

Self-evaluation as an opportunity for learning in organisations

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Abstract

Self-evaluations provide a valuable opportunity for learning in organisations. But time is scarce and results must be at hand quickly and easily. Simple and inexpensive tools are needed. The current paper compares existing evaluation guides for sustainability research, transdisciplinary projects and success factors for networks (Nölting et al. 2004, Späth 2008, Bergmann et al. 2005, Grossmann et al. 2007).

The project “NENA – network of sustainable lifestyles” serves as a case study to assess success factors for self-evaluation in transdisciplinary settings.

The project investigated how sustainable lifestyles can be successfully implemented. A network was initiated to promote the co-operation of organisations working in the field of sustainable development. The network aims at integrating different views, exchanging experiences and bundling efforts in order to ensure more far-reaching changes towards sustainable life and consumption patterns.

The three evaluation tools have been applied as an ex-post evaluation to the NENA project. The comparison of the three tested evaluation tools gives valuable suggestions on time requirements, fields of application, suitability, helpful suggestions, adaptiveness to specific frameworks, cost-benefit ratio and missing aspects.

Introduction

The debates about climate change, scarcity of natural resources and increasing poverty indicate that for organisations a (re-)orientation towards the normative concept of sustainable development will be a future necessity and therefore the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) gains importance. Subsequently there is an increase of research projects and consulting activities which aim at supporting organisations on their way towards sustainable development.

A collaboration of companies with transdisciplinary research, which aims at solving problems relevant for society, and NGOs, which seek new forms of co-operation to enhance their effectiveness, might be fruitful and essential for all partners involved.

Networks are viewed as a good instrument to bundle efforts. However, collaboration and networking of different parties generally proves to be rather demanding. To estimate and improve activities self-evaluation is might be a good instrument to stimulate learning processes. But learning ex-post (that means after completion of projects and contracts) usually lacks motivation, funding and time. To be of use for transdisciplinary research and/or management consultancy ex-post evaluation has to be quick and comprehensive.

In this contribution we selected three evaluation tools and investigated whether they are suitable for ex-post learning. First of all, we outline the framework of sustainable development, networks and transdisciplinary research. The reasons for evaluation are discussed and the three tested evaluation tools presented. The test case NENA, the objectives of the NENA evaluation and the evaluating procedure are described, and some of the lessons learned for NENA and further projects are highlighted.

The comparison of the three tested evaluation tools is described in the section 'evaluation of evaluation tools' and gives valuable recommendations on time requirements, fields of application, suitability, helpful suggestions, adaptability to specific frameworks, cost-benefit ratio and missing aspects.

Sustainable development, networks and transdisciplinarity

In the following we will outline the concepts of sustainable development, networks and transdisciplinarity, before starting with the evaluation objectives in the subsequent section.

Sustainable Development

For the concept of sustainable development different aspects like fairness, freedom, well-being of all humans and responsibility for the future play a role. Public authorities as well as companies and NGOs view sustainability as an important objective. However, based on diverging interests, objectives, and preconceptions of the diverse stakeholders, different definitions for sustainability exist, often leading to ambiguity and contradictions. In 1989, the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) articulated what has now become a widely accepted definition of sustainability: "[to meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainability refers to a social development, including environmental, social and economic aspects. Sustainability can be realised on a regional, national or global level. For environmental issues in general a global approach is pursued, whereas for economic and social sustainability often the national perspective is in the foreground. Participation is viewed as one of the most important aspects of a sustainable development, referring to the involvement of a broad public and different social groups, but often fails because of the unfocused concept and the complexity of the terminology. Usually the knowledge about sustainability correlates with a higher education, even though the principles of a sustainable development appeals to a large part of the population (Michelsen 2005). Meanwhile the term sustainability is often substituted by "future proof" development.

Networks

The sustainable development of society highly depends on organisations and their ability to co-operate with each other. Exchange and mutual support to achieve common goals are the motivation for initiating inter-organisational networks. They are built around different thematic fields, such as resPACT, the leading platform for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainable Development in Austria (www.respact.at), the initiative civil society (www.initiative-zivilgesellschaft.at) or the network of protagonists for a sustainable Austria (Akteursnetzwerk nachhaltiges Österreich, www.nachhaltigkeit.at). These kinds of networks form a communicative framework for becoming acquainted with each other and for disciplinary, inter- and transdisciplinary exchange and common learning. Sub-groups may decide to co-operate more intensively, to unite for common projects, or even to found new legal entities.

Transdisciplinarity

Transdisciplinary research focuses on problems from everyday life. Specialisation is often a hurdle, when it comes to the solution of complex, social problems, as they can not be solved by specialists solely. Usually the perspectives and the cooperation of experts from various disciplines and practitioners from the field in question are required to find new solutions.

Transdisciplinarity is strongly connected with participation as non experts are involved as actors who introduce their practical knowledge, their values and interests in the project. Transdisciplinary research connects scientific gain of knowledge and the intervention of social transformation process (Darnhofer et al. 2008)..

According to the Evalunet – Evaluation Network for Transdisciplinary Research (Bergmann et al. 2005) transdisciplinary research has the following characteristics:

- **Problem Orientation and Problem Translation:** Transdisciplinary research takes up problems of everyday life and the project participants together translate them into research questions. The project structure enables the pursuit of a common research goal.
- **Actor Orientation:** it is characterized by its orientation towards actors and target groups. Interaction with representatives of societal practice is an essential characteristic.
- **Transdisciplinary Integration Concept:** Essential for transdisciplinary research is the integration of knowledge from several disciplines and from the field of practical action that the research is related to. Suitable methods and approaches have to be found to ensure this.
- **Context-Relatedness:** Successful implantation of project results has to be ensured by including local framework conditions and possibilities of action.

Why evaluation?

An evaluation brings important, methodically secured and very useful information for the persons involved in a project, for consultants and/or for the contracting authorities.

Evaluation data can serve as basis and starting point for changes and improvements.

Self-evaluations provide a valuable opportunity for learning. But time is scarce and results must be at hand quickly and easily. Simple and inexpensive tools are needed.

Within the NENA project (further description see sections below) it became clear that evaluation represents a weak point within most organisations. Organisations argue that time and money for evaluation is missing. Usually evaluation is limited to the handing-out of questionnaires after the end of seminars and workshops. Some inter- and transdisciplinary project teams are used to mutual feedback, but structured evaluations are the exception.

Späth (2008) suggests that evaluation, possibly by means of a basic set of questions, should become a minimum standard in any research institute committed to transdisciplinary research.

In order to find simple and quick ways for self-evaluation and to ensure comprehensive tools, the evaluation in this contribution was done in two steps.

At first two evaluation tools have been selected due to their thematic range (sustainable development, transdisciplinarity) and under the premise of simple and fast performance.

With respect to the network aspect, the eleven success factors found by Grossmann and colleagues (Grossmann et al. 2007) were adapted for the purpose of self-evaluation.

In a second step the evaluation tools themselves were evaluated in order to reveal complementary viewpoints and missing aspects and to depict their potential for quick and inexpensive evaluation. Goal and results of this comparison of evaluation tools is discussed after the presentation of the results of the single evaluations.

The tested evaluation tools

The following set of guiding questions and success factors has been selected for the evaluation of the test case NENA.

- A. Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainable Research (Nölting et al. 2004, Späth 2008)
- B. Eleven Success Factors for Networks (Grossmann et al. 2007)
- C: Evalunet guide – Basic criteria (Bergmann et al. 2005)

A. Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research

As illustrated by table 1, the small set of guiding questions suggested by Nölting et al. (2004) focuses on normative aspects typical for sustainability research as well as on aspects of integration and participation.

Table 1: Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research suggested by Nölting et al. (2004), translation by Späth (2008)	
<i>Normativity</i>	1. What are the values and objectives of the relevant stakeholders? How are they empirically investigated?
	2. In what way does the project relate to sustainable development? What objectives and normative orientations have been adopted?
	3. What is the role of the project with regard to the broader discourse on sustainable development?
<i>Integration</i>	4. What links or contexts are considered by the project that disciplinary science would ignore? What is the comprehensive problem definition?
	5. What forms and sources of knowledge (theories, experiences, etc.) does the project integrate? How is this conceptualised?
	6. What social differences are bridged by the research process? By what procedures?
	7. How is the processing of subtasks coordinated? How are partial results integrated? How does the project secure a balance between focusing on specifics and keeping the whole picture in mind?
<i>Participation</i>	8. What functions do scientists and stakeholders fulfil for the project flow? What different roles do they play in the project?
	9. According to which criteria have they been selected for participation? By what procedures are they integrated into the workflow?
	10. How are practitioners', or stakeholders', perspectives integrated into the project results? How meaningful are the project results for their day-to-day practice?
	11. What constellations of interests and power are found in the field of enquiry? How does the project deal with them?

B. Eleven Success Factors for Co-operations and Networks

Grossmann and colleagues (Grossmann et al. 2007) analysed co-operations in public management with the focus on theory and practice of successful organisation development in cooperation and collaboration, networks and fusions. They found eleven success factors for the organisation of co-operations. These success factors are not designed as an evaluation tool but we found it useful to include it.

1. Organize co-operation as an independent social system.
2. Put the focus on the capacities and capability of the cooperation partners.
3. Take the persons and their relations into account.
4. Compile the business case.
5. Install a co-operative steering system.
6. Manage the co-operation .
7. Provide for the internal conditions for co-operation.
8. Use teamwork as a link.
9. Be aware of the different logic of co-operation and politics.
10. Confidence is the basis of co-operation.
11. Profit from target-oriented consultation.

C: Evalunet guide – Basic criteria

The Evalunet guide is based on the analysis of six transdisciplinary research projects from the area of research on sustainability. According to the authors the criteria are suitable for a discursive evaluation process that initiates learning processes (formative evaluation).

The guide provides two sets of criteria: one set with “basic criteria”, for a basic evaluation, and a second set with “detailed criteria” providing explanations and assistance in making judgements.

Table 3: Evalunet guide - Basic Criteria for the Evaluation of Transdisciplinary Research Projects (Bergmann et al. 2005)

Actors, Project Construction, and Project Formulation	Actors and Competences
	Do the disciplinary composition and the competence in the team permit the treatment of the essential aspects of the problem or object of study?
	Is the competence of the practice partner appropriate to the everyday life problem and its solution (relevant knowledge, role in the project, possibilities for implementing results)?
	Problem Formulation, Focus, Goals, and Criteria of Success
	Does the project take up an everyday life problem, and how is this problem relevant?
	Is the everyday life problem adequately translated into scientific questions? Is the current state of knowledge taken into consideration and can the research questions be regarded as innovative in relation to this state of knowledge?
	Is a common research object formulated that covers the whole research team, and can it serve in the research process as a basis for knowledge integration?
	Has the project team formulated plausible criteria of success for the project?
	Is a distinction made between goals of scientific knowledge and goals for practice? Are reasons given for the focus?
	In the research project, is flexibility ensured by permitting research with as few normative goals as possible (the desired goals situation in the realm of practice; not anticipating the result)?
	Do the methods envisioned, the interfaces of trans-disciplinary collaboration, the form of integration of practice, and the form of results and products in the project fit the solution strategy sought for the project goal?
	Project Planning and Financing
	Does the structuring of the project (work steps, connection between modules, integration steps, etc.) correspond to sensible processes of generating and integrating knowledge in the research process and to the requirements of the participating actors?
	Have means and opportunities for the specific tasks of coordinating, integrating, and organizing a transdisciplinary research project been planned?

Project Execution and Methodology	Work Planning and Project Management
	Did the research team plan the work jointly?
	Are the kind of project management and the decision-making structures described, and do they seem to promise success under the condition of the project?
	Transdisciplinary Methodology and Integration
	Are suitable methods used or have they been developed to conjoin contributions of knowledge from the participating scientific fields and from practice?
	Is there regular reflection on the cooperation in the team and on the implementation of plans for knowledge integration? If applicable, are conclusions drawn from this?
	Reflection and Communication
Are the planned procedures of self reflection and quality assurance used ("revision points") and, if applicable, are adjustments made (procedure, structure, products)	
Results, Products, and Publications	Have the scientific goals been achieved? Do scientific innovations (methodological/conceptual) come about?
	Can the result make a contribution to solving the everyday life problem?
	Are the criteria of success set by the research team being fulfilled?
	Products and Publications
	Do publications and other products (for example, changes in actors strategies, organizational reforms, social network structure, guides, ranking, artefacts) represent an appropriate yield from the project?
	Are the methods and procedures of transdisciplinary knowledge integration and collaboration presented and their success/problems reflected?
	Are the publications and products tailored to the needs of and actively conveyed to the target groups?
	Generalizeability and Implementability of Results
	Are there elucidations on whether and how research results that are context-related or worked out on the basis of a model case can be generalized?
	Justification of the Transdisciplinary Approach
	What additional use for the research result does the transdisciplinary approach have in comparison with other research approaches?

Test case NENA

The project "NENA – network of sustainable life styles" investigated how sustainable lifestyles can be successfully implemented. It was financed by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research within the program "proVISION". Research was conducted from October, 2005 to May, 2008. Though there is consent that only a change of traditional consumption and production patterns can stop climate change, it remains unclear how to motivate a large population to choose a sustainable lifestyle. In Austria numerous organisations deal with the subject, but in spite of many efforts and an open attitude towards environmental topics few results are to be registered at the behavioural level. Thus, the research focused on the following questions: How to support the work of stakeholders in the field sustainable lifestyles? How to link different actors in this field? How to support a network of these actors?

The project analysed Austrian organisations in the thematic field of sustainable life styles, with focus on learning opportunities, campaigns, projects and information material. Interviews with experts indicated which factors are crucial for success or failure. Additionally focus groups with clients of organisations in the field of sustainable lifestyles showed which success factors can be transferred to other fields and what to avoid. A network was initiated to promote the cooperation of organisations working in the field of sustainable development. Three network meetings aimed at two purposes: to discuss research results and provide creative impulses on the one hand and to facilitate mutual exchange and new forms of co-operation on the other hand.

Evaluation of NENA: objectives and procedure

The evaluation is an ex-post self-evaluation and aims at reviewing the project concept, the process and the project products, thus gaining useful information for the future of the NENA network as well as for future projects.

The two authors of this contribution have been the coordinators of the NENA project. The evaluation is done one year after project end. In our opinion (supported by the feedback of

network partners) follow-up activities and continuing network management would be helpful for pursuing the aims of the project in the long run.

For the evaluation procedure we met at two subsequent days and we applied the three tools described above, using NENA as a test case. For each tool we discussed the single questions and we put down the results in writing, thus producing a document comprising 21 pages.

The discussion of each question was organised around the following four aspects:

1. Activities and output of the project.
2. Our answer to the respective evaluation question.
3. Lessons learned for the future of the NENA network and/or for future projects.
4. Suitability of question (with respect to comprehensibility, gain of knowledge, effort to answer the question, helpful for evaluation goals).

Table 4 exemplarily shows the results of these procedure.

Table 4: Exemplary results of the NENA evaluation. Question selected from the Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research (Nölting et al 2004, Späth 2008).	
Normativity	1. What are the values and objectives of the relevant stakeholders? How are they empirically investigated?
Activities	Relevant stakeholders of NENA are the project team, experts from the practical field, network participants, authority providing subsidy. Values and objectives have been discussed within the project team and the network. Interviews have been done with potential network partners in advance. Objectives of the project team were to form a network that supports the actors and promotes the topic of sustainability. The definition of sustainable lifestyles and the underlying values have been developed within the project team and discussed within the network. Aim of the network partners was to develop joint projects and to get support for their work.
Estimation	Values and objectives of relevant stakeholders have been clarified adequately.
Lessons learned	Though the values and objectives were clear to the project team, some objectives could not be met properly within the project duration.

Suitability	Question confirmed that the approach was appropriate and clarified that the demands from practice partners couldn't be met with the project resources.
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The lessons learned for NENA when doing this evaluation exercise by using three different tools will be highlighted in the following.

Lessons learned for NENA and further projects

Only few questions of tool A (Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research, Nölting et al. 2004) stimulated new findings. The topics of the questions mostly confirmed what the project team had already taken into account and revealed shortcomings we have already been aware of.

Originally Tool B is not designed for evaluation. We used the set of Eleven Success Factors for Co-operation and Networks (Grossmann et al. 2007) to review the co-operation within our scientific project team at the IFZ and the co-operation with the 'practice' partner, the Umwelt-Bildungs-Zentrum UBZ, at the one hand and the co-operation with the network partners of the NENA network on the other hand.

The evaluation showed that the collaboration was successful, but we also found hypotheses for some aspects of the project that did not develop as intended and the evaluation provided useful ideas for future projects.

The set of basic criteria of the Evalunet guide (Bergmann et al. 2005) mainly confirmed that concept and execution of the project were well prepared. There are only a few lessons learned for NENA or future projects. Some questions have been raised, which we find useful to further investigate within our future research activities: how can a process of knowledge integration be designed and what are the key success factors? When contributing for sustainable development: How can one be clear about values and normative goals on the one hand, and permitting as few goals as possible, not anticipating the result? We will seize the suggestion to take care for quality management and define

revision points within the running time of projects. Concrete agreements on objectives may serve as a tool for continuous formative self evaluation.

Applying the three different evaluation tools highlighted some crucial aspects of NENA and provided ideas for the conception of future research projects.

In the following section we will discuss advantages and short-comings of the tested tools, having in mind some pre-conditions for implementing evaluation as standard in research and consulting organisations.

Evaluation of evaluation tools

The evaluation described in this contribution pursues a twofold goal: first of all we wanted to investigate the NENA project in an ex-post evaluation and learn from success and failures using a distant perspective. Secondly it was important for us to find ways to integrate evaluation in the fast pace of our project-driven research and consulting activities. Tools serving these goals have to cover the aspects sustainable development, co-operation and transdisciplinarity. An internal evaluation has to lead the persons involved to the critical points and stimulate knowledge sharing as well as personal and institutional development.

Thus the objectives when evaluating the three evaluation tools was to investigate the usability of the tools and to answer the following questions:

- Can the tool be applied in a fast way?
- Can it be used for internal evaluation?
- Is it suitable for an ex-post evaluation?
- Do the single items provide useful information?
- Can the single items be easily adapted for the specific purpose?
- Is there a high cost-benefit ratio?
- Are aspects missing?

A. Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research (Nölting et al 2004, Späth 2008)

At first glance the questions seem rather deterring than stimulating. Sometimes it is not clear what a certain question aims at, phrasings are often long-winded and not easily understandable. However the questions may be helpful for reflexion and new insights. We wonder whether persons who are not familiar with the sustainability discourse can answer how a project relates and contributes to sustainable development. A short description and a checklist regarding sustainable development and normative orientation parameters might support users with few knowledge in the field of sustainability.

To answer the question “What links or contexts are considered by the project that disciplinary science would ignore? What is the comprehensive problem definition?” it would be necessary to know the limitations of the specific disciplines represented within the project and this would require an extensive debate of the whole project team with possibly interesting insights for the transdisciplinary scientific community but questionable relevance for practice. Instead of this question one should ask whether the project deals with problems relevant for society. We think that some of the following questions might be also added in order to stimulate more in-depth learning:

- What are the limits of the projects – which topics or aspects are not addressed by the project, are there limitations based on the set framework?
- Are the resources and competencies in the project sufficient to carry it out properly?
- Have all important players (stakeholders) been taken into account and integrated?
- Which publication and dissemination strategy is pursued?
- Useful for an ex-post reflection: What did not work as foreseen? What could have been done to prevent failures?

<u>Table 5: Evaluation of tool A (Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research, Nölting et al. 2004)</u>	
Time involved:	3 hours
Suitability for internal evaluation:	Well suited for internal evaluation. Questions shall be answered within the project team and not alone.
Suitability for ex-post evaluation:	Most questions should be posed at the beginning and not at the end of a project.

Adaptability to specific contexts:	Yes. But in-depth look into the subject required.
Cost-benefit ratio:	Limited benefit.
Missing aspects:	Resources, competencies, partners involved, management of co-operation, products and results.

B. Eleven Success Factors for Co-operation and Networks (Grossmann et al. 2007)

Before starting with this evaluation set we discussed whether it would be necessary to turn the success factors into evaluation questions. To save time we decided against a reformulation. We soon found out that the short sentences using the imperative (or infinitive form respectively) are much more activating than the (nested) questions of the other two tools. The single success factors were stimulating to find alternative /supplementing ways for improvement. We found some explanations why the project did not work well with respect to some aspects, but we did not feel urged to find excuses. Relating the success factors to the context of the NENA project was a motivation for planning the future of the NENA network. And we are stimulated to integrate the lessons learned in our present projects. In our opinion the set of success factors can serve as a quick and fruitful instrument for the management and improvement of many different kinds of (transdisciplinary) co-operation and/or network settings. To be of use for targets groups not familiar with organisation development, its concepts and terminology, as well as short illustration shall be added for each success factor.

<u>Table 6:</u> Evaluation of tool B (Eleven Success Factors for Co-operation and Networks, Grossmann et al. 2007))	
Time involved:	1,5 hours
Suitability for internal evaluation:	Good. Additional benefit when discussed in group.
Suitability for ex-post evaluation:	Good. Learning for future projects stimulated.
Adaptability to specific contexts:	Yes. Co-operation as well as network specifics can be dealt with. Items also stimulate to think about the critical aspects of transdisciplinary research.
Cost-benefit ratio:	Very good

Missing aspects:	Sustainable development, normative and ethic aspects.
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C: Evalunet guide – Basic criteria (Bergmann et al. 2005)

The high number of 24 questions and the amount of subheadings led to first doubts whether we have chosen an instrument suited for our purposes. Soon after starting with the set of basic criteria we found that mostly two to four or five aspects are intermingled within one question.

Questions have to be answered by: ‘yes/yes, but.../no, because...’. This approach does not allow for stimulation and new solutions and we found it very exhausting. After reaching question eleven we did not feel like continuing and we could not see whether this evaluation will be meaningful for us. For the sake of our evaluation experiment we forced us to bring it to an end. Since it was already very time-consuming and straining to discuss the questions in a group of two persons, it is not advisable to carry out this evaluation tool with a larger group.

Before starting an evaluation it is worthwhile to have a look on the six steps of evaluation as described in the Evalunet guide. We also want to emphasise that the underlying principles of most of the questions are of high relevance for the success of transdisciplinary projects, but the set of criteria has to be condensed and reformulated in order to make evaluation faster, more easy and inspiring.

<u>Table 7:</u> Evaluation of tool C: (Evalunet guide – Basic criteria, Bergmann et al. 2005)	
Time involved:	3 hours
Suitability for internal evaluation:	Low
Suitability for ex-post evaluation:	Yes
Adaptability to specific contexts:	No
Cost-benefit ratio:	Low
Missing aspects:	Fun, stimulation

Conclusions

How can research teams and consultants evaluate their completed projects easily and inexpensively? This question was the starting point for our test and analysis of three different tools. The Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research (Nölting et al. 2004), the Eleven Success Factors for Co-operation and Networks found by Grossmann et al. (2007) and the Evalunet guide (Bergmann et al. 2005) have been chosen, because of the growing importance of sustainable development, co-operation and networks and transdisciplinary research. The project NENA has been taken as a test case for the evaluation of these three tools: NENA has been a transdisciplinary research project enhancing sustainable lifestyles by initiating a network of organisations. One year after the formal end of the project we wanted to get ideas helpful for planning activities with regard to the future of the NENA network as well as for similar projects.

The results of the evaluation, as summarised in the section above,

- show helpful aspects of the investigated concepts and evaluation tools,
- identify what is lacking and which elements are complementary to each other,
- give information on the field of application and how to implement them in practice.

Learning ex-post provides valuable insights which can be used for the further development of offers, services and products. Because of the fast pace in transdisciplinary research, and management consulting as well, the most important success factor for evaluation seems to be that the evaluation has to be quick and inexpensive. If learning ex post shall get a standard in organisations two further criteria are important: Evaluation shall not only reproduce what has been known before, but provide new insights and helpful suggestions for further improvement and self-evaluation has to be stimulating and in the best case makes fun.

Only the eleven Success Factors for Networks defined by Grossmann et al. (2007) do fulfil the three success criteria mentioned above – though the authors did not design them as an evaluation tool. There is another noteworthy difference to the other two evaluation tools tested: The Guiding Methodological Questions for Sustainability Research (Nölting et al. 2004) and the basic criteria of the Evalunet guide (Bergmann et al. 2005) are formulated

as questions, most often in the form of nested sentences, including two or more different aspects in one phrase. In contrast to this the eleven success factors are formulated as short and concise messages which stimulated us to discuss the many aspects associated with the respective success factor. Thus our recommendation is to use short and stimulating phrases, instead of a multitude of questions and sub-questions.

As mentioned in the introduction Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) becomes increasingly important. As one of the consequences, e.g. the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber has founded the CSR consultants group to actively promote CSR concepts and to establish a professional approach. The CSR concept attaches importance to the participation of stakeholders. Business locations in Austria (and Europe) increasingly feel the need for innovations for the reason of competitiveness. Thus co-operation and networks with research institutions and a diversity of stakeholders, including civil society, will have to be successfully organised. The debate about climate change and other global trends of economical, ecological and social relevance indicates that for organisations a (re-)orientation towards the normative concept of sustainable development shall be a necessity in the future. Research institutions as well as management consultancies are well-advised to pay attention to the critical aspects and success factors of sustainable development, transdisciplinarity and co-operation. Therefore evaluation tools should include aspects critical to sustainable development, co-operation and transdisciplinarity. We encourage to take the set of Eleven Success Factors for Networks of Grossmann et al. as an evaluation basis, and to supplement it with a few additional statements. These extra stimuli shall aim at investigating the normative and ethical background of stakeholders on the one hand, and focusing on two special stakeholder groups on the other hand, namely (natural) environment and society, thus taking ecological and social aspects of sustainable development into account.

We believe that research should be combined with consulting activities. This would provide the basis that transdisciplinary projects do not only serve the scientific interests, but also ensures benefit and stimulation for the practice partners involved.

As a consequence of our evaluation experiment, we conclude that ex-post learning with the help of evaluation tools can be helpful and inspiring without being necessarily time-consuming. We feel motivated to include self-evaluation as a standard into our project routines. And we want to encourage research and consulting colleagues not only to tailor and implement evaluation tools at the clients side, but to use evaluation tools in a self-referential way, thus learning from own experiences.

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