

# **Kirsty and the Evaluators: Getting a Grip on Evaluation**

by  
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KIRSTY AND THE EVALUATORS: GETTING A GRIP ON  
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<sup>1</sup> with help from Brendan Hughes

## GETTING A GRIP ON EVALUATION

*All of the props and costumes for this skit should be made out of foam core, and be exaggerated and cartoony. Preferably in black and white with thick black borders at the cut out.*

*We start with a desk, and a sign held above the desk by a company member that says "The DoMore Foundation".*

### **NARRATOR**

Welcome to the DoMore Foundation. Patricia is the new executive director.

*PATRICIA takes the stage and sits down to his desk (on a rolling office chair). She brings on a flat foam desk phone, lifts the receiver and laughs. Freeze.*

She has a reputation for *efficiency!*

### **PATRICIA**

Yes I'm thrilled to be here. Everyone has welcomed me with open arms.

### **NARRATOR**

She is speaking with the head of the board of trustees.

### **PATRICIA**

It seems like the annual report is right around the corner, doesn't it?

*KIRSTY joins us on stage.*

### **NARRATOR**

Here's Kirsty. She is a program officer and good at what she does.

*PATRICIA looks at KIRSTY.*

### **PATRICIA**

Well, believe me, our program officers are good at what they do.

*Patricia waves Kirsty in to sit down. As Patricia talks Kirsty looks for a place to sit, not seeing one. Suddenly, a company member shoves on another chair. She sits, relieved.*

Yes, I think that is a fantastic idea. We'll find a way to quantify it.  
A month?

*Kirsty shifts in her chair, waiting.*

Of course. Nice talking with you. (hangs up) Kirsty, thanks for coming in.

**KIRSTY**

Of course! Thanks for joining me on my site visit this morning. I'm thrilled about that program.

**PATRICIA**

As am I. Listen, the board of trustees is looking down the field and feels there needs to be a way to quantify our impact. This will help up evaluate our situation as things get tight in the coming economic downturn.

**KIRSTY**

Quantify? Well, Patricia, these programs are aimed at social justice outcomes. I mean I could give you plenty of anecdotal narratives just from being a resident of this city for the last 25 years...

**PATRICIA**

I'm interested in something more official. I'd like you to produce a pilot plan for evaluating all of the Foundation's programs.

**KIRSTY**

All of them...

**PATRICIA**

In a month's time.

**KIRSTY**

I'm afraid I'll be dealing with a somewhat steep learning curve.

**PATRICIA**

I have every confidence in you. I've seen what you do with your team. Pete is a whiz kid. Good luck.

*Patricia leaves, taking her large phone with her. The "DoMore Foundation" sign is flipped. The other side says "Kirsty's office". Pete enters as the foamcore desk is flipped around in front of Kirsty.*

**PETE**

How's the meeting with the ED, boss?

**KIRSTY**

I am stunned. I have to develop a gigantic plan to evaluate all of our programs in a month, and I've never done anything like that before.

**PETE**

We know the foundation has had some major impacts, right?

**KIRSTY**

Agreed, definitely agreed, but how do we measure them? And for that matter, how do I evaluate my fellow program officers?

**PETE**

Start by telling them about it.

**KIRSTY**

Right, call a meeting.

*The two other "program officers" enter. The three then grab their hair and pace in a wide triangle (like a choreographed dance) stopping at the points of the triangle to address each other all talking at the same time.*

**ALL THREE**

Why do we need to evaluate our programs?!  
They're excellent!  
Everyone we fund tells us that!

*They pace.*

**ALL THREE**

What exactly are we evaluating?  
Are we looking for impacts or outcomes?  
What's the difference?

*They pace.*

**ALL THREE**

Who is being evaluated?  
Is it us? Or the Grantees work?  
Couldn't we just ask the grantees to evaluate their own work?

*The "other program officers" leave suddenly. Pete reappears immediately.*

**PETE**

How'd the meeting go?

## **KIRSTY**

I'm panicked. I'm going to pilates.

*Kirsty drops and does some pilates poses. The rest of the company drop into formation behind her and do the same movements. KIRSTY's CONSCIENCE begins to speak her thoughts as Kirsty performs pilates moves and thinks.*

## **KIRSTY'S CONSCIENCE**

I feel so exposed. What if my programs are actually weak and I'm the only one that doesn't know it? The others seemed to be thinking the same way. What if I lose my job? Is Patricia using this to squeeze me out? Am I being made to fire myself?

*Slowly the others get up and leave. The pilates class has ended, but Kirsty doesn't notice and continues to do leg scissors (or whatever).*

I hate feeling this ignorant. I hate not knowing how to do this! I feel so alone.

*She notices she is now alone on stage and stands.*

How long ago did pilates class end?

*She is instantly handed an oversized foamcore frying pan (in profile) and spatula. A company member in black, wearing black gloves with alternating orange and red fingers, kneels and wiggles his fingers under the pan (i.e. the flames). Another black clad company member holds a foamcore phone under her ear, which she speaks in while she cooks.*

## **KIRSTY**

The problem, Sam, is that I am completely out of my depth and I'm drowning.

*Sam, her friend from high school, appears on the other side of the stage, talking on another phone.*

## **SAM**

You're not drowning. Add paprika.

*She does.*

**KIRSTY**

It feels that way.

**SAM**

Opportunity and seawater feel very similar entering the lungs. Flip it.

**KIRSTY**

It doesn't look ready.

**SAM**

Trust me, it will be the perfect golden brown on the other side. You just have to flip.

*She does.*

**KIRSTY**

It's beautiful!

**SAM**

See? And here's what else: this isn't the only difficult thing you've faced down, you are a highly competent person.

**KIRSTY**

Doesn't feel that way lately.

**SAM**

And it's perfectly reasonable for Patricia to want an evaluation of the programs. It's a pretty good way of knowing how well the work has performed thus far for the money spent.

*Kirsty has begun to ignore the pan and is just listening now.*

And it's a very rational way of deciding what to do in the future. It's burning.

**KIRSTY**

What?

**SAM**

Your dinner.

**KIRSTY**

Whoa! Thanks.

*She turns down the glove-wiggle "burners"*

Thanks! How did you know that?

**SAM**

I have my ways.

**KIRTSY**

Thanks sam.

*Suddenly Kirsty is back in her office with Pete! She is jazzed!*

There really are a ton of benefits to doing this evaluation. A good one could result in all sorts of learning about what would improve grant making in the future. It might even expose some areas of programming that aren't working!

**PETE**

I've got a friend named Abbie from grad school who was a whiz with numbers and might know exactly what the next step will be.

**KIRSTY**

Well let's get Abbie on the phone!

*"Abbie" is wheeled on in a chair. Abbie's head is a **giant abacus**. Abbie speaks babbling and holding up foam core word bubbles that say "log frame" and "least squares regression" and "sensitivity analysis" and "theory of change" and the some strange squiggles that are too complex to understand. Kirsty, listening to her desk phone, is ashen. She has no idea what **ABBIE** is saying.*

Uh... Maybe I'll google "evaluation grants programs"

*She stands and turns upstage, where a giant foamcore google homepage awaits her. She hits enter with her finger and the following entries roll out like wallet flip photos: "Six Sigma" "Logic Model of Evaluation" "Outcome Mapping" "Results Based Accountability" "Balanced Scorecard". She clicks on one randomly, and a **BUCKET OF FOAMCORE WORDS IS DUMPED ON HER HEAD**. She recovers, clicks on another one, and **ANOTHER BUCKET!***

**PETE**

How's the Googling?

**KIRSTY**

(speaking as buckets of “information” continue to be dumped on her head)

Fine thanks!

(Bucket)

Actually not fine.

(Bucket)

They’re all so heavy-weight and cumbersome. I just want something simple, clear and tailor made for me. Is that too much to ask?!

(Bucket)

**PETE**

Okay. I’ve got an idea. First, calm that itchy mouse finger. For this, Google is a rabbit hole. Why don’t we very simply figure out what we want to know, then devise a tender specification for an external evaluator based on that?

**KIRSTY**

Pete, you’re a genius!

**PETE**

It’s noon, I’ll be back with some ideas at 3.

*(a company member runs on and sticks both arms straight in the air, then rotates their right arm slowly clockwise in front of them, while inching their left arm from straight up to the side – thus simulating the hands of a clock going from noon to three. They run off revealing Pete, who hasn’t moved, but now holds a piece of paper.)*

Okay, I’m back. I’ve listed the key characteristics of our program, and brainstormed a list of questions we’d like answers to. 1. has the capacity of the non-profit sector increased in the city? 2. Are there closer working relationships between civil society and the city administration as a result of the grants made by the DoMore Foundation? And 3. Are policies and practices toward civil society better in the city?



**KIRSTY**

Fantastic. Let's get this to the education and health programs and see if they think we should go with this. Let's start with the health program.

*(Health program officer from earlier and staff members enter braiding their bodies quickly and passing the paper in front of them – keeping it in front of the center person.)*

**HEALTH PROGRAM OFFICER**

Are you kidding us?!

**ALL THE HEALTH FOLKS ALTERNATING FAST**

We're not interested in capacity building!

We want to know how many low-income people are served!

Where the program has failed to provide health care to those who most need it!

Whether the clinics and other service providers are cost efficient!  
The demographics of those most served through the programs provisions!

Changes in health threats over the course of the program's existence and whether the program adequately addresses the modern acute problems!

The trajectory of health indicators in the city over time!

Whether the city's health indicators are better or worse than other cities of comparable size!

*(They braid themselves off stage in a flurry.  
KIRSTY and PETE look at each other.)*

**KIRSTY**

Maybe it'll be more popular with the education program people.

*(Pete holds out the paper tightly in both hands in the direction opposite that to which the health people went. The EDUCATION program officer enters, wielding a graduation cap (mortarboard) like a weapon, and uses it to split the paper in half.)*

## **EDUCATION PROGRAM OFFICER**

Hiyyyyyyahh! (then, deadpan) I just have one question for your evaluation: (putting on the mortarboard) Has access to a quality public education extended to marginalized populations as a result of DoMore programming? The I am adamant that if we could figure out the answer to this one question, all the other questions we have could be answered from it.

*(the education program officer leaves)*

## **KIRSTY**

Okay... uh... let's sort out all these needs, Pete. The health program seems to be most interested in evaluating the *work of the grantees*. While we are interested in evaluating the *cumulative impact of our program on civil society in the city*. And the education program is interested in whether their program has achieved a social justice outcome.

## **PETE**

There is only one agreement coming out of these meetings: three separate evaluations are likely to be necessary...

## **KIRSTY**

and the costs will be exorbitant.

## **PETE**

And guess who's going to have to argue for three separate evaluations to "Ms. Efficiency"?

*(Suddenly we set up in the ED's office, just like the first scene, Kirsty whirls around to face the boss)*

## **PATRICIA**

Three separate evaluations?!

*(Kirsty takes in a breath and then says the following all in one breath extremely fast!!!)*

## **KIRSTY**

Well... (go!) different goals in each program require different evaluation techniques and also 15 years of grant-making with no evaluation is like 15 years without research and development because the value over the next 15 years could be well worth the cost especially if failures or poor analysis is identified because failure is a cost born by the city which may be wasting money on failed strategies but this way the evaluations can also be released in the public domain thus it can be considered a public service and should be expensed at the same level as grants are.

*(silence. Patricia considers this. Kirsty catches her breathe.)*

**PATRICIA**

Okay.

**KIRSTY**

What?

**PATRICIA**

Three evaluations. Just don't break the bank.

*(Instantly back in Kirsty's office)*

**KIRSTY**

She went for it, Pete!

**PETE**

Terrific! I've been researching consultants. I've got a list for us to send our tender out to.

**KIRSTY**

Let's do it!

*(They throw paper airplanes in every direction)*

Now we wait.

*(Three thick manilla envelopes are thrown back at them)*

**PETE**

They're here!

*(They open them and read. At first they're excited. Then they frown.)*

This says they will apply the 'Logit and Probit' model, which forms part of the family of log-linear techniques to their situation. But, there is nothing in this proposal to suggest that they understand our situation – even remotely.

**KIRSTY**

This one seems to rely on 'stakeholder confidence', which seems to signify how people feel about the foundation and its work. I mean, this is interesting but there is almost nothing about the value-added of the grants in the program.

**PETE**

This one proposes to track key social indicators in the city over the past seven years and see whether these improve, but the connection between the indicators and the grants program is pretty tenuous.

**KIRSTY**

I thought consultants would be the answer.

**PETE**

I'm doing some pretty hardcore frowning right now.

**KIRSTY**

Are you going to frown town?

**PETE**

I'm shopping for condos in frown town.

**KIRSTY**

It's a buyer's market. Well, it's pretty late, let's pack it in. You wanna catch the subway?

**PETE**

I think I'll stay and see if there's anything else that might be promising.

**KIRSTY**

All right. You're an angel.

*(The whole company comes on stage and instantly forms a crowded subway car. Kirsty rides for a while, holding the strap, thinking. Then she gets an idea and whips out her cell phone. PETE is still sitting on the other side of the stage at her foam core desk. He answers his foamcore cell phone.)*

**PETE**

Are you already home?

**KIRSTY**

I'm still on the subway, we haven't gone into the tunnel yet. Listen, I just remembered our grantees have been doing their own evaluations and sending them to us as part of their reports! See if we have any on file, this may be just the answer!

**PETE**

I love it! I'm checking now.

*(A foam core file drawer yields up some files. Pete flips through them fast.)*

Hmm. These evaluations seem to fall into two categories. There are those that simply praise the organization and present the results in an uncritical way so that the report looks like an annual report that the organization itself might have produced. The second kind is full of figures and tables that give information on various bits of the operation of the organization, but don't seem to say anything meaningful about the effect of the work on the communities that the grantees were serving.

**KIRSTY**

So you're telling me none of the evaluations take an aggregate view of the impact of work in the field the partners wish to influence.

**PETE**

That's what I'm telling you.

**KIRSTY**

So the problem it seems may not lie in our lack of knowledge or understanding but rather there may be something wrong with the approach taken by all these evaluators that resulted in facts and figures but not in real knowledge.

**PETE**

Right.

**KIRSTY**

The real question is: how do we capture REAL KNOWLEDGE, and know we're not just counting heads and counting beans?

**PETE**

Exactly.

**KIRSTY**

How do we evaluate *social justice impact*?

**PETE**

That's the \$64,000 question.

**KIRSTY**

Okay, hold everything.

*(The subway stops and everyone gets out – and off the stage – Kirsty is left all alone addressing the audience.)*

We're going to do this ourselves. We just have to explore the following decisions...

*(The narrator from the beginning comes back)*

### **THE NARRATOR**

Social contracts

What is being evaluated – the grantee's work or the foundation's programming?

Where is the evidence?

New language – what is our theory of change?, logic model, log frame, structural transformation – transactional vs. transformation, snapshot vs. long term impacts; outcomes vs. impact

### **KIRSTY**

(to audience) this is where you come in. Where do I go from here?  
What do I do now?