values of its stakeholders?
- Are moral values explicitly discussed?

Data Analysis & Interpretation
- Does analysis and interpretation take into consideration the range of values held about good and right by diverse stakeholders? (E.g. are you defaulting to ends-only thinking?)

8.2 Questions Regarding the Who (Who Decides)

- Who are the major stakeholders? How are they involved in decision-making? (e.g. outsiders or insiders?)
- Are the major stakeholders open to having their theory of change reassessed by a broad group of stakeholders? (E.g. asking "what would success look like to you?")

Entry/ Contracting

- Do you anticipate any misuse of findings by major stakeholders? How can you address this?
- Can you do more to ensure evaluation findings are used?

Utilization of Results

- Is the evaluation structured to identify and address significant power imbalances and moral value differences between stakeholders?
- Are you using a reference group? Does it include diverse voices? How will you manage power differentials?

Evaluation Design

- In your communications, do you reflect considerations of a broad group of stakeholders?
- Are vulnerable groups and community groups included in the communication?
- Are results shared (including made public as appropriate)?

Communication of Results

- Are some voices more or less represented in your data collection? Is this fair and appropriate?

Data Collection

Data Analysis & Interpretation

- Does the analysis and interpretation take into consideration the range of stakeholders views appropriately?
- Is there undue influence of some views (e.g. the commissioners or your own) on the analysis?

8.3 Questions of How to Conduct an Evaluation Ethically

- Are you acting with integrity (honest, transparent, trustworthy, competent)? Do you have any conflicts of interest?
- Can the evaluation be done ethically? Will this evaluation contribute to the common good (does it need to)?
- Will the commissioner discuss ethical dilemmas?
- Are you prepared to decline?
- Have you considered "the Who" and "the What" questions?

Entry/ Contracting

Utilization of Results
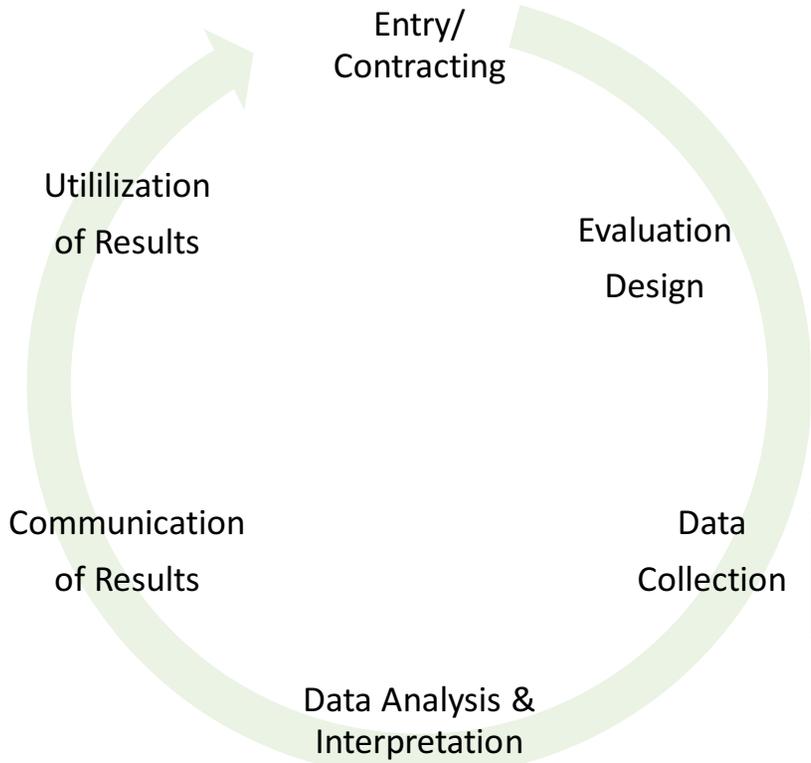
- Do you anticipate any misuse of findings? How can you address this?
- Can you do more to ensure evaluation findings are used?

Evaluation Design

- Are you competent in the evaluation methods proposed?
- Are the data collection methodologies in conflict with other values held by stakeholders?
- Is the design conflict sensitive? (Are you reinforcing any stereotypes? Are you avoiding issues?)
- Have you considered culture and context?
- What are the limits of your design?

Communication of Results

- Is the communication strategy conflict sensitive?
- Are vulnerable groups and community groups included in the communication?
- Are results shared?
- In your communication, do you act with integrity (e.g. honest, transparent, include limitations)
- Is confidentiality maintained?

Data Collection

- Is the data collected in a trustworthy way?
- Does the process of data collection respect people and relationships? Are people protected from coercion? Is confidentiality ensured? Are all groups represented?
- Are you embodying personal and professional character virtues? (e.g. trustworthy, having integrity)
- Is the data collection process conflict sensitive?
- Is the data protected and handled carefully?

Data Analysis & Interpretation

- Are the claims being made based upon sufficient data?
- What are the limits of the data and inferences?
- Does your analysis consider multiple viewpoints? Is it careful? Are you transparent in your process?
- Is confidentiality maintained?