

EXTENT OF EVALUATION ACTIVITY AND EVALUATION UTILIZATION OF CES MEMBERS

Michael P. Shea
Laurentian University
Sudbury, Ontario

Shelagh M. J. Towson
University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario

Abstract: This article reports surveys results obtained from 69.3% of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) members listed in the 1988 membership directory. Only 310 (58.4%) of the 530 survey respondents had completed a Canadian program evaluation in the years 1985 through 1987. Of those who had completed an evaluation during this period, 11.3% were unaware of how their results had been utilized. The remaining 275 CES members supplied data on the extent of their evaluation activity that demonstrated high variability between CES members and revealed that a minority were full-time evaluators. Data on the extent of utilization showed extensive conceptual, instrumental, and persuasive utilization.

Résumé: Le présent article présente les résultats d'un sondage auquel ont répondu 69,3 % des membres de la Société canadienne d'évaluation (SCE) dont les noms figurent au répertoire 1988 de la Société. Seulement 310 (58,4%) des 530 répondants avaient effectué l'évaluation d'un programme canadien durant la période de 1985 à 1987, et 11,3% de ces derniers ne savaient pas comment on avait utilisé leurs résultats. Les 275 autres membres de la SCE ont fourni des données sur l'ampleur de leur activité d'évaluation, lesquelles ont révélé qu'il existait beaucoup de variabilité entre les membres de la SCE et qu'une minorité d'entre eux étaient des évaluateurs à temps plein. Les données sur l'ampleur de l'utilisation indiquent une importante utilisation conceptuelle, instrumentale et déterminante.

Not all Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) members are practising program evaluators. The membership of the CES is an extremely heterogeneous group in terms of both evaluation experience and current direct involvement in the field. It comprises a number of

actual program evaluators, some full time and most part time, as well as significant numbers of administrators from evaluation departments in both the federal and provincial governments, program administrators, academics, and a variety of other individuals who have some degree of interest in the field of program evaluation. As yet, no data have been published on the number of CES members engaged in the conduct of program evaluation studies compared to those who are not. Nor do we have any published data on the extent to which the subset of CES members who do perform evaluations actually practice evaluation in their day-to-day work activities.

Furthermore, for those CES members who do perform program evaluations, little systematic data have yet been reported on the manner in which or extent to which the evaluations that they perform are utilized. The extent of program evaluation utilization has been the subject of speculation, but very little empirical investigation, within CES and within Canada (Hudson, 1988; Rayner, 1986; Robinson, 1988; Rutman, 1986; Shea, 1988; Shea & Towson, 1990). How and to what extent program evaluations are utilized in the United States has also been extensively discussed and debated at conferences and in the published literature (Agarwala-Rogers, 1977; Ciarlo, 1981; Cook, 1978; Dunn, Mitroff, & Deutsch, 1981; Patton, 1987; Weiss, 1977; Wholey, 1986), but the extent of program evaluation utilization has also been sparsely researched, although significantly more so than in Canada (Alkin, Daillak, & White, 1979; Braskamp & Brown, 1980; Johnson, 1980; Leviton & Hughes, 1981; Patton, Grimes, Guthrie, Brennan, French, & Blyth, 1978; Weeks, 1979; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1981).

This article discusses some preliminary data on the extent of 1988 CES members' past and current evaluation activity. Data on the extent and types of evaluation utilization achieved by members within the Canadian evaluation context is also presented and discussed. The source of this data was a survey sent to all 765 Canadian-based CES members whose names appeared in the 1988 *CES Membership Directory*. The data reported in this article represent a subset of the data obtained from a larger study of program evaluation utilization in Canada (Shea, 1991). In late September 1988, personalized survey packages were mailed to all current, Canadian-based members of CES ($N = 765$). Surveys were returned by 535 (69.9%) of these individuals. Analyses of a number of characteristics of those members who returned surveys, and the 230 who did not, indicated that the members who returned surveys were a representative sample of the total membership at that time. Of those members who returned the survey, only 5 of the 535 (0.9%) refused to participate in the study.

PERCENTAGES OF EVALUATORS AND NONEVALUATORS WITHIN CES

During the construction of the survey, it was hypothesized that not all CES members were practicing program evaluators. To remove these survey respondents from further analyses, we inserted a series of screening questions at the beginning of the survey. Before proceeding with the body of the survey, the 530 survey respondents were presented with a screening question that asked if they had completed a Canadian program evaluation study between January 1, 1985 and January 1, 1988. Of the 530 CES members who returned the survey and were prepared to respond, 220 (41.5%) indicated on this first screening question that they had not performed a single Canadian program evaluation study during the entire three-year period in question. Put differently, more than 4 out of every 10 of the CES members who chose to respond to this survey had not completed a single evaluation study during a three-year period that ended nine months prior to the time of the survey. Some of these members may have completed an evaluation before January 1985 but were not currently practicing program evaluation. Others may have completed an evaluation between January 1988 and the time of their response to the survey. However, it is clear from this data that many CES members of the time were not practicing program evaluators.

EXTENT OF PROGRAM EVALUATION ACTIVITY BY CES MEMBERS

A subset of 275 of the 535 (51.4%) CES members who returned the survey indicated that they had completed at least one Canadian program evaluation study during the years 1985–1987 and were aware of how their evaluation results had been utilized. (As will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this article, 35 respondents had been removed prior to this analysis by an additional screening question, which had asked respondents if they were aware of the extent to which their evaluation had been utilized.)

This subset of 275 CES members supplied data on the extent of their past and current program evaluation activity in two ways. First, they were asked to indicate the number of program evaluations that they had conducted during their entire career as a program evaluator. Of the 275 CES members in this subset of survey respondents, 270 (98.2%) chose to answer this question. A large amount of variability was evident in their responses to this question. These 270 members indicated that they had conducted between 1 and 100 program evaluations

during their careers. The mean number of past evaluations reported by these 270 CES members was 13.1. However, the standard deviation was quite large at 15.22 past evaluations conducted. One-third of this sample of members had performed 5 or fewer evaluations, and 62.6% had performed 10 or fewer. Only 2.6% of these 270 CES members had performed more than 50 evaluations during their careers as program evaluators.

These same 275 CES members were asked to indicate what percentage of their total current work time was being spent on the performance of program evaluation research. A total of 272 (98.9%) chose to answer this question. Once again, there was tremendous variability in their responses. The estimated percentages of current work time spent on conducting program evaluations ranged from 2% to 100%. The mean amount of time spent conducting program evaluations was 50.8% with a large standard deviation of 33.75%. Approximately one out of five CES members (18.8%) spent less than 10% of their time conducting program evaluations. The majority (54.4%) spent 50% or less of their total work time in conducting program evaluation research. Only approximately one of five CES members (22.1%) spend more than 85% of their time conducting program evaluations. And finally, only 11.4% reported that they spent 100% of their time conducting evaluation research. Clearly, only the minority of CES members can claim to be full-time program evaluators; most perform this role on a part-time basis.

EXTENT OF PROGRAM EVALUATION UTILIZATION

Of those 310 CES members who indicated that they had completed a Canadian program evaluation during the three-year period 1985–1987, 35 (11.3%) indicated on a screening question that they were unaware of how the results of their last evaluation completed during this time period had been utilized. Approximately one out of every nine did not know to what use, if any, their results had been put, despite the fact that at least nine months had passed since the evaluation in question was completed. It was therefore not possible to determine the extent or type of utilization (if any) that this minority of CES members had achieved.

The extent of program evaluation utilization achieved by the remaining 275 CES members was measured using three different methods. First, they were asked to indicate if program evaluation utilization of one or more of three known types (instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive utilization) had occurred in the last evaluation that they had completed between January 1, 1985, and January 1, 1988. The three

different types of utilization were described, and members were asked to indicate their presence or absence in the evaluation in question. Second, they were asked to complete the Weeks (1979) Program Evaluation Utilization Success Scale with regard to this same evaluation. Third, they were asked to rate this same evaluation using the Johnson (1980) Program Evaluation Utilization Success Scale. All 275 survey respondents provided data on each of these five measures of the extent of program evaluation utilization.

Occurrences/Nonoccurrences of the Three Types of Utilization

Only 3 of the 275 CES members (1.5%) indicated that not one of the three types of program evaluation utilization had occurred in the last program evaluation study that they had completed in the three-year time period in question. Utilization of either the instrumental, conceptual, or persuasive variety was reported to have occurred in more than 98 out of every 100 program evaluations conducted by these 275 members. However, some caution should be exercised in viewing these data, as it is not clear if the last evaluation the CES members conducted during the period specified was representative of their total evaluation performance. In addition, we cannot be certain that some amount of selection of utilized versus nonutilized cases did not occur, despite the instruction to choose the last evaluation performed during a specified time period.

When the relative frequencies of occurrences of the three different types of utilization were examined, some interesting findings came to light. The frequencies and percentages of occurrence/nonoccurrence of the three types of program evaluation utilization are presented in Table 1.

First, the most frequently occurring type of utilization in this sample of 275 recent Canadian program evaluations conducted by CES members was conceptual program evaluation utilization at 63.6%. This type of utilization occurred significantly more frequently than either instrumental utilization (57.5%) or persuasive utilization (40.7%). Conceptual utilization is said to occur when program evaluation findings are used in indirect fashion, as in making program development decisions about programs similar to the one evaluated. This type of utilization occurred in almost two out of every three recent Canadian program evaluations reported here.

Instrumental utilization occurs when evaluation findings are used in a direct manner, as in making decisions about program operations in the

Table 1
Extent of CES Members' Recent Evaluation Utilization by Type

Type of Utilization	Relative Percent Utilized ^a
Conceptual	63.6%
Instrumental	57.5%
Persuasive	40.7%
	Absolute Percent
All types	98.5%

Note: $N = 275$ recent Canadian program evaluations performed by CES members.

^aA single evaluation could be reported as having been utilized in more than one manner, so these relative percentages do not add up to 100%. Indicating that one type of utilization had occurred did not preclude subjects from indicating that either of the other two types had also occurred.

program that was evaluated. This type of program evaluation utilization occurred in almost six out of every ten evaluations reported on here by CES members. Most of the nonempirical literature on program evaluation utilization has predicted that this type of utilization would be most common. This was not the case in this study.

Persuasive utilization occurs when the findings of a program evaluation are used to defend or attack a program. This type of utilization was reported to have occurred in more than four out of every ten evaluations reported in this study. The existence of this type of program evaluation utilization was demonstrated empirically for the first time in this study, supporting the hypothesis advanced by Leviton and Hughes (1981).

Utilization Success Scales Results

The extent of program evaluation utilization was also measured by asking survey respondents to rate the extent of utilization in the evaluation in question using evaluation utilization scales developed by Weeks (1979) and Johnson (1980). These scales produced similar but not identical findings.

The Weeks scale consists of ten items that describe different extents and types of utilization success. Respondents are asked to indicate *which one item of the ten items* best described how the evaluation results had been utilized. Weeks contended that his scale acts as a Guttman scale and provided statistical evidence to support this claim. He reported acceptable indices of reliability and some validity data. Data were analyzed by examining the ordered item number chosen as well as

the percentage of survey respondents who chose each item. The results on this scale are reported in Table 2.

On the Weeks scale, only 22 of these 275 (8.0%) CES members endorsed scale items that indicated that no evaluation utilization of any type or extent had occurred. The vast majority, 92.0%, indicated that at least some utilization had occurred using this measure of evaluation utilization success. The most frequently endorsed item, which was endorsed by 19.6% of this sample of members, indicated that the decision participants in the programs that were evaluated made indirect, conceptual-type uses of the evaluation findings. The Weeks scale items that were endorsed second and third most frequently at 17.5% and 16.0%, respectively, were items that indicated that some evaluation findings were utilized in direct, instrumental ways.

The Johnson (1980) scale consists of seven statements that describe different extents and types of program evaluation utilization success. Johnson also reported acceptable reliability data and some evidence of his scale's validity. Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether or not *each of the seven scale items* could be used to describe how the evaluation in question had been utilized. Johnson's seven items are not mutually exclusive. Data were analyzed by examining the total number of items endorsed by survey respondents. The data are presented in Table 3.

Table 2
Weeks Utilization Scale: CES Members' Item Response Frequencies

Item Number	Percent of Total Endorsements
1 ^a	1.1%
2 ^a	2.9%
3 ^a	4.0%
4	7.6%
5	19.6%
6	4.4%
7	14.5%
8	12.4%
9	17.5%
10	16.0%

Note: $N = 275$ recent Canadian program evaluations performed by CES members.

^aEndorsement of any of these three items indicates that no utilization of any type occurred. The total for all three items is therefore 8.0% nonutilization in a sample of 275 Canadian program evaluations performed by CES members.

Table 3
Johnson Utilization Scale: CES Members' Total Number of Items Endorsed

Total Number of Items Endorsed	Percent of Total
0 ^a	2.5%
1	1.5%
2	5.1%
3	15.3%
4	25.1%
5	27.6%
6	18.2%
7	4.7%

Note: $N = 275$ recent Canadian program evaluations performed by CES members.

^aZero items endorsed indicates that no utilization of any type occurred in these 275 recent Canadian program evaluations performed by CES members.

It should be noted that only 7 of 275 (2.5%) respondents failed to endorse a single item that described some extent or type of utilization, and thereby obtained a score of 0 on the Johnson scale. According to the results obtained on this utilization success scale, 97.5% of the evaluations were utilized to at least some extent. More than half of the evaluations scored five or more using this scale. Clearly, the Johnson scale leads to very high assessments of program evaluation utilization.

SUMMARY

We have described results from a survey of the extent of evaluation activity of CES members. Less than six out every ten CES members in 1988 had completed a Canadian program evaluation study over a three-year period that ended nine months prior to the survey. Of those CES members who had conducted a program evaluation research study in this period, almost two-thirds had conducted less than ten program evaluations during their entire career as an evaluator. Most CES members are part-time evaluators at best. Very few CES members at the time conducted program evaluation studies on a full-time basis.

Despite speculation to the contrary in the evaluation utilization literature, program evaluation utilization was quite common for CES members. More than 90% of a sample of 275 CES members reported that a recent evaluation had been utilized to at least some extent. However, this data was based upon only a subset of all CES members who had reported recent evaluation activity, as one out of nine CES members

surveyed was not aware of how the results of their evaluation had been utilized (or if it had been utilized at all), adding a cautionary note to this optimistic finding.

Conceptual program evaluation was the most frequent type of utilization, and not instrumental utilization as has been hypothesized in the nonempirical literature on evaluation utilization. The existence of persuasive utilization was demonstrated empirically for the first time.

This survey represented a first exploration of what is or should be a vital concern for Canadian program evaluators. For, to paraphrase Michael Patton, if our findings are not utilized we are wasting valuable time and money.

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