

Audio File Transcripts

UNIT 1

Section 4

Evaluation is a critical, but often forgotten, management tool for leaders. It's a form of business intelligence that is often an afterthought, or absent from the boardroom, and that needs to change. Why? Evaluation provides evidence for "evidence-based practice", and informs leaders engaged in "informed decision-making". It's a data-driven tool that provides the information you need to effectively execute your priority-setting and resource-allocation tasks and meet your organization's priorities.

We recognize that every decision cannot be made solely on the basis of evaluation and research findings. In the complex world of health care, political and stakeholder demands are everyday realities. However, incorporating more evaluation ensures the presence of a more rational and systematic framework for decisions.

UNIT 2

Section 12

A process evaluation examines what is working and not working in the delivery of the program. It answers questions like, "Is the program reaching its intended target group?" and "Are the participants satisfied with the program?".

An outcome evaluation examines what impacts, benefits, or changes occurred as a result of the program. It answers the questions, "So What?" and "Are we making a difference?"]

Section 23

Determining the evaluation questions is one area where leaders and decision-makers can significantly influence the utility of the results. By asking meaningful and useful evaluation questions, you can ensure the evaluation is focused on the most important information.

UNIT 4

Section 40

Our knowledge of experimental and quasi-experimental research design comes from the renown work of Donald Campbell and Julian Stanley in the sixties. They had a vision of politicians and decision-makers using rational decision-making based on randomized experiments that tested causal inferences about the effects of the many social reforms happening at the time. Campbell and Stanley also recognized that laboratory-style experimental designs could seldom be applied in the real world. Consequently, they developed the concept of quasi-experimental designs to compare intervention and comparison conditions for situations when randomizing individuals to a treatment or control group, or including a control group were not possible. By the early 1980's, though, it became clear that both experimental and quasi-experimental designs were not the full answer. Why was this the case? First of all, true random assignment in social settings is difficult, expensive, and frequently impossible to achieve. The denial of treatment and other ethical issues prevented their use in many real-life situations. Secondly, budget cuts were limiting the number of such studies that could actually be funded. Finally, sophisticated and lengthy RCT evaluations were not providing timely evidence for decision-making.

Think back to the differences between research and evaluation that we discussed in Unit 1. Research is typically a curiosity-driven endeavor, designed to advance general knowledge and often conducted in a highly-controlled context, such as a laboratory. Evaluation, on the other hand, is stakeholder-driven, and designed to address practical problems in the 'real' world. Real-life is typically messier and muddier, and evaluation occurs on the ground, and in the trenches.

Evaluators regularly rely on both qualitative and quantitative data. However, just as evaluation is sometimes perceived by some as a poor substitute for research, quantitative data is often erroneously considered more valid and rigorous than qualitative data. This places many evaluation findings at a perceived disadvantage. Fortunately, most consider this a tired and outdated argument, but unfortunately it still persists in some circles despite efforts on the part of both researchers and evaluators to refute it.

Section 42

Internal validity is the ability to determine, with certainty, whether a causal relationship exists, whether an intervention has produced an outcome, and the magnitude of the outcome. A high degree of internal validity is achieved when an evaluator is able to control all extraneous factors that might influence or bias the effect of an intervention. Strong

internal validity allows an evaluator to make a *causal link* between an intervention and its outcomes. Threats to internal validity are those biases that reduce the credibility of a causal link.

External validity indicates how valid results are outside of the controlled limits of a study, and whether or not the results can be generalized to other people and situations with confidence. Evaluations *with* strong external validity have results that are applicable beyond the controlled limits of the study to other contexts such as different people, places, and/or times. Evidence *without* strong external validity is of questionable use for guiding practice in other contexts.]

Section 44

Therefore, evidence can be credible in the context studied but of questionable relevance for guiding actions in other contexts. How then does a busy leader with frequent and immediate needs for business intelligence navigate between these two extremes of scientific credibility and practical utility??? One answer is to replace the current preoccupation with internal validity with a greater focus and emphasis on *external validity*. By striking a balance between internal and external validity, additional yardsticks of good evidence come to the fore such as relevance, contextuality, coherence, justifiability, and plausibility.]

Section 45

Contribution Analysis is an approach for inferring causality in real-life evaluations. It is designed to determine what contribution a program has made to particular outcomes and reduce the uncertainty about these contributions. Here are some of the steps in contribution analysis:

- Set out the attribution problem to be addressed^[SEP]
- Develop a theory of change (logic model) and risks to it
- Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change
- Assemble and assess the contribution story, and challenges to it
- Seek out additional evidence
- Revise and strengthen the contribution story.

UNIT 5

Section 51

Systems thinking is based on the understanding that traditional reductionist approaches to solving problems are not as effective as ones that acknowledge the complex nature of many of the issues you face as a senior health care leader.

To be wise about complexity, you must be knowledgeable about what it is and what is not. What it means, and what it does not mean. What the implications are, and what they are not. Like any concept that becomes popular and widely used, many who mouth words like 'complexity' and 'system thinking' are, unfortunately, ignorant about the implications for development evaluation and, I'm afraid, unaware of their own ignorance. Don't join them in that. I urge you to study complexity and systems thinking. The development evaluation implications are huge and with greater knowledge and sophistication you will come to understand, and here comes my rant, why Randomized Controlled Trials are inadequate, inappropriate, and actually distorting in a complex development situation. You will come to understand how Randomized Controlled Trials simplify, impose controls (and therefore oversimplify), essentially approaching complex dynamic systems most commonly, not always, but most commonly, through mechanistic models, fixed, standardized, inflexible and non-adaptive interventions, with independent and dependent measures that produce results that are inherently static, artificial, non-generalizable, and not to put too fine a point on it, relatively useless, when not actually distorting. All this despite rhetorical flourishes about being 'evidence driven', 'scientific', and a 'gold standard'. Know that such claims are ideological and paradigm-based rather than methodological, justified, or appropriate, though I have knowledge that such claims have been wildly successful in attracting money and prestige as a result of successful proselytizing including claiming to deal with complexity while actually ignoring the real world dynamics of complex dynamic systems.

Section 52

In the past evaluations focused almost exclusively on a program's activities and outcomes by looking only at simple cause and effect processes and ignoring the broader system surrounding the program.]

Today, evaluators are learning to view a program as part of a larger system. Note that the evaluation scope below has expanded to include factors in the system that are outside of the program itself. Can you see the difference? The systems evaluation has a greater chance of identifying leverage points for action.]

You'll recall from the previous video that Leverage Points are parts of a system where small, incremental, and iterative actions, with feedback, can have big impacts. They often highlight new and innovative ways to approach some of the complex problems facing senior leaders

today. With a greater understanding of the **interactions** within and between the different parts of the system, more leverage points are identified. For example, a weight-loss program for obese adolescents is more likely to be effective if, in addition to individual programming, there are school policy changes related to healthy food choices.

Program logic models are usually developed in a linear fashion, for example, if we do X, then we anticipate that Y will occur. But when we approach them from a systems perspective, they begin to reflect the more dynamic, ever-changing environment that programs really operate in. Logic models are usually developed as static tools, but programs are dynamic and unfold in real-time. Sometimes we call these types of logic models "fuzzy". Fuzzy logic models can often make planners nervous. This is understandable when things like public money and organizational reputation are on the line. But they do have their advantages. Linear logic models are often overly simplistic and don't fully reflect any of the different system's influences that impact the outcomes the program is trying to achieve. This information can provide valuable insight for planners and decision makers that puts the program into perspective by identifying what is needed to fully establish and sustain the desired change.

UNIT 6

Section 58

Noted evaluator, [Jane Davidson](#), has stated that leaders are not able to act on evaluation findings unless the evaluation questions are designed to produce actionable answers.

But you don't have to do this alone! Evaluators are trained to translate your queries and concerns about a program into measurable questions that can be addressed through evaluation.

Section 59

In order to make informed decisions, the nimble leader must have the information they need when they need it, not when the evaluation happens to finish.

Research by the noted evaluator Michael Quinn Patton found that typically one-quarter to one-third of an evaluation budget is spent writing a final report. From a cost-effectiveness perspective, it may be more fiscally prudent to request a shorter Decision Brief and put the balance towards more valuable evaluation pursuits such as data collection, more stakeholder consultation, or other activity.

Champions are senior managers who understand the value of evaluation, are personally committed to evaluation conducted and who have the power to influence the use of the results.

UNIT 7

Section 66

Depending on the size of the internal evaluation unit, they may be swamped with requests or be directed to focus on particular organizational priorities. Sometimes they may not have expertise in a particular content area or new methodology, which may prompt the occasional need to bring in external evaluators or other experts. There are also occasions when a more "arms-length" approach from an external evaluator may be more desirable.

Section 67

Evaluation functions best when it is recognized by senior management as a part of the planning and decision-making process. Once you fully realize the skill set evaluators bring to the table, you'll find them an indispensable source of business intelligence. Evaluators typically are trained within a particular discipline. They will have content knowledge, qualitative and quantitative research skills, knowledge about evaluation theories and approaches, and strong communication and knowledge translational skills. Evaluation is an interdisciplinary field and most evaluators hold graduate degrees in diverse areas. The focus of every evaluator's work is different depending on which sector they work in (for example government, academia, or community), the specific issue area, such health, education, social services, etc.), and what they evaluate, be it programs, policies, or performance. What all evaluators hold in common is the desire to systematically gather the best information possible for informed planning and decision-making.

In 2010 the Canadian Evaluation Society launched a new Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation that is designed to define, recognize and promote the practice of competent, high quality, and ethical evaluation in Canada. Having this designation means that an evaluator has provided evidence of the education and experience required to be called a competent evaluator. Currently, Canada and Japan are the only countries that have formally identified the competencies required to be an evaluator and implemented such a designation program. The United States is actively pursuing a similar program.

Section 69

A common question many decision-makers ask is how much to budget for evaluation. Although there is no existing standard, for many years the rule of thumb has been 10%. However, depending on the evaluation context, it can range between 1 and 15% of the total cost of a program. If this range of is surprising, consider the resources required to evaluate a \$30,000 program versus a \$300,000 one. There is clearly little that can be accomplished with a \$3,000 evaluation; therefore, a minimum threshold does exist. However, the wisdom of spending \$10,000 to evaluate a \$30,000 program is also questionable.

A good evaluation requires a conceptually strong and well-articulated program plan upon which to base the evaluation. If a strong program plan is already in place, the resources required to develop the evaluation plan will be less. However, if an evaluator is required to work upfront with program staff to articulate the program theory, develop clear and measureable program objectives, identify the desired outcomes, and develop a logic model, it will cost more.