

# **RENOMO—A Design Tool for Evaluations**

*Designing Evaluations Responsive to Stakeholders' Interests by Working with NOMinal Groups using the MOderation Method*

**WOLFGANG BEYWL**

*University of Cologne*

**PHILIP POTTER**

*University of Cologne*

Evaluators designing evaluation studies that are responsive to the interests of the different stakeholding audiences have to cope with conflicts and constraints from the very beginning of their work. This article describes a tool for a stakeholder-orientated evaluation approach which combines Nominal Group Techniques and the Moderation Method. The tool is presented in a detailed scenario for an evaluation design context. The paper concludes with an assessment of the utility and areas of application of the RENOMO instrument.

## **Introduction**

The obligation of evaluators to take account of the interests and information needs of different groups has been acknowledged at least since the time the term 'stakeholder' was introduced to evaluation discourse. Evaluators of human services and human resources settings have become sensitive to the variety of groups with which they become involved during the course of an evaluation and take account of their values and expectations. In an educational programme, for example, an evaluator may be concerned with politicians, administrators in public education authorities, with teachers and head teachers, with pupils, their parents, employers and local community leaders.

In the present day in the European Union, the complexity of the evaluation task is increased in those contexts (such as the Structural Funds of the Union), in which stakeholders from different national cultures come together to manage evaluation (for example, see Wollmann, 1996). What are the appropriate techniques to empower committees of very diverse composition to formulate evaluation questions consistent with their own concerns and to achieve a consensus on common action strategies? Given the heterogeneity of the origins, standpoints and interests of participants, there is

#### *Evaluation 4(1)*

a danger of misunderstanding, muddle and conflict, before even beginning to tackle clear differences of principle and interest. If insufficiently constructive results are achieved by stakeholders in the evaluation design phase, then the whole evaluation process is endangered from the start.

The RENOMO tool is presented here as a practical instrument for conducting meetings of stakeholders with the object of achieving an agreed evaluation design. The theoretical underpinnings of the tool lie in naturalistic evaluation, specifically in stakeholder-orientated and responsive evaluation and, as such, is a contribution to the 'bag of tricks' (Scriven, 1996) of this evaluation paradigm. The tool draws on two techniques used in organizational development, the Nominal Group, which originated in the USA in the 1970s, and the Moderation Method, a technique which was developed in Germany at around the same time.

In the following these three components of the RENOMO tool are set out and their interrelation in this context explained. The paper subsequently describes a detailed scenario for the application of the RENOMO instrument. In conclusion, the current and potential areas of application of the tool are considered and an assessment is made of its strengths and weaknesses.

### **Responsive Traditions in Evaluation**

Those genres of evaluation that have devoted themselves in particular to multiple stakeholder contexts and that have sought specific responses to the challenges of stakeholder complexity are situated within the naturalistic tradition (Greene, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and have been specifically termed 'stakeholder-orientated evaluation' and 'responsive evaluation' (Beywl, 1988; Stake, 1975).

The stakeholder-orientated approach has been concerned in determining what stakeholders need and want from the programme and whether these needs and wants are being met, while the responsive approach has sought to determine what participants and stakeholders need to know in order to decide for themselves whether to continue the programme, or whether and how to improve it. The stakeholder-orientated approach poses the question 'Did this programme yield benefits to stakeholders?', while the responsive approach asks what stakeholders need to know in order to make decisions about the programme. It is within these two traditions of naturalistic inquiry that the RENOMO evaluation tool has been developed.

In both cases, the relationship between evaluator and stakeholders is extremely complex, because the object of the evaluation itself is arrived at in a process of dialogue and negotiation in which no single stakeholder is accorded a privileged position—even if in practice this principle of parity may be difficult to achieve under real socio-economic conditions of differential access to information, human and financial resources.

### **The Nominal Group**

The Nominal Group gains its name from the fact that the individuals coming together in this situation are only a group in nominal terms, because their interaction with each other is strictly limited by the meeting convenor. Instead of group discussion of the topic, the

members compose brief sentences, which they submit to the chair in prearranged order. The ordering and rating of the contributions also takes place in a formalized way, with strong emphasis laid on a series of votes with the object of achieving consensus (Delbeq et al., 1975; O'Neil and Jackson, 1983; Van de Ven and Delbeq, 1971).

The strengths of the nominal group lie in the areas of information and ideas generation. The formal structure has the intention of preventing a premature process of consensus building in a group situation, in order to ensure that as many ideas, opinions, items of information as possible (depending on the nature of the group meeting) are assembled and recorded before any discussion takes place.

In addition, the technique is designed to secure equal contribution from all group members, by means of a written record of each participant's contribution (a kind of 'brainstorming on bits of paper') and opportunities are given to each member of the group, in turn, to present a contribution ('round-robin'). In particular, this procedure is intended to prevent the group being dominated by extrovert or voluble members and to avoid those in senior positions in an organization using their status to dominate group members in lower echelons. Such situations will be common experiences to many readers of this paper.

It should be stressed that not too much can be expected of the nominal group approach—in its strengths lie also its limitations:

- (1) It is to be used in cases which can be expressed verbally and concisely (a phrase or short sentence).
- (2) There should be distinct alternatives that members can put forward, and about which there is no danger of fundamental differences of interpretation.
- (3) There should be consensus in the group on the formulation of the question or definition of the problem, in order to preclude meta-critiques ('I don't think the issue should be posed in these terms').
- (4) The ideas generated by the process should be essentially comparable, in order for a choice to be made between them—otherwise the formal voting stage in the process cannot work ('I think we should do both').

These points make it clear that the nominal group cannot be used effectively for very complex, or contentious problems. Therefore, for a great many situations in organizations for which people need to come together in groups and reach a decision, the nominal group is unsuitable. Indeed, to be fair to the creators of the Nominal Group, they were already stressing in the 1970s that the instrument is not suitable in all group situations within organizations. 'For . . . purposes such as attitude change, team building, and consensus generation, interacting groups are superior' (Delbeq et al., 1975: 17). A number of attempts have been made to improve the Nominal Group Technique in such respects (e.g. Frankel, 1987).

Moreover, the technique leaves unconsidered some fundamental aspects of the group situation, which are variables of central importance if groups are to reach useful conclusions:

- (1) The role and skills of the group convenor are of central importance (cf. Bartunek and Murnighan, 1984: 428).

#### *Evaluation 4(1)*

- (2) The formulation of the question or objective of the meeting has to be considered carefully.
- (3) The central stage in the process in which the participants, having once submitted their contributions in unordered form, sift and reorganize them and discuss the merits of each—this stage, which is not a nominal but an interactive group situation, is given little attention in the literature, indeed Van de Ven and Delbecq (1971) referred to it rather cursorily as ‘spontaneous group discussion’.

It is precisely in these three areas that the Moderation Method, described below, can offer effective techniques (see also Schobert, 1997).

The Nominal Group was developed in response to the problem that in traditional organizations steep status hierarchies, an individualistic, competitive work ethos, and unfamiliarity with teamwork resulted in unsatisfactory meetings, especially when such meetings were hoped to draw on staff resources for organizational innovation. Junior staff would not commit themselves until they knew the standpoint of their superior, peers would compete to monopolize discussion and, as a common rule, the men would not listen to the women. Within such an organizational culture, something as rigid as the Nominal Group might achieve modest results, even if it made no claims to champion an alternative organizational culture. But in an organization predicated on hierarchy, competitiveness and individualism, it is too much to expect staff suddenly to be open and creative when they have been used to insecurity and mistrust in their working environment, and to expect them to adopt teamwork practices and use them effectively if they have no such experience in their day to day work—if the organizational climate is characterized by secrecy, surveillance, the identification of errors and the punitive response.

### **The Moderation Method<sup>1</sup>**

The Moderation Method, also known as the Metaplan Method, offers solutions to the deficits of the Nominal Group.

The method was developed in the 1970s as a reaction to dissatisfaction with existing procedures in meetings as group working processes. ‘We sat in a circle but the communication didn’t work, so we started pinning notes on the wall . . .’ (Schnelle, 1992; quoted in Schobert, 1997).

The guiding principles of the Moderation Method are to be found in Habermas’ (1984) discourse on domination-free communication and in Cohn’s Theme-Centred Interaction (Cohn, 1975; Löhmer and Standhardt, 1992). It originates from outside business administration—although it should be said that these origins have not been spelled out in existing literature on the Moderation Method, which has generally taken the form of manuals for practice (Klebert et al., 1985; Klebert et al., 1992; see also Pädagogik, 1995), in particular, in organizational settings (Wohlgemüth, 1993). The principles of the Moderation Method presuppose a consensual striving for ideal speech situations in communication (e.g. ‘communication cards’ to attenuate status differences and expertise differentials, as well as differences in verbosity) and democratic, transparent decision-making (e.g. open scoring and rating in group settings).

The role of the moderator is given special attention: ideally, the moderator is a

neutral facilitator, not a leader nor an expert in the topic of the meeting—only an expert in the *method* of the meeting. Under no circumstances should the moderator be senior in the organization to the group members, and should preferably be external to the organization.

The Moderation Method places great emphasis on structured procedures in meetings. Meetings are structured into around six phases:

- (1) Arrival—welcome and warm-up.
- (2) Finding or agreeing on the topics.
- (3) Processing the topic.
- (4) Implementing the result.
- (5) The close.
- (6) The record.

Structure is also embedded in question and answer procedures that continue through the meeting. The particular property of the Moderation Method is, however, the emphasis on visualization: not just as a supportive technique to verbal communication—rather, it is a way of structuring verbal communication through graphic means, imposing an order, evident to all participants, on verbal exchanges, which otherwise have a tendency to deviate or to become diffuse.

The method offers a clearer, but less rigid, structure for the progress of a meeting, it pays attention to the role and function of the moderator and, as an organizational development technique, it goes hand in hand with new, teamwork-based, working practices in organizations. It is particularly useful in complex situations with multiple stakeholders and, as such, can be seen as a practical instrument for the application in situations of naturalistic evaluation. Moreover, it presupposes new paradigms in organizational culture, working effectively in contexts of organizational learning, openness and teamwork—instead of hierarchy, competitiveness and individualism.

For an overview of RENOMO, see Table 1.

## **Evaluation Design with Multiple Stakeholders**

In the first phase of any evaluation the object to be evaluated (the *evaluand*) has to be defined. The scope of information to be collected has to be marked out and decisions made regarding which evaluation questions are to be selected and answered in the following stages of data collection, analysis and reporting. Furthermore, a very effective way of securing the commitment of the future users with regard to data, results and reports is to involve them from the beginning in the process of defining the evaluand and planning the evaluation process. At the very beginning of her investigation, the evaluator should therefore identify the people, organizations and institutions that, ultimately, are to use (read, discuss and build action on) the reports and other products of the study. As the American Evaluation Association Standards recommend: ‘When planning . . . evaluations, evaluators should consider including important perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders in the object being evaluated’ (AEA, 1995: 25).

In social programmes there are often several clients at the same time. In the

Table 1. Elements of RENOMO—An Overview

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Responsive evaluation</i>	<i>Nominal group technique</i>	<i>Moderation method</i>
Definition	Open (vs. pre-ordained) and participatory evaluation model	Decision-making technique with behavioural science background	Problem-unfolding and solving group discussion/voting method
Discipline	Educational science	Business psychology	Management consulting
Instruction	Negotiate the evaluation questions with the relevant stakeholders and respond to them by gathering and presenting credible information and data	Rank order ideas or proposals through a weighting process using votes; try to reach a group consensus on which is the best decision/solution/alternative	Inductively define and process problems, cluster them; rank order them; find a group consensus on results/decide on suggestions for further action.
Elements	<p>A constructivist, emergent and interactive methodology i.e. differentiation of 'merit' and 'worth'; context boundedness</p> <p>Negotiation procedures with the stakeholders ideally by a steering committee with representatives of the 'agents', the 'beneficiaries' and the 'victims'</p> <p>A step-by-step workscheme to fix the evaluation questions claims, concerns and issues</p> <p>The evaluator as sensitive, receptive, non-instructional: 'Evaluators are orchestrators of a negotiation process that attempts to culminate in consensus of better informed on more sophisticated constructions' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 45)</p>	<p>A nominal 'group' whose members do not communicate verbally with each other but by written statements and the mediation of the chairperson: verbal interaction is restricted to the leader individual-member dialogue</p> <p>Specific role of the chairperson as neutral receiver of group ideas; controlling the group process through the management group process through the management of information flow</p> <p>Plenary process with six steps: (1) silent generation of solutions; (2) recording in 'round-robin' fashion; (3) clarification of ideas; (4) individual rank-ordering; (5) discussion of the group-vote; interaction of (4) and (5) until the group reaches (6) consensus</p>	<p>Role instructions for the moderator: process guide, helps the group to reach a result; has no interest nor necessarily expertise in the subject matter</p> <p>Plenary sessions, small group phases and dramaturgy</p> <p>Set of group question techniques: card and call questions, partner interview, single and multiple dot questions</p> <p>Principle of visual representation of communication content and outcome; specific rules for handwriting on cards and sheets of paper; elements as conflict arrows</p> <p>Specific hardware equipment: pin boards, sheets of packing paper, pins, cards (rectangles, discs, oval discs), board-markers, adhesive dots, pin board copy machine.</p>

educational sector, for example, it is not only central and local government authorities as paymasters and decision makers who may see themselves as the clients of an evaluation and legitimate users of the outcomes. Although not paying for an evaluation, the teachers, students, parents and future employers may also see themselves as possible winners or losers—stakeholders—in the programme under study and as such as stakeholding consumers of the evaluation. The important point here is not the *number* of stakeholders to be involved, rather the challenge lies in the inclusion of stakeholder groups characterized by pronounced heterogeneity and potentially divergent interests. With homogeneous groups of stakeholders, on the other hand, focus group techniques might be more appropriate (Krueger, 1994).

It is also of interest for clients, other stakeholders and evaluators to keep the planning of the evaluation not only satisfying in terms of participation, social justice or power balance, but also in terms of effectiveness (to come to a shared and usable set of evaluation questions) and efficiency (to do it in a timely, frugal and economical way).

There are three main objections to stakeholder-based evaluations. First, they can be very time-consuming in that they involve intensive and extensive dialogue between multiple actors. A second, more technical, objection contends that no instruments are available to steer evaluations at once democratically and efficiently (Greene, 1988). Finally, it is argued that stakeholder-based evaluations are not able to cope with the complexities of modern society with its national if not global social problems (Shadish et al., 1991: 475).

The RENOMO tool provides operational responses to these three problems. First, through the structuring of group discussion and the use of visualization aids, time can be used more efficiently and economically. Second, the RENOMO instrument strives for democratic decision making not simply through formal voting procedures but through procedures that promote ideal speech situations—something which is of particular utility in international contexts when bringing together stakeholders from different language backgrounds. Finally, the economical use of time and human resources makes RENOMO appropriate in evaluation contexts which involve bringing together geographically dispersed stakeholders—a factor of relevance, for example, in European evaluation contexts.

The questions for which the RENOMO tool was developed are the following: how can the evaluator support stakeholders to develop realistic expectations, to come to an accepted rank order of evaluation questions and to a treatable evaluation design, all in light of available resources? How can the evaluator ‘orchestrate’ the many voices different in interest, tongue and volume, power and influence so that evaluation questions are shared or at least accepted by as many stakeholders as possible and with an economical use of time?

The application of the RENOMO tool in the setting of an evaluation design meeting is set out in detail in the following sections of this paper.

## **The Evaluation Design Meeting**

The evaluation design meeting has three aims. First, *to win the stakeholders’ understanding of and commitment to the evaluation process*. The evaluator has to prove

#### *Evaluation 4(1)*

that they understand the role of moderator—a professional who supports different stakeholders to communicate effectively. The moderator can only win credibility by obviously acting as an agent of the whole group, and not merely of a single paymaster. She or he has to take into consideration the anxiety of stakeholders, their possible opposition to the evaluand, power imbalances between the participants and the audiences they represent. To win their confidence and their commitment is an essential precondition for a fruitful process of data collection and the likelihood that the evaluation results will be accepted and even used.

Second, *to make explicit the different value perspectives of the stakeholders*, so that the bases for value judgements are clear. A variety of evaluation criteria should be elicited from the different participants. To take educational evaluation as an example: not only the experts (educational scientists) or the professionals (teachers), but also the consumers (pupils), their relatives (parents) or future employers, citizen action groups (favouring equal opportunities for underprivileged children) bring in their concerns and needs. The same statement ‘Reading instruction shall take into consideration the learning speed of the weaker pupils’ for some stakeholders may be valued positively and for others negatively. In bringing to light the variety of values, the evaluator and stakeholders come into contact with the dynamics of the socio/economic/political processes surrounding the evaluand.

Finally, the explicit aim of an evaluation design meeting is *to draw up a list of evaluation themes grounded in the perspectives and interests of each participant*. The dramaturgy of the scenario should confirm that this rank ordered list expresses both consent and dissent over those themes that the evaluator should stress in further work. This is the basis to formulate the pertinent questions about the programme. The formulation of the evaluation questions is a professional piece of deskwork to be done back in the office—how to approach this task is not described in this paper.

Depending on the number of unsolved important questions, the degree of conflict between the stakeholders, the willingness to reach a compromise among other conditions, the decision on the theme(s) to pursue can be made at the end of the meeting or requires further discussions. In pursuit of this aim, the participants develop an understanding of the evaluand, which has to be balanced between a too narrow, fixed perspective and a too broad, unmanageable one. For example, teachers, pupils and parents may have very different images of what is ‘teaching reading’. The evaluator should not only let the staff or experts draw boundaries around facts, actions and structures, but should also invite the other groups to share their ideas of the nature of the evaluand. A provisionally shaped understanding of ‘what are the main constituents’ of the item to be evaluated is the precondition for searching questions concerning the item.

A basic precondition for a RENOMO meeting is that the contract with the client provides for (a) open access and discussion with all stakeholders and (b) modifications, widening or lessening of the initial agreement. On the one hand, stakeholders to be involved and questions to be investigated should clearly be determined by the client while, on the other hand, the evaluator should be able to take in more stakeholders and to change the rank order of questions to be answered as a consequence of consultations with stakeholders.



## **Sequence of the Meeting**

This section is structured as a description of the consecutive stages—10 in all—of a RENOMO meeting.<sup>2</sup> The evaluand must be quite clear, the group of participants not larger than 20 persons (smaller, if interests and values are clearly divergent or if the members have limited awareness of the roles and positions of others), the moderator must be experienced and good working conditions (room, materials, equipment) are required. Six hours may be enough when starting a local evaluation project within a complex working context; a number of meetings of 4–6 hours may be necessary for a regional, national or international evaluation.

### ***Stage 1***

The Starting Poster presents the aims and the course of action of the meeting. Sometimes a second more process-orientated poster is useful, which contains some rules to be observed while working together and sketches the principles of the Moderation Method (especially the principle of visualization). This is also the place for some organizational matters (e.g. schedule, breaks, etc.) (Figure 1).

## **Starting Poster**

### **Evaluation of the conference - scheme and pursuit -**

#### **Aims**

- ∑ Identification and description of evaluation criteria
- ∑ building on the different perspectives and interests of the participants
- ∑ a group decision process

#### **Agenda**

- sampling
  - sorting
  - prioritizing ... evaluation criteria
- judging the conference

*Figure 1.* Starting Poster

### Evaluation 4(1)

The evaluator acts as moderator, and should make clear the role she or he wants to play: she or he acts as a facilitator of the discussion and uses the Moderation Method to conduct group work. She or he guides the process and is aware of its requirements; but does not become involved in the content to be discussed and leaves decisions on the subject matter to the group. This is also the point in time to establish the *nominal* character of the group: the remarks of the participants are directed to the group as a whole; ideas will be recorded on the posters; communication between participants is restricted (in terms of number and duration and also content—most dialogue serves to better understand the ideas of the other, there is nearly no space for argumentation and for struggling to prove oneself in the right).

The starting poster establishes the very first boundary of the evaluand. In many cases, it is a demanding task to find a good formulation. The evaluator should underline that her or his concern is to gain advice from the group on which aspects should be stressed in the ongoing evaluation and make very clear the limitations she or he works in (conditions imposed by the client or legal regulation, restraints in terms of money and time, professional limitations).

### Stage 2

The next step invites the participants to propose boundaries for the evaluand from their point of view. It is important to follow the rules of brainstorming (each contribution is welcomed, no criticism of other peoples' contributions, you can build on others' ideas (Figure 2).

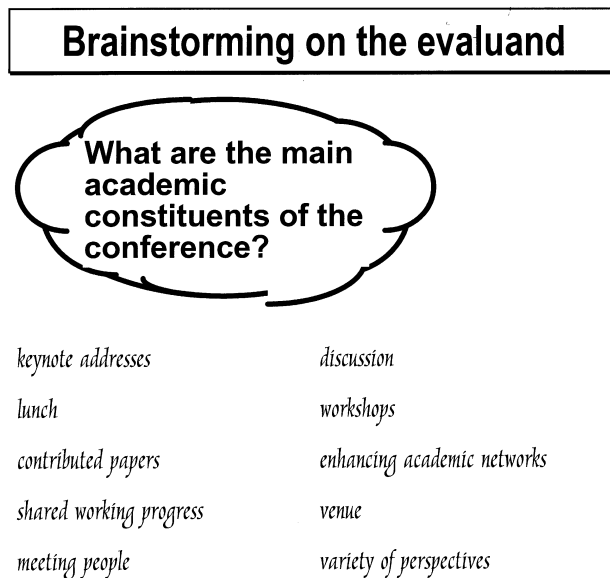


Figure 2. Brainstorming on the Evaluand

**Stage 3**

Stage 3 is the core step of the Moderation Method and the most powerful device to bring in the varieties of concerns and issues, hopes and fears related to the evaluand. The participants reply to the questions asking for strengths and weaknesses of the evaluand by writing their comments on moderation cards. They note their replies in key words: and use a new card for each comment. Depending on group size, theme and time, the number of cards used may or may not have to be restricted. If necessary the moderator should establish a procedure to guarantee confidentiality for participants (see the working instruction for stage 4 in the scenario) (Figure 3).

## Card Question

Please note strengths & weaknesses which characterize this conference

1	2	3	4	5
good opportunity to understand the issue of quality assessment in different countries+	good range of topics in presentations +	opportunity to meet people OK (but tendency to be language based groups) +/#	practical ideas to take home +	not enough opportunity to explore the town and surroundings#
perspectives other countries +	lack of clear focus #	in large group more thought needs to be given on encouraging members#	some interesting ideas +	insufficient time to reflect #
too much emphasis on UK in keynotes #	interest groups were valuable +	sharing of experiences +	working models strength / weakness success fairness #	too many workshops held at same time #
international perspectives +	discussions in interest groups +	international contacts +		too little time devoted to some presentations #
		made some good contacts +		little time to discuss with keynote speakers #

Figure 3. Card Question

**Stage 4**

Stage 4 is similar to the task of categorization when working with qualitative data. The moderator collects the cards, reads them aloud, attaches them to the pinboard and sorts them into ‘clusters’, i.e. categories of related ideas. It is important that the moderator avoid bringing in her own preconceptions of how the object of inquiry is structured. As far as possible, the group should steer the decisions to form superordinate categories (so that the group experiences ownership of the design and categorization process). If there is time, the categories should be titled by short headings. The moderator should use the words of participants to name the clusters and as far as possible should choose non-judgemental headings (dichotomies should not be used). The moderator tries to reach consensus in the group on how it can transpose the stakes of the participants into an image written on the pinboards. Judgements can impede such a consensus. If participants can’t agree on to which cluster a specific card belongs, the moderator duplicates this card and attaches it to several proposed categories. If time is short, the clusters are merely numbered and if time runs out, the numbered clusters can be ranked

**Value Statement List**

No.	on conferences such as this one there should be...	! / #	state-ment is	this conference fits the statement.....			
			very im- portant	com- pletely	the greater part	the smaller part	not at all
1	a variety of international perspectives on quality assessment		<b>5</b>	0	6	0	0
2	a clear conference theme and papers related to the theme		<b>6</b>	0	3	4	0
3	opportunity to make intensive professional contacts		<b>3</b>	2	3	2	0
4	enough emphasis on «how to do it»		<b>4</b>	0	0	7	0
5	a time scheme allowing flexibility in respond to participants needs		<b>2</b>	0	0	6	1
6							
7							

Figure 4. Value Statement List

for example along the criterion: ‘On this point we should do more intensive work in our next meeting’ and the meeting then closes by proceeding directly to stage 10 (Figure 4).

### ***Stage 5***

Stage 5 transforms the categories into value-loaded statements which can be judged in the next steps of the process and used as evaluation criteria for the evaluand. Sometimes there is a one to one relation (one statement per category), sometimes one category will be split into several statements. This task is the most challenging for the moderator who has to keep in mind (a) the variety of the comments on the cards belonging to each cluster (b) verbal comments on the cards, areas of consent and dissent (c) the need to formulate evaluable statements, and (d) procedures about how to formulate such statements. In contrast to other forms of qualitative research, where the researcher/evaluator has hours of desk time to transform raw data into conclusions, interpretations or attitude-statements, here she or he has to do it together with the group under narrow time constraints. As in the other stages too, the moderator must not influence the content of the statements, but has to attend to the form, e.g. following advice available in the literature on formulating statements for Likert-type scales, statements must be one-dimensional, must not contain a double negation, avoidance of ‘only’, etc. The reformulating process can be made easier by adopting a standard format, completing a sentence beginning ‘in the case of <evaluand>, there should be ...’. The risk of this procedure is that the group starts reformulating the categories exclusively into objectives. This could focus the evaluation exclusively on outcomes, and the moderator should be aware of the dangers of following a managerial approach.

### ***Stage 6***

Stage 6 serves as evaluation of the statements themselves: Are the values included in each statement—from the points of view of the different participants—positive or negative? Do the statements express processes, situations, objectives, feelings, which participants like or dislike for an evaluand such as this? Often, this step is a mere ‘check’ on whether all participants agree that exclusively positive statements have been formulated. In other cases this step allows minorities or factions to express their divergent values. If the moderator expects minority votes or conflicts, she or he should prepare an anonymous procedure (see stage 8 in detail).

### ***Stage 7***

Stage 7 asks the group to sort out the most important criteria for the evaluand. The perspective changes from the individuals and subgroups within the audience to the group as a whole. The—still nominal—group should make a decision on which evaluation criteria are the most important. The aim is also to form a group that charges the evaluator to proceed with the evaluation process (to collect data, to prepare reports). In order to win this commission from the group, it is essential that most if not all members can recognize their concerns and issues embedded in the evaluation questions. One way to achieve this ideal starting point for a stakeholder-based evaluation is to give each participant the opportunity to vote for more than one statement. The moderator has to balance the number of votes she or he allows for each participant with the other aim of obtaining clear priorities. Too many votes can result in

*Evaluation 4(1)*

no priority, whereas too few votes can result in many participants feeling their concerns to be excluded from the evaluation design.

**Stage 8**

Stage 8 applies the inductively constructed set of criteria to the evaluand. It is a very first attempt to evaluate the object under investigation in the light of the evaluation criteria of the group (this procedure may be supplemented or replaced by a survey: in this case the moderator composes a questionnaire comprising the statements and distributes it to a larger number of stakeholders subsequent to the meeting).

In the case of deep conflicts, anxiety or mistrust between the participants, then instead of filling in the master list by attaching dots visible for everyone in the room, the moderator can copy the statements into a prepared matrix on a piece of paper, xerox the paper and distribute it as a questionnaire to the participants. After the participants have filled them in, the questionnaires are collected, the marks counted and the aggregated result presented as the master list.

**Stage 9**

In stage 9 the completed master list should be verbally described and interpreted by the group. The moderator may invite the members by asking very open questions such as:

evaluand fits the criterion...	+	±	-
_____	... completely	...partly /partly	...not at all
The criterion is ...			
... important and positive (negative) for (nearly) all participants	R	E-1	P
... important and / or positive, both for a part of the group	E-2	E-3	E-4
... important for (nearly) no one	-	-	-

**Evaluative Tasks**

- E-1 Clarification of the controversial assessment through systematic information collection.
- E-2 Clarification of the definiteness, clearness and transparency of the evaluation criteria for different stakeholders / estimation of consent / dissent
- E-3 Clarification of the evaluation criteria (E-1) and examination of their accomplishment (E-2)
- E-4 Clarification of the evaluation criteria / Preparation of proposals for improvements

**Postevaluative Tasks**

- Report: (Summative) report on performance / strengths of the evaluand
- Proposals: (Formative) work on suggestions how to improve the evaluand / (summative) judgement, may be to postpone the evaluation

Figure 5. Identification of Pertinent Evaluation Questions By Interpreting the Master List

‘What do you see on the poster?’ ‘What stands out for you?’ ‘What is as you expected, what is surprising for you?’. The other option, which is especially helpful if the participants are tired after intensive work, is for the moderator to set the criteria in the order shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 suggests how to deal with statements in respect to their assessments by the group. Statements that are not important for any stakeholding group can often be excluded from further work. If most participants have the impression the evaluand fits completely, there is no need for further data collection: there seems to be without doubt an obvious strength of the evaluand. On the other hand, if (nearly) everyone says that the evaluand does not fit the criteria, then the evaluator will need no additional evidence and should make proposals regarding how to improve the evaluand. Indeed, if many important criteria are not met by the evaluand, the evaluator may be able to formulate a ‘summative’ report at this stage.

It is the task of the evaluator in stage 9 to support the group to get an image of ‘what is at stake’, and what should be taken into consideration in further steps of the evaluation process. Often, it is too early to draw a conclusion, perhaps because of the complexity of the RENOMO outcomes. The evaluator, in this case, will have to do some homework on the master-list, tracking back statements to the content of the communication cards. At an additional meeting, or using a written procedure, she or he should then disseminate the findings and look for support from the stakeholders.

### ***Stage 10***

Stage 10 is the conclusion of the meeting. The evaluator should give clear information on how the work of the group will proceed: what kind of report will the participants get, in how many days/weeks? Will a procedure be established for the participants to comment on minutes? Will there be an additional meeting?

The evaluator in the end should come back to the poster presented in stage 1 and give a very brief summary of the process and the outcome of the meeting. Ideally, a photographic record is made of the visual materials generated during the meeting, which are distributed to participants before departure.

## **Evaluation Contexts for RENOMO**

In which contexts can the RENOMO tool be applied? It is particularly appropriate for evaluation in the fields of education and human services in general. It has been used for the development of evaluation designs in the following settings:

- Primary and secondary school curriculum development.
- University curricula and courses.
- Continuing education programmes in enterprises and in providers of further education.
- Training of administrative staff in public sector employment authorities.
- Measures reintegrating the long-term unemployed and university drop-outs into the labour market.
- Educational concepts and processes in residential youth work settings.
- Social work with families.

### *Evaluation 4(1)*

The instrument is appropriate in those fields in which there are negotiable measures for personal services—negotiable at least in principle. It is therefore most suitable at the level of the organization, the local authority or even the region. For application at the national or supranational level, provision has to be made for the necessarily physical presence of the representatives of the stakeholders—though in this respect the instrument, with its economy of time and human resources, does not place greater demands on personnel and logistics than do mainstream management activities in these settings.

The present paper has been concerned with the design stage of an evaluation. But the instrument is also suitable at other stages of the evaluation process:

Within an evaluability assessment exercise: the tool can, for example, be used to identify at an early stage cases when value conflicts are too great for systematically collected and plausible data to improve the basis for decision making and organizational development processes.

In the development of closed questionnaires: instead of conducting preparatory open interviews with members of the survey population, it is possible to work out the dimensions of questions and the exact wording in a moderated group. The relative importance of different ways of posing questions can be assessed, and potential difficulties in the responses can be anticipated though testing rating scales in practice.

Meta-evaluations can also be conducted with the use of the RENOMO instrument: which interests and questions do stakeholders such as public funding agencies, scientists, accounting offices or employees' federations have with respect to high quality evaluations?

Although in this paper the tool is applied within a naturalistic responsive paradigm, it can also be used within other theoretical frameworks. This applies in particular to stakeholder-orientated, participative approaches, and to empowerment and decision-orientated evaluation approaches. On the other hand it is not suitable in clearly preordinate evaluation models—this applies to cost-benefit analysis, advocate-adversary models or objective-driven evaluation. It may be possible to use the tool within the context of theory-driven evaluations as a kind of 'reality check' of the questions derived from theories and hypotheses.

## **Evaluating RENOMO as an Evaluation Tool**

What are the particular strengths and weaknesses of the RENOMO tool? Fortunately, the tool has a built-in evaluation mechanism, in that participants are always invited to reflect on the meeting. The moderator also has the opportunity to observe the effectiveness of the meeting.

The technique suffers from non-acceptance from senior staff participants, who feel discomfort at the supposed egalitarianism of the group setting. The reluctance to give up power and seniority status, even if only for an hour-long meeting, is confirmed by other sources: 'Members may not co-operate in such a strict format if they have (or believe they have) a more powerful position (within the organization or profession) than does the facilitator' (Carney et al., 1996).

On the part of the moderator, the tool presupposes more experience in the facilitation



of groups, in the mediation of conflicts, in visualization skills and much more besides, than one might suppose at first glance. A training course in the Moderation Method will generally involve between 10 and 40 training days: if the RENOMO tool is to be applied without such preparation, then it is advisable to begin with evaluation projects of modest dimensions with groups whose members are known in advance. In this way, experience in the application of the instrument can be gained. The instrument should also only be used when the contractor or the highest level of the organization is fully supportive. As with all instruments, its application should be carefully planned in advance (cf. Nevis, 1987).

## **Conclusions**

The RENOMO tool, with its foundation in responsive evaluation, nominal group techniques and the moderation method has the potential and promise that it:

- Produces shared (or obviously controversial) value criteria even in unstable environments with ‘ill-structured-problems’
- Intensively taps the knowledge and potentials of the stakeholders
- Promotes creative perspectives and proposals
- Allows the non-powerful and less articulate to participate
- Allows the identification of the important and the open questions
- Elicits commitment of the individual and of the group
- Expands the range of consensus within the group or organization
- Anchors evaluation or improvement processes in the organization or setting
- Increases the probability that evaluation results will be used
- Keeps the evaluation process on track and lean (no data cemeteries)
- Remains time and money saving and avoids unnecessary redundancy.

The best use of RENOMO is to adapt it to personal aims by creatively criticizing, completing, developing and changing the technique.

The RENOMO tool draws on naturalistic evaluation theory and organizational development instruments. As such, it reflects the increasing interpenetration of the fields of evaluation and organizational development (and, indeed, quality assurance) in contemporary approaches (cf. Heiner, 1996). Some have voiced disquiet at such developments, arguing that the discrete identity of evaluation is thereby in danger of being lost. For example, Scriven (1996) argues that Fetterman et al.’s (1995) approach to empowerment evaluation does not constitute evaluation as such, but rather offers training in evaluation methods for programme participants, thus, it is organizational development rather than evaluation. We would argue that in the present case, reservations of this kind do not apply, for here it is a question of using instruments from the toolbox of the organizational sciences and applying them in explicit evaluation contexts.

## **Notes**

1. In this article, the German term ‘Moderationsmethode’ has been translated directly. It is worth noting that the German verb ‘moderieren’ and the substantive ‘moderation’ do not have the

## Evaluation 4(1)

English-language meanings of 'lessening of extremes or intensity'. Corresponding meanings in English are 'to preside over or act as chairman at' (Websters: moderate vt 3) or 'to act as mediator' (Websters: moderate [archaic] vi [2]). Websters does not give us a use of 'moderation' as a substantive in this sense, but its meaning can easily be inferred from the foregoing.

2. For interested readers, a manual for moderators of evaluation design meetings can be downloaded from the homepage of the 'Arbeitsstelle für Evaluation' at the University of Cologne: <http://www.uni-koeln.de/ew-fak/Wiso>.

## References

- AEA (1995) 'Guiding Principles for Evaluators', in W. R. Shadish (ed.) *Guiding Principles for Evaluators*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bartunek, J. M. and J. K. Murnighan (1984) 'The Nominal Group Technique: Expanding the Basic Procedure and Underlying Assumptions', *Group and Organization Studies* 9(3): 417–32.
- Beywl, W. (1988) *Zur Weiterentwicklung der Evaluationsmethodologie*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Carney, O., J. McIntosh and A. Worth (1996) 'The Use of the Nominal Group Technique in Research with Community Nurses', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 23: 1024–9.
- Cohn, R. C. (1975) *Von der Psychoanalyse zur Themenzentrierten Interaktion*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Delbeq, A. L., A. Van de Ven and D. H. Gustafson (1975) *Group Techniques for Program Planning: A Guide to Nominal Group and Delphi Processes*. Glenview: Scott Foresman.
- Fetterman, D. M., S. J. Kaftarian and A. Wandersman (eds) (1995) *Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Frankel, S. (1987) 'NGT + MDS: An Adaptation of the Nominal Group Technique for Ill-Structured Problems', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 23(4): 543–51.
- Greene, J. G. (1988) 'Stakeholder Participation and Utilization in Program Evaluation', *Evaluation Review* 2: 91–116.
- Greene, J. C. (1994) 'Qualitative Program Evaluation: Practice and Promise', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E. G. and Y. S. Lincoln (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E. G. and Y. S. Lincoln (1994) 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Heiner, M. (ed.) (1996) *Qualitätsentwicklung durch Evaluation*. Freiburg: Lambertus.
- Klebert, K., E. Schrader and W. G. Straub (1985) *Moderationsmethode*. Hamburg: Windmühle.
- Klebert, K., E. Schrader and W. G. Straub (1987) *Kurzmoderation. Anwendung der Moderationsmethode in Betrieb, Schule und Hochschule, Kirche und Politik, Sozialbereich und Familie bei Besprechungen und Praesentationen*. Hamburg: Windmühle.
- Klebert, K., E. Schrader and W. G. Straub (1992) *Winning Group Results: Techniques for Guiding Group Thought and Decision Making Processes with the Moderation Method*. Hamburg: Windmühle.
- Krueger, R. (1994) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Löhmer, Cornelia and Rüdiger Standhardt (eds) (1992) *TZI: Pädagogisch-therapeutische Gruppenarbeit nach Ruth C. Cohn*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

*Beywl and Potter: RENOMO—A Design Tool for Evaluations*

- Nevis, E. (1987) *Organizational Consulting: A Gestalt Perspective*. Cleveland: Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Press.
- O'Neil, M. J. and L. Jackson (1983) 'Nominal Group Technique: A Process for Initiating Curriculum Development in Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education* 8(2): 129–38.
- Potter, P. (1997) 'Responsive Evaluation als Katalysator für Selbst-Evaluationen', *Informationen zur Selbst-Evaluation* 2.
- Schnelle, E. (1992) 'Wie die Werkstatt des Wandels entstand' in *Werkstatt des Wandels*. Quickborn: Metaplan.
- Schobert, B. (1997) *Aufgabenorientierte Gruppentechniken—ein Vergleich der Nominal Group Technique und der Moderationsmethode*. Köln: dissertation.
- Scriven, M. (1996) 'Evaluation—The State of the Art', *Evaluation News and Comment* 5(2).
- Shadish, W., T. Cook and L. C. Leviton (1991) *Foundations of Program Evaluation. Theories of Practice*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. (1975) *Evaluating the Arts in Education: A Responsive Approach*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Van de Ven, A. and A. L. Delbeq (1971) 'Nominal vs. Interacting Group Processes for Committee Decision-Making Effectiveness', *Academy of Management Journal* June: 203–12.
- Wohlgemüth, A. C. (ed.) (1993) *Moderation in Organisationen. Problemlösungsmethode fuer Führungsleute und Berater*. Bern: Haupt.
- Wollmann, H. (1996) *Begleitung und Bewertung in der EU Strukturfonds-Förderung—Möglichkeiten und Grenzen*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Evaluation Methods for Structural Funds Interventions. Berlin.

WOLFGANG BEYWL completed his doctorate on evaluation methodology in 1988. At the University of Cologne his teaching and research is in the fields of evaluation, quality management and organizational development. He is Co-founder and Manager of the Evaluation Working Group in the Social Science Seminar of the Department of Education. Please address correspondence to the University of Cologne, Gronewaldstrasse 2, D-50931 Cologne, Germany.

PHILIP POTTER gained qualifications in social policy and in urban and regional studies in England. Since the mid-1980s he has been working in contract research in Germany, with specialisms in urban research, cross-national social research and the monitoring and evaluation of pilot project programmes. Please address correspondence to the University of Cologne, Gronewaldstrasse 2, D-50931 Cologne, Germany.