Module Discussions

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This document provides my response to the four discussion questions asked by the instructor throughout the course.

Module Discussions

Discussion 1

What is the difference between Research and Evaluation?

To the common knowledge, research and evaluation are both defined as a form of analyzing or seeking information about a topic, organization, process, or program. In our textbook, *Evaluation in Organizations*, Darlene Russ-eft and Hallie Preskill provide evidence that the roles of research and evaluation have clear similarities and differences. The main difference between research and evaluation is that research focusses on data gathering for the purpose of gaining an understanding, while evaluation gathers the data to not only understand it, but to also use the information for decision-making purposes (2009, p. 6). In other words, Evaluation = Research + Decision-making

How do you see the role of evaluation in organizations?

As mentioned in our textbook, evaluations can help identify areas of opportunity for growth and development both for the organization as a whole and for its employees (2009, p.12). This means that evaluations can play a key role in the development of an organization's strategic plan. When used appropriately, an evaluation can present the strengths and weaknesses of an organization to showcase areas that they're unique in and areas they need to improve on.

What are the ethical issues in evaluation practice?

The ethical issues in evaluation practice is that every evaluation is conducted as a political act. Darlene Russ-eft and Hallie Preskill (2009) proves this statement on page 119 of our textbook by saying that "an evaluation is *not* political under the following conditions:

- No one cares about the program
- No one knows about the program.
- No money is at stake
- No power or authority is at stake.
- No one in the program…"

With that said, it is in best practice that the evaluator(s) work with an unbiased view. This means asking questions that focus on the evaluation plan so that the data is not corrupted to lean one way or another. The best way for an evaluator to act in this way is to first understand his/her own ethical standards and have the courage to not let their standards manipulate the evaluation practice. The evaluator also needs to be aware of the ethical standards or political thoughts of other parties that are involved in the evaluation practice.

Discussion 2

Why is it critical to develop a logic model for your evaluation project?

As the authors of our textbook explain, the logic model is a visual display of how a program operates (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). The model shows the resources, activities, participation, and external factors that play a role in the program's operation to meet its theoretical short-term and long-term goals. The purpose of creating a logic model for this project is to help our team understand the program we are evaluating with a visual mindset. After we gather our data from our survey and interviews, the logic model will play a role in helping us pinpoint any areas that may need improvement in order to help grow the program.

What is the connection between an evaluation's key questions and evaluation design?

The evaluation design is the overall project's plan. This means understanding the program's theory of change with the logic model, understanding the background and history of the program, develop the purpose of the evaluation base on the series of questions, and results in including the stakeholders in making a positive change to the program (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). The evaluation's key questions play an important role in the design as it helps provide the necessary information about the program, such as background, history, and the process that is being evaluated. The questions should also help determine what area of the program should go under redevelopment. That could be resources, staff, or the activities involved in the program.

Why do we need to be careful when choosing a data collection method? And how would this affect the usefulness of the evaluation's results?

When conducting a data collection method, we need to first determine what information is needed and what information can we collect without the use of an evaluation method. The second is we need to understand which method is appropriate for gathering the necessary data. If we are evaluating a training program, it would be more suitable to gather the data by having the participants take a written, oral, or observation exam (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). If we are evaluating a customer service program, then it would be appropriate to gather the data through a set of questions in a survey format. The method we select can affect the validity of the data we receive. For example, sending a survey to the trainees of a training program would not provide appropriate information to see if the training was actually useful. By conducting just a survey about the training, we've wasted the resource of time, money, and the training experience.

Discussion 3

How can we decide on a data collection instrument (qualitative vs. quantitative; survey vs. interview; etc…)?

As Russ-eft and Preskill mentioned in our textbook, *Evaluation in Organizations,* the most overused data collection instrument is the survey (266). I can relate to this as it has always been the "go-to" in both my academic and professional career. Surveys have a multitude of uses. They can be utilized to measure employment satisfaction, behavior skills, and knowledge (268). Even though surveys can be used for collection, they're not always the best choice for measurement. For example, the observation method would be more beneficial to use than a survey if you were measuring the knowledge of an employee that worked in a distribution factory. An employee in this setting could not be measured correctly by a multiple-choice test through a survey. He or she must be reviewed through observation to make sure they're meeting the qualification of their job.

Have you collected data at work? If yes, share your experience(s) with data collection process and the challenges you faced to get your data. If you have not collected data, share some of the challenges you think you might face.

In my professional experience, I have created two surveys. The first was a survey to evaluate the onboarding process for new employees. I asked questions about their hiring process, how well we prepared them for their first day, and how their first day experience went. This helped us figure out more ways to improve the process. This evaluation tool continues to be used to find more ways to evaluate the process and the experience for new employees. The challenge with this project is the survey can only be sent via email. Also, it is understandable that this data collection process is not the best to measure the data. The focus group method would be a better method to gather data about new employees than a survey. Focus groups would allow us to get a better understanding of employees' experiences.

The second data collection process I designed was an exit survey for employees that voluntarily left the organization. This survey was connected to our employee record system, which allowed for the survey to be automatically sent to employees leaving the organization. The purpose of the survey is to measure what employees were leaving base on title, department, years at the organization, and salary. We also measured the reasons people were leaving as well as their experience at the organization. As mentioned in the second data collection process, it would be better to gather this data through another method. For this process, it would be better to host face-to-face interviews. However, the organization I was working for turnover rate was high, so it would be challenging to host face-to-face interviews with every employee that left the organization. We didn't have enough manpower to handle that.

I like to end my discussion post reminding us of Russ-eft and Preskill's comment that the development of surveys, and really all data collection instruments, is a work of art and a science (290). As evaluators, we need to design our instruments to gather useful information. It takes a science to decide on what tool is best to use and it takes a work of art to create the questions for said tool.

Discussion 4

What cautions you need to pay attention to when analyzing data (both qualitative and quantitative)?

I think the main caution an evaluator must take while analyzing their collected data is to not overthink or read past the responses. In other words, the evaluator cannot interfere the results with their own assumptions that the data cannot support (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). I think this is more common in the case when the evaluator is connected to the program or process that is being evaluated. They have their own opinions prior to the study and might want to share their input in any way they can. Russ-Eft and Preskill (2009) mentioned in the early chapters of their book, *Evaluation in Organizations*, that all evaluations are political.

Figure 14.5 (page 415 in our textbook) provides a summary of "effective communication"? discuss these guidelines, paying particular attention to "communicating negative findings".

Figure 14.5 provides guidelines for effective communication and reporting. The guidelines are split into four sections: writing, tables and graphs, findings, and negative findings. The writing section focuses on clarity. In other words, the written report should have the common reader in mind. This means avoiding the use of technical terms that could be difficult to define for the reader. The second section is to focus on the use of tables and graphs in your report. Tables and graphs should be clean and easy to understand. They should fit within the flow while providing more support to the report. The findings, section three and four of the guidelines, should be shared with the audience in mind. As the evaluator, you must keep the stakeholder's perspective in mind, especially when you're providing negative findings in your written report. In addition, it is best to start your report sharing the positive findings and ending with the negative ones. This allows the reader to see the strengths and success their program is meeting followed by suggestions in order to make improvements.

If you were asked to report your findings to your organization, how would you do that? Take into consideration your audience(s) and purpose/content of your evaluation.

If asked to report my findings, I would split the presentation into three steps. The first step would be through a written report. This report would be sent to the stakeholders of the evaluand. It would start off by reminding the audience the purpose of the evaluation project, followed by the methodology. Then the written report would share the results from the data collection methods as well as an analysis presenting the strengths of the program. The final part of the written report would present areas that need to be improved followed by recommendations.

The second step I would take is to present the information with a powerpoint presentation to the leaders of the program. This would resemble the same information provided in the written report. The purpose of sharing the information again via a powerpoint presentation is to provide opportunities to discuss the results with the leaders. This would help them brainstorm together to help with the next step.

The final step I would take in reporting my findings is to involve the leaders in the planning of trainings for the employees and working through the program's process for improvements. Having leadership's buy-in is necessary in order to make the most impact to the changes to the program. Leadership's buy-in will also help in the buy-in of their employees.

References

Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2009). *Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change.* Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.