

The Road Toward Institutionalizing Evaluation in Developing Countries: Following the Path of Ray Rist

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Background: This paper traces Ray Rist's many and varied contributions to evaluation capacity development (ECD) through the 2000s so as to provide a global perspective on his contribution toward institutionalizing evaluation in developing countries.

Purpose: The intent is to not only acknowledge the various ways that Ray Rist has supported countries in their institutionalizing of evaluation, but to also reflect on the various dimensions associated with building an effective and sustainable national monitoring and evaluation system (NMES), and, in so doing, draw lessons for new and emerging evaluators from the Ray Rist experience.

Setting: The early 2000s saw a major change in international development evaluation, as a new paradigm was emerging based on country ownership of evaluation and evaluation capacity linked to the national vision of the country, accountability, and good governance. This would require a new evaluation architecture centered around institutionalizing evaluation, and a different approach to ECD.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: The framework used in examining the various contributions of Ray Rist recognizes four broad

building blocks to support countries in developing and institutionalizing their NMES—vision of leadership, enabling environment, technical capacity to supply monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information, and capacity to demand and use M&E information. All influence how far and how fast institutionalization of evaluation occurs at a country level (UNEG, 2012; Lahey, 2013, 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis: Data and information has been drawn from a review of documents, literature, formal interviews, and consultations with former colleagues and key collaborators of Ray Rist, as well as firsthand experience of the author with ECD and NMES capacity development in a number of countries across the globe over the period in question.

Findings: Ray Rist was a catalytic force on his own career path, intersecting with and influencing the paths of others along the way, and all helping countries accelerate their own journeys toward country-owned and institutionalized NMES. Notable points are depicted along a nonlinear path that included challenges and opportunities that Ray, collaborating with others, took advantage of to gain greater momentum.

Keywords: *evaluation capacity development (ECD); national monitoring and evaluation system (NMES); institutionalizing evaluation; International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET); International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)*

A key part of Ray Rist's legacy is his contribution to training and learning of evaluation in a development context. Several articles in this volume speak to specific areas where Ray's efforts contributed to evaluation capacity development (ECD). This paper addresses Ray's many and varied contributions from a more global perspective, following Ray's path across his various activities associated with development evaluation through the 2000s: formal training, such as IPDET; building and supporting country and regional evaluation networks; partnering and hands-on country-level development; and leading, developing, and promoting a global network, conferences, and publications, all aimed at furthering the understanding of evaluation practice and its use and importance to countries across the globe.

It is contended that what emerged over time from Ray's notable efforts and various activities was a state where the whole became greater than the sum of the parts, insofar as his overall impact on aiding countries in their institutionalization of country-owned evaluation is concerned.

Ray was a catalytic force on his own career path, intersecting with and influencing the paths of others along the way, and all helping countries accelerate their own journeys toward country-owned and institutionalized national monitoring and evaluation systems (NMES).

The path of Ray Rist's career depicted in this paper draws from documents, literature, consultations with key collaborators, and personal experience from an association with Ray over nearly 25 years. Out of this, an attempt has also been made to draw lessons learned about promoting, positioning, and using evaluation that could have application for emerging evaluators.

The Changing Paradigm of National Evaluation Capacity Development

The early 2000s saw a major change in international development evaluation, as a new paradigm was emerging centered on country ownership of evaluation and evaluation capacity that is linked to the national vision of the country, accountability, and good governance (Menon, 2010). It would require "a new evaluation architecture ... to be erected so as to give a privileged role to country-based evaluations with developing countries in the driver's seat" (Picciotto 2007, p. 520).

For this to happen, recognition needed to be given to the broad set of players within a country required in developing an NMES. *Institutionalizing*

evaluation would imply a capability within government to both generate as well as use evaluation information.

Historically, the focus had been on the supply side; i.e., the technical capacity to measure performance and provide credible information in a timely way. While that remained critical, the new paradigm put additional focus on developing capacity within a country to demand and use evaluation information—key users being government institutions, ministries, civil society, the media, and other stakeholders. It all highlighted the importance of political will for change, as well as an enabling environment within the country, both of which would impact the pace of development, effectiveness, and sustainability of an NMES (UNEG, 2012).

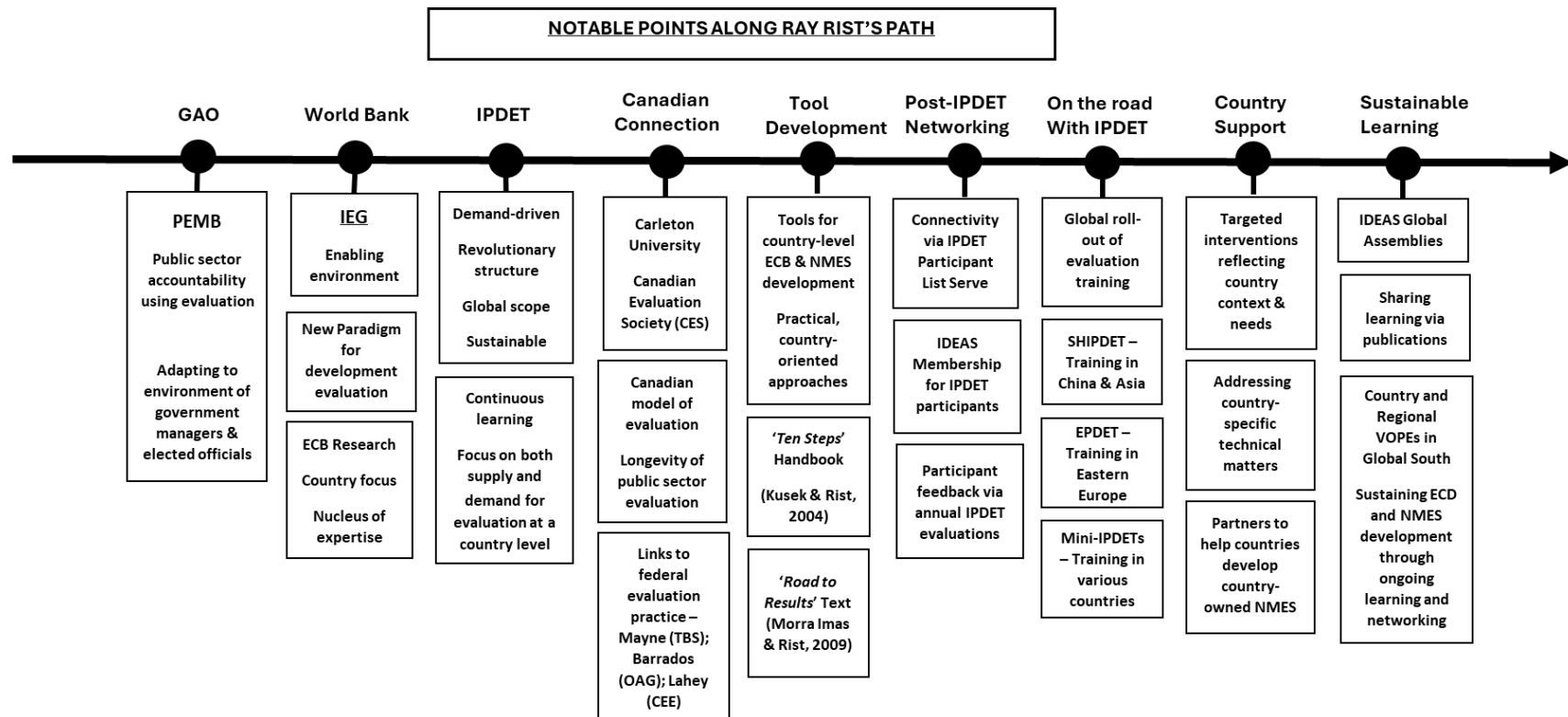
These new ideas about ECD and institutionalizing evaluation proved to be fortuitous timing for Ray Rist, as he was in the process of putting more focus on ECD while working in the World Bank's Operations Evaluation department (which would later become the Independent Evaluation Group, IEG)

An Overview of the Path Toward Institutionalizing Evaluation

Figure 1 depicts the path that Ray traced out over the 2000s that would help developing countries move closer to institutionalizing country-owned evaluation. Notable points along the way that had impact on progress toward that goal are identified. It must be noted that the path was not linear. There were challenges and opportunities that Ray took advantage of to gain greater momentum.

One can think of a country's journey to institutionalization of evaluation as being rather organic. There is no one standard approach that would be appropriate for every country—no one-size-fits-all. There would be a sense of planning, but some other factors—country context, political and global considerations, and recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities that come along—would likely greatly influence how far and how fast institutionalization of evaluation would occur at a country level (UNEG, 2012; Lahey, 2013, 2015). This would be an environment well-suited to Ray's personality and leadership style and approach to ECD.

Figure 1. The Road towards Institutionalizing Evaluation in Developing Countries – Following the Path of Ray Rist



Early Days and Critical Learning

Joining the World Bank in 2000 was really the start of the Ray Rist path that focused on facilitating the institutionalization of evaluation in developing countries.

The first part of Ray's career had been spent largely in an academic environment, where research and publication play a significant role. He then spent more than a decade in the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), including within the Program Evaluation and Methodology Division (PEMD). This served to bring Ray closer to a public-sector environment and the reality of the importance that politics and leadership play in influencing decisions in government.

The GAO environment, with its bent on accountability, also brought out the importance of the practical side of evaluation practice, focusing on questions that matter, and timely and relevant information to satisfy the needs of senior leadership and the political level. This would influence Rist's approach to supporting institutionalization throughout his career (Barrados, this volume).

An Enabling Environment to Help Launch the Journey

The World Bank provided Ray an enabling environment to launch what would prove to be notable milestones along his career path to helping countries institutionalize evaluation. In some ways, it represented a perfect storm to enable action.

The new paradigm for development evaluation, noted above, served as an important backdrop, as did the support of Bob Picciotto, director general of evaluation at the World Bank. There was a wealth of country-level information being developed via the ECB working paper series launched in 1998 by Keith Mackay of the IEG (Mackay, 2007).

Two products codeveloped by Ray in the early 2000s served as significant foundation pieces for international ECD, and as springboards playing key roles in institutionalization across the globe: in 2001, with Linda Morra-Imas, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET); and, in 2004, with Jody Kusek, *Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System: A Handbook for Development Practitioners*. They were two different vehicles—IPDET a hands-on training program offered in an innovative way (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2023); and the *Ten Steps* handbook an easy-to-follow guide for developing a new country-owned public

management tool that emphasized results-based M&E (Kusek & Rist, 2004).

These two initiatives reflected many of the hallmarks of Ray's approach and style: They were both developed in partnership with others; both innovative; both high-profile, yet blessed by the World Bank and introduced without undue delay; both emphasize a practical approach to M&E and the importance of country context; and both have proven to be highly successful, still used some 20 years later. They both also employ crossover vehicles to further enhance the training and messaging—a workshop was designed to be used in conjunction with the *Ten Steps* handbook, and a 2009 textbook, *The Road to Results*, was published to provide more in-depth learning than the 2-to-4-week IPDET training, and to reach a wider audience (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2009).

The formula proved effective as, for example, the *Ten Steps* handbook, supplemented by a series of training sessions conducted for Colombia's National Planning Department over 2004–2005, was recognized as having assisted officials in strengthening the *Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de Gestión y Resultados* (SINERGIA).

The technical tools and approach were essentially being marketed to an audience that went beyond evaluators, in addition to aspiring evaluators. Ray was very adept at communicating with senior government officials and those who could influence the political level. This was a key part of his forte. Appealing to a country's senior leadership would be important in order to make inroads for developing and sustaining an effective NMES. It in effect represented ECD on the *demand* side, an area traditionally overlooked.

I saw this firsthand in both Botswana and Guyana in the early 2000s, where Rist was advocating for evaluation and ECD to the Office of the President (Botswana) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF; Guyana). In the process, he developed lasting relationships with key senior government officials who would become champions for country-owned evaluation.

Broadening the Network and Reach—On the Road with IPDET

Over the 16 years (2001–16) that Rist and Morra-Imas were codirectors of IPDET, the program trained 4,000+ participants from 80+ countries through its Carleton University base. Deemed highly successful, an independent impact evaluation also found that IPDET helped build local capacity and an appetite for development evaluation in home countries (Cousins et al., 2010).

IPDET's success created demand for in-country versions of the training program. Generally led by Rist and Morra-Imas, this could take on different forms: specialized training in a particular country (Beijing, China, 2006), a partnership with the Shanghai International Program for Development Evaluation (SHIPDET), offered twice a year—once for Chinese participants and once for persons from some 26 countries across Asia; regional mini-IPDET training cosponsored by IPDET and an international agency (such as the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian De-Mining, GICHD); and country-requested mini-IPDETs (such as occurred in Botswana and Guyana over the years).

Needless to say, this would demand a fair amount of administration, business acumen, and energy to make it happen smoothly. Much of this fell on the shoulders of the IPDET codirectors, Rist and Morra-Imas, an amazing feat since IPDET was essentially operating on a cost-recovery basis.

Targeted Country Support

Not only were the country-based mini-IPDETs broadening the network and reach of the messaging around ECD and institutionalizing evaluation; they also provided opportunities for more direct contact with country officials and leadership, an area where Ray would excel.

Taking the two examples of Botswana and Guyana noted above, Ray used this opportunity to facilitate ECD and institutionalization even further, following an approach that supported a country's goal of a country-owned institutionalized and sustainable NMES. Having built trust and support with senior country officials, Ray drew from his vast network to help identify other experts who could be brought in by the country to work with their evaluation champions and other officials, many of whom had received IPDET training. This would involve assisting country officials with the more detailed follow-up work of institutionalization in a practical and timely way. For Botswana, I have been actively engaged over the last 15 years, working with country officials in helping develop a strategy and action plan for a country-owned NMES and related infrastructure development (Lahey, 2013, 2016).

In Guyana, a similar pattern was followed, though a broader-based team under Frederic Martin led (and, to this day, continues) the majority of the fieldwork in support of the Ministry of Finance efforts to institutionalize a country-owned NMES. Indeed, between 2011, when Ray introduced the first mini-IPDET to Guyana's senior officials (Ministers and PS), and 2024, a total of 41

5-day sessions, involving 1,700 participants, had been delivered. MOF officials acknowledge that this has raised awareness by government decision makers and professionals about the value-added of M&E. Some modest demonstration evaluations of practical issues, conducted by Ray, helped officials to start to see the value in evaluation.

These are but two of several examples where Ray's influence impacted the pace of development of country-owned NMES.

Sustainable Learning

Early on, Rist and Morra decided to establish an IPDET participant listserv to maintain the network that was being created during the on-site IPDET training. It would help keep participants current on issues in evaluation, job opportunities, and evaluation events. This simple idea was to have greater-than-expected impact on continued cross-fertilization and growing the network, as most participants (some 4,000+) registered on the listserv (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2023). This took on even larger dimensions, as IPDET graduates, through a partnering agreement arranged by Ray and Linda, were automatically being offered membership in IDEAS, the International Development Evaluation Association founded in 2002. This proved to be yet another opportunity that supported ECD and NMES development, as the growing evaluation community in the Global South and North could discuss and debate practical topics such as the ideal organizational placement for a new evaluation unit (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2023).

Ray took on the role of IDEAS president in 2008 (and Linda became secretary general a year later), bringing more international exposure to the association, largely due to Ray's leadership style and his championing the work of international development evaluators who were contributing to the institutionalization of country-owned evaluation across the globe.

Through his knowledge and experience with the publication process, and an ability to muster people toward a common goal, the biennial IDEAS Global Assemblies took on more prominence. Over his period as president, following a Global Assembly, Ray would lead a team to draw from the various presentations, addressing a key and timely theme associated with ECB and institutionalization. This led to the following World Bank publications: *Influencing Change: Building Evaluation Capacity to Strengthen Governance* (Rist et al., 2011); *Development Evaluation in Times of Turbulence: Dealing with Crises That*

Endanger Our Future (Rist et al., 2013); and *Poverty, Inequality and Evaluation: Changing Perspectives* (Rist et al., 2016). Through this mechanism, the sharing and retention of knowledge and “lessons” would be strengthened.

Conclusions and Lessons

In tracing the path of Ray Rist, as depicted in Figure 1, some critical elements come into view that new and emerging evaluators might learn from Ray’s experience—indeed, lessons that have relevance for the global evaluation community in looking ahead to the uncertainties of the remaining 2020s.

Ray’s professional and results-oriented approach, collaborative nature, and ability to identify and then take advantage of opportunities all contributed to his influence in helping countries move forward toward institutionalizing country-owned evaluation.

More than this, as noted by many colleagues consulted, it has been Ray’s connectivity with people that has worked to instill interest and support in an agenda among widely diverse groups of people.

Connectivity Between Activities and with People

A key learning from the Ray Rist journey in support of institutionalizing evaluation is the importance of connectivity between activities. It is not necessarily a well-thought-out plan but really an organic process that recognizes opportunities and takes advantage of those opportunities to make progress toward the goal of institutionalization. It helps ensure momentum and, in the long run, sustainability. But it also recognizes the importance of creating a reliable network and partnership that may be needed in order to maintain momentum.

Continuous and Lifelong Learning

From a training/learning perspective, Ray’s journey also emphasizes that we learn not just during periods of formal education (such as the 2-to-4-week IPDET course), but also even when we don’t know we are learning. For new evaluators, that should be considered a key part of their development.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities and Being Nimble to Take Full Advantage of the Opportunities

Following Ray’s path, it is clear that challenges didn’t deter him (nor Linda); indeed, they represented opportunities to be innovative. Possessing a passion for his field, for people, and for achieving results, this also required a willingness to connect with others and be nimble in finding workable solutions to problems (Hagel, 2021). In a post-COVID world, this is critical for the global evaluation community.

The Importance of Effective Communication and Leadership Skills

A key competency of evaluators that needs to be reflected in training and development is communication and interpersonal skills—for example, as Ray so ably demonstrated, the ability to relate to and understand the needs of senior officials and nontechnical audiences. Improving one’s emotional intelligence (EI) skills could be an important component and long-term development objective, helping equip evaluators with a better understanding of how to best interact with individuals, collaborate, and build stronger relationships. It also reflects a leadership style that calls for more than an ability to analyze, control, and command (Hamalainen & Saarinen, 2007). In terms of leadership, it could help create a collective energy and sense of urgency toward a goal. As observed at various points along the Ray Rist path, Ray’s mantra, “Work hard—play hard,” which musters a business-like attitude alongside a spirit of collegiality and playfulness, has led groups of professionals from diverse backgrounds toward common goals in a timely and results-oriented fashion.

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