Exploring Effective Strategies for Facilitating Evaluation Capacity Building

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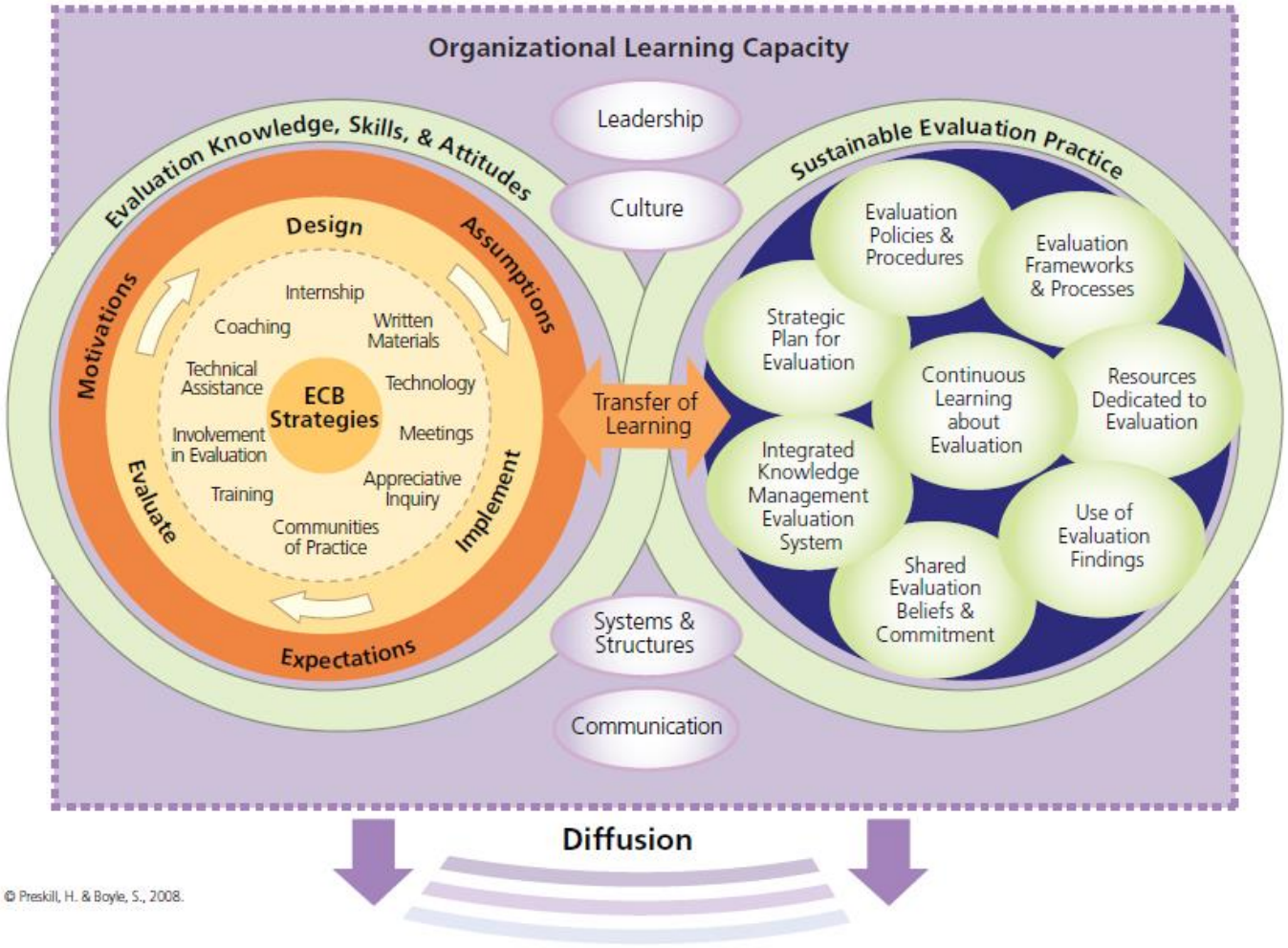
Evaluation Capacity Building Overview

Evaluation capacity building involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of evaluation capacity building is sustainable evaluation practice – where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. For evaluation practice to be sustained, participants must be provided with leadership support, incentives, resources, and opportunities to transfer their learning about evaluation to their everyday work. Sustainable evaluation practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that help embed evaluation work into the way the organization accomplishes its strategic mission and goals. (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p.444)

A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building



Ten Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies©
Quick Guide

1. **Coaching/Mentoring**: building a relationship with an evaluation expert who provides individualized technical and professional support

2. **Technical Assistance**: receiving help from an internal or external evaluator

3. **Technology:** using online resources such as websites and/or e-learning programs to learn from and about evaluation

4. **Written Materials**: reading and using written documents about evaluation processes and findings

5. **Training**: attending courses, workshops, and seminars on evaluation

6. **Involvement in an Evaluation Process**: participating in the design and/or implementation of an evaluation

7. **Internship**: participating in a formal program that provides practical evaluation experience for novices

8. **Meetings**: allocating time and space to discuss evaluation activities specifically for the purpose of learning from and about evaluation

9. **Appreciative Inquiry**: using an assets-based, collaborative, narrative approach to learning about evaluation that focuses on strengths within the organization

10. **Communities of Practice**: sharing evaluation experiences, practices, information, and readings among members who have common interests and needs (sometimes called learning circles)

Evaluation Capacity Building Objectives©

Knowledge - *ECB participants understand***:**

1. That evaluation involves purposeful, planned, and systematic activities.
2. Evaluation terms and concepts.
3. The relationship between research and evaluation.
4. How evaluation processes and findings can contribute to decision-making.
5. The strengths and weaknesses of different evaluation approaches.
6. The strengths and weaknesses of different data collection methods.
7. How to apply basic statistical analyses to quantitative data.
8. How to apply basic content and thematic analyses to qualitative data.
9. How politics can affect evaluation processes and findings.
10. The importance of using culturally appropriate and responsive evaluation approaches and methods.
11. What constitutes ethical evaluation practice.
12. That various stakeholders may have differing opinions, experiences, and perspectives about an evaluand.
13. The relationship between a program's goals, objectives, activities, and expected outcomes.
14. What knowledge, skills, and experiences to look for when hiring an evaluator.

Skills (Behaviors) - *ECB participants are able to*:

1. Develop a program logic model.
2. Develop key evaluation questions.
3. Write an evaluation plan.
4. Design data collection instruments.
5. Choose appropriate and relevant data collection methods.
6. Collect credible and reliable data.
7. Analyze quantitative data.
8. Analyze qualitative data.
9. Interpret results and draw conclusions.
10. Develop an evaluation budget.
11. Communicate and report evaluation processes and findings using a variety of strategies.
12. Use the *Program Evaluation Standards* and/or the *AEA Guiding Principles for Evaluators*.
13. Teach others about evaluation.
14. Develop an evaluation strategic plan.
15. Manage the evaluation process.

Beliefs - *ECB participants believe that:*

1. Evaluation yields useful information.
2. Evaluation can be a positive experience.
3. Evaluation should be part of a program's design process.
4. Evaluation contributes to a program's success.
5. Evaluation adds value to the organization.
6. Evaluation is an important part of their work.
7. Evaluation is worth the time and money.

Mentoring/Coaching

Mentoring/Coaching is an ongoing one-to-one relationship in which a more experienced individual offers advice, counsel, or guidance to someone less experienced.

Mentors provide: emotional and psychological support, assistance with career and professional development, and role modeling (Davis, 2001).

Examples:

- University faculty/external evaluator invites graduate student to work on evaluation project after student has completed evaluation course.
- Internal evaluator invites program staff to work on evaluation study after they take a workshop on evaluation design and implementation.

Mentors and coaches help individuals:

- develop knowledge and skills
- learn from others' experiences
- develop relationships
- develop political awareness
- build commitment
- create networks
- understand the larger picture
- practice according to a set of professional ethics
- integrate and use constructive feedback

Guiding Questions for Using Mentoring/Coaching as an ECB Strategy:

- Who is available to be a mentor?
- Who are the potential mentees?
- What structures are there to support a mentoring program?
- To what extent is a "program" necessary - should it be more informal?
- What will be expected of mentees and mentors?
- Who will oversee the mentoring "program"?
- What benefits might be achieved from mentoring individuals?

Potential Challenges with Mentoring/Coaching:

- Mentee or Mentor/Coach makes excessive demands on the time and energy of the other person
- Personality conflicts between mentor/coach and mentee
- Mentor/Coach does not make the time - no follow through
- Mentor/Coach and/or mentee have unrealistic expectations
- Mentor/Coach has little faith in the mentee's ability
- Mentee feels superior to mentor/coach
- Mentor/Coach manipulates mentee
- Overdependence of mentee on mentor/coach
- Jealousy of others

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance may take forms such as instruction, skills training, working knowledge, consulting services, and may also involve the transfer of technical data. Technical assistance is about providing help and advice on a specialized subject matter.

Technical assistance typically involves one-on-one or small group support:

- telephone consultations
- newsletters
- specific knowledge and skill training
- information dissemination (via website, mailings)
- resources (databases, links, referrals)
- facilitation of meetings

Example:
Program staff are matched to experienced evaluators who are available to answer questions about the evaluation's design and implementation as needed. Communications are typically through email and the phone.

Guiding Questions for Using Technical Assistance as an ECB Strategy:

- Who might provide technical assistance?
- What resources are available for providing technical assistance?
- What is the scope of technical assistance service you might provide?
- Who would have access to technical assistance?

Potential Challenges with Technical Assistance

- Because technical assistance evolves over time with the development of its users, it must be flexible to grow and change with the users' needs
- Its success is dependent on two-way communication and the strength of relationships
- Users can become overly dependent on those providing technical assistance
- Intermittent assistance may leave gaps in capacity

Technology

The use of synchronous and asynchronous technologies can provide information and feedback on various aspects of evaluation practice. (e.g., *email, knowledge management systems, twitter, blogs, websites, video-conferencing, web conferencing, video*)

Examples:

- A knowledge management database of previous evaluations has been developed that is accessible to all members in the organization. Employees may, at any time, review previous evaluation studies to learn more about an evaluation's methodology, findings, and recommendations.
- A list of websites that provide information on how to conduct evaluations is made available to all organization members.

Guiding Questions for Using Technology as an ECB Strategy:

- What are we trying to achieve with using the various technologies?
- What are the most appropriate technologies for these various objectives?
- What are the strengths and limitations of each technology?
- What resources are available to build and use these technologies?
- What experiences do organization members have with using these technologies?
- How likely are members to use these technologies?

Potential Challenges with Using Technologies:

- Can be costly to design, develop and implement
- Many organizations do not yet have the level of technology needed to facilitate capacity building
- There is an uneven distribution of technology among organizations
- Organization members must be committed to using technology (see the value of it)
- Organization members must be willing to contribute information to knowledge management systems

Written Materials

Organizations can design, develop, and use a variety of written materials to build evaluation capacity (e.g., how-to manuals, newsletters, books, brochures, evaluation plans and reports).

Examples:

- A checklist of things to include in an evaluation plan
- Evaluation textbooks made available in the organization's library
- Newsletter articles about a completed evaluation with descriptive information on what was studied and why, its methods, findings, recommendations, and how the results will be (or are being) used.

Guiding Questions for Using Written Materials as an ECB Strategy:

- What kinds of written materials already exist in the organization?
- What kinds of written materials do organization members pay attention to?
- Who will write the new materials?
- What resources exist to design and develop new written materials?
- What might these written materials focus on?
- How will these written materials be distributed?

Potential Challenges with Using Written Materials:

- They may not be read
- Their abbreviated form may mislead individuals or the materials' content can be misinterpreted
- They can be costly to develop and distribute
- They are easily misplaced or lost

Training

A workshop is a short-term learning experience that encourages active, experiential learning and uses a variety of learning activities to meet the needs of diverse learners. (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999)

Examples:

- A 4-hr. workshop for program staff on how to design and conduct evaluations.
- A 2-hr. workshop on developing logic models.

Guiding Questions for Developing ECB Related Workshops

- What is the purpose and focus of the training? (e.g., skill building, problem solving, increasing knowledge, personal awareness, self improvement, systemic change)
- What are the goals and objectives?
- Who should be involved? What experience do they have with evaluation? How many people will be trained?
- Where will the training take place?
- How long will the training be?
- How will trainee's learning be shared with others?

Potential Challenges with Training:

- Not always developed with transfer of learning as a primary goal
- Often include individuals who are not in a position to use what they have learned - not "just-in-time"
- Take place outside of the work environment
- Are sometimes poorly designed and facilitated/taught
- Are often one-shot
- Rarely take into account participants' previous knowledge and skills
- Participants often lack effective post training management support and follow-up
- How transfer of learning will be supported is rarely addressed

Involvement in an Evaluation Process

Evaluation capacity may be an artifact of the evaluation when stakeholders are active participants in the *design and/or implementation of an evaluation process*. The difference between process use and evaluation capacity building is the intentionality of learning and the efforts made to support and sustain learning throughout the evaluation process (Harnar & Preskill, 2007).

Example:
In an evaluation of an early childhood education program, a group of 12 parents, educators, human service providers, and policy advocates is established to help guide the evaluation's design and implementation. With guidance from a paid professional evaluator, the group engages in several in person and virtual meetings to develop the program's logic model, identify the evaluation's key questions, and other aspects of the evaluation's design, which results in a comprehensive evaluation plan. The evaluator and her team collects and analyzes the data, and brings the group back together to collectively interpret the findings and to develop a set of recommendations. To insure that participants are learning from and about evaluation, the evaluator embeds several different learning opportunities throughout the process so that participants can reflect on their learning at key points throughout the evaluation.

Facilitating Learning Processes
- *Dialogue* - Individuals seek to inquire, share meanings, understand complex issues, and uncover assumptions
- *Reflection* - Individuals and groups review their ideas, understandings, and experiences; provide opportunities to explore values, beliefs, and assumptions
- *Asking Questions* - Identifies and frames issues of key importance, acknowledges prior knowledge, develops a culture and spirit of curiosity; leads to deeper levels of knowledge and understanding
- *Feedback* – Provides opportunities for reflection and modification of mental models; allows for integration of new with old knowledge and skills

Guiding Questions for Using this ECB Strategy:
- Who is interested, willing, and able to participate?
- How will you choose whom to involve/invite?
- What are participants' roles? How deep or wide is their involvement? What role will the evaluator(s) play?
- How will learning processes be integrated throughout the evaluation?
- To what extent will the physical location of participating stakeholders affect their level of engagement?
- What are some possible consequences (positive and negative) of involving stakeholders in the evaluation process?

Potential Challenges of Using this ECB Strategy:
- Participants' time constraints
- Participant's limited level of evaluation knowledge and skills
- Finding the right balance between participant involvement and evaluator control
- Participants abiding by ethical and professional evaluation standards
- Participants wanting to use the "findings" before all of the data have been collected and/or analyzed
- Participants using the evaluation process as part of a political agenda

References and Additional Resources

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