Practical Program Evaluation: A Program Theory Approach

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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
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

- 1980s: 3
- 1990: 5
- 2000: 50+
- 2006: 70+
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

WNJ Program

- Job Search Self-Efficacy
- Job Search Skills
- Inoculation Against Setbacks
- Reemployment
- Mental health

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 Present on the Handout
Evaluation Theory Tree

Use
- King
- Preskill
- Fetterman
- Patton
- Alkin
- Owen
- Stufflebeam

Methods
- Cronbach
- Weiss
- Chen
- Boruch
- Ross
- Henry + Mark
- Cook
- Other
- objective
- oriented
- theorists
- Wholey
- Tyler
- Campbell
- Scriven
- Guba + Lincoln

Valuing
- Greene
- Wolf / Owens
- Elmore
- House + Howe
- MacDonald
- Morton
Practical Program Evaluation

- Integrative Framework
- Contextual: Contingency Perspective
- Method Neutral
- Culturally Competent
- Evaluation Standards
- Guiding Principles
Practical Program Evaluation: A Program Theory Approach
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/