

INFORMING EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH PROFILING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF FOUR CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: According to the literature published on the topic, the development of an organization's capacity to do and use evaluation typically follows four stages: *traditional evaluation*, characterized by externally mandated evaluation activities; *awareness and experimentation*, during which organizational members learn about evaluation and its benefits by participating in a number of evaluation-related activities; *evaluation implementation*, the stage at which the role of evaluation is more clearly defined in the organization; and *evaluation adoption*, which occurs when evaluative inquiry becomes a regular and ongoing activity within the organization through the allocation of continued financial and human resources. In this article we argue that this perspective is oversimplified and that it is essential to understand the complexity of an organization's evaluation capacity in order to better understand how it might proceed with evaluation capacity building (ECB). We present an analysis of four Canadian federal government organizations' self-assessment of their organizational evaluation capacity using a profile conceptual framework developed as part of our larger study. We then integrate the resulting multidimensional profiles of observed levels of organizational evaluation capacity with the aforementioned stages of ECB to provide added value in thinking about the direction of organizational ECB.

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Résumé : Les études publiées au sujet du renforcement des capacités organisationnelles à réaliser et à utiliser les évaluations révèlent que le processus suit généralement quatre étapes : *l'évaluation traditionnelle*, qui a lieu en réaction aux pressions externes; *la conscientisation et l'essai*, au cours desquels les membres de l'organisation reçoivent de la formation au sujet de l'évaluation et ses bénéfices en participant à certaines activités reliées à un projet spécifique; *la mise en œuvre*, l'étape à laquelle le rôle de l'évaluation est défini de façon plus claire au sein de l'organisme et qui mène enfin à *l'adoption d'une pratique continue de l'évaluation*, où l'évaluation devient une activité régulière à laquelle on attribue des ressources financières et humaines. Nous suggérons par l'entremise de cet article que cette perspective représente une simplification excessive et qu'il nous faut plutôt étudier les dimensions plus complexes des capacités d'évaluation d'un organisme afin de mieux identifier les pistes à suivre pour les renforcer. Nous présentons ici une analyse d'une auto-évaluation des capacités organisationnelles d'évaluation complétée par quatre agences du gouvernement fédéral canadien. L'auto-évaluation a été menée à partir d'un cadre conceptuel développé au cours d'une étude plus large. Nous intégrons les profils multidimensionnels découlant de l'auto-évaluation de chacun des organismes étudiés aux étapes du renforcement des capacités d'évaluation afin de fournir une valeur ajoutée dans la réflexion sur l'orientation du renforcement des capacités d'évaluation dans l'organisation.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation capacity building (ECB), or how organizations develop their ability to produce and to use evaluation, has been the object of increasing empirical and anecdotal examination in recent years. The process through which organizations develop their evaluation capacity has been studied by a number of researchers and evaluators, and it is now possible to synthesize this knowledge into a series of stages of evaluation capacity building. Although ECB is an important research area on its own, we have found in our research that it is quite distinct from organizational capacity for evaluation. The latter concept can be generally defined as an organization's visible, enacted evaluation practices and processes, whereas ECB is the *process by which* an organization develops its understanding and ability to undertake these practices and processes. In reality, these two concepts are closely intertwined, but up until now little attention has been paid to the conceptual differences between the two. In fact, organizational evaluation capacity in general has not received as

much research attention as ECB. In a larger study we endeavoured to fill this knowledge gap by deepening our understanding of organizational evaluation capacity through the systematic identification and analysis of the dimensions of evaluation capacity in Canadian federal government organizations (Bourgeois, 2008; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2008). This article extends this research work by further exploring stages of evaluation capacity building, as derived from the literature, and comparing these to four levels of organizational evaluation capacity arising from our research. The conceptual anchor that we use to support this comparison is a detailed multidimensional conceptual framework that enables the profiling of key dimensions of evaluation capacity in government organizations. While we report on the development and validation of the framework elsewhere (Bourgeois, 2008; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2008), for our present purposes we take the results of a self-assessment by four government organizations using the profile tool in the light of knowledge about ECB stages and use them to develop considerations for ongoing ECB direction and planning. Although this particular analysis is limited in terms of breadth and depth, it has nevertheless enabled us to integrate several key concepts related to ECB and thus provides a more comprehensive description of the process through which organizations may increase and improve their evaluation capacity. The results of our analysis show how organizations progress as they develop their evaluation capacity and provide potential avenues for organizations wishing to move beyond their current level of capacity.

STAGES OF EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING

Several writers have published largely theoretical and anecdotal works on evaluation capacity building (e.g., Gilliam et al., 2003; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). Through an analysis and integration of this literature we discerned four stages of evaluation capacity building. The first stage, *traditional evaluation*, is the initial state of ECB. At this stage, evaluation is entirely mandated by external factors; individual programs are evaluated as required, often by external contractors hired specifically for this purpose. This stage is also characterized by minimal involvement on the part of program stakeholders (Gilliam et al., 2003; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). It is similar to the stage of *compliance* identified by Gibbs, Napp, Jolly, Westover, and Uhl (2002) in their case study of ECB implementation in community-based organizations dealing with HIV prevention programs. These authors characterize this stage as evaluation conducted only to the extent required by external bodies

with the perception that evaluation brings no benefit to the organization other than continued funding.

The second stage, *awareness and experimentation*, begins when organizational members become aware of a need to change certain activities, usually because of changes occurring within the external environment of the organization. This stage involves collecting and analyzing data through more participatory evaluation approaches and leads to a greater understanding of program goals and outcomes (Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). By participatory we mean approaches where trained evaluators work in partnership with non-evaluator stakeholders (often program community members) to produce evaluative knowledge (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Once organizations experience success with these participatory evaluation approaches, they may begin to *implement evaluative inquiry* throughout the organization, which constitutes the third stage of ECB. Specific plans are developed and resources are committed to ECB initiatives at this stage, and the organizational culture starts to move toward greater acceptance of systematic reflection on practices and procedures (Duignan, 2003; Gibbs et al., 2002; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001).

Finally, the organization *adopts evaluative inquiry as a management function and sustains its practice*, regardless of other internal or external constraints. In this fourth stage, evaluative inquiry becomes part of the tightly held values of the organization and new members are initiated into this culture of self-reflection and learning (Gibbs et al., 2002; Lewis & Thornhill, 1994; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001).

These stages naturally imply that organizational involvement in evaluation has the potential to enable movement by the organization to a higher level or stage of capacity development. Yet there are at least three problems associated with this contention. First, there are limits to the knowledge base on which the stage descriptions are grounded. Much of the background literature, as we have noted, is either theoretical or anecdotal; there is a paucity of rigorous empirical support for the observed stages. Second, although a staged approach may provide a good basis for describing a given organization's current status in terms of ECB, it really does not provide much in the way of guidance for developing ECB initiatives and plans. Third, relying on ECB stage descriptions may oversimplify the situation in which organizations find themselves with regard to evaluation capacity and interest in developing it.

PROFILING ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY

We believe that an alternative approach—one that embraces the distinction between ECB and organizational capacity for evaluation used in conjunction with ECB stage considerations—can provide added value for determining ECB direction and guidance. For our present purposes we draw from a larger project focusing on the identification of the dimensions of organizational evaluation capacity in Canadian federal government departments and agencies (Bourgeois, 2008; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2008). The study resulted in the creation of a framework of organizational evaluation capacity, which identifies six dimensions of evaluation capacity, each broken up into more specific sub-dimensions. Each sub-dimension is described using four levels of capacity (low, developing, intermediate, and exemplary); in a way, these four levels are somewhat reminiscent of the four stages of ECB presented above, suggesting some potential for integrating the two perspectives in the interests of organizational ECB planning.

The activities leading to the development of this framework were associated with a methodology for developing “innovation profiles,” multidimensional profiles of growth for understanding the implementation of planned educational innovation (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1987). The approach acknowledges the complexity of interventions and constructs, and the need to understand them in multidimensional terms. A profile tool is created that enables self-assessment by individuals, teams, or organizations as a basis for decision making and planning for improvement. The tool is meant to provide a description of the manageable steps required to move from one level to the next, a feature that is fully aligned with ECB objectives. Although this approach was developed in the context of educational innovation implementation, it has been applied in other domains such as the evaluation of program implementation in community mental health (Cousins, Aubry, Smith, & Smith Fowler, 2004).

Once developed, the framework was used as a self-assessment instrument in the four government organizations described in the next section. While we provide a description of the process used to develop the profile tool as a contextual backdrop, in this article we present only the organizational self-assessment results. Interested readers may consult Bourgeois (2008) and Bourgeois and Cousins (2008) for a more complete presentation of the final profile instrument and its development and validation processes.

CONTEXT AND METHODS

Participating Organizations

Initially, five organizations were selected by the authors based on data collected as part of a larger study. It was felt that conducting interviews in five organizations would be manageable given the scope of the project and would provide sufficient data to validate the framework, as long as there was some variability in the evaluation capacity of the organizations studied. Two organizations at the exemplary level (Organizations 1 and 2), one organization at the intermediate level (Organization 3), and two organizations at the low level (Organizations 4 and 5) were identified to ensure such variability. The capacity level of each organization was determined through consultation with four evaluation experts in Ottawa, each of whom have ongoing, close contact with a number of federal departments and agencies. Four of the five organizations agreed to participate in the larger study, but one organization was unable to contribute to the study due to changeover in leadership and limitations in time necessary to engage in reflection about evaluation capacity. Summary information about each organization is provided below as contextual information.

Organization 1: Exemplary Capacity

This large service organization has traditionally been considered a leader in the field of evaluation in terms of its technical capacity and the quality of its products. Its large evaluation staff is organized by program area to ensure continuity between evaluation projects and to develop greater understanding of the programs under scrutiny. Some of the more innovative work conducted in the evaluation unit of this department include the extensive use of peer review as a quality control mechanism and the development of complex quantitative evaluation methodologies.

Organization 2: Exemplary Capacity

This medium-sized regulatory organization has long been recognized for its continued efforts in reaching out to program areas and in diversifying the products offered to its clients. This organization has received awards for its efforts and is often held up as an example to follow for other government departments and agencies.

Organization 3: Intermediate Capacity

This medium-sized organization has made significant efforts in recent years to build its evaluation capacity on several fronts, such as staffing, professional development, ongoing data collection, and management processes. It was selected for the larger study because of these reasons, and also because its unique mandate within the federal government raises evaluation challenges specific only to a handful of other government departments and agencies.

Organization 4: Low Capacity

This organization has an operational mandate within the federal government and has therefore only recently been required to evaluate its programs. Because it is still in the early stages of developing a central evaluation function, its capacity level was identified as low by expert assessors involved in the larger study, who cited a high turnover rate and a low skill level as the main reasons behind this assessment.

Data Collection

Participant Selection

The heads of the evaluation units of the respective organizations identified through a separate process were contacted to request their participation in the study. An official invitation to each head of evaluation provided details about the study and what organizational participation would imply; the letter followed an initial informal invitation. An interview was then scheduled with each head of evaluation. These participants were also asked to nominate two other members of their organization for participation in the study (one senior evaluation officer and one organizational decision-maker/evaluation user). In all cases but one, the additional participants contacted the researcher and agreed to participate. One individual from the low capacity organization could not be reached and no suitable replacement could be identified to participate in the study. Therefore, Organization 4 is represented by only two participants in the study.

Organizational Self-Assessment Exercise

One of the purposes of the larger study was to obtain validation of the dimensions and sub-dimensions included in the organizational evaluation capacity framework developed thus far by asking individuals

in the participating organizations to closely examine the profile framework and to provide feedback on the contents and wording used and on the framework's applicability to their particular situations. Once the validation exercise was completed, the same individuals were asked to use the profile framework to assess their own organization's level of evaluation capacity on the six main dimensions and their associated sub-dimensions. Both objectives were met within the same interview sessions; previous versions of the framework had been validated prior to organizational testing, and we believed that the framework was well enough developed to support a preliminary organizational self-assessment, even if participants were also asked to critique the framework itself in the interview.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed and tested by the researchers in order to ensure uniformity and consistency throughout the interviews. Many of the interview questions focused on the breadth and comprehensiveness of the dimensions included in the framework (e.g., Does the framework include the most important dimensions of evaluation capacity? Is anything missing?) as well as the clarity of the wording used to describe each of the dimensions (e.g., Is the wording used for the different column headings clear?). The final question of the interview required the participant to assess their organization's evaluation capacity, based on the dimensions included in the framework (i.e., Can you tell me about your organization's capacity, based on the framework?) and provide feedback about the ease of use of the framework to accomplish this task (e.g., How difficult was it to use the framework?).

Data Analysis and Reporting

A qualitative content analysis was used to identify trends in the interview data collected from the four participating organizations. The coding and analysis process was based on the integration of data from all four organizations and the three different roles within each organization. Special care was taken to distinguish between comments made about the framework and those focusing on the organizational assessment made by the participants. In this segment of the analysis, the organizational role of interviewees was preserved in the data to properly interpret the combined organizational assessment: while heads of evaluation had more knowledge and authority in terms of assessing sub-dimensions such as staffing, the evaluation users would have more exposure to decision-making processes. The coded and analyzed self-assessment data were used to develop organizational profiles of the four participating departments and agencies.

RESULTS

The findings derived from the analysis described above were used both to finalize the profile framework of evaluation capacity that had been the focus of the organizational interviews, and to develop organizational profiles of evaluation capacity through the self-assessment made by organizational representatives. An overview summary of the profile instrument is provided in the next section as a conceptual anchor for the more detailed description of the respective organizational profiles.

Profile Framework of Organizational Evaluation Capacity

Without including the entire framework of organizational evaluation capacity developed as part of the larger study, we describe the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the profile tool in Figure 1. The figure serves as a conceptual anchor before a connection can be made between the framework and the stages of ECB (see Bourgeois, 2008, and Bourgeois & Cousins, 2008, for the complete instrument).

The six dimensions presented in the framework are divided into “capacity to do evaluation” and “capacity to use evaluation” based on the important ECB distinction that has been made by Cousins and associates (Cousins, Goh, Clark & Lee, 2004; Cousins et al., 2008) among others.

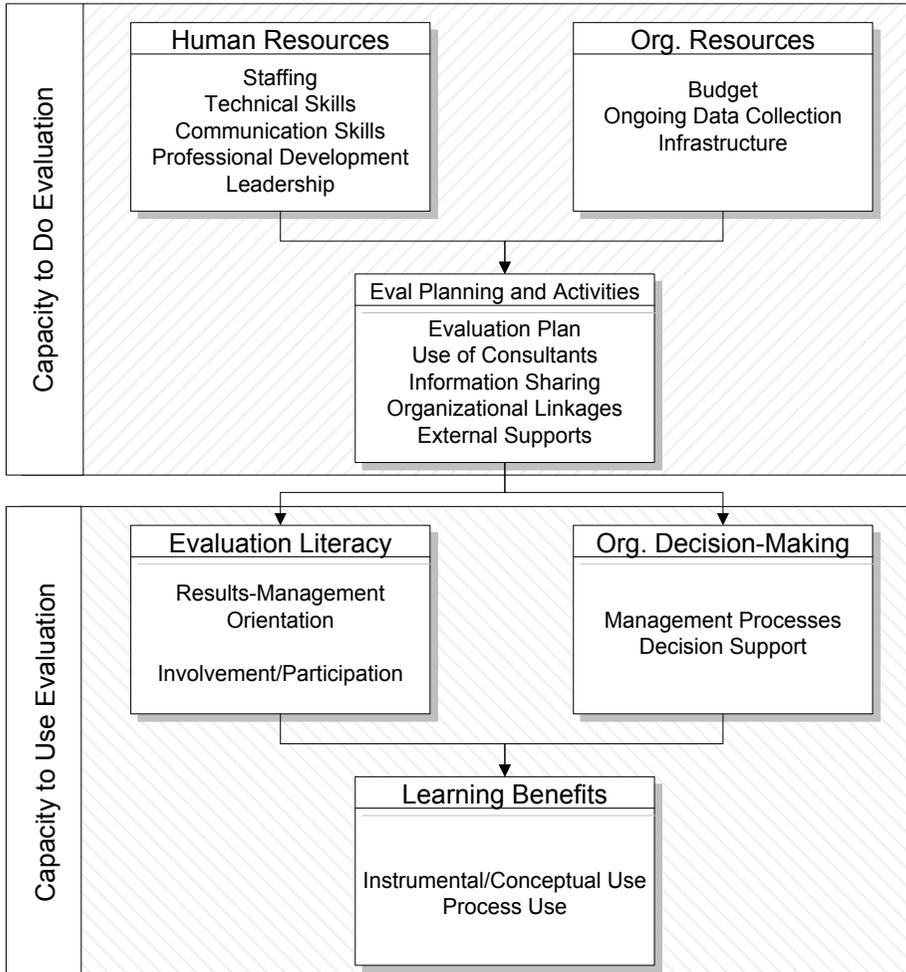
The first dimension of the framework, *Human Resources*, refers to the composition of the evaluation unit itself and is divided into five sub-dimensions. These focus on the recruitment, training, and retention of evaluators with the requisite technical and interpersonal competencies to undertake internal evaluation projects and to manage evaluation contracts when needed. This dimension also includes a consideration of leadership within the evaluation unit, which is crucial to the development of a healthy evaluation function for the entire organization.

The second dimension outlined in the framework is named *Organizational Resources* and offers a complementary perspective to the first dimension. Three sub-dimensions are included in this section of the framework: “budget,” which refers to the stability and sufficiency of the financial resources allocated to evaluation activities; “ongoing data collection,” which focuses on the availability of performance measurement data; and organizational “infrastructure,” which re-

fers to the organization's governance structure, policies, and other organizational supports that enable the evaluation function to thrive.

The third dimension focuses on the activities undertaken by evaluators as part of their regular duties and is called *Evaluation Planning and Activities*. The development of an evaluation plan in consultation with other stakeholders, the inclusion of a risk assessment process in the identification of evaluation priorities, ongoing intelligence gathering, and a systematic review of the evaluation unit itself are

Figure 1
Dimensions and Sub-dimensions of the Profile Tool



thought to be particularly important within this dimension. Evaluators in most departments make some use of consultants to provide assistance with various matters; this is often considered to be a good indicator of the organization's evaluation capacity. Information sharing within the organization and organizational linkages with external supports are also considered to be crucial to conducting high-quality evaluation.

The fourth dimension is the first included under the "capacity to use" evaluation category and reveals a less operational perspective than the first three dimensions of the framework. This dimension focuses on *Evaluation Literacy* within the organization and refers to the broad knowledge of evaluation across the organization. It assumes that increased knowledge eventually leads to increased use and thus refers to the extent to which an organization has a results-management orientation and whether other organizational members are encouraged to be involved in evaluation.

The fifth dimension follows in the footsteps of the previous one and focuses on the integration of evaluation information with *Organizational Decision-Making* processes. At the outset, the management processes of the organization, such as the development of memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions, should include evaluation considerations in order to ensure that sufficient resources are provided for the eventual evaluation of new initiatives. At the final stage of the evaluation process, the findings and recommendations made in an evaluation study should be clearly linked to budget allocation and other high-level organizational and policy decisions. An organization with exemplary capacity searches out evaluation information as decision support and relies on this information on an ongoing basis.

Finally, the sixth dimension, *Learning Benefits*, provides information on the types of uses that can be made of evaluation information within an organization. At a more operational level, the evaluation findings can be used as a basis for action and change through the implementation of evaluation recommendations ("instrumental use"). The evaluation findings can also have an impact on the understanding and attitudes of stakeholders about a program by clarifying certain operational aspects or by highlighting specific program results ("conceptual use"). In addition to this, the participation of organizational members in the evaluation process can sometimes result in behavioural or cognitive changes within these individuals based on their exposure to evaluation ("process use").

Organizational Self-Assessment of Evaluation Capacity

The findings associated with each participating organization's evaluation capacity are summarized in Table 1. The left-hand column of Table 1 presents the six key dimensions of evaluation capacity identified in the profile framework developed as part of the larger study (see summary of the framework in Figure 1) and summary of the self-assessment data collected for each of the four organizations involved in the study. The level at which organizations self-assessed (low, developing, intermediate, exemplary) is provided in each data summary cell in the matrix. This shows that even organizations considered exemplary in general tend to have areas of evaluation capacity that could be developed further, and that organizations considered to generally have little evaluation capacity also have pockets of high evaluation capacity. This is a pivotal consideration and advantage afforded by the profile tool, as it enables the assessment to be sensitive to organizational context, conditions, and constraints. Each organization is unique and will face different pressures and priorities. Such forces may explain why there may be variation across dimensions in organizational capacity for evaluation. In our view, this is the added value that the profile tool may bring to ECB considerations. We now turn to an integration of these findings with the stages of ECB described above, with the goal of enhancing understanding of organizational direction for ECB.

Integrating Stages of ECB and Profiles of Evaluation Capacity

In order to expand our understanding of how organizations develop their evaluation capacity, we reviewed the data collected as part of the larger study and conducted a new analysis focusing on the potential correspondence between the stages of ECB identified through the literature review and the four levels of evaluation capacity developed in our study. Although the stages of ECB (traditional evaluation, awareness and experimentation, implementing evaluative inquiry, and adoption of evaluation as a management function) and four levels of evaluation capacity (low, developing, intermediate, and exemplary) may appear similar at first glance, they are conceptually very different. The four levels of capacity represent a multidimensional snapshot of the organizational features present at each level, while the stages refer to the specific activities that organizations may undertake to improve their capacity. In other words, implementing the activities outlined in the stages of ECB theoretically enhances the probability of change from a lower level of capacity to a higher level.

Although the stages and the levels are distinct from one another, we believe it is useful to examine the four stages of evaluation capacity building in relation to the four levels of evaluation capacity, and to draw linkages between the two in the interests of considering implications for ECB planning. The integration of the profile of organizational growth in evaluation capacity with ECB stages can add considerable value to understanding and deciding next steps. This section will attempt to describe the conceptual and empirical linkages that exist between the profile's levels of organizational evaluation capacity and the stages of ECB in an attempt to provide some direction to organizations wishing to undertake a planned sequence of activities targeted towards the enhancement of their organizational evaluation capacity.

Figure 2 provides a summary of the analysis described in the remainder of this paper. The four levels of organizational evaluation capacity are featured in the boxes presented in the Figure. For each of these, a description based on the six dimensions of evaluation capacity is presented in order to better illustrate how organizations might appear and what key characteristics they would exhibit. Growth

Figure 2
Four Levels of Organizational Evaluation Capacity

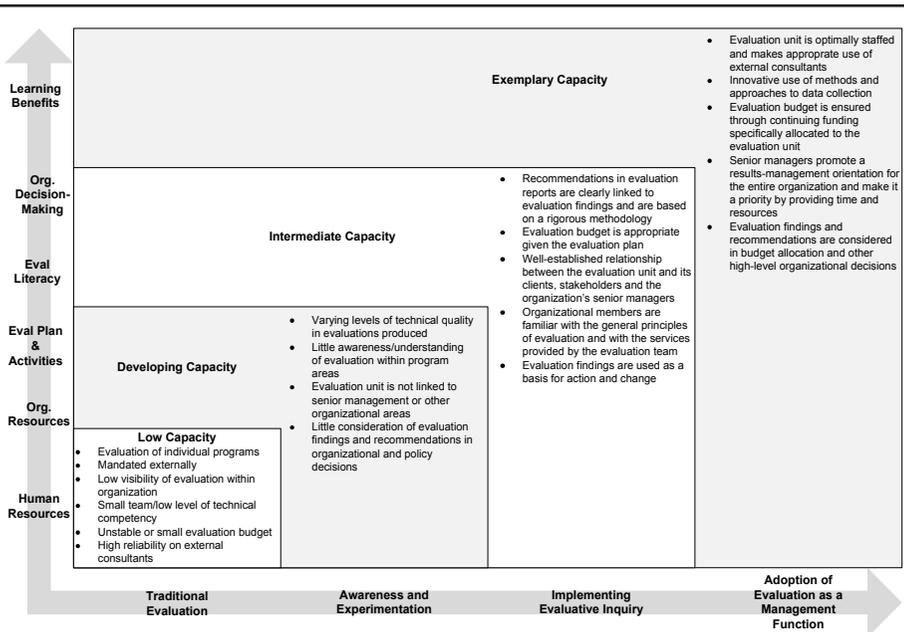


Table 1
Organizational Self-Assessment by Dimension

Dimensions of EC	Org 1 (High)	Org 2 (High)	Org 3 (Intermediate)	Org 4 (Low)
Human Resources	<p><i>Exemplary:</i> Experienced, highly skilled team and leadership Built-in career progression process Learning plans for all staff members</p>	<p><i>Exemplary:</i> Built-in career progression process Excellent PD opportunities Staff works in teams to achieve balance in terms of expertise Strong leadership</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Built-in career progression process PD opportunities depend on workload Highly specialized staff with good balance of skill sets Strong leadership</p>	<p><i>Developing:</i> Several vacant positions due to recent departures Mix of experience and project management skills within team Some PD opportunities for staff members Leader has strong evaluation and management background</p>
Organizational Resources	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Well resourced evaluation unit, expansive budget Data rich, but often low quality Many reorganizations but clear accountability lines Some issues with organizational supports</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Well resourced evaluation unit, additional funding available when needed No overall data collection system Stable governance structure, decentralized organization Good organizational supports, with some "irritants"</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Budget is sometimes shared with other business lines within the group Currently developing PM system but not implemented yet Good linkages to other corporate areas</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Stable funding source Data rich but difficult to access Clear organizational structure and accountability lines Organizational supports hinder timely production of evaluation work</p>
Evaluation Planning and Activities	<p><i>Exemplary:</i> Extensive consultation for planning purposes Annual report on evaluation activities Good balance between in-house and use of consultants Location of evaluation unit allows for information sharing with other groups and good organizational linkages</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Extensive consultation for planning purposes Logic model for evaluation unit developed and use of report card Extensive contracting out of projects based on available human resources Staff encouraged to share info and lessons learned on projects</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Five-year plan in place; some needs assessment done No systematic review of evaluation unit Exemplary model for use of consultants External networks could be improved</p>	<p><i>Developing:</i> Evaluation plan based on some consultation with managers Consultants generally not used Some opportunities to share info among staff members Advisory committees and peer review process under development Good access to senior management</p>

<p>Evaluation Literacy</p>	<p>Extensive external supports; strong peer review system</p> <p><i>Exemplary:</i> Involvement of key stakeholders through use of advisory committees Demand for evaluation from DG and ADM Sign-off authority on RMAFs, with PM specialists within program areas</p>	<p>No advisory or steering committees to maintain independence</p> <p><i>Exemplary:</i> Involvement of stakeholders at key points in process Some confusion because of dual roles of PM facilitation and evaluation follow-ups Strong RMAF development process within program areas</p>	<p>Excellent access to senior management</p> <p><i>Intermediate:</i> Program managers involved at key points in process Evaluations thoroughly discussed at DG and ADM level Evaluation unit often drives RMAFs</p>	<p><i>Developing:</i> Little awareness of evaluation outside senior management but building Good measurement of outputs, but difficulty in measuring outcomes Just started doing RMAFs, evaluators take the lead</p>
<p>Organizational Decision-Making</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Evaluators often consulted on TB submissions and MC for pilot projects Evaluation findings are used for decision-making when available Some timeliness problems for use</p>	<p><i>Exemplary:</i> Program staff require help with TB submissions RMAFs used extensively Evaluation info used for allocation and reallocation of funding</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Use of evidence to support MC requirements Increasing recognition of the contribution of evaluation to decision-making</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Growing demand for evaluation services from senior management</p>
<p>Learning Benefits</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Impact and level of implementation of evaluation recommendations not currently known Lessons learned unit produces information packaged by theme (impact yet unknown) Very transparent process in terms of publishing reports Evaluations used to train new program staff</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Some evidence of evaluation use, but only partial for now No real evidence of process use as of yet</p>	<p><i>Intermediate:</i> Evaluation findings sometimes used No systematic follow-up on recommendations Senior managers show some process use</p>	<p><i>Developing:</i> Good implementation of evaluation recommendations Will build on process use once advisory committees are up and running</p>

in evaluation capacity (along the vertical axis) is dependent upon growth along the horizontal axis, which features the stages of ECB derived from the literature.

Low Capacity

The starting point for this level is close to the description of traditional evaluation presented as a first stage of ECB. Organizations at this level typically engage in the evaluation of individual programs, usually conducted by external contractors specifically hired for this purpose (Gilliam et al., 2003; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). The main motivation behind evaluation is to meet external requirements, with little or no interest in organizational improvement or learning. Organizations with low evaluation capacity have several vacant positions, project management issues, and little capacity in terms of technical skills. In addition to this, there is little impetus from management to collect performance data and to report on results in a rigorous fashion. Staff members are generally not aware of the need to conduct program evaluation, and there is little evidence that the evaluations produced are used to support decision-making or other organizational activities. In order to increase their evaluation capacity, these organizations can focus on the first dimension, Human Resources, by recruiting evaluation staff with the needed skills and competencies. They can also move toward the second dimension, Organizational Resources, by putting in place a fairly stable evaluation budget and implementing an evaluation planning process that takes the needs of program managers and other requirements into account.

Developing Capacity

This level is characterized by limited involvement of senior management in the production and utilization of evaluation, scarce resources for evaluative activities, basic planning processes, and little awareness of evaluation within the broader organizational context. Organizations at this level usually produce evaluation reports of varying quality, and make extensive use of external suppliers in their work. Although some efforts are being made toward the development of a functional evaluation unit, it is still too early to speak of actual evaluation capacity within the organization. In order to achieve a greater level of capacity, evaluators in these organizations can focus on increasing the resources available for evaluation activities by obtaining firm commitments regarding the work plan and budget of the evaluation unit (Duignan, 2003; Gibbs et al., 2002; Sanders,

2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). They can also invest in professional development activities to continue to expand upon their skills and competencies.

Intermediate Capacity

Organizations at this level have experienced early successes from their evaluation activities and are looking to formalize it as a regular part of their management function. These organizations typically have a full complement of highly skilled evaluators who work alongside more junior personnel progressing along a pre-determined career path, have strong leadership within the evaluation unit and a supportive cast of senior managers who value and use evaluative information, collect ongoing performance data, allocate a stable budget to the evaluation function, and show excellent evaluation planning. Other organizational members are aware and knowledgeable about evaluation's role, and some participate in evaluation projects. There is some evidence of instrumental and conceptual use of evaluation findings through the implementation of recommendations. To increase their capacity further and make it an integral part of their culture, organizations at this level can increase evaluation literacy by teaching new members about evaluation and encouraging discussions about organizational values and achievements (Gibbs et al., 2002; Lewis & Thornhill, 1994; Sanders, 2002; Torres & Preskill, 2001). They can also focus on the integration of performance measurement systems to the evaluation process, and develop organization-wide performance measurement and evaluation policies to clarify internal roles and responsibilities and to integrate evaluation to ongoing organizational decision-making.

Exemplary Capacity

Organizations that have reached this level of capacity value evaluative inquiry and consider it one of their core functions. Exemplary capacity is characterized by a strong, highly skilled evaluation function, quality evaluation products that are integrated seamlessly into organizational decision-making processes, excellent leaders within and outside the evaluation unit, a strong results-management orientation, a stable organizational structure and budget, a thorough planning process that involves a review of the evaluation unit itself, and clear evidence of evaluation utilization. Although this represents the highest level of described evaluation capacity, organizations that have reached this level can continue on this path by reaching out to

their external environment and learning from other organizations. They can also ensure the ongoing maintenance of their capacity by focusing on succession planning and retention of skilled evaluators. Finally, they can identify instances in which process use can be demonstrated to assess the extent to which the organizational culture has integrated evaluation and thus reaps its benefits in terms of learning and continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION

The development of an organization's evaluation capacity can be conceptualized as occurring through two different but related channels. Through our own empirical work we observed that organizations are situated at specific levels of evaluation capacity (low, developing, intermediate, or exemplary) with some variation across six different dimensions. To move from a lower level of capacity to a higher level of capacity, organizations should implement a specific set of activities that can be outlined in four different stages. The interplay between the stages of evaluation capacity building and the achievement of higher levels of evaluation capacity was presented in this article to offer an integrated description of evaluation capacity and the process of ECB. Examples from four federal government organizations point to the fact that ECB occurs differently from one organization to the next; the stages of ECB, therefore, should be used as general guides and not as prescriptive instructions. These examples also show that a given organization may not achieve the same level of capacity for all six dimensions at the same time; in fact, the more common occurrence is that an organization has an intermediate or exemplary level of capacity for the dimensions that are directly under the control of the evaluation unit, but a lower level of capacity for the dimensions that speak to the use of evaluation by senior management and across the organization. In such a case, specific ECB activities could be implemented individually across dimensions rather than in an integrated fashion for all six dimensions. This would also allow for some priority setting within the ECB process. For instance, an organization may choose to focus its efforts on developing awareness of evaluation and its potential among the ranks of senior management rather than throughout the organization in order to have a more visible impact on the decisions made at the organization's topmost level.

The integration of the levels of evaluation capacity, its dimensions, and the stages through which organizations move as they develop such capacity allows for a broader conceptualization of evaluation as a learning instrument or system in organizations. In order to enable

organizations to make use of this framework, future research might focus on an integrated tool that could be used on one part to concretely measure an organization's overall level of evaluation capacity, and on the other to identify specific organizational strengths and weaknesses based on the dimensions of evaluation capacity included in the framework. Further, such a tool could produce a series of actionable recommendations for organizations interested in implementing ECB initiatives to target specific dimensions and move through the stages of ECB identified in the literature. An instrument enabling organizations to further increase their evaluation capacity is likely to be of high interest in both government and non-government settings, given the ever-increasing need to achieve more with less.

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