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Introduction to Program Evaluation

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Outline

- **What is program evaluation?**
  - Types of evaluations
  - Purposes of evaluations
- **Steps in program evaluation**
- **Developing evaluation questions**

Introduction with a long quote

"We all make mistakes; to err is not distinctively human. But although many other living things, animals and even plants, do have a partial ability to anticipate some of their mistakes, to recognize them and even to learn from them, only human beings, it seems, actively assert themselves in this direction. Rather than wait for errors to reveal themselves, perhaps with disastrous consequences, we consciously and deliberately seek them out: we put our ideas…

Introduction with a long quote

"…and inventions to the test, we probe critically, we scrap what we find to be wrong and try again. Mingled with this critical attitude there is admittedly a distinctive human weakness: the feeling that we should be ashamed of our mistakes, and should regret making them, since they must be the result of our incompetence or our lack of mature insight. Yet such qualms are out of place and need to be firmly quashed…

Introduction with a long quote

…for there is no way known of systematically avoiding error; no way known, in particular, of avoiding it in our exploration of the unknown. Thus, a reluctance to make mistakes typically degenerates into wariness of new ideas, into a distaste for any kind of bold initiative. If we are in earnest to discover what the world is like, we must be fully prepared to correct mistakes; but if we are to correct them, we must be fully prepared to commit them first."(Miller, 1985, p. 9)

What is Program Evaluation?

"Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming."

(Patton, 1997)

Why?

"It is a systematic collection of information….for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and affecting." It means, "gathering data that are meant to be, and actually are, used for program improvement and decision making."
(Patton, 1997)

Key Question

Key question to be asked from the beginning:
How are we going to use this information?

Types of Evaluation

Process evaluation: deals with program delivery issues (outputs) and stakeholder concerns.

- How many potential program participants are being reached?
- How many of the above actually participate, either through attending a program in person or using various educational materials on their own?
- What are the program activities?
- Are participants satisfied with the program as is? If not, what improvement would they like to see?
- What do staff and others involved directly in the program believe is working well, and what needs to be changed?
- Have any changes been made to the program? If so, what and why?
- How do program changes and adaptations influence resource needs such as staffing and volunteers?

(Horne, 1995)

Types of Evaluation (cont'd)

Outcome evaluation (short-term): For instance in health related program evaluation, short-term outcomes may refer to changes in behaviour and the psychological and social influences on behaviour

- What behaviour changes (e.g., quitting smoking, increasing one's community participation) occur during or after involvement in the program?
- Do participants feel increased confidence in making behaviour changes that are conducive to improving health?
- Do participants develop the skills they need to change their health behaviours (e.g., proper condom use, cooking skills) or to work toward larger changes in their communities (e.g, advocacy skills)?
- What behavioural changes occur among those stakeholders who are not direct program participants (e.g., learning or increased participation by teachers, health unit staff)?

(Horne, 1995)

Types of Evaluation (cont'd)

Outcome evaluation (long-term): The term outcome usually may refer to longer-term changes which are assumed to follow from changes in health related behaviour.

- Do participants experience a positive change in their physical health status?
- Do participants have a long-term enhanced sense of positive well-being that is related to changes they have made in their lives since their involvement in the program?
- Do the skills learned in the program contribute to an improved quality of life?
- Are there long-term increases in community resources and public or private sector policies as more residents get involved in advocacy for resources and policies that address the social determinants of health?

(Horne, 1995)

Logic Model

Inputs→Process/Outputs→Outcomes

Doing more with program evaluation (2007) – pp. 10-11

Purposes of Evaluation

- Judgment oriented
  - Aimed at determining the overall merit, worth, significance or value (e.g., summative evaluation aimed at deciding if a program is sufficiently effective to be continued or replicated).
- Accountability
  - Aimed at rendering account. Includes oversight and compliance, the assessment to the extent to which a program follows the directives, regulations, mandated standards, or other formal expectations (e.g., audits; accreditation). Driven by attention to external stakeholders.

Purposes of Evaluation (cont'd)

- Improvement oriented
  - Improve programs (e.g., formative evaluation; continuous improvement; quality enhancement; manage more effectively).

- Knowledge-Generating
  - Generate knowledge (e.g., generalizations about effectiveness; theory building; scholarly publishing; policy making; extrapolate principles about what works).

Purposes of Evaluation (cont'd)

- Monitoring
  - Manage the program, routine reporting, early identification of problems. Provided information to those internal to the program (e.g., quality control, management information systems; routine reporting).
- Development
  - Involves changing the intervention, adapting it to changed circumstances, and altering tactics based on complex, emergent and dynamic conditions (e.g., developmental evaluation; rapid assessment; rapid feedback; environmental scanning).

  (Patton, 2008)

Types of Evaluation Revisited

Formative

Summative

Prospective

Developmental

Types of Evaluation Revisited (cont'd)

Formative

To collect information that can be used for program development and improvement.

Summative

To make an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a program.

Types of Evaluation Revisited (cont'd)

Prospective

Assess the likely outcomes of proposed projects, program (theory of change).

Developmental

Supports program and organizational development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities from a complex systems perspective.
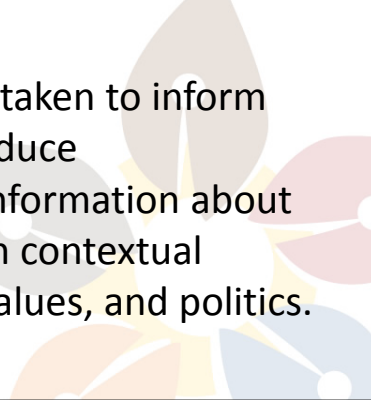
Evaluation & Research

Program evaluation uses research methods to gather information, but evaluation differs fundamentally from basic research in the purpose of data collection.

Evaluation & Research (cont'd)

- Basic scientific research is undertaken to discover new knowledge, test theories, establish truth, and generalize across time and space.
- Program evaluation is undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, reduce uncertainties, and provide information about programs and policies within contextual boundaries of time, place, values, and politics.
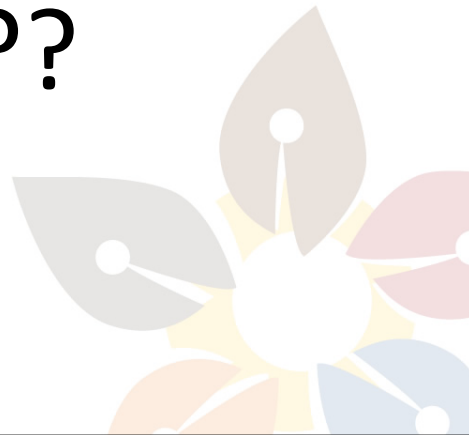
Evaluation & Research (cont'd)

The difference between research and evaluation has been called by Cronbach and Suppes the difference between conclusion-oriented and decision inquiry. Research is aimed at truth. Evaluation is aimed at action.

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Evaluation: A Seven Step Program

1. Identify the primary intended users of the evaluation
2. Identify and focus the relevant evaluation questions
3. Make design methods and measurement decisions
4. Collect data
5. Organize data for stakeholder analysis
6. Involve users in interpretation of findings
7. Facilitate intended use by intended users

Identify the Primary Intended Users of the Evaluation

Who will make the decisions?

Whose questions will the evaluation answer?

(People, not organizations, use evaluation information)

- Multiple stakeholders
  - Funders
  - Staff
  - Administrators
  - Clients
  - Other

Identify and Focus the Relevant Evaluation Questions

Once primary users have been identified and organized, the second step is to <u>identify and focus the relevant evaluation questions</u>. It can be difficult because deciding what to evaluate means deciding what will <u>not</u> be evaluated.

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- How will the information be used?
- What will we know after the evaluation that we do not know now?
- What can we do after the evaluation that we cannot do now for lack of information?

Identify and Focus the Relevant Evaluation Questions (cont'd)

<u>Formative and Summative Evaluation Questions</u>

Important to clarify whether primary purpose of the evaluation is:

- To collect information that can be used for program development and improvement (formative)
- To make an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a program (summative)

Examples of Evaluation Questions

About need for program services:

- What is the nature and magnitude of the problem to be addressed?
- What are the characteristics of the population in need?
- What are the needs of the population?
- What service delivery arrangements are needed to provide those services?

(Rossi et al. 2004)

Examples of Evaluation Questions (cont'd)

About the program's conceptualization or design:
- What clientele should be served?
- What services should be provided?
- What are the best delivery systems for the services?
- How can the program identify, recruit, and sustain the intended clientele?
- How should the program be organized?
- What resources are necessary and appropriate for the program?

(Rossi et al. 2004)

Examples of Evaluation Questions (cont'd)

About program operations and service delivery:

- Are administrative and service objectives being met?
- Are the intended services being delivered to the intended persons?
- Are there needy but unserved persons the program in not reaching?
- Once in service, do sufficient numbers of clients complete service?
- Are the clients satisfied with the services?
- Are administrative, organizational, and personnel functions handled well?

(Rossi et al. 2004)

Examples of Evaluation Questions (cont'd)

About program outcomes:

- Are the outcome goals and objectives being achieved?
- Do the services have beneficial effects on the recipients?
- Do the services have adverse side effects on the recipients?
- Are some recipients affected more by the services then others?
- Is the problem or situation the service intended to address made be better?

(Rossi et al. 2004)

Examples of Evaluation Questions (cont'd)

About program cost and efficiency:

- Are resources used efficiently?

- Is the cost reasonable in relation to the magnitude of the benefits?

- Would alternative approaches yield equivalent benefits at less cost?

(Rossi et al. 2004)

Criteria to Assess Questions

Criteria

- Data can be brought to bear on the question; that is, it is truly an *empirical* question.

- There is more than one possible answer to the question; that is, the answer is not predetermined by the phrasing of the question.

- The primary intended users want information to help answer the question. They care about the answer to the question.

- The primary users want to answer the question for themselves, not just for someone else.

- The intended users can indicate how they would use the answer to the question; that is, they can specify the relevance of an answer to the question for future action.
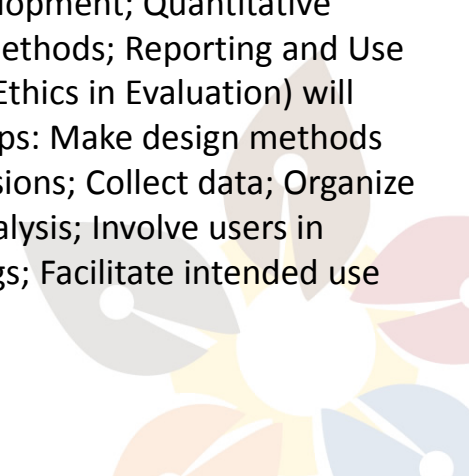
(Patton, 1997)

Question Development

- Brainstorm
- Identify themes
- Define question/s
- Operationalize question/s

Next Steps

Workshops and lectures that follow (Evaluation Designs; Indicator Development; Quantitative Methods, Qualitative Methods; Reporting and Use of Evaluation Findings; Ethics in Evaluation) will address the last five steps: Make design methods and measurement decisions; Collect data; Organize data for stakeholder analysis; Involve users in interpretation of findings; Facilitate intended use by intended users.

It all depends…

Wise evaluators tailor their approach to fit the complexity of the circumstances they face (Patton, 2011).

Caution about data

" The chief danger to our philosophy, apart from laziness and woolliness, is scholasticism,… which is treating what is vague as if it were precise…

(Ramsey, 1931, p. 269)

Caution about proof

"In empirical inquiry, nothing is ever literally proven; one presents evidence and tries to show that it can be explained on the basis of the hypothesis advanced. A critic could then rationally argue that the evidence is mistaken, poorly chosen, or otherwise inadequate, or that there is a better theory to explain the facts." (Chomsky, 2003, p. 146)

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