

Blog ParEvo

My previous experiences with ParEvo

This is the fourth time I've used ParEvo, mainly in the context of evaluations - focusing on retrospective analysis. This time, however, I approached it very differently to my previous endeavours. In the first three cases, the emphasis was on reconstructing a narrative, often through the collaborative creation of a fictional character who travelled chronologically through the project, highlighting different perspectives from start to finish. In the final iterations, I also incorporated the character's view of the project's future. Despite these adaptations, the basic structure remained consistent - a narrative unfolding in chronological order, detailing the evolution of the project from inception to completion, and capturing the different perspectives of the ParEvo participants.

The last approach

The most recent use of ParEvo was very different from previous instances. This time, the methodology took a specific form - a group discussion centred on relevant topics aligned with the evaluation matrix. It's worth noting that the evaluation questions were tailored to meet the specific needs of this assignment, deviating from the standardised patterns typically followed, for example, by OECD/DAC.

The overall aim was to engage 12 to 15 members of the same organisation in discussions about the programme model implemented in the project under evaluation. In the first three iterations, participants were tasked with articulating the programme model used in the project. This involved reconstructing the programme model, looking at its design, partner selection, theory of change (ToC) development, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes, and other aspects. Throughout these iterations, participants interacted as if they were physically present in a room, agreeing, disagreeing or elaborating on the contribution they chose to follow.

In Iterations 4 and 5, participants were asked to go beyond describing to making critical contributions to the programme model in order to identify both its strengths and weaknesses. This phase was designed to promote a deeper understanding of the model's effectiveness and areas for improvement. Subsequently, in the sixth and final iteration, participants were asked to develop recommendations for improving the programme model for future projects and programmes. Again, the interaction mirrored that of a focus group, with participants providing input, expressing agreement or disagreement, and shaping the discourse together.

The decision not to use the comment function in this exercise is recognised in retrospect as a missed opportunity. Although its inclusion could have provided valuable insights and facilitated more extensive discussions, there were concerns about potential slowdowns and participant fatigue. Balancing engagement and efficiency in such group exercises can indeed be challenging and this particular dilemma remained unresolved.

The analysis of this exercise proved to be extremely valuable and interesting. In particular, the questions posed in each iteration closely mirrored those in the evaluation matrix. This deliberate alignment facilitated a direct correlation between the ParEvo results and the

evaluation questions, similar to using input from a structured 6-week focus group. While the focus group analogy may seem repetitive, it accurately captures the collaborative nature and structured format of the ParEvo discussions.

The analysis process involved distilling the main themes that emerged from each iteration and then coding them against the evaluation questions. This was done using qualitative analysis software, in this case MAXQDA. It's worth noting that, in this case, the client preferred a traditional approach without the use of artificial intelligence to distil the emerging themes in each iteration. However, it's important to emphasise that using AI for this step can be a valid and efficient option, provided the client agrees.