Trends

Embracing the Three Characteristics will become even more important in the coming years as dramatic societal shifts create both new opportunities and new challenges related to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. These shifts in the landscape of philanthropy—and the world around it—are fundamentally transforming the context for decision-making within social sector organizations and for the broader practice of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Key trends cut across a range of different dimensions:

- ***Social trends*** – demographic shifts that influence the populations and organizations with which an organization works
- ***Technological trends*** – digital developments that influence the information that can be collected, accessed, analyzed, and applied
- ***Behavioral trends*** – changes in perceptions, expectations, and preferences that influence how individuals engage with organizations and with one another
- ***Political trends*** – transformations in policy that influence the requirements and priorities for funding and accountability

Understanding these trends allows us to anticipate the future we can most likely expect for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (absent active intervention). And it can help the field imagine how the trends might be harnessed to create a better future that we'd like to see. On the following pages, we explore a number of the trends that are most likely to have significant implications for the future of monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Trends

Social

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity

The U.S. is becoming a majority nonwhite country; by 2020 more than half of the children born in the US are expected to be part of a nonwhite race or ethnic group. Minorities have increasing economic and political power as an ever-larger share of college students, entrepreneurs, and voters. The present U.S. electorate is the country's most racially and ethnically diverse ever; almost one-third of eligible voters are Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American or another racial or ethnic minority. These demographic shifts are changing the composition of communities and workplaces, creating the need for organizations to inclusively adapt to the priorities and perspectives of a broader range of constituents, staff, and other stakeholders.[1]

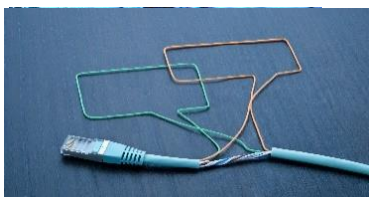
Next generation leadership and organizations

New people are entering the workforce and new types of organizations are driving change. More than one in three U.S. workers today are Millennials, and in 2015 they surpassed Generation X to become the largest share of the American workforce. Millennials bring with them greater familiarity with technology and data, new definitions of success, and new attitudes about supporting "causes" over organizations. Millennials, along with new "Digital Native" organizations that fundamentally integrate technology into their business models, are changing approaches and expectations about how data is collected, analyzed, and integrated into decision-making.[2]

Blurring of the sectors

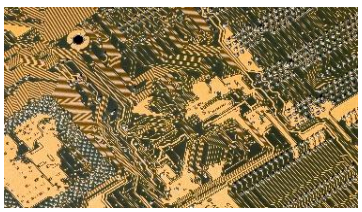
The social sector, private sector, and government are increasingly intertwined. Innovative new models that blend elements from multiple sectors – including impact investing, social impact bonds, social enterprises, and B Corps—are increasingly prevalent. The number of B Corps, for example, has grown exponentially since 2007. In the social sector, greater numbers of staff have private sector experience and bring expectations, tools, and approaches rooted in their business experience. As organizations and individuals work across sectors, it's also becoming more difficult to distinguish between funding for investing, philanthropy, and political activity.[3]

Technological



Accessibility and sharing of information

The spread of technology and near-universal internet access has changed the way we access and share information. There is now more data than ever at our fingertips. Technology now allows us to find and broadcast information both simultaneously (in real time) and asynchronously (for information posted online that can be found and retrieved indefinitely)—making it easier than ever before to share and collect data, and for people to find the information they need when they need it. As important, the rise of environmental sensors, "smart cities," and the "internet of things" means the digital data collection process envelopes us everywhere. However, access is not universal or equitably distributed, and the more information that goes online, the more isolated those without access become.[4]

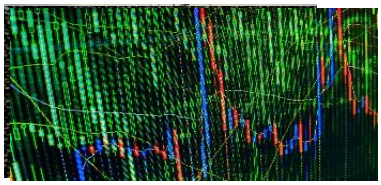


Growing connectedness and aggregation

Technology is not only increasing our access to data, but also making it cheaper, faster, and easier for people to collaborate, connect data sources, and create entirely new knowledge by mashing up and building on information they find. Organizations can now pool individual information into much larger, more powerful, collective datasets, and protocols for interoperability are making it possible to stitch together disparate data sources to aggregate information like never before. At the same time, individuals are becoming more aware of a lack of control over their data, and interest in privacy-protecting, data-destroying, and encrypted messaging tools is on the rise.[5]

Trends

Technological



The power of data analytics

The growing accessibility of information and exponential improvements in data processing technologies have resulted in a rapid increase in the speed and scale at which data can be processed. For example, in 2003 it took 8 years and $1 billion to sequence a genome. Today it can be done in a few days for a few thousand dollars. Advances in our ability to analyze, visualize, and make sense of data is increasingly enabling society to ask and answer new—and often more challenging—questions. However, the skills and capacities to do this credibly and ethically – and to understand the findings – are not well distributed. Further, algorithmic analyses of large data sets include racial, ethnic and other biases. The data sets used to train artificial intelligence, machine learning approaches, and analytic methods rely on data sets also contain biases and other limitations.[6]

Political

Demand for greater transparency, accountability, and measurement

Efforts to make government data more open and available have succeeded in multiple countries. Civil society organizations have been both proponents and beneficiaries of this movement, and robust subsectors of "civic tech" organizations have emerged, alongside new programs at nonprofits that depend on access to digital government data. The U.S. government has in turn increasingly emphasized an "evidence-based approach" to government social policy, tying more funding to data on effectiveness. There are still not clear guidelines on data sharing across sectors, and many nonprofits are challenged to meet often conflicting demands for privacy, accountability to funders, and non-discrimination or bias laws. Governments are also finding that controlling access to data can be as powerful as controlling funding when it comes to shaping civil society.[7]

Behavioral

Increasing expectations for "say"

New technologies and methodologies are raising public expectations for greater participation and voice. The social, private, and government sectors are, with varying degrees of success, engaging users and constituents earlier and more frequently in decision-making. For example, product and program development is increasingly incorporating user-centered design that places the customer or citizen at the center of the process (e.g., patient-centered or student-centered design). And this shift has been complemented by growing knowledge of human behavior supplied by disciplines such as behavioral science and social marketing. At the same time, individuals are becoming more aware of a lack of control over their data, and interest in privacy-protecting, data-destroying, and encrypted messaging tools is on the rise.[8]

Growing recognition of the power of collaboration and ecosystems

Given the interconnectedness of today's world and the scale of the challenges we now face, no independent business, agency, or organization, no matter how large, can succeed on its own. For-profit companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of thinking about value chains and ecosystems—auto, transportation, and technology companies, for instance, are working together with lawmakers and regulators to advance clear rules of the road for self-driving cars.[9] Meanwhile, foundations and nonprofits are embracing collective impact approaches and figuring out ways to align independent action to advance progress towards shared social goals.