

Practical Program Evaluation: A Program Theory Approach

Stewart I. Donaldson

Christina A. Christie

Claremont Graduate University



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Overview

- Growth of Evaluation Practice & the Profession
- Contemporary Evaluation
- Roles for Theory in Evaluation
- Practical Program Evaluation Approaches

Booming Evaluation Practice

First Boom (Late 60s-70s)

- Great Society
- War on Poverty
- Evaluation of Government Programs

Booming Evaluation Practice

Second Boom (90s-present)

- Global
- Diverse Contexts
- Many More Evaluands
- Multidisciplinary
- New Approaches & Methods Needed

Professional Evaluation Has Come Along Way Baby!

Evaluation has evolved quite remarkably over the years from its early close adherence to traditional social science models.

Global Values

- Accountability
- Professionalism
- Evidence-based ...

Evidence Based Practice: Sample of Applications

- Evidence-based Medicine
- Evidence-based Mental Health
- Evidence-based Management
- Evidence-based Decision Making
- Evidence-based Education
- Evidence-based Coaching

Evidence Based Practice: Sample of Applications

- Evidence-based Social Services
- Evidence-based Policing
- Evidence-based Conservation
- Evidence-based Dentistry
- Evidence-based Policy
- Evidence-based Thinking about Health
Care

Evidence Based Practice: Sample of Applications

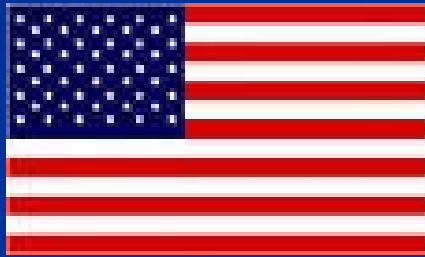
- Evidence-based Occupational Therapy
- Evidence-based Prevention Science
- Evidence-based Dermatology
- Evidence-based Gambling Treatment
- Evidence-based Sex Education
- Evidence-based Needle Exchange Programs
- Evidence-based Prices
- Evidence-based Education Help Desk

New Formula



Mom

+



The Flag

+



Warm Apple Pie

=

Evidence-based Practice

In God We Trust



- ALL OTHERS MUST HAVE CREDIBLE EVIDENCE

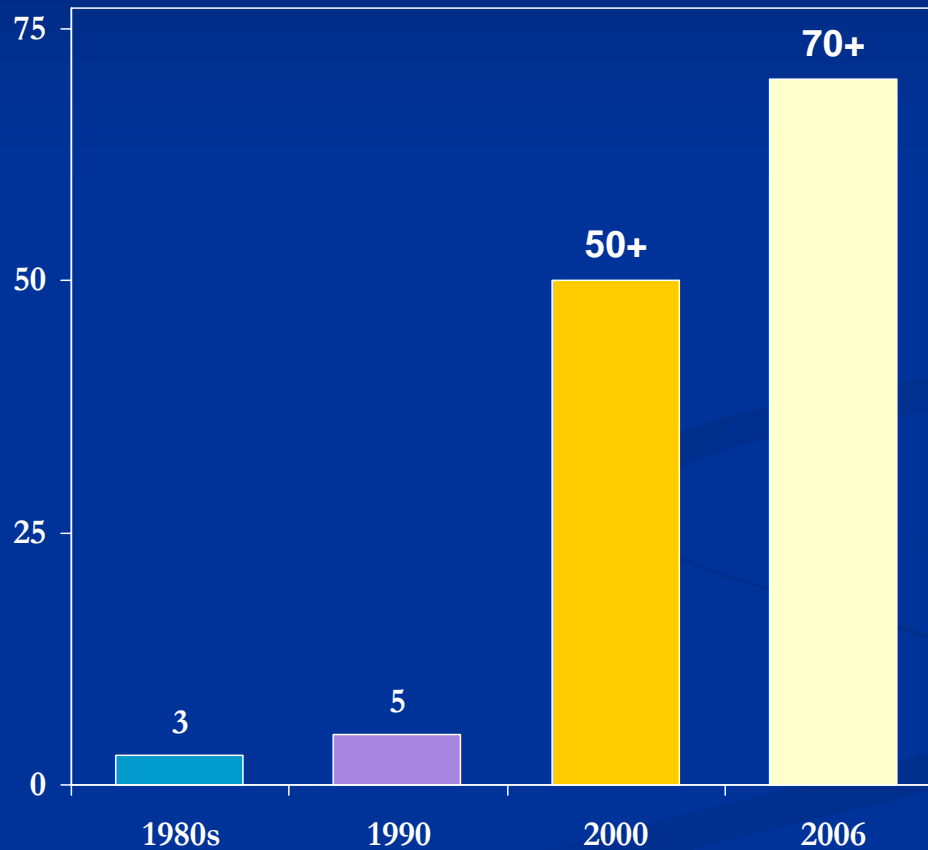
What Counts as Credible Evidence?



An Indicator of the Second Boom in Evaluation Practice

- 1980s – Only 3 National and Regional Evaluation Societies
- 1990 – 5
- 2000 – More than 50
- 2006 – More than 70 including a Formal International Cooperation Network

Number of Evaluation Professional Associations



Sample of Professional Evaluation Organizations

- American Evaluation Association
- Canadian Evaluation Society
- European Evaluation Society
- Australasian Evaluation Society

- International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE)

Sample of Professional Evaluation Organizations

- African Evaluation Association
- Associazione Italiana de Valuatazione
- Brazilian M&E Network
- Central American Evaluation Association
- Danish Evaluation Society
- Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Evaluation
- Ethiopian Evaluation Association
- Finnish Evaluation Society
- Ghana Evaluators Association

Sample of Professional Evaluation Organizations

- Israeli Association for Program Evaluation
- Japanese Evaluation Association
- Kenya Evaluation Association
- Korean Evaluation Association
- La Societe Francaise de l'Evaluation
- Society Malaysian Evaluation
- Nepal M&E Forum
- Nigerian Evaluation Association
- South African Evaluation Network

Sample of Professional Evaluation Organizations

- Spanish Public Policy Evaluation Society
- Sri Lanka Evaluation Association
- Swiss Evaluation Society
- Thailand Evaluation Network
- Ugandan Evaluation Association
- UK Evaluation Society
- Utvarderarna (Sweden)
- Zambia Evaluation Association
- Zimbabwe Evaluation Society
- International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)

The Top Regional Evaluation Association of the Future



Hawaii-Pacific Evaluation Association

Contemporary Evaluation

- Evaluation Theory
- Evaluation Design
- Evaluation Methods
- Evaluation Practice
- The Evaluation Profession
- Research on Evaluation

Why Evaluate?

...Purposes of Evaluation

- Program and organizational improvement
- Oversight and compliance
- Assessment of merit and worth
- Knowledge development

Reasons to Evaluate

- Determine the need for a program (needs assessment)
- Assist in program planning by identifying potential program models to achieve goals (needs assessment/program planning)
- Describe program implementation (monitoring/process)
- Determine if goals have been achieved (outcome)
- Judge overall benefit of program (relative value and cost/impact)

Reasons Not to Evaluate

- **Cost**
- **Risks**
- **Evaluation Anxiety**

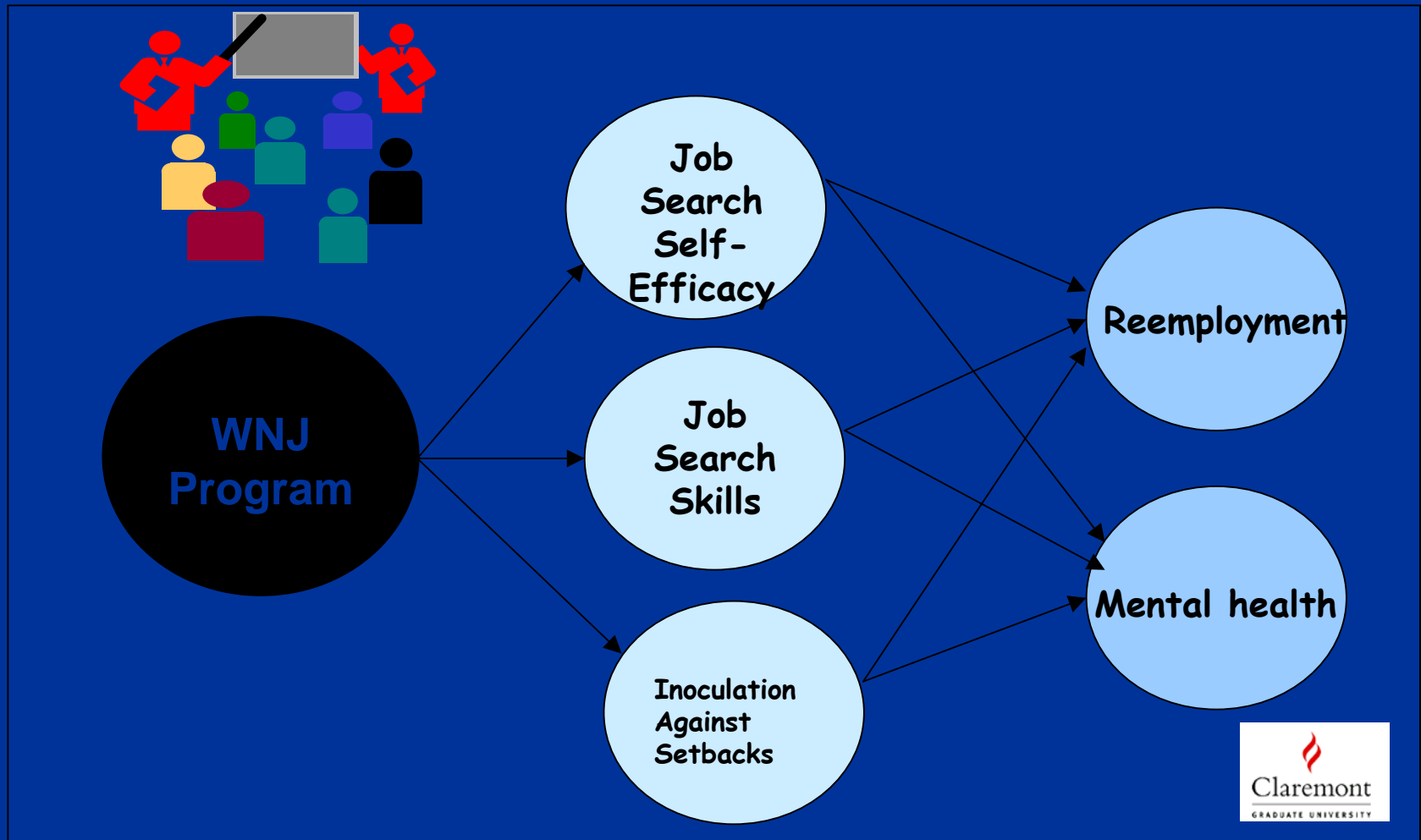
Excessive Evaluation Anxiety (XEA)

- Consequences of XEA
- Signs of XEA
- Sources of XEA
- Strategies for Managing XEA
- Psychology of Evaluation

Roles for Theory in Evaluation Practice

- **Program Theory**
- **Social Science Theory**
- **Evaluation Theory**

Example: Winning New Jobs Program Theory



Method for Visions of Future Framework

- **Invited Diverse Set of Evaluators**
- **Ask to Give a “Last Lecture”**
- **Visions of “How We Should Practice Evaluation in the 21st Century”**
- **Reactor Panel**
- **Audience Participation**



Visions for the Future of Evaluation Practice

- **Social Experimentation - Cook**
- **The Transdisciplinary Vision – Scriven**
- **Empowerment Evaluation – Fetterman**
- **Fourth Generation Evaluation - Lincoln**
- **Inclusive Evaluation - Mertens**
- **Results-oriented Management - Wholey**
- **Theory-driven Evaluation - Donaldson**



More Evaluation Approaches

- **Utilization-Focused - Patton**
- **Community-Based - Connor**
- **Realist – Pawson**

Reconciling Diverse Visions

- **Argue for Superiority**
- **Toward Integration - Mark**
- **Embracing Diversity – Donaldson**

Evaluation Theory

- **Prescriptive (not empirically based)**
- **Guide Practice**
 - e.g., Design, Methods, Breath and Depth of Stakeholder Involvement
- **Driven by the Primary *Role* of Evaluation**

EVALUATION THEORY EXERCISE

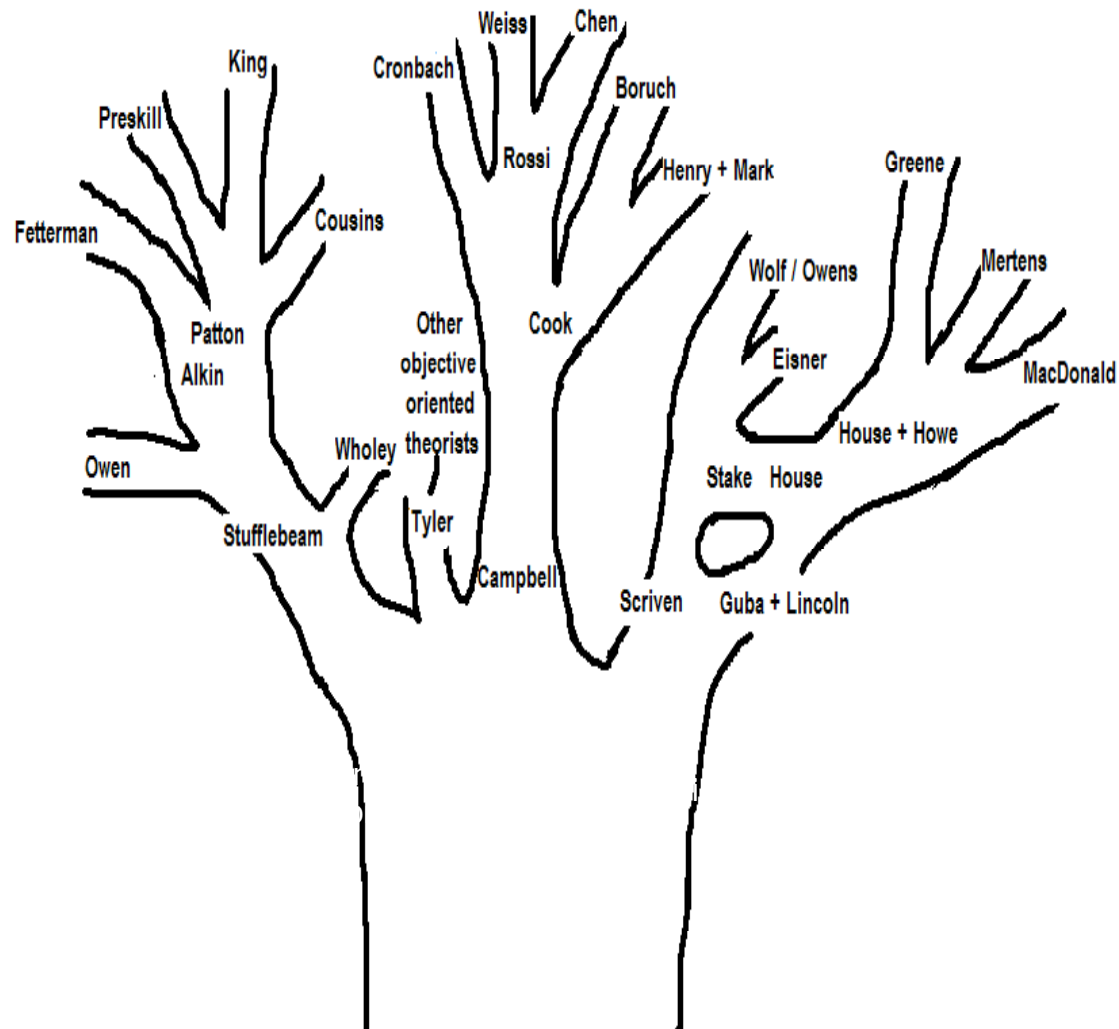
- **Small Groups of 5-10**
- **Evaluate the Room from the Perspective Presented on the Handout**

Evaluation Theory Tree

Use

Methods

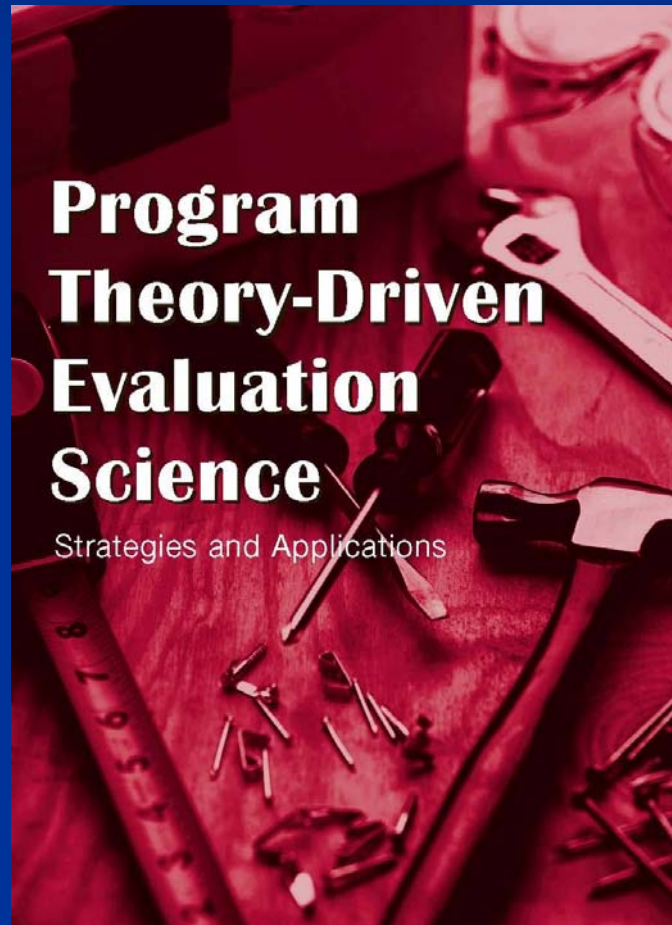
Valuing



Practical Program Evaluation

- Integrative Framework
- Contextual: Contingency Perspective
- Method Neutral
- Culturally Competent
- Evaluation Standards
- Guiding Principles

Practical Program Evaluation: A Program Theory Approach



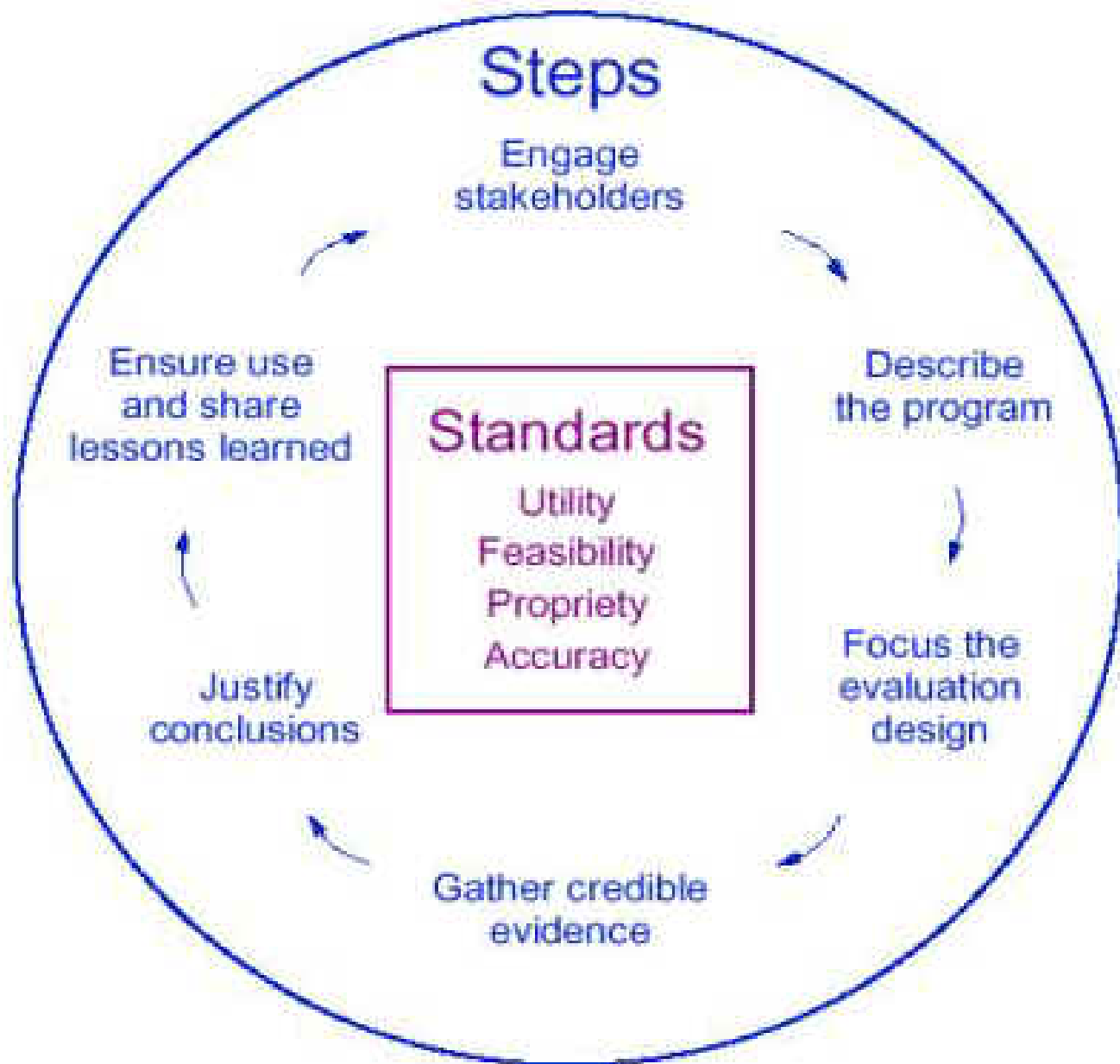
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Program Theory-driven Evaluation Science: 3 Steps

- **Develop Program Impact Theory**
- **Formulate & Prioritize Evaluation Questions**
- **Answer Questions**

Program Theory-driven Evaluation: CDC Framework

1. Engage Stakeholders
2. Describe the Program
3. Focus the Evaluation Design
4. Gather Credible Evidence
5. Justify Conclusions
6. Ensure Use and Lessons Learned



Step 1: Engage Stakeholders

- Definition: Fostering input, participation, and power-sharing among those persons who have an investment in the conduct of the evaluation and the findings; it is especially important to engage primary users of the evaluation.
- Role: Helps increase chances that the evaluation will be useful; can improve the evaluation's credibility, clarify roles and responsibilities, enhance cultural competence, help protect human subjects, and avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Step 2: Describe the Program

- Definition: Scrutinizing the features of the program being evaluated, including its purpose and place in a larger context. Description includes information regarding the way the program was intended to function and the way that it actually was implemented. Also includes features of the program's context that are likely to influence conclusions regarding the program.
- Role: Improves evaluation's fairness and accuracy; permits a balanced assessment of strengths and weaknesses and helps stakeholders understand how program features fit together and relate to a larger context.

Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

Definition: Planning in advance where the evaluation is headed and what steps will be taken; process is iterative (i.e., it continues until a focused approach is found to answer evaluation questions with methods that stakeholders agree will be useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate); evaluation questions and methods might be adjusted to achieve an optimal match that facilitates use by primary users.

Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design (Continued)

Role: Provides investment in quality; increases the chances that the evaluation will succeed by identifying procedures that are practical, politically viable, and cost-effective; failure to plan thoroughly can be self-defeating, leading to an evaluation that might become impractical or useless; when stakeholders agree on a design focus, it is used throughout the evaluation process to keep the project on track.

Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence

- Definition: Compiling information that stakeholders perceive as trustworthy and relevant for answering their questions. Such evidence can be experimental or observational, qualitative or quantitative, or it can include a mixture of methods. Adequate data might be available and easily accessed, or it might need to be defined and new data collected. Whether a body of evidence is credible to stakeholders might depend on such factors as how the questions were posed, sources of information, conditions of data collection, reliability of measurement, validity of interpretations, and quality control procedures.

Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence (Continued)

- Role: Enhances the evaluation's utility and accuracy; guides the scope and selection of information and gives priority to the most defensible information sources; promotes the collection of valid, reliable, and systematic information that is the foundation of any effective evaluation.

Step 5: Justify Conclusions

- Definition: Making claims regarding the program that are warranted on the basis of data that have been compared against pertinent and defensible ideas of merit, value, or significance (i.e., against standards of values); conclusions are justified when they are linked to the evidence gathered and consistent with the agreed on values or standards of stakeholders.
- Role: Reinforces conclusions central to the evaluation's utility and accuracy; involves values clarification, qualitative and quantitative data analysis and synthesis, systematic interpretation, and appropriate comparison against relevant standards for judgment.

Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

- Definition: Ensuring that a) stakeholders are aware of the evaluation procedures and findings; b) the findings are considered in decisions or actions that affect the program (i.e., findings use); and c) those who participated in the evaluation process have had a beneficial experience (i.e., process use).

Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned (Continued)

- Role: Ensures that evaluation achieves its primary purpose — being useful; however, several factors might influence the degree of use, including evaluator credibility, report clarity, report timeliness and dissemination, disclosure of findings, impartial reporting, and changes in the program or organizational context.

Evaluation Reframed

Thought to be:

- Expensive
- Time-consuming
- Tangential
- Technical
- Not inclusive
- Academic
- Punitive
- Political
- Useless

Can be:

- Cost-effective
- Strategically timed
- Integrated
- Accurate
- Engaging
- Practical
- Helpful
- Participatory
- Useful

Helpful Resources

Claremont Graduate University

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/154.asp/>

CDC Evaluation Framework

<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/>

American Evaluation Association

<http://www.eval.org/>