

Chapter 7

Evaluation Models for Evaluating Educational Programs¹

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the literature related to three of the many evaluation models that can be applied to programs providing services (training, teaching, counseling, or any type of intervention) or products to students, personnel, or program participants. The three models addressed are the CIPP Evaluation Model, the Kirkpatrick Four-Step Evaluation Framework, and the Outcome-Base Evaluation Model. These models are capable of helping decision makers assess the effectiveness and efficiency of programs or projects. The following discussion is based on over 50 different sources in the literature and focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of these models.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Hectic scheduling, tight funds, high-pressure careers, and the stress that accompanies a multitude of events, meetings, and deadlines are common factors of contemporary life for most Americans. These factors not only affect individuals as they struggle to balance family time with work while maintaining a reasonable but limited household

budget, but extend into the professional world. Concerns about education, cost-effectiveness, program outcomes, accountability, and providing assistance to those in need are evident in the workforce. Royse, Thyer, Padgett, and Logan (2006) identified four main reasons programs are evaluated: required evaluation, competition for scarce funds, evaluation of new interventions, and evaluation of accountability. These areas are increasingly addressed through the implementation of program evaluations.

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7.2 DEFINING PROGRAM EVALUATION

According to Sanders and Sullins (2006), program evaluation is “the process of systematically determining the quality of a program and how it can be improved” (p. 1). Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004) concluded that program evaluations are conducted as systematic and objective processes that collect, analyze, and interpret information. More specifically, program evaluation deals with collecting and documenting information about a particular program to enable valid decision-making pertaining to a particular aspect of that program (McNamara, 2000). The ultimate purpose of program evaluation is to arrive at a definitive, intelligent, objective, and valid conclusion regarding specified objectives and questions related to a program’s overall effectiveness (Fitzpatrick et al.). Education legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the 2007 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), have increased the importance of timely and effective program evaluation.

Typically, program evaluations are used to measure progress in achieving objectives, improve program implementation, provide accountability information to stakeholders, assure funding institutions about effectiveness, increase community support for initiatives, and inform policy decisions. Posavac and Carey (2007) observed that program evaluation is “a collection of methods, skills, and sensitivities necessary to determine whether a human service is needed and likely to be used, whether the services is sufficiently intensive to meet the unmet needs identified, whether the service is offered as planned, and whether the service actually does help people in need at a reasonable cost” (p. 2). In addition, McNamara (2000) noted that improvement, in practice, implementation, and reproduction, is the goal of any high-quality program evaluation.

7.3 USES OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation can be beneficial in a variety of contexts. It can aid in developing a concrete understanding of a program’s intended outcomes and personnel requirements, or it can promote an analysis of the program’s efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, program evaluations have expanded to encompass more complex issues, no longer focusing solely on establishing cause-and-effect relationships between expectations and outcomes. Instead, they are increasingly utilized for making program decisions that relate to effectiveness, efficiency, value, and adequacy based upon a variety of systematic data collections and analyses (Rossi & Freeman, 1993). Validity is ensured via the utilization of reproducible study techniques. Program evaluations, although varied in style of implementation, must produce a basis for valid comparisons between similar programs (McNamara, 2000).

There are many different types of evaluative measures depending on the object(s) or program(s) being assessed and the purpose of the evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). These measures are typically distinguished by the manner in which information will be obtained and used throughout the life of the program. The appropriateness of an evaluative measure has a direct correlation to the specific nature of information that is being sought (McNamara, 2000). Ultimately, the evaluator will determine the best means of evaluation. This judgment will be based on a combination of methodologies considered, an understanding of the information needed, and knowledge from personal experiences and beliefs (Fitzpatrick et al.).

A program evaluation design is most dependent upon the information required to meet the objectives established by the group seeking the evaluation (McNamara, 2000). Consequently, a *focused evaluation* that addresses the full set of objectives of a varied group of stakeholders and other personnel will produce the most time-

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