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Evaluation for Specific Users and Specific Purposes: The Utilization Focused Evaluation

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Overview

- A Basic Introduction to Evaluation
  - Definition(s)
  - Basics of Evaluation
  - Steps
  - Classifying Types of Evaluation
- Defining Utilization Focused Evaluation
- "The Personal Factor"
- UFE in Practice
- Politics and Issues in UFE

Evaluation Defined

- There is not a universally agreed upon definition…
  - terms merit/quality and worth/value are universal

- …to determine or fix the <u>value</u> of; to examine and judge.
- …the systematic determination of the <u>value</u> or quality of something (Scriven, 1973).
- …the identification, clarification, and application of defensible *criteria* to determine an evaluation object's <u>value</u> in relation to those *criteria*.

- Often considered a dynamic *process*…

Encyclopedia of Evaluation

- Defines as:

  - …an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, *value*, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan. Conclusions made in evaluations encompass both an empirical aspect (that something is the case) and a normative aspect (judgment about the *value* of something). It is the *value* feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigative journalism, or public polling. (Fournier 2005a: 140)

The Stakeholder(s)

- Stakeholders hold a vested interest in the evaluation
  - Upstream Impactees
    - Taxpayers, political supporters, funders, policy makers
  - Midstream Impactees (Primary Stakeholders)
    - Program Managers, Staff, Teachers, Administrators
  - Downstream Impactees
    - Those receiving services or products

- Important role for evaluator to help stakeholders articulate their criteria
  - Evaluator is also a stakeholder

Why Evaluation?

- Help stakeholders make a judgement and/or decision on what is being evaluated
  - Determine the *value* of what is being evaluated
  - Determine if what is being evaluated should continue
- Evaluations …
  - are intended to have a relatively immediate impact
  - can inform decision making
    - Public policy, education, etc…
  - help improve programs
  - bring about social betterment
    - …alleviate social problems and meet human needs…
  - contribute to extending knowledge

Types of Evaluation

- Formal vs. Informal
  - Structured vs. Non-structured

- Formative
  - Continuous feedback for purposes of improvement
- Summative
  - Summary of what has occurred for accountability purposes

- *Chef tastes his own creation vs. Customers taste Chef's creation*

What is Evaluated?

- Programs
  - After school programming (ASP), Head Start, Teacher Training
- Policies
  - Health Care Reform, NCLB, Firearms Control
- Products
  - Textbook, curricula, student work
- Other
  - Personnel
  - Processes
  - Proposals

General Areas of Evaluation

- Context/Needs Assessment

- Theory Assessment

- Process

- Impact
  - Product/Outcomes

- Cost/Benefit

- A single evaluation could contain all or one of these areas!

Evaluation Methods

- Design
  - Observational
  - Experimental
  - Quasi-Experimental

- Data Collection
  - Focus Groups
  - Questionnaires/Surveys
  - Direct Observation
  - Participant Observation
  - Interviews

- Data Analysis
  - Qualitative
  - Quantitative
  - Mixed Methods

Evaluation Approaches

- A classification system (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011)
  - Expertise-Oriented Approaches
    - Professional judgments on quality
  - Consumer-Oriented Approaches
    - Judging quality to aid decisions about purchases
  - Program-Oriented Approaches
    - Determining the extent to which program objectives or key elements in the program theory are delivered or achieved
  - *Decision-Oriented Approaches*
    - *Providing useful information to aid in decision making*
  - Participant-Oriented Approaches
    - Involving a few or many stakeholders in depth in the evaluation; understanding and portraying the complexities of programmatic activity; empowering stakeholders; pursuing social justice

Judging Evaluations

- Evaluation Standards
  - Joint Committee on Standards for Evaluation
  - American Evaluation Association

    - *Utility*
    - Feasibility
    - Propriety
    - Accuracy

What is UFE?

- Michael Quinn Patton considered primary proponent/developer
  - History here at UNL as well
    - Dr. Robert Brown, Larry Braskamp, Robert Stake
  - In general, defines evaluation as a process "undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements and provide information about programs and policies within contextual boundaries of time, place, values, and politics"
  - Defines UFE as "a process for making decisions and focusing an evaluation on intended use by intended users"
    - Evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses
- Considered open-ended
  - Does not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, theory or even use
  - Focuses on primary users and their intended uses of the evaluation

What is UFE?

- Concerned with how *real people* in the *real world* apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process.
  - From general/abstract
    - Possible audiences/potential uses
  - To real/specific
    - Actual primary intended users and explicit commitments to concrete, specific uses
- Based on the premise that use must be planned for and facilitated

Assumptions in UFE

- UFE is based on assumptions that
  - Primary purpose of evaluation is to inform decisions
  - Use is more likely to occur if the evaluator identifies one or more stakeholders who *care* about the evaluation and are in a position to use it
    - i.e., "the Personal Factor"

Identifying Stakeholders

- Most important factors in identifying stakeholders
  - Level of interest in the evaluation
  - Power in the organization and/or power in the program or policy to be evaluated

Patton (2008; p.80)	Low-Power Stakeholders	High-Power Stakeholders
High-interest stakeholders	Support/enhance capacity to be involved, especially when they may be affected by findings, as in the case of program participants. Their involvement increases diversity of the evaluation.	High potential as primary intended users. These are often key "players" who are in a prime position to affect use, including using it themselves as well as drawing the attention of others.
Low-interest stakeholders	Inform them about the evaluation and its findings. Controversy can quickly turns this amorphous "crowd" of general public stakeholders into a very interested mob.	Need to cultivate their interest and be alert in case they pose barriers to use through their disinterest. Considered "context setters".

"The Personal Factor"

- Research based
- Defined as "the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates"
    - Specific, identifiable people, not vague, passive audiences
- Presence of "The Personal Factor" results in greater use of evaluation findings.
- Critical to UFE
- Evaluator must establish a personal relationship with primary stakeholders
    - aids in meeting their needs/sustaining their interest

Steps in UFE

- Intended users are identified
- Intended users and evaluator come together
  - commit to the intended uses
  - determine evaluations focus
- Methods/Measurement/Design
  - engage users in the process so they understand how the findings can be interpreted/used
- Intended users/evaluator come together to interpret/discuss findings
  - recommendations generated
  - strategies for use decided upon
- Dissemination decisions are made

- At every stop in the evaluation, primary stakeholders are asked "how will this impact use"?

Situational Negotiation

- Negotiation between evaluator/user occurs throughout evaluation
- Most important negotiation begins in design stage with negotiation of intended and expected users
- Situations are unique
  - Mixture of people, politics, history, context, resources etc…
  - No "right" way
- "Active-Reactive-Adaptive"
  - Consultative nature between evaluator and intended users
    - Actively identifying intended users and focusing useful questions
    - Reactive in listening to intended users and responding to what they learn about the particular evaluation situation as it unfolds
    - Adaptive in altering evaluation questions/designs in light of increased understanding of situation/changing conditions
  - Cookbook designs are not imposed
    - Approach/role changes from situation to situation

Process Use

- Refers to individual changes in thinking and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process (Kellaghan & Sutfflebeam, 2003).

- Primary types of process use
  - Enhancing shared understandings, particularly about results
  - Supporting and reinforcing the program through intervention-oriented evaluation
  - Increasing participants' engagement, sense of ownership and self-determination
  - Program or organizational development

- UFE increases this, and other uses, through relationships developed with intended users

Evaluation Questions in UFE

- Patton provides criteria for UFE questions
  - The evaluation question is empirical.
    - Data based
  - Phrasing of the question does not lead to a particular answer.
  - The primary intended users have a vested interest in answering the question.
  - The primary intended users have a vested interest in answering the question for themselves.
  - The primary intended users can identify a use for the answer to the question.
    - What, if any, action will result?

In UFE...

- ...the evaluator
  - is not the primary decision maker and/or user
    - Facilitates judgement/decision making
  - identifies real people as users, not vague passive audiences
  - identifies people, not organizations (e.g., federal gov), as users
  - focuses on decision makers, not decisions
  - does not assume the funder is the primary decision maker
  - identifies intended users/uses prior to any findings
  - identifies all primary stakeholders and includes them meaningfully in evaluation decision making
  - sorts through messy politics and nurtures stakeholder relationships to foster use of evaluation findings
  - is not co-opted by powerful stakeholders
    - does not succumb to demands of powerful stakeholders

Issues in UFE

- UFE is a pragmatic, flexible approach BUT…

- Focus on interests of intended users of results may reduce role of other important groups
- Technical quality can be sacrificed
  - Methods/measures should be appropriate
- Achilles heel is staffing changes/turnover of primary stakeholders
  - build in team of primary stakeholders
  - consider time needed to bring replacements up to speed
- Capacity building can be a long, difficult process
  - Too much too soon
  - Relationships must be cultivated

Issues in UFE

- Role of evaluator generally varies
  - Scientist
    - Academic/social scientist
  - Consultant
    - Collaborative style
  - Surveillance and compliance oriented
    - Accountability
  - Primarily a negotiator in UFE
- Use can often mean misuse
- Ethical concerns – who does evaluator serve?
  - Limiting stakeholder involvement to primary intended users
  - Working closely with primary intended users

UFE in Practice

- National evaluation of policy requiring health insurance organizations to provide contraception coverage
  - For purpose of accountability and policy review
    - Primary intended users of the evaluation are congressional committee members
  - Policy highly visible/controversial/political
    - Requires certain organizations to do something they do not believe in

- Credibility/Utility of an evaluation of a policy/program of this nature depend on evaluators
  - Independence
  - Ideological neutrality
  - Methodological expertise
  - Political savvy

UFE in Practice

- Local evaluation of a rural leadership program of the Cooperative Extension Service
  - For purpose of program improvement/increasing impact
    - Primary intended users of the evaluation are county extension agents, elected county commissioners and farmers representatives with a hand in designing the program
  - Comparatively low key
    - Impact of use on a much smaller scale

- Evaluator must nurture relationships
  - Facilitate trust to aid facilitation of evaluation process
    - Priorities/methods/interpretations/uses

Summary of UFE Premises

- Driving force is commitment to intended use by intended users
- Strategizing use begins at the beginning
- Person factor is critical
- Stakeholder analysis should be well thought out
  - Identify "best" primary users
- Evaluations focused on intended use by intended users are the most useful
- Deliberate and thoughtful choices are required for focus on intended uses
- Adaptability
  - No single "recipe"
- Nurture and enhance intended users' commitment to use
  - Involvement is key
- Quality, not quantity, of participation
  - Skilled group facilitation is a must

Summary of UFE Premises

- High quality involvement = high quality, useful evaluations
  - Validity/utility interdependent
- Credibility and integrity of evaluator are always at risk
  - Active-Reactive-Adaptive
- Evaluator as trainer
  - Users should gain knowledge of evaluation processes and uses of information
- Use is not reporting and dissemination
  - Only facilitate use, do not make decisions or change programs/thinking/knowledge
- Resources should be made available to follow through on intended uses

Political Underpinnings of UFE

- Not all information is useful
  - Relevant/understandable
- Not all people are information users
  - Getting right information to right people
  - Training those not inclined to use information
- Hit the target
  - Information targeted at use is more likely to get used
- Not all information is powerful
  - Credibility is key, particularly in situations where visibility of evaluation is high

Limitations of Evaluation

- Political
  - Sometimes stakeholder interests limit what can/can't be said about evaluation
    - Information in the wrong hands can be detrimental to a program
  - Stakeholder agenda should not create desired results
- Inaccurate view of the evaluation
  - A systematic process rather than a series of discrete studies
- Characteristics of what is being evaluated
  - Context of the evaluation
- Fiscal limitations
- Evaluator competencies
- Timeframe
- Limitations of measurement instruments

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Thank You!