

Helen Simons



Bio

Helen Simons, PhD, AcSS, FRSA, is Professor Emeritus of Evaluation and Education at the University of Southampton and an independent evaluation consultant incorporating the creative arts. A specialist in programme, policy and institutional evaluation, for over 25 years she has conducted case study evaluation and/or directed evaluation training and consultancy in over 20 countries. Her case study workshops are all experienced-based, drawing on the humanistic methodologies and democratic processes which are central to her work, and utilizing examples from the field of evaluation practice.

Helen is a past president of the United Kingdom Evaluation Society, an elected academician of the Academy of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences (UK) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She has published widely on the theory and practice of evaluation, case study, qualitative methodology and the ethics of evaluation.

Workshop title

Case Study Evaluation

Target audience

Professional evaluators using or aspiring to use case study evaluation as the major approach for conducting evaluation of public programmes; and commissioners of evaluation considering whether to invest in this approach.

Level

Introductory/Intermediate. Some experience of case study evaluation would be helpful so the workshop can build on participants' experience.

Workshop content

This workshop will briefly consider the many uses of case study in evaluation. However its prime focus is on case study methodology as the main mode of evaluation for evaluating policies and programmes. It will examine the kind of knowledge it generates and the warrant for its central role in evaluation that aspires to influence policy making and practice. The workshop will contest frequently held assumptions about case study evaluation e.g. that 'you cannot generalize', it is 'too subjective' and 'not useful for policy-making'. It will also explore how we can best re-present and communicate the unique insights and experiences of case study to persuade our audiences that living with the uncertainty and complexity often portrayed in case study evaluation increases their agency in policy making and practice. The workshop draws on a recent book, Simons, H (2009) *Case Study Research in Practice*. London: Sage, which explores the practice of case study evaluation over thirty years.

Detailed workshop outline

The workshop will address questions which perennially worry case study practitioners and commissioners of evaluation. These include how to justify case study in cultures where quantitative methodologies dominate; how to identify 'quality' and rigour in case study evaluation; how to manage 'politics' in the field when personal and political agendas threaten professional aspirations; how to generalize from the case; theorise within the case; how to get beyond the perception of case study as merely the telling of a 'good story' to offer critique of programmes and policies; and how to communicate findings so they can be effectively utilised. This is not an end state but an ongoing process, starting from an understanding of stakeholders' information needs but also challenging the concept of conclusive evidence as a basis for policy making and action. Broadly speaking the course

will follow the process of setting up case study evaluation from start to finish. However we may need to refine the exact focus in the event to concentrate on issues participants find problematic or on which they would welcome further elaboration.

Specific issues and sessions:

Introduction: to participants' experience and issues

Session 1 - Purposes, types and uses of case study evaluation – concept and justification for the approach; when and why useful for policy making/practice; intrinsic, instrumental, collective; appropriate questions, contexts, audiences; strengths and limitations

Session 2 - Planning and design of case study to ensure rigorous, valid knowledge; choosing the case/s, boundaries, unit of analysis; working with stakeholders to refine goals and outcomes. Data collection methods and sampling within method.

Session 3 - Field work - interface of relationships, methods and politics - how to manage difficult field situations and people; ethical principles and procedures which facilitate transparency of process; how to ensure validity of the case when policy context shifts

Session 4 - Analyzing and interpreting in context - different approaches, formal/informal; validity for purpose, strategies for enhancing validity; credibility, generalization in case study – different types - concept, process, situated, cross-case, in-depth particularization.

Session 5 - Reporting and Communicating Evaluation - re-presenting data and people, how to present results to both portray experience and draw implications for action, forms of reporting –formal, portrayal, artistic - for different audiences and to ensure their use.

Training/Learning Methods

The workshop will be interactive combining short presentations, group work, dialogue and peer critique. Participants will be encouraged to contribute their experience of conducting case study evaluation. Many of the issues will be addressed through a single case to illustrate the theory and process of case study evaluation in action.

Learning Objectives

- Enhanced understanding of the purposes, types and contexts in which case study evaluation is useful;
- Insight into the kind of knowledge case study generates and how we learn from it.
- Knowledge of how to plan, design and conduct case study evaluation
- Awareness of different modes of analyzing and interpreting case study data
- Familiarity with diverse ways of reporting that are useful and credible
- Appreciation of the political/ethical in case study evaluation practice.
- Greater confidence in arguing the strengths of case study as methodology.