



Evaluation Brief #5

Determinants of Success in Evaluation, Part 2

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Along with the factors related to the evaluation methodology and process, there are many context related factors that determine success in program evaluation and specifically, the utilization of results. The most common of these factors are highlighted in the brief.

Commitment

Evaluations cannot be carried out successfully without commitment (i.e., buy-in) from decision-makers and relevant staff. It can be garnered by engaging stakeholders at various stages of the evaluation (e.g., planning, designing tools, data collection, development of recommendations).^{1,2} Participation increases the likelihood of evaluation utilization because the stakeholders develop a sense of ownership for the findings.^{1,2}

Personal Characteristics

Successful implementation of evaluations and utilization of findings are dependent on decision-makers' personal characteristics. They include: attitudes, interest, enthusiasm, determination, aggressiveness, leadership and access to power.^{1,3} Positive attitudes towards evaluation (e.g., open-mindedness) will likely facilitate its implementation, whereas negative attitudes (e.g., fear of findings) will hinder its progress.

Decision-making Climate

Program evaluation is likely to be affected by the type of decision and the magnitude of the impact the decision may have.^{1,3} The decisions could be retroactive (e.g., justification, accountability) or prospective (e.g., develop or improve program).^{1,2}

“Feelings are more dangerous than ideas, because they aren't susceptible to rational evaluation. They grow quietly, spreading underground, and erupt suddenly, all over the place” - Brian Eno

The extent to which the evaluation findings contribute to the decision being made affects the utilization of those findings.

Competing Information

In addition to evaluation results, decision-makers may rely on other information, such as their personal observations, staff input for decisions, or support for a program adoption from the public. This information has been shown to diminish the importance of evaluation for decision-making.³ The job of evaluators is to get decision-makers' buy-in for using credible data sources in evaluations.^{1,2}

Political Climate

The utilization of evaluation findings can be complicated by stakeholders' limited influence to make certain decisions (e.g., change the program), accountability to funders, and budgetary and power struggles.^{1,3} For findings to be used, they must be politically palatable to decision-makers.

Financial Climate

An organization's financial situation affects how evaluations are carried out, as well as whether or not the findings are utilized.^{1,3} Recommendations regarding modifications or improvements in programs need to consider financial feasibility, in order for the findings to be relevant and useful for decision-makers.^{1,3}

References

1. Neuman, A., Shahor, N., Shina, I., Sarid, A., Saar, Z. (2013). Evaluation utilization research: Developing a theory and putting it to use. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 36, 64-70.
2. Patton, M.Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
3. Cousins, B., Leithwood, K. (1986). Current empirical research on evaluation utilization. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(3), 331-364.