

# **ACTION EVALUATION:**

## **Integrating Evaluation Into The Intervention Process**

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### Abstract

To date, there is really no standard for what constitutes success in various forms or levels of conflict resolution, though seeking a single standard is, in the end, not a realistic goal. There is a need for developing a comprehensive approach to articulating contextually relevant standards for success and, with them, to promote greater internal coherence and consistency across the way projects are proposed, funded, implemented and evaluated. The Action-Evaluation Research Initiative has been dedicated to the purpose of research, development and application of a methodology for defining, promoting and evaluating the success of conflict resolution initiatives. Our agenda has led us to formulate an approach that strives to: (1) be scientifically rigorous and systematic, (2) be practically integrated into the process of conflict resolution through a conceptual and applied focus on goal-setting and seeking, (3) facilitate a process of defining and promoting success both within specific projects and across the field, and (4) be relatively user friendly for interveners and participants. This paper will explore ways in which we have accomplished these goals, as well as what remains to be done.

### Introduction

As the field of conflict resolution matures, accountability becomes increasingly important. Does conflict resolution make a difference and how can we know whether it does? The funding community and general public are asking for rich definitions of success and for valid and rigorous assessment of it. At the same time, conflict resolution practitioners are trying to figure out how to inform the public, the funding community and policy makers about the nature and long-term impact of their demanding work. Researchers too are asking questions about assessment. How can it be more dynamic and integrated into practice? How can rigorous research avoid compromising conflict resolution (by violating issues of confidentiality or by imposing control on real-life and often volatile situations that rarely lend themselves to experimental conditions) and positively contribute to its purpose?

For the past four years, dozens of students, researchers and practitioners worldwide have been collaborating in a research project, the [Action Evaluation Research Initiative](#) funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, to address these

complex and interrelated questions. Our work has resulted in a methodology called "Action Evaluation" which employs evaluation as a bridge between conflict resolution research and practice in ways that promote greater quality in each (see [Rothman, 1997b](#) and [1997c](#)). The initiative's work has focused on the development and application of a rigorous evaluation methodology that both serves the needs of specific ongoing conflict resolution projects and also promotes the field in general. Action Evaluation has now been field-tested in eighteen projects across seven countries.

Action Evaluation was born out of a combination of conflict resolution, organizational development and Action Research (see [Dick](#) in this conference), Action Science (see Argyris et. al. 1985), Action Learning, (see Morgan and Ramirez, 1984), and Action Inquiry (see Torbet, 1976). It is rooted in core principles and values of the conflict resolution field itself, such as participation and empowerment (see Bush and Folger, 1995 and [Rothman, 1997a](#)) and focuses on the complex nature of success.

At the start of the project, conveners of dozens of conflict resolution projects worldwide were interviewed about their goals and how they define and assess success (see Ross and Rothman, forthcoming). As the pure research turned into applied research, the methodology of Action Evaluation evolved into a process of guided goal setting and monitoring. It emerged to help participants in conflict resolution, and in other complex social interventions like community and organizational development projects as well, to define success in ways that would be self-fulfilling: the more various players in such efforts share definitions and strategies for success, the more likely they can work together effectively to accomplish it. Action Evaluation is designed to develop rich, nuanced and context-specific definitions of success to allow discreet projects to determine their own internal standards in ways that would also be generalized to other conflicts and interventions. This, in turn, is intended to contribute to making the field more effective, accountable and more highly valued by the lay public, funding, policymaking and research communities.

### Evaluating Conflict Resolution: What's Been Missing?

Many assessments of the contribution of conflict resolution efforts to the peaceful resolution of conflicts are based primarily on simple pre- and post-intervention questionnaire data and anecdotal evidence; more fulsome data showing the efficacy of such efforts is lacking. Given the relatively recent growth of the field of conflict resolution, there has been increasing interest in developing standards for this field and rigorous means of assessment. However, evaluating what makes a conflict resolution initiative well-conceived and ultimately successful is a rather daunting task since conventional means of program evaluation are either impossible, unethical (if controlled data generation in cases of actual conflict resolution efforts compromise the efficacy of the effort or safety of participants), or inadequate. In addition, although "failure" might be measured on the basis of an outbreak of violent conflict, the absence of conflict is not easily measured as success. Given such obstacles to systematic evaluation of conflict resolution, many early conflict resolution innovators previously declared it futile, or at least not a good use of scarce time and energy for the emerging field. They may well have been correct then. Now, however as the field has matured, such an attitude hinders conflict resolution research and practice and creates some understandable confusion among policy makers and the funding community about what conflict resolution is and claims to be.

To date, there is really no standard for what constitutes success in various forms or levels of conflict resolution, though seeking a single standard is, in the end, not a realistic goal. The field of conflict resolution needs a variety of standards for, and definitions of, success that can be applied on a contingency basis across different conflict contexts. Conflict resolution has grown both rapidly and relatively haphazardly; it is now time to forge greater internal coherence, based on the development of some agreed upon standards of what conflict resolution can and should do in given conflict settings at certain times. There is a need, and opportunity, for developing a

comprehensive approach to articulating such standards for success and, with them, to promote internal coherence and consistency across the way projects are proposed, funded, implemented and evaluated.

Evaluation, which must be based upon certain standards about what constitutes quality or "success," can contribute to the very evolution of those standards and, in that way, help promote effective conflict resolution practice. Our research and development agenda has led us to formulate an approach that strives to:

- (1) be scientifically **rigorous and systematic**,
- (2) be **practically integrated** into the process of conflict resolution through a conceptual and applied focus on goal-setting and seeking,
- (3) facilitate a process of **defining and promoting success** both within specific projects and across the field, and
- (4) be relatively **user friendly** for interveners and participants.

The remainder of this paper will explore ways in which we have accomplished these goals, as well as what remains to be done.

### I. Rigorous and Systematic

The Action-Evaluation Research Initiative has been dedicated to the purpose of research, development and application of a systematized process for defining, promoting and evaluating the success of conflict resolution initiatives. Through a combination of basic and applied research, dozens of researchers and practitioners have collaborated to develop a methodology through which key players, particularly conveners and participants in conflict resolution initiatives (and also in community and organizational developments efforts as well), articulate their shared, unique and contrasting goals, why they hold those goals and how they hope to achieve them. Action Evaluation is designed to enable project or program stakeholders to interactively define and commit to shared visions and plans, as well as to work through differences in constructive ways. It seeks to establish criteria for success that are internally relevant to the specific effort and context and are neither artificial nor imposed from the outside. Thus, a great deal of commitment may be fostered for ongoing self-monitoring as well as a willingness, and perhaps even an eagerness, for external assessment of the criteria of success that a project has established as it has defined its mission, determined its activities and generally organized itself.

Most existing research methodologies are inadequate for the three-fold task of conflict resolution design, intervention, and evaluation. Action Science, which has strongly influenced Action Evaluation, is an exception. Action Science, built upon traditions of Action Research first set forth by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s (1947; see also [Dick](#) in the conference), is based on the philosophy that good theory may derive from sound practice and sound practice may promote good theory. Chris Argyris and his colleagues coined the term "Action Science" (1985) to reflect their effort to dovetail the best from both action-research and normal science methods. They believe that social science, while being "scientific" in terms of rigor and systematization, must also be engaged in the project of transforming the human condition. Thus, they reject the positivist dualism of pure and applied science that is the legacy of traditional empirical methods. Action Science is a merging of theory and practice and provides the foundation stones for Action Evaluation.

Combining empirical and action-research methods, the Action Science approach adheres to the discipline, rigor, and public responsibility of research, while simultaneously pursuing a normative involvement in social change. Action Science, like conflict resolution, is designed to generate intersubjective agreement about various interpretations of reality (whereby surfacing my belief plus your belief enables us to articulate our belief) and then design an

intervention for constructively changing current reality to become more of what communities of scholars and practitioners believe it ought to be (e.g. more just, less violent, more democratic, and so forth). The notion of intersubjectivity (or the merging of separate perspectives of reality into shared visions) is core to the principles and practices of Action Evaluation.

Through its focus on the repeated articulation, enactment and monitoring of goals, Action Evaluation is both systematic and actionable. Moreover, the action is observed in a way that enhances the development and testing of action propositions (if we seek X goal through Y means, we hope to produce Z outcomes). This practice, in turn, then may lead cybernetically to new and richer propositions when, for example, the action fails to lead to expected results, or the expected results occur but prove insufficient or unsatisfactory in meeting articulated goals.

## II. Integrated into Practice

Many conflict resolution practitioners have embraced research in the service of action, at least in principle; these practitioners, however, frequently have something of an uneasy relationship with traditional forms of "academic" (or what they see as "detached") research. In fact, many conflict resolution practitioners view research as detached to the point of irrelevance or, even worse, harm. On the other hand, practitioners are realizing that merely providing ex-post facto, or anecdotal evidence of their "success," which early conflict resolution artists could legitimately employ during the heady founding days of the field, is no longer adequate as the discipline moves into the realm of science. External scrutiny and quality control are now necessary facts of a self-proclaimed "field." Thus, while the need and desire for conflict resolution evaluation are clear, meaningful and appropriate ways to carry it out generally have been lacking.

Nearly all forms of evaluation research converge on the use of goals or standards against which success can be measured. While the use of goals can motivate adaptive and effective practice, goals have often been used in evaluation research in ways that are pre-determined and limiting. For example, the one size fits all approach in the form of intelligence tests in education is still with us, though increasingly this form of determining academic potential is losing prominence and giving way to more complex and nuanced measures. Built upon this approach, testing-by-objectives (predating by decades the famous management-by-objectives in business) evolved because it provided teachers with criterion with which to rank and track students. Pioneers of educational evaluation research at the turn of the century measured the attainment of specific goals or objectives (e.g. literacy) based on predetermined standards (i.e., fourth grade level). As we seek ways that evaluation can make room for more nuance, sophistication and sensitivity to context in conflict resolution, goals must be articulated not a-priori or by experts at a distance, but rather interactively by those engaged in a conflict resolution process itself (including those who sponsor it, facilitate it, and participate in it).

While the use of goals is still key to any evaluation methodology, how these goals are developed and what makes them valid is the place where action evaluation parts company with more traditional forms of assessment. Instead of seeking to develop "*objective*" objectives, communities of scholars and practitioners are convened (in person, on the web, through questionnaires and feedback, etc.) to initiate a search for and articulate *intersubjective agreement* about objectives. In this way conflict resolution principles and practices are employed (e.g. articulating needs, interests and motivations, surfacing differences and seeking common ground) in the development of evaluation criteria, and conflict resolution is enacted as evaluation is integrated into it. Action Evaluation is, most essentially, a systematic process by which goals are interactively and integratively determined and articulated from within the context of that to be evaluated.

More attention to objectives and the articulation of operational indicators of their achievement will mean more realistic and careful planning of conflict resolution projects and more self-conscious linkage between goals and activities (Ross & Rothman, forthcoming). The often-implicit link between project activities and goals, when made explicit, may become useful for both formative evaluation (tracking and monitoring goals and assumptions and revising them as necessary) and summative evaluation (the accomplishment of the goals). Through greater self-consciousness about objectives, project initiators may think more effectively about what success involves and will better evaluate and make adjustments to their programs. The evaluation process itself can, in this way, become an internal part of any project, not something imposed from the outside and conducted for the sake of credibility. Thus, this process can help contribute to articulating, tracking, and hopefully accomplishing a project's goals.

In addition to articulating criteria for success, systematic goal articulation at the start of interventions also provides a baseline for monitoring how projects grow and evolve. This kind of monitoring is generally lacking in the field. Unfortunately, too many projects assess themselves and are assessed externally based on what they proposed to accomplish at the start of their effort. Yet, it is crucial to recognize that most projects will significantly grow and evolve and their goals will become more realistic, specific and concrete as they move ahead from proposal to implementation.

Self-conscious monitoring of changes in project goals and using newly evolved goals to redefine success is essential for good program development and can provide the basis for useful assessment as well as effective practice. As projects develop, they should indeed regularly assess themselves based on original goals. More importantly though, from the perspective of action evaluation, assessment is viewed as a powerful vehicle for self-consciously guiding a program, rather than for "judging" its early accomplishments. Monitoring changes from a project's inception helps develop specific, realistic and meaningful criteria for success and assessment.

### III. Defining and Promoting Success Within and Across Projects

Defining "success" in conflict resolution (and in all kinds of development work) often seems, not surprisingly, to depend upon whom you ask. In one of the Action Evaluation projects described in this conference (see the conference paper by [Ghais and Valova](#)), a somewhat intuitive though nonetheless important conclusion was systematically made: the closer stakeholders are to the site of the actual intervention, the more specific and functional are their goals; those farther, geographically and/or, in a more applied sense, from the intervention itself, hold more global goals. Thus, in this intervention project in Bulgaria, the "sponsors," who were based in the U.S., sought such goals as democracy building, establishing new models of ethnic cooperation and so forth. The participants, on the other hand, sought more concrete goals like reducing poverty, ensuring quality education for youth and reducing violence between ethnic groups.

Whether this result is widely generalizable or not is another question for comparative researcher and analysis (and is the focus of the conference paper by [Loramy Conradi](#)). Nevertheless, the results from the Bulgarian project very nicely frame the issue of success and different definitions of it (e.g. that it depends at least in part upon where one, literally, stands). Moreover, these results also frame a primary concern that Action Evaluation seeks to address: getting different people in a single effort on the same page. As Ghais points out, the fact that the different stakeholders in her project had significantly different goals did not, in and of itself, pose a problem. In fact, as these different goals were adequately surfaced, articulated and negotiated, they became a strength of the project.

Definitions of success by the various stakeholders in conflict resolution and development work are often quite different from one another. That often means that, right from the start, those engaged in the conflict resolution process or development work also encounter conflict among themselves. This need not be an obstacle to

accomplishing success but it certainly emphasizes the point that success itself is a major issue that must be addressed as the stage is set for a conflict resolution intervention--not after it is already under way. As Bob Dick suggests in his paper in this conference, the dialectic of difference, such as different goals of different groups in a project, is an opportunity for growth and creativity, but only if it is well-mined and guided (see also, Rothman, [1997a](#)).

Ultimately what is needed is a contingency approach to goals (or criteria for success) articulated by the various stakeholders who initiate, observe, sponsor, and participate in specific conflict resolution and development initiatives. Such a goal-setting process could lead to the articulation of a contingency model in which it would be possible to articulate that in X type of conflicts or projects, Y goals would be most appropriate; in A-type conflicts or projects, B goals would be more appropriate (Fisher & Keasley, 1991). Having articulated goals in this way, the various stakeholders could constantly re-evaluate their project to ensure that the goals actually reflect appropriate objectives for the initiative. Thus, goals would be responsively reset throughout the life of an initiative.

Goals established at the outset of a program or project rarely remains stable. Rather, goals set at the start of a project naturally evolve, and a means to monitor and guide that evolution is necessary both to enhance a project's quality and to develop standards for assessment that evolve alongside of a project's development. While projects are launched with propositions and hypotheses about useful goals and outcomes, only by "entering the field" can the most appropriate goals be determined and applied.

Finally, goals are too often pre-determined, either by being set at the launch, or from standards imposed from outside the specific context of the project itself. The appropriateness of goals, and possible consensus or dissension about them, is too rarely determined or surfaced by the various stakeholders themselves. Action evaluation is concerned with what one prominent conflict resolution theorist-practitioner describes as "contextualized-evaluation," whereby participants "evaluate their own action and behavior according to the standards and values of that setting, rather than judging their approaches according to outside criteria" (Lederach, 1995, p. 60), and what Fetterman in his paper for this conference and elsewhere describes as "empowerment evaluation."

In sum, through greater self-consciousness about goals and objectives, project initiators, participants, sponsors and others may think more effectively and interactively about what success involves. They will be better able to evaluate and make on-going adjustments to their programs. The evaluation process itself can, in this way, become an internal part of any project, not something imposed from the outside and conducted for the sake of external credibility and can thus help contribute to articulating, tracking, and promoting a project's goals. Developing an Action Evaluation process in which interveners, reflexively with other stakeholders in an intervention, continually monitor and self-consciously evolve their goals can help ensure a flexible and contextually relevant intervention design. Moreover, once projects are systematic and nuanced about their own definitions of success, wider standards can be developed by comparative analysis across multiple projects.

Beyond its focus on specific projects, as previously mentioned, Action Evaluation is designed to generalize goals of individual projects to other cases and contexts. In addition to leading to standards which may be employed by specific initiatives for ongoing reflection, self-monitoring, correction, and evaluation purposes, this methodology also seeks to begin addressing the lack of general standards in the field of conflict resolution. By comparing and contrasting goals in a number of initiatives that are concerned with similar types of conflicts (i.e. ethnic or identity-driven) and employ generally similar procedures (i.e. education and training of leaders representing disputing sides), one could expect to see patterns about what should be done, why, and how.

These patterns can begin to lead to the establishment of provisional standards for the field.

#### IV. User-Friendly

Action-Evaluation is designed to be widely used by professionals, laypersons, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, foundation officers and others. We have used it in complex international ethnic conflict resolution initiatives and in a US domestic race relations project. It has been used in higher education (see Stobbe's paper for this conference) and in high school peer mediation (see Wooddell's paper for this conference) and community conflict resolution programs. We have also used it in a large government agency as a vehicle for problem framing and dispute system design (while most of our project have focused on goals; focusing on problems is really just the other side of the same coin). It has been adapted for use in broader community and organizational development efforts as well. In order to facilitate this very wide range of applications, we have sought to make Action Evaluation as adaptable and accessible as possible. Moreover, we have also made the computer technology relatively accessible to people with a wide range of professional and academic training and interests, technological proficiency and prior research experience. It is designed so that, with the assistance of a specially trained "action evaluator" (who participates in a training program and receives ongoing guidance from The ARIA Group) various stakeholders in projects or programs will become their own researchers, reflexively studying their own goals and activities as they articulate and enact them.

To date, our twenty or so Action Evaluators have been researcher-consultants who are either already insiders to a specific initiative (in one case the institution's President chose to serve as her project's action evaluator), or outsiders, typically graduate students, who can gain trust and legitimacy with project participants while still retaining some analytic detachment (see Bing and Cobb's paper in this conference for a description of optimum characteristics and criteria for being an effective action evaluator, as well as for a description about obstacles they encountered in trying to carry out their roles). The job of the action evaluator is essentially to be a project consultant in promoting reflexive practice and ongoing engagement by all project stakeholders in the process of "interactive introspection" about their goals as the project unfolds (see Rothman, 1997a).

Action Evaluation begins with a systematic and broad-based collection of the goals of the relevant stakeholders (participants, conveners, interveners, funders, etc.) involved in a conflict resolution initiative. The Action Evaluation process is launched by asking three questions (what, why and how):

- 1       **WHAT?** What internal and external goals do various stakeholders have for this initiative? Another way to think about this question is to pose visions of success against current reality. Various stakeholders (e.g. project funders, conveners and participants) may be asked to consider what they hope will change for participants and in the larger social setting due to this intervention and their involvement with it.
- 2       **WHY?** Why do the various stakeholders care about their goals so much? What motivations are driving their outcome goals? More conceptually, and directed toward the conveners more than participants or funders, what are the theories of practice and domain assumptions which guide their practice?
- 3       **HOW?** How will stated goals be most effectively met? What intervention processes should be used? Based on the goals and motivations articulated, stakeholders are asked to suggest what kinds of intervention strategies might best contribute to moving from the present unwanted reality to the vision of success they have just articulated.

This data is gathered in one of three ways, or a combination of them: via online questionnaires (respondents go to The ARIA Group website at [www.ariagroup.org](http://www.ariagroup.org)--where they will locate a questionnaire designed for their project), through interviews (which can also be used to supplement data gathered online), or through paper and

pencil surveys. (See ADR online article for further details about the computer technology and database system that supports the research process.)

The preferred method to date is through the on-line computer process since it makes the questionnaire easily accessible from anywhere in the world where the Internet is available. Moreover, thanks to computer technology, the on-line questionnaire is both user-friendly and self-referential. In addition to narrowing geographic gaps and aiding in data gathering and analysis, the computer-assisted goal setting process is designed to assist respondents in the analysis of their own goals. After the respondents provide up to three specific answers to the question of "what" are their goals, their why and how answers are then in turn each dynamically and self-referentially linked with their own previous responses thanks to the web technology. {For a process description of the action evaluator's steps, see endnote.}

In many ways the Action Evaluation process and the computer technology developed to assist it, is simply a more efficient, economical and democratic way of doing what we normally do in the field of conflict resolution. We bring together people, sometimes individually and sometimes in groups, to determine what they are trying to do (solve problems, improve social conditions, enhance intergroup relations, reduce violence, etc.). We ask them to articulate their goals (and/or problems) and discuss why these goals or problems matter and how they will be accomplished or addressed. As a result of this process, the walls are often filled with responses recorded on flipcharts. Or, we interview the participants and transcribe hours of tapes. Sometimes we only get small segments of key stakeholders who are able to participate in those meetings or who are willing or able to be interviewed. Getting wider participation in goal setting through the Internet not only helps us prepare more fully, but the process is also democratizing because more folks are able to participate (we have had datasets that are as small as a dozen and as large as a few hundred). In short, this is a process that can be used to enhance wide participation and elicitive program design, while various stakeholders are establishing their own visions of and standards for success.

The data analysis is still labor-intensive. The Action Evaluators will collect the data, enter it into the project website (if it is not entered directly into the system by respondents themselves) and analyze it, with the input and guidance of the project director as needed. This analysis is designed to look for shared, unique and, sometimes most interestingly, contrasting goals. This analysis is then fed back to the stakeholders. This kind of process is familiar to conflict resolution practitioners. The innovation here is not so much in the process itself but the way in which it has been systematized, contributing to the efficient and effective use of time and other resources.

The action evaluator then works directly with the players to establish a *baseline assessment* for the project, based on the articulation of shared goals among the stakeholding groups. Following the baseline assessment, project leaders can use this data to design an agenda and action plan that is maximally participatory and has been widely elicited from all key stakeholders. As a project is implemented and gains relative stability, the evolution of its goals can be carefully tracked and monitored, and a new round of what, why and how questions are asked. This *formative assessment* helps determine (and assist) how goals evolve (and we find that they often become more specific and realistic than initial, somewhat abstract goals). Through this entire process, standards for success can be articulated to promote self-evaluation as a project unfolds and to allow easier external assessment as well. Finally at the conclusion of a project, a *summative assessment* about the goals as they have been articulated and monitored is taken to evaluate their accomplishment.

In essence, Action Evaluation is a process of goal articulation and data gathering that is designed to systematize what is normally, though often haphazardly, done in design and implementation of most conflict resolution (and in many community and organizational development) interventions. This systematization of intervention process and content is intended to promote reflexive evaluation among all stakeholders as they move forward in their intervention. Given that a great deal of conflict resolution is about raising awareness and enhancing interactive

analysis--specifically about disputants' notions of and approaches to conflict--this process is very consistent with conflict resolution itself. In fact, in some ways Action Evaluation may be viewed as both an adjunct to, as well as a form of, conflict resolution practice.

As the Action Evaluation Research Initiative wraps up (and as we await word on further funding to continue our research and development work), we are proud of our accomplishments, aware of our shortcomings, and looking forward to fuller and richer application of our methodology. While it has undergone intensive research and development over the years and has been generously assisted by gifts of time and money by a number of institutions and individuals, Action Evaluation is by no means a completed methodology. For example, Action Evaluation is designed to culminate in a summative process. However, due to many circumstances, most notably the time and energy poured into development of the methodology, we have only had two of our twenty projects (Woodell's and Stobbe's) reach that stage to date. Another gap between the aspirations and application of Action Evaluation to date is the limited input from foundations. While we have been concerned with ensuring that those who fund conflict resolution be directly integrated into goal-setting by making explicit what they seek to accomplish and participating in dialogue about whether such goals are the most appropriate and if so how they may best be implemented, monitored and assessed (instead of more indirectly through funding choices), to date only one foundation officer has provided data and participated in a feedback session (although three foundations have supported action evaluation projects). Finally, while action evaluation seeks to be useful and relevant across borders and has been applied in several continents, it is still primarily a U.S. based practice and we look forward to close collaboration with, and critique from, non-U.S. and non-Western colleagues (see conference paper by Jennifer Fisher that describes cultural blinders that Action Evaluation may need to address).

While Action Evaluation is still new, the methodology is evolving-in-use and its application is undergoing further research and development, the need for such an integrated evaluation methodology is clearly an idea--and practice--whose time has come. We look forward to widening the circle of those who are using, and improving, Action Evaluation over the months and years ahead.

On the agenda is the following:

- 1 **Training** more researchers, practitioners and foundation officers in the theory and practice of action evaluation.
- 2 **Publishing** and speaking about the methodology, both to receive critical feedback and widen the circle of those who know about it and can improve it.
- 3 **Applying** it in its entirety to more conflict resolution and community and organizational development projects.

Thank you for joining us and our hundreds of colleagues worldwide who are concerned about "Innovations in Evaluation." We hope you enjoy this conference and look forward to fruitful deliberations and ongoing relationships.

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When data is entered online, the action evaluator accesses it through the Internet (with a password to protect its confidentiality) saving the step of data entry when it is gathered through a questionnaire or interview. Regardless of the means of data-gathering, the action evaluator then organizes the data within stakeholding groups and analyzes it as follows: The what data is analyzed according to shared goals (of two or more respondents in each group), unique goals (that only one respondent has articulated) and contrasting goals (between two or more respondents). The why data is simply prepared for feedback verbatim, usually in the form of self-report (which enables project members to learn more about each other and what motivates them). The how data is listed and quantified according to each specific suggestion and the numbers of respondents who have proposed similar ideas. (While a kind of pure-type approach is described here, it should be said that each action evaluator has found his or her own best methods of using the system, and this is as it should be. While we have developed a methodology with a coherent system and logic of its own, its value is derived as much from its flexibility and adaptability as from its focus.)

The analyzed data is then fed back to the respondents in their groups (face-to-face is greatly preferred but it is possible to be fed back via phone, computer conferencing or through the data itself if necessary - which can be the case when resources are scarce). While there is no single method for providing feedback, a method that I have used a number of times is as follows: First the why data is read back pretty much as received allowing each respondent to read their own and lead a discussion about why they care about their own goals. This has created an intimate feeling among the several groups I have done this with as they gain real understanding about the motives of their colleagues and may question them for deeper insight.

Next we move back to the what data. During this session, respondents are asked first to "check" my work as their action evaluator. Did I organize and analyze their data accurately? In summarizing or combining data did I misconstrue the meaning? Next they are asked to determine which shared what goals, that I as action evaluator determined to be shared, are truly shared. I have found the "thumb method" to be very useful in this process. Reviewing a goal that I have determined to be shared by at least two of the respondents, I then ask those who are strongly supportive of that goal to provide a "thumbs up" sign (and a measure of such support might be willingness to seek it oneself and/or devote group resources to it). Next I ask those who are mildly supportive (they are happy for the group to pursue it but may not themselves want to do so) to show a "thumbs sideways." And lastly those who are opposed to the goal for the group to pursue at all (though of course this would not exclude an individual from doing so separately) to show "thumbs down." Next, using the same procedures we will move on to the unique goals and see if others, now seeing these goals, may want to embrace them as well. Finally, and often most usefully, we will address the contrasting issues. The goal here is not so much to change anyone's mind, or necessarily to reach common ground, but rather to point out differences that do exist (and to be sure that they are truly differences in kind and not just differences in formulations or semantics) and make decisions about what to do with them (which may be to solve them, or simply live with them).

Having done this process, ideally, with each stakeholding group, we will then return to the database and enter in a fully developed baseline assessment constituted of an analysis of the shared, unique and contrasting goals across the groups, as we previously did within each group. If possible we will call a feedback meeting again, this time of representatives of each group. If that is not possible, at least the data will be send back to everyone for comment and self-monitoring as their project unfolds. This process will then be repeated at least one more time (at the formative stage) prior to launching a summative assessment based on an operationalization of the formative goals (especially of the how goals), where we begin to look for measurables based on self-determined and widely shared definitions and mechanisms for success.