Using Evaluation to Develop Creative and Effective Programs and Strategies

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Thinking Evaluatively…

“My question is: Are we making an impact?”

Published in The New Yorker August 5, 1991
Rationale for this Discussion

- Expectations of program effectiveness, cost-benefit, accessibility, and appropriateness
- Program evaluation is an essential organizational practice in public health and a public health service
- Evaluation practice is not consistent and well-integrated across rural and public health programs
- Importance of developing ability to monitor and evaluate programs and strategies
- Need for appropriate evaluation skills, systems, structures, and resources to take a more evaluative approach to our work

Why Think Evaluatively? (Eval Purposes by Wayne Welch)

- NEEDS ASSESSMENT - examine a situation to determine what could or ought to be done
- OBJECT IMPROVEMENT - improve the object during development phrases (FORMATIVE evaluation)
- ACCREDITATION - certify the quality of a program
- (RATIONAL) GOAL ATTAINMENT - determine whether or not goals/objectives were achieved
- DECISION MAKING - select from among several alternative courses of action
Why Think Evaluatively? (Eval Purposes by Wayne Welch)

- ACCOUNTABILITY - indicate responsibility for promised outcomes (involving cost considerations)
- CLARIFYING UNDERSTANDING - describe or portray an object to interested parties
- SUPPORT - show value of efforts or a need for reinforcement, usually for continued funding
- CONSUMER PROTECTION - protect the public; aid consumer decision making
- SOCIAL CHANGE - bring about social reform; provide evidence to aid in policy decisions

Definitions

- **Evaluative thinking**: “Intellectual discrimination used to judge or compare; required to move past uncertainty and deal constructively with the issues; and to participate meaningfully in evaluations”
  Davidson, Howe, & Scriven, 2004, p. 260

- **Evaluation**: "The process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something"
  Scriven, 1991, p. 139

- **Program evaluation**: The systematic and comprehensive approach to studying the effectiveness of programs for the purposes of program improvement, making judgments about the programs, informing decision making, and generating practical knowledge
Utilization-Focused Program Evaluation

“Evaluation done for and with specific, intended primary users for specific, intended uses”

The PERSONAL FACTOR in evaluation: "The presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates“

Patton, 1997, p. 44

Logic of Evaluation

• Selecting criteria of merit on which the thing being evaluated should do well;
• Setting standards of performance on those criteria for how well the thing must do;
• Gathering data on the criteria relative to the standards; and
• Synthesizing the result into a statement of whether the thing is good or not (i.e., judgment)

Scriven, 1980
Types of Evaluation

FORMATIVE evaluation
- Evaluation for program improvement
- A developmental process
- Often done for program developers and implementers

SUMMATIVE evaluation
- Typically done at the end of a project
- Often done for other users or for accountability purposes

Also, PROCESS and OUTCOME evaluation

Constraints on Program Evaluations (by Dr. J. King)

- Organization politics: support, opposition, security of the object
- Resources available: some say to spend 5-10%, but more often it is 3% or less
- Leadership: control, people’s goals, fit of evaluation
Constraints on Program Evaluations (by Dr. J. King)

- Program history: program stability, duration, past evaluations
- Social patterns: attitude of staff, clients, agencies, organizational climate
- Guidelines and standards: "standards," human subjects rules, confidentiality, legislation, professional ethics

CDC Framework for Program Evaluation

FIGURE 1. Recommended framework for program evaluation

- Engage stakeholders
- Describe the program
- Focus the evaluation design
- Gather credible evidence
- Justify conclusions
- Ensure use and share lessons learned

Standards
- Utility
- Feasibility
- Propriety
- Accuracy

Program Evaluation Standards

- Utility
- Feasibility
- Propriety
- Accuracy

“So what?” Dilemma

- Many organizations design their work plans based on showing what was done as opposed to the actual impact
- More emphasis needed on developing outcome measures to answer “so what” question
- Outcomes should be linked to the program goals, inputs, and activities
Importance of Program Theory/Logic Model

**Program Theory:** "The full chain of objectives that links inputs to activities, activities to immediate outputs, immediate outputs to intermediate outcomes, and intermediate outcomes to ultimate goals"

Patton, 1997, p. 218

**Logic Model:** A concise way to show the relationship between the program’s ultimate goal and the strategies and activities it is using to get there, along with how it will measure progress.

Example of a Logic Model Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project:</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources/Inputs</strong></td>
<td>Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influences</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Another Logic Model Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>EVALUATION AND LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESIRED RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>DATA SOURCES AND METHODS Where the data needed to track the indicators and performance measures will come from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTIVATING CONDITIONS AND CAUSES</td>
<td>INDICATORS</td>
<td>EVALUATION QUESTIONS Questions, based on indicator data and movement that will determine whether the strategy needs to be modified. Questions, based on the performance measures, that determine whether the project is working as intended, what lessons have been learned, and how the project may need to be modified in order to get better results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIES</td>
<td>PERFORMANCE MEASURES</td>
<td>STAKEHOLDERS The funders, collaborators, and other individuals or organizations with a vested interest in the program who need to be involved in learning from the data being collected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVITIES</td>
<td></td>
<td>MECHANISMS FOR LEARNING The opportunities for stakeholders to come together and learn from and make decisions based on the data about the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### When Evaluation Is Meaningful

- Program objectives, important side effects, and priority information needs are well defined
- Program objectives are plausible
- Intended uses of the information are well defined

Wholey, 1979
Evaluability Assessment (EA)

• A systematic process that helps identify whether program evaluation is justified, feasible, and likely to provide useful information

• Determines whether a program is ready for evaluation—either a process or outcome evaluation, or both.

Advantages of EA

EA will improve a future evaluation by
• formalizing the agreement between the evaluator and decision makers on what is important in the organization,
• anticipating evaluation problems, and
• smoothing the overall process
**EA Questions**

1. Does the program serve the population for whom it was designed?

2. Does the program have the resources discussed in the program design?

3. Are the program activities being implemented as designed?

4. Does the program have the capacity to provide data for an evaluation?


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**Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)**

- Evaluative thinking is “a combination of commitment and expertise, involving an understanding of the performance gap and knowing how to gauge it”
  
  Davidson, Howe, and Scriven, 2004, p. 260

- ECB is a “context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality program evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices within and/or between one or more organization/program/sites”

  Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002, p. 8
Evaluation Capacity Building Framework

Figure 1. Elements of a Grounded Framework for Evaluation Capacity Building

References


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