Theory-based evaluation and objective-based evaluation: An integration of the two approaches

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Abstract

Theory-based evaluation and objective-based evaluation have gained tremendous popularity in the last decade. The former because of its power to augment an evaluation’s capacity to assess program impact without strong experimental designs (partially through its support for causal modeling analysis), and for the latter, due to the education reform and quality assurance initiatives and these initiatives’ reliance on setting standards. In theory-based evaluation, according to Chen, the 6 domain theories address the treatment and its implementation, the outcomes and their logical link to treatment, and the generalizability of findings. Expanding on Tyler’s original conceptualization, objective-based evaluation involves specifying and determining degree of attainment of program implementation, utilization and outcome objectives. The link between theory-based evaluation and objective-based evaluation is logic modeling, which has been widely used, especially among practitioners, as a tool for evaluability assessment, management and evaluation. In logic modeling, input, activity, output, outcome or goal are delineated with objective statements.

In my paper, I will compare and contrast between program theory, logic modeling, and Stufflebeam’s CIPP model, and present an evaluation model that utilizes objectives, logic modeling and program theory. A model such as this is comprehensive and capitalizes on the merits of theory-based evaluation, objective-based evaluation and logic modeling methodologies. It should have strong appeal to policy makers and education reformers.

Supporting Statement

The paper directly addresses one of the themes of the conference: Theory-based evaluation. Since objective-based evaluation and logic modeling are useful for policy and development efforts, my paper could speak to the two topics of European interest related to development (“Developing European Capacity” and “looking outwards: Evaluation for International Development) and the topic related to policies (“Evaluating Employment Policies”).

I have worked on and published in the objective-based evaluation methodology, have great interest in and have studied theory-based evaluation over the past several years. The idea behind the paper came about from a contrast analysis between the two evaluation approaches. I have presented
the paper in my advanced program evaluation course. It will be revised in time for the EES conference.