

PROGRAM EVALUATION IN THE MANITOBA GOVERNMENT: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Abstract: This article reviews the state of program evaluation in the Manitoba civil service over a 10-year period up to the present time and into the future. The study methodology consists of a literature review and survey of senior Manitoba government officials to assess their beliefs about the role of program evaluation in decisions made by their departments in recent years. Also assessed were program evaluation's present role and the expected utility that program evaluation will have for managers over the next five years.

Résumé: Cet article traite de l'état de l'évaluation de programme dans la fonction publique du Manitoba depuis dix ans et fait des projections pour l'avenir. La méthodologie de l'étude consiste en une recherche documentaire et une enquête auprès de fonctionnaires supérieurs du gouvernement manitobain pour évaluer ce qu'ils pensent du rôle de l'évaluation de programme dans la prise de décision à leurs ministères au cours des dernières années. L'étude porte aussi sur le rôle actuel de l'évaluation de programme et l'utilité de l'évaluation de programme pour ces gestionnaires dans les cinq prochaines années.

█ This article discusses the history and state of program evaluation in the Government of Manitoba during the past 10 years. Program evaluation in Manitoba has been shaped in recent years by a number of events. The article examines how past evaluation activities affect the present and future state of evaluation in Manitoba.

In the spring of 1988, the Filmon administration came to power and immediately launched a series of program and policy reviews across government departments. These reviews identified "accountability" as a recurring problem. In 1989, the minister of finance, Clayton Manness, tabled a report by the Coopers & Lybrand consulting group entitled *Openness, Effectiveness and Accountability in the Manitoba Government*. The report's findings and recommendations pointed to

a significant problem of accountability and identified several barriers to the achievement of greater accountability in government.

A set of recommendations from this report centred on two themes: first, a requirement to increase the level of managerial authority in the civil service, and second, a need to institute better ways to measure and report on the effectiveness of government programs and services.

Out of this came consideration of the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation's (CCAF) model (1987) for effectiveness reporting. A couple of Manitoba government programs were used as pilot test areas. These tests were completed in 1990.

In 1989 the Department of Labour initiated a service quality initiative. As part of that initiative, Labour agreed to pilot the CCAF model. The department used the 12 attributes of CCAF as a framework for measuring performance, and piloted the CCAF process within the Workplace Safety and Health Branch (WSHB) (Fraser, 1993; Sprout, 1995; Vincent, 1994). This represented a first effort in the process of continuous improvement and self-analysis. This work provided the department with the opportunity to use internal resources working in a team environment to analyze the effectiveness of WSHB operations.

In the early 1990s, some departments also embarked on activities to improve their client service. To do this, they developed and fielded surveys about client service, and have used the data that were collected to inform administrators about program operations, allowing them to make revisions and adjustments to their programs and services.

Another important influence in the mid-1990s was a movement, promoted by central government agencies such as the Treasury Board Secretariat of Manitoba, to have program performance measures developed for programs and services. This was in part spurred on by the push to greater fiscal responsibility and by public demand.

In April 1995, Gary Filmon, premier of Manitoba, stated:

Government must continually evaluate the performance of the programs and their value for public tax dollars. The government will introduce Performance Measure-

ment Accountability Planning to formalize our ongoing commitment to focussing all program expenditures on outcomes and results. Beginning in the 1996/97 fiscal year, as a key part of the annual budget and management review, all departments will be required to provide operational plans, including performance measurement targets. To improve accountability to the public, all departments will be required to report on performance progress as part of their annual report. (Treasury Board Secretariat, 1997, p. 1)

Manitoba Labour was one of the first departments to pilot the new performance measurement system and report on its performance through the new set of measures (Manitoba Labour, 1996).

The next logical step in this progression was to integrate these measures into a formal business planning system (Treasury Board Secretariat, 1997). The performance measurement and business planning activities directly supported the Coopers & Lybrand report of 1989. These initiatives have, in their own way, shaped the thinking of the senior bureaucrats of the Manitoba civil service and underpin their thoughts and beliefs about program evaluation, its role in government, and its future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study has been to assess the beliefs of senior managers about the extent to which evaluation has proved to be valuable and its expected utility in the future. In early June 2000, a survey was developed and forwarded to all departments in the Manitoba government. The purpose of this survey (reproduced in Appendix 1) was to examine the state of program evaluation in the Manitoba civil service. Three periods were selected as being of interest: the past five years, the present, and the future five years.

For the purpose of this survey, program evaluation was defined as encompassing both the formative and summative dimensions. As always, there are many areas that might usefully be explored, but these were weighed against the issue of what length of survey it is reasonable to expect respondents to answer, especially as they are senior civil servants. The questions included on the survey were based on a set format of issues and topics as suggested by the editor of *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*.

Three possible methods of data collection were considered: telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and a mail survey. Although face-to-face interviews were considered preferable, given time and cost constraints a mail survey was developed. It was believed that the mail survey approach offered the greatest ease and flexibility for respondents.

The survey was then forwarded to the deputy ministers of all departments, asking for their participation and assistance in the collection of information on the state of program evaluation in their particular department. Additional copies of the surveys were forwarded for distribution to senior staff in their departments. This was done to develop a broad cross-section of views on program evaluation that could be used for analysis purposes.

Of 15 departments surveyed, responses were received from 11. A total of 32 surveys were completed, mainly by respondents at the assistant deputy minister level (24 of 32). These respondents provide a good cross-section of responses to the survey and insights into the state of program evaluation. This work reports on the compiled and analyzed results of this survey.

Concerning questions of validity and reliability emanating from this research survey, as the respondent pool represented almost all Manitoba government departments encompassing more than 95% of workers and departmental budgets, these matters were not considered critical. Because the questions in this survey, in many instances, ask for opinions and judgements of senior managers, these opinions may vary to some extent. This does not detract from the validity or reliability of the results concerning many of the evaluation constructs assessed, as for many questions respondents had similarly strong beliefs.

PROGRAM EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 1995–99

The first set of questions covered the time frame 1995–99, dealing with the state of program evaluation activities in departments. The questions dealt with a number of evaluation areas.

The first question discussed program performance measurement and its use in government. A total of 21, or 65.6%, of the respondents undertook some form of program performance measurement annually and the remainder occasionally (a couple of times in a five-year

period). Respondents were also asked whether they had undertaken any program evaluations during this period for the purposes of improving their program operations. Here, 13, or 40.6%, of the respondents indicated they had done this annually, with 15 (46.9%) responding that this was occasionally done in this period. They were also asked if program evaluations were conducted to measure the general health of a program, with 9 (29%) respondents indicating yes on an annual basis and 11 (35.5%) indicating yes occasionally during this period.

Client service or quality measurement was undertaken by 10 respondents (31.3%) on an annual basis and by 15 respondents (46.9%) on an occasional basis during this time period. Program evaluations were not as likely to be undertaken on an annual basis: 8 respondents (22.5%) used them to make key decisions on cancelling programs, and 13 (40.6%) indicated that evaluations were undertaken occasionally for this purpose.

The next set of questions dealt with the purpose of undertaking program evaluations. More than half of respondents (53.1%) cited accountability reasons as very important, as a requirement of business or strategic planning (48.4%) and as a requirement of Treasury Board (51.6%). Less often cited as very important were that evaluations are a requirement of federal, provincial, or other program funding (17.9%), of the provincial auditor (15.6%), or of a departmental policy (4.2%).

When both the very important and important reasons were combined, the most important reason for evaluating was for accountability reasons (90.6%), followed by a requirement of Treasury Board (89%) and for the purpose of business or strategic planning (74.2%).

Other reasons for conducting program evaluations included their being requirements for special operating agencies to do business planning and to measure program performance, to support continuous improvement of programs, and to support executive decision-making.

CURRENT PROGRAM EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN MANITOBA GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

The first questions dealt with a variety of program evaluation-related activities. Program performance measurement was indicated

as being undertaken annually by 25 (78.1%) of the respondents. Fewer respondents cited that annual program evaluations were undertaken to change or improve program operations (12, or 37.5%), for measuring client service or quality (31.3%) or program assessment to measure the health of a program (25.8%), and to make key decisions on continuing or cancelling a program (25%).

Respondents indicated that they occasionally undertook program evaluations at the present time to change or improve program operations (56.3%), to measure client service or quality (50%), or to make key decisions on continuing or cancelling a program (40.6%). Other uses of evaluation included measurement of the general health of a program (35.7%) and program performance measurement (15.6%).

Departments conducted program evaluations for many reasons. Cited as very important are: as a requirement for business strategic planning (53.1%), as a requirement of Treasury Board (48.4%), for accountability reasons (45.2%), and as a requirement for federal or provincial program funding (20.7%). Other reasons for conducting evaluations included: as a requirement of the provincial auditor (18.8%) and a departmental policy (8.3%).

When both very important and important responses were grouped together, most important were accountability reasons (90.3%), followed by a requirement of Treasury Board (87.1%) and business/strategic planning (81.3%). In only one third of cases was it very important to undertake evaluation because there was a departmental policy requiring to do so. Other reasons were: as a requirement for special operating agencies and in support of executive decision-making.

PROGRAM EVALUATION IN THE FUTURE: LOOKING FIVE YEARS FORWARD

The first set of questions dealt with program evaluation-related activities expected in the next five years. On an annual basis, performance measurement was cited by 90.6%, change or improvement to program operations by 53.1%, client service or quality measurement by 45.2%, making key decisions on continuing or cancelling programs (31.3%), and measuring the general health of a program (22.6%).

Respondents reported that program evaluations will be undertaken occasionally to make key program decisions (59.4%), to measure the

general health of a program (54.8%), for client service or quality measurement (45.2%), or for the purpose of changing or improving program operations (46.9%).

Reasons given as very important for undertaking program evaluation-related activities in the future included: as a requirement of business or strategic planning (59.4%), for accountability reasons (54.8%), as a requirement of Treasury Board (51.7%), as a requirement of federal program funding (25%), as a requirement of the provincial auditor (16.1%), and as a result of a departmental policy (13.6%).

When important and very important reasons are combined, 96.8% of respondents explained that evaluation was carried out for accountability reasons, 93.8% for business/strategic planning, and 96.6% as a requirement of Treasury Board.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Respondents were also asked the general question whether they believed that program evaluation was increasing in importance, would remain about the same in importance, or was expected to lessen in importance. Here, 26 (83.9%) of respondents believed that program evaluation was increasing in importance, and 5 (16.1%) thought that its importance would remain the same. No respondent indicated that they thought program evaluation would become less important.

Another general question posed dealt with whether a number of aspects related to program evaluation activities would increase, remain about the same, or decrease. Cited as more likely to increase were: pressure from clients/public for accountability (78.1%), time spent on program performance measurement (75%), the need for program evaluation activities (68.8%), and pressures from central agencies for program evaluation (56.3%). Those expected to remain about the same were resources dedicated to program evaluation (62.5%), separate units with a program evaluation mandate (70%), and the number of staff dedicated to program evaluation activities (48.4%).

The last questions addressed critical barriers to program evaluation activities in the Manitoba government. Cited as very important barriers were: lack of resources (38.7%), difficulties in measuring government program performance (31.3%), and the cost of hiring third-party evaluators (25%). Cited as both very important and important barriers were: difficulties in measuring government program performance

(78.1%), lack of resources (74.2%), lack of leadership/sponsor for program evaluation activities (71.9%), and the cost of hiring third-party evaluators (53.1%); 51.7% indicated that program evaluation is not a priority at this time. More than one third (34.4%) of respondents indicated that their fear that the information collected could be used in a negative way was not important as a barrier.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey results suggest that an excellent foundation has been laid for the improvement and expansion of the use of program evaluation tools and techniques in the Manitoba government. There seems to be a high level of knowledge and understanding of the importance of program evaluation on the part of senior management staff in government departments.

The survey research revealed an important change in the use of program performance measurement over the three periods being considered. Respondents' reports indicate that 66% undertook annual evaluation in their department five years ago, 78% annually at present, and 91% expected to annually in the future five years. Although only 38% of respondents indicated that evaluation was used as a tool for changing/improving program operations, 53% indicated that evaluation would be carried out annually in the future five years.

Whereas evaluation was used annually/occasionally about two thirds of the time in 1995 to make key decisions on continuing or cancelling programs, and remains at that level at the present time, it was expected that 91% of departments would be doing evaluations annually or occasionally for this purpose five years in the future. Client service and quality measurement is also expected to increase in annual/occasional use, from 78% in the past five years to 90% moving forward from now.

The data presented seem to support the conclusion of an expected increased demand for the use of program evaluation services and activities in future years, as cited by 26 respondents (83.9%). The data point to this being supported by the demands of Treasury Board, for accountability reasons, and arising out of the business planning process.

Reasons given for the increased level of program evaluation included increased pressure for accountability and pressure from central agencies. There was general agreement that the need for program evalu-

ation is increasing, and that the future level of program evaluation activities as well as the time spent in performance measurement activities will increase.

Despite the number of barriers cited as affecting the use of program evaluation, senior provincial government officials have indicated that program evaluation will remain an increasingly important tool for departments to use, linked to business planning and performance measurement activities.

At the same time, senior officials stressed that the level of resources and staff allocated to evaluation activities would likely remain at present levels. It remains to be seen if these beliefs in a strengthened future for program evaluation will come to pass.

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Appendix 1

Survey of Program Evaluation Activities in the Manitoba Government

This survey is looking at program evaluation activities in the Manitoba Government Service over the past 5 years, the present and looks forward 5 years into the future. By program evaluation we mean the measurement of program outcomes for use in either improving programs or deciding if they should be continued. We are interested in your responses. They will be grouped with those of other respondents, and *neither your name nor Department will be identified*. Your personal responses will be *kept strictly confidential*. The questions below focus on your particular department and its program evaluation related activities.

A. The first series of questions deals with the period 1995-1999

1. During this period (1995-99), did your department undertake any of the following program evaluation related activities

	Annually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
a) Program performance measurement (inputs, outcomes, activities, outputs)	1	2	3	4
b) Program evaluations undertaken to change or improve program operations	1	2	3	4
c) Program evaluations undertaken to make key decisions on continuing or cancelling programs	1	2	3	4
d) Program evaluation to measure the general "health" of a program	1	2	3	4
e) Client Service/quality measurement	1	2	3	4

2. If you undertook any of the activities listed in question 1, why did your department undertake these program evaluation related activities

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
a) a requirement of Treasury Board	1	2	3	4
b) a requirement of provincial auditor	1	2	3	4
c) a departmental policy (Please provide a copy of the policy)	1	2	3	4
d) requirement of federal / provincial or other program funding	1	2	3	4
e) business planning /strategic planning requirement	1	2	3	4
f) for accountability reasons	1	2	3	4
g) Other reason (specify)	1	2	3	4

B. The next series of questions deals with the present time

3. At the present time, does your department undertake any of the following program evaluation related activities

	Annually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
a) Program performance measurement (inputs, outcomes, activities, outputs)	1	2	3	4
b) Program evaluations are undertaken to change or improve program operations	1	2	3	4
c) Program evaluations undertaken to make key decisions on continuing or cancelling programs	1	2	3	4
d) Program assessment to measure the general "health" of a program	1	2	3	4
e) Client Service /quality measurement	1	2	3	4

4. If you undertook any of the activities listed in question 3, why did your department undertake these program evaluation related activities

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
a) a requirement of Treasury Board	1	2	3	4
b) a requirement of provincial auditor	1	2	3	4
c) a departmental policy (Please provide a copy)	1	2	3	4
d) requirement of federal / provincial or other program funding	1	2	3	4
e) business planning/ strategic planning requirement	1	2	3	4
f) for accountability reasons	1	2	3	4
g) Other reason (specify)	1	2	3	4

C. This series of questions deals with the future — the next five years

5. During this future period, do you expect that your department will undertake any of the following program evaluation related activities

	Annually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
a) Performance measurement (inputs, outcomes, activities, outputs)	1	2	3	4
b) Program evaluations are undertaken to change or improve program operations	1	2	3	4
c) Program evaluations undertaken to make key program decisions on continuing or cancelling programs	1	2	3	4
d) Program evaluation to measure the general health of a program	1	2	3	4
e) Client Service/quality measurement	1	2	3	4

6. If you expect to undertake any of the activities listed in question 5, explain why?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
a) a requirement of Treasury Board	1	2	3	4
b) a requirement of provincial auditor	1	2	3	4
c) a departmental policy (Please provide a copy)	1	2	3	4
d) requirement of federal / provincial or other program funding	1	2	3	4
e) business planning/ strategic planning requirement	1	2	3	4
f) for accountability reasons	1	2	3	4
g) Other reason (specify)	1	2	3	4

D. General questions about program evaluation in the future

	Increasing in importance	About the same in importance	Lessening in importance
7. In the future, do you believe that program evaluation is	1	2	3

8. Concerning the future:

	Increasing	About the same	Decreasing
a) Resources dedicated to program evaluation will be	1	2	3
b) Number of staff dedicated to evaluation activities	1	2	3
c) Separate units with program evaluation mandate	1	2	3
d) Pressure from clients/public for accountability	1	2	3
e) Pressures from central agencies (Treasury Board) for program evaluation	1	2	3
f) General need for program evaluation	1	2	3
g) Time spent on program performance measurement	1	2	3
h) Level of program evaluation activities in your department	1	2	3

9. What do you see as the critical barriers to program evaluation activities in the Manitoba Government?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
a) a lack of leadership/sponsor for program evaluation activities	1	2	3	4
b) difficulties in measuring government program performance	1	2	3	4

c) not a priority at this time	1	2	3	4
d) lack of resources (staff, \$)	1	2	3	4
e) cost of hiring "third party" evaluators	1	2	3	4
f) fear that the information collected could be used in a negative way	1	2	3	4
g) Other reason (specify)	1	2	3	4

10. I am a :

	Deputy Minister	Assistant Deputy Programs	Assistant Deputy Minister Management Services/Admin.
	1	2	3

Thank you very much for responding to the survey!

**For further information contact Barry Warrack, Workplace Safety and Health Division,
Manitoba Labour 945-2351, email: bwarrack@labour.gov.mb.ca**

Your Department (for statistical purposes only) _____

**Optional: Name of person completing the form (in case there are any questions or a need
to clarify any issues)** _____

