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Evaluability Assessment: Clarifying Organizational Support and Data Availability

Joseph Hare
Center for Learning Innovation
Bellevue University

Timothy Guetterman
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Background: Evaluability assessment (EA) emerged in the 1970s as a way to ensure a program was ready for summative evaluation. The primary purpose was assessing the presence of measureable program objectives (Trevisan, 2007), yet evaluators conducting EA encountered difficulty with unclear, ambiguous methods (Smith, 2005).

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to clarify two aspects of evaluability assessment, organizational support and data availability. In practice, organizational stakeholders must support the evaluation project to ensure it is pursued to completion. In addition, the availability of operational data facilitates analysis of the evaluand effect.

Setting: Participants from both human services and corporate organizations participated in interviews. Participants worked on evaluation projects serving in three roles: organizational stakeholder, program evaluator, and information technology personnel.

Intervention: NA

Research Design: A qualitative research design was selected to best understand the experiences with regard to organizational support and data sufficiency of individuals who have engaged in evaluation studies and to understand how these domains affected their ability to conduct an evaluation.

Data Collection and Analysis: This study consisted of purposive sampling of 13 participants serving various roles to add breadth to the data. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data using thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings indicate the importance of specific organizational and data related considerations that affect evaluability. The researchers recommend considerations that elaborate upon the existing EA framework. The recommended evaluability considerations assist evaluators in identifying ill-advised evaluations and enhancing the likelihood of success in ongoing studies.

Keywords: *evaluability assessment; organizational stakeholders; data availability; data quality; qualitative*

Program evaluation studies are substantial endeavors, requiring adequate resources in terms of funding and time to ensure the breadth, depth, and rigor of the evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). In other words, a substantial investment is involved in producing a good evaluation. To manage the limited resources available for evaluation as well as their own time, evaluators can turn to tools that have developed, such as evaluability assessment, to determine whether an evaluation is feasible and whether to engage in the effort (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Evaluability assessment (EA) is a critical component of program evaluation that can ensure a more viable evaluation study (Trevisan & Huang, 2003). A type of exploratory evaluation (Wholey, 2011), EA is an activity that precedes evaluation to ensure a program has been properly implemented, is comprised of measureable objectives, and is ready for evaluation (Wholey, 1987). Its purpose is to determine whether programs are ready for impact evaluation (Trevisan, 2007), conserving valuable time and money.

EA consists of three primary activities: (a) describing the program model with a focus on its goals and objectives, (b) assessing the clarity and evaluability of the model, and (c) identifying stakeholder interest and plans for use of findings (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). The focus of these activities is assessing the degree to which program theory is coherent and the utilization plan is adequate. However, limiting the EA in this manner ignores at least two important facets of the evaluability of an intervention: the degree of organizational support for evaluation and the contextual suitability of available data. The authors' experience as evaluators suggested these aspects were critical to evaluability. In addition, many of the tactics suggested in the literature to improve the utilization of evaluation results involve support from stakeholders (e.g., Greene, 1988). If these aspects of evaluability (organizational support and the availability of contextually suitable data) are not considered early in the evaluation process, the evaluation is unlikely to succeed.

The problem leading to this study is a gap in the literature regarding specific evaluability considerations. Specifically, the literature provides ample guidance regarding steps for conducting EA (e.g., Smith, 1989; Wholey, 1979, 1987 2004, 2011), but its implementation has been hindered by vague, unavailable, and un-actionable methodology (Smith, 2005). Recent EAs tend to follow recommended steps and focus on assessing the readiness of programs for impact evaluation, yet a review of EAs has found "inconsistent implementation and use of EA, and reveal a lack of clarity concerning EA as a concept and method" (Trevisan, 2007, p. 298). As a result of the review, Trevisan (2007) urged the field to improve the implementation and use of EA by refining and studying components of EA frameworks. A recent EA reported in the literature followed Wholey's (2004) approach to EA and echoed these concerns. In that study, D'Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, Ridde (2013) noted difficulties with the ambiguity and discussed the need for clearer EA methods.

This article seeks to address this problem by clarifying organizational support and data availability as they pertain to EA. The researchers approached the present study from a pragmatic stance, seeking potential criteria that clarify evaluability assessment to assist practicing evaluators in determining whether an impact study can proceed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the relevance and importance of organizational support and data availability for program evaluation from the perspectives of organizational stakeholders, information technology staff, and program evaluators so that these criteria may be pragmatically considered when conducting an EA. For this paper, organizational support is defined as the affirmation from organization members of the priority of evaluation and the commitment of time and resources. Data availability is the accessible presence of contextually suitable data with an acceptable level of intrinsic quality. Based on the findings of this qualitative study, the authors also reconsider previous efforts to assess evaluability and recommend assessment criteria that clarify the existing evaluability assessment methodology.

Literature Review

In reviewing the relevant literature, the authors of the present study considered works related to evaluability assessment, organizational support, and data availability. Seminal evaluability assessment literature from the 1970s to the present charts the evolution of thought about the preconditions necessary for program evaluation. Some of these preconditions are related to organizational support for and stakeholder involvement in evaluation activities (Leviton & Gutman, 2010). These organizational dependencies discussed in the following paragraphs demonstrate that judicious stakeholder involvement may positively contribute to program evaluation but that not all stakeholders are equally able to influence the evaluation effort (House & Howe, 1999). Possibly due to the dearth

of information systems during early evaluability assessment formation, the availability of organization data to support evaluation is largely absent from the evaluability assessment literature. The authors of the present study looked to the fields of computer science and information systems for literature related to availability of suitable data to support program evaluation. The literature in these fields offered a "fitness for use" perspective that may offer insight into evaluability assessment practice.

Evaluability Assessment

EA emerged in the 1970s as an activity that preceded evaluation to ensure a program had been properly implemented and consequently was ready for summative evaluation (Trevisan, 2007). The first seminal work on the topic (Horst, Nay, Scanlon, & Wholey, 1974) described three propositions concerning the evaluand that might inhibit evaluation and should be assessed prior to evaluation: (a) the lack of definition concerning the intervention and outcomes, (b) the lack of testable assumptions linking expenditures and program implementation, and (c) the lack of management understanding or authority to use evaluation results. In a succeeding article, Wholey (1979) identified EA as the first of four phases in the sequential purchase of information evaluation approach. Wholey (1987) stated that an important use of program evaluation was to modify program activities to improve program performance. He modified the three original propositions that might necessitate EA by dividing management challenges into (a) a lack of agreement on evaluation priorities and utilization and (b) an unwillingness to act on evaluation information. Finally, in Wholey's (2004, 2011) most recent evolutions of EA, he added the consideration of data availability in proposing four necessary evaluability conditions: (a) the program goals are agreed upon and realistic, (b) the needed information is well-defined, (c) the evaluation data are obtainable, and (d) the intended users are both willing and able to use the evaluation findings. These conditions are assessable through a six-step process: (1) involve intended users and key stakeholders, (2) clarify program design, (3) explore program reality, (4) assess the plausibility of the program leading to intended outputs and outcomes, (5) reach agreement on changes to program design or implementation, and (6) reach agreement on the focus and intended use of the evaluation (Wholey 2004, 2011). Of these steps, involving intended users and clarifying program design involve organizational support, and exploring program reality involves assessing data. Thus, this study relates closest to steps one through three of EA and seeks to elaborate the aspects of these three steps.

While Wholey (1979, 1987, 2004, 2011) and Smith (1989) presented the EA framework, it is also important to consider the application of EA, as the practice of EA is the focus of this paper. In a review of 23 studies related to evaluability assessment published from 1986 to 2006, Trevisan (2007) found that most assessments employed document reviews, site visits, and interviews to determine if a program was ready for some form of evaluation. These readiness assessments were based on the belief that measureable program objectives and a coherent program theory are foundational evaluability considerations. In his review, Trevisan noted other purposes for the EA, particularly stakeholder involvement for developing, clarifying, or modifying a program. These formative uses of EA manifested as revised objectives, mission statements, altered program components, and enhanced stakeholder awareness of the program (Trevisan, 2007). Trevisan called for additional work in EA and added clarity of procedures.

Organizational Support

An ambiguous program, program theory, evaluation objectives, or plan to utilize evaluation information will negatively affect the use of evaluation information (Horst, et al., 1974; Wholey, 1987). It is noteworthy that all potential remedies to these challenges require support for evaluation activities from the organization sponsoring the evaluation. For example, Wholey (1987) suggests involving key stakeholders in a series of interactions to establish the agreed program theory and specifying the intended uses of evaluation information. In addition, Patton (2011) developed a comprehensive evaluation process focused on utilization that relies heavily on stakeholder involvement.

Organizational stakeholder involvement in evaluation activities clarifies the program theory and plans for use of evaluation recommendations, and it might influence other aspects of the evaluation. Torres and Preskill (2001) discussed the emergence of collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation that are intended to increase stakeholders' interest, understanding, and ultimately the utilization of evaluation findings. Eden and Ackermann (1998) offered that not all stakeholders are equally capable of

influencing the evaluability of a program. Their stakeholder analysis matrix offers a means of identifying stakeholders with the interest and power necessary to propel an evaluation project. Smith (1999) cautioned that stakeholder participation should be viewed carefully from the perspective of evaluation, defined as an activity that produces knowledge about program processes or effects. She stated that general participatory activities, for example activities intended to enhance interdepartmental communication or provide a developmental opportunity for staff, might be beneficial in some ways but may have an unpredictable effect on the evaluability of a program.

Data Availability

The availability of data is also an important evaluability consideration, particularly when conducting a program evaluation with existing data. Interestingly, the evaluability assessment literature presents little information about data and information systems. Wholey (1979) and Smith (1989) discussed document review but not a review of data per se. Perhaps this omission merely reflects the nature of information systems 30 years ago when these systems were sparsely implemented and contained less information. More recent conceptualizations of EA have recommended assessing data, including its quality and availability (Leviton, Kettel Khan, Rog, Dawkins, & Cotton, 2010). However, a better understanding of the concept of data availability is needed to assess it when conducting EA.

The fields of computer sciences and information systems have explored the issue of data availability. Batini, Cappiello, Francalanci, and Maurino (2009) conducted a systematic review and comparison of methodologies for assessing and improving data quality. Their review of data quality literature resulted in four basic dimensions: accuracy, completeness, consistency, and time-related dimensions. These objective measures of quality must be taken into consideration, but the four dimensions do not address the relevance of available data to the evaluation objectives.

Wang and Strong (1996) stated that poor data quality can have substantial social and economic impacts and that most data quality improvement efforts are focused narrowly on objective measures of quality and accuracy. Strong, Lee, and Wang (1997) offered additional dimensions that consider data quality in a use context. Using a "fitness for use" perspective from total quality management, they suggested four data quality categories: intrinsic, accessibility, contextual, and representational. Intrinsic quality encompasses the data's accuracy, objectivity, believability, and reputation. Accessibility includes the ability to access the data and access security. Contextual quality is comprised of relevance, timeliness, completeness, and an appropriate volume of data. Representational is the last data quality category and includes interpretability, ease of understanding, and concise and consistent representation (Strong, et al. 1997). The dimensions of quality addressed within these categories articulated the objective quality concerns advanced by Batini et al. (2009).

In summary, the body of literature discusses the overall concepts of organizational support and data availability when conducting EA. The organizational support literature is more developed with respect to program evaluation but less detailed with regard to EA. The fields of computer science and information systems offer further specific criteria to assess data availability. What is missing, however, is the connection of data availability to the actual practice of evaluation. In the present study, the authors sought to address this gap by conducting an empirical study and interviewing individuals participating in evaluations. The focus was specifically on how organizational support and data availability affect evaluability in the participants' experiences.

Method

A qualitative research design was selected because the aims of the study were to understand the experiences of individuals who have engaged in evaluation studies with regard to organizational support and data sufficiency and to understand how these domains affected their ability to conduct an evaluation, both positively and negatively. Qualitative research is a process to explore and develop an understanding of participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013). This study used qualitative interviews to understand the perspectives of participants regarding organizational support and data availability. The findings may not be applicable to other groups or situations (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

A purposive sample of 13 individuals participated in this qualitative study. Table 1 describes the participant characteristics. Gender was fairly

evenly divided with seven (54%) female and six (46%) male. Participants were from both human services and corporate organizations, and they served in three roles: organizational stakeholders, program evaluators, and information technology personnel. Organizational stakeholders serve as the evaluation sponsor and consist of managerial personnel responsible for ensuring completion of the evaluation project. Program evaluators are responsible for conducting the evaluation and are the practitioners skilled in the systematic inquiry of program effect. For the purpose of this study, information technology personnel are managerial personnel responsible for providing operational performance data for analysis. In sampling, the authors intentionally sought participants who played multiple roles to add breadth to the qualitative data, as most participants serve multiple roles, particularly in small organizations and agencies. For example, a program evaluator may also provide information technology expertise to a project. Table 1 reports the primary and secondary roles for each study participant.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

ID	Gender	Industry	Primary Role	Secondary Role	Interview Duration (min)
P1	Female	Health Care and Social Assistance	Program Evaluator, Internal	Organizational Stakeholder	41
P2	Female	Finance and Insurance	Organizational Stakeholder	NA	40
P3	Female	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Program Evaluator, External	IT Personnel	35
P4	Female	Health Care and Social Assistance	Program Evaluator, Internal	Organizational Stakeholder	26
P5	Female	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Program Evaluator, External	Organizational Stakeholder	27
P6	Male	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Program Evaluator, External	Organizational Stakeholder	25
P7	Male	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Organizational Stakeholder	Program Evaluator, Internal	27
P8	Female	Finance and Insurance	Organizational Stakeholder	NA	17
P9	Male	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	Organizational Stakeholder	Program Evaluator, Internal	19
P10	Female	Health Care and Social Assistance	IT Personnel	Program Evaluator, Internal	43
P11	Male	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Organizational Stakeholder	Program Evaluator, External	45
P12	Male	Health Care and Social Assistance	Organizational Stakeholder	Program Evaluator, Internal	41
P13	Male	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Program Evaluator, External	IT Personnel	30

Procedure

This study received approval from an independent, accredited Institutional Review Board. We recruited individuals from a database, maintained by the university, of people that have indicated an interest in receiving educational material and participating in research related to program evaluation. The database is populated using a web form that allows interested people to submit their contact information. We sent an initial recruitment invitation to selected individuals in the database who expressed their interest in participating in a research project. Database members received a recruitment invitation if they were 21 years old or older and had experience with evaluation studies in at least one of three roles: organizational stakeholders, program evaluators, and information technology personnel. In addition to the recruitment invitation, the researchers employed snowball sampling to recruit additional participants by inviting participants, at the end of the interview, to refer anyone who may be interested if they felt comfortable doing so. The aforementioned criteria for recruitment were applied to the additional participants. Snowball sampling yielded three additional participants.

After obtaining a signed informed consent, participant interviews were scheduled. The researchers conducted semistructured interviews with all participants via telephone. The semistructured interviews intentionally relied on open-ended questions to allow maximum freedom of response within a constrained topical space. The interview items consisted of background information, experiences with evaluation studies, organizational support for evaluation, and the availability of data for evaluation. Table 2 provides the full set of interview questions. In addition to the main questions, the interviewer probed and asked follow-up questions as needed to explore the topic.

Table 2

Participant Semistructured Interview Guide

Interview Questions
1. What is your role in your organization?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. What are some evaluation studies you may have been involved with? (Note: to evaluate something means to determine its merit, worth, value, or significance. Evaluations might answer three types of questions: what?, so what?, and now what?)
a. What types of programs?
b. Can you characterize the size of these studies, such as number of participants in the program evaluated?
4. Do you have a standard process for evaluations you are involved with?
a. If yes, please describe the process.
b. If no, what was the process for your two most recent evaluations?
5. Sometimes, certain factors may affect the ability to carry out evaluations. Some may facilitate the evaluation and other may impede it. We are interested in factors related to organizational support for the evaluation and the availability of data for evaluation.
6. In your experience, how does support within the organization affect the ability to conduct evaluations?
7. In your experience, how does the availability of data affect the ability to conduct evaluations?
8. Of the factors we discussed, what factors were more influential than other factors?
9. Thinking about organizational support for evaluation, what would it be like in an ideal situation?
10. Thinking about data availability for evaluation, what would it be like in an ideal situation?
11. Can you think of anything else that would be important for us to know?

The participant interviews followed a set procedure. Although both researchers were present on the phone call for nearly all interviews, one researcher took the lead role and asked all interview questions and follow-up questions. The two researchers divided the interviews evenly, such that each led approximately the same number of interviews. The lead interviewer adhered to the interview guide, asked follow-up questions, probed for further explanation, and allowed the interview to continue as long as necessary to fully explore the participants' evaluation experiences. Each interview was recorded digitally and sent to a

professional transcriptionist skilled in transcribing research interviews.

Analysis

The interview transcripts permitted thematic analysis, in which data is analyzed for key statements, meaning units, and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). A meaning unit is a segment of the interview conversation that represents a single idea and can be a word, phrase, or complete sentence. A structural description is a participant retelling of how the phenomena was experienced "in terms of conditions, situations, or content" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA Version 10 (VERBI GmbH, 2011), supported coding and thematic analysis. Using an inductive process, the first step after importing transcripts into MAXQDA was to read transcripts several times to obtain a general sense of the meaning related by the participant. Next, the researchers coded the transcripts. Within each transcript the researcher identified salient sections of text (e.g., phrases or groups of sentences) that captured meaning related to organizational support, data sufficiency, and their relationship to evaluability. Because two researchers analyzed the data, we wanted to ensure consistency in coding. Thus, the researchers first coded separately by determining categories that best captured the data collected. Next, they met to review codes and assess intercoder agreement. The initial intercoder agreement was 62% based on the identification of the same codes. The researchers reviewed each code and reached complete agreement on the final code set after collapsing redundant and similar codes into consistent language. The aim was to select in vivo codes whenever possible. In vivo codes are code "names in the exact words used by the participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). After selecting the code set, the researchers identified themes that best characterized the codes.

As previously noted, the purpose of the study is to clarify organizational support and data availability in order to pragmatically consider the domains in evaluability assessment. Given the authors' past experiences conducting program evaluation, they strived to focus on the participants' words throughout the coding and thematic analysis and only consider their past work with evaluability assessment in the present study after conducting the thematic analysis. The authors' past experience served as an asset, providing insight during interpretation of the qualitative findings.

Validation

To build evidence of validity, the authors employed three strategies: intercoder agreement, rich data, and respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013). The researchers coded separately and then met to determine the extent of intercoder agreement. At the first meeting, the researchers' codes were in agreement; however, the specific terms for codes varied. To establish intercoder agreement, a common code set was developed by collapsing redundant codes and selecting in vivo codes whenever possible. Second, the use of rich data is an important strategy for validation (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) explained, "In interview studies, such data generally require verbatim transcripts of the interviews, not just notes on what you felt was significant" (p. 126). This strategy solicits more than the participants' description of organizational support and data availability in evaluation and also helped the researchers to understand how and why their perspectives exist. For this study, rich data included the interview transcripts that provided a detailed and nuanced description of participants' experiences with organizational support and data availability to conduct evaluation. The results of the researchers' conversations about the data and intermediate analysis were captured through memos. This documentation provided rich data about our initial ideas and conclusions for reference throughout the remainder of the study. Respondent validation is the systematic solicitation of feedback regarding data and conclusions from the study participants to mitigate the possibility of misrepresenting participants' meaning and perspective (Maxwell, 2013). To conduct respondent validation, the authors selected four participants (two from human services and two from corporate organizations) to read a brief summary and examine a table of thematic findings. Participants were asked to provide feedback about the accuracy and completeness of our findings. They provided generally positive feedback and suggested no changes to the findings. Ultimately, the aforementioned validation strategies sought to reduce the threat of researcher bias.

Findings

From the findings of the qualitative analysis, six themes emerged: programs; process structure; influence, time, and material support; and organization data relationship. Table 3 presents each theme, codes within that theme, a definition,

and a sample participant response. In the following text, words in italics indicate *codes* and themes are italicized headings. The results suggest aspects of organizational support and data availability that would likely affect the evaluability of a program and, therefore, may benefit from pre-evaluation consideration.

Programs

Participants talked about evaluating *benefits programs*, *human services*, *performance management* efforts, and *training and development* activities (see Table 3). The programs evaluated by the study participants were of interest to the researchers not only to help describe the study population but also to explore similarities and differences between the programs and other organizational support and data availability items of interest. Participants who primarily evaluated training and development activities mentioned *data suitability* and *culture* slightly more frequently than other participants.

Process Structure

The participants differed in terms of the structure of their process for conducting an evaluation. In general, the participants' processes seemed to divide into two structures: those who follow a *standardized process* and those who apply an *ad hoc process*. The participants who described a standardized process portrayed a set methodology that they follow when conducting an evaluation. Participants P11 and P13 described their standardized processes as "rigorous"; P11 added that it was comprehensive, covering from "beginning to end." Participant P7 indicated their process was "complete." Evaluators using ad hoc processes may also emphasize rigor and completeness but differ in that the methodology varies for each evaluation. With ad hoc processes, evaluators seemed to tailor the evaluation design to fit the particular program and organization. Participant P7 explained tailoring evaluation designs using a team-based structured approach: "These working groups are to come up with standard processes for the programs we're evaluating, but we don't really have a standard process for the evaluation of those programs." There does not appear to be a relationship between the programs and other study codes.

Influence Support

The involvement of influential stakeholders affects the evaluability of a program. Influential proponents facilitate evaluation, powerful opponents impede evaluative activities, and indifferent stakeholders might impede a project by simply withholding support. The *evaluability effect* refers to the effect of influence on the quality of the evaluation. Deficiencies, and the associated poor quality, may be so serious that the evaluator is compelled to directly address the reasons for indifference or opposition. For instance, Participant P9 described an experience overcoming a deficiency, saying:

> A lot of businesspeople in leadership don't understand the statistics involved, so we spend a lot a time justifying the data and the approach before we can even get them to feel comfortable that the process, and the survey, was the right approach.

In this example, Participant P9 took a tangible step to provide education to stakeholders so that the evaluation could proceed. The need for education to enhance the application of influence was evident in the stakeholders' words and actions, suggesting observation as a means to assess influence before initiating an evaluation.

In addition, influential support is needed from the top of the organization. In the words of Participant P4, *influential leaders* (e.g., the CEO) can bring "the positive impact or the negative" to the evaluation project. Participants described a concept of *borrowed authority*, in which having full support from a senior leader gives evaluators the influence they need to carry out evaluation activities. When individuals throughout the organization understand the evaluation's criticality, as perceived by an important leader (e.g., the executive director, administrator, or CEO), the evaluators are able to borrow that leader's authority. Participant P11 explained that one of his most successful evaluations was because he had CEO support and was able to overcome obstacles "because you have the support of the senior officers saying 'help these guys; this is an important study.'" Overall, buy-in from the *leadership* facilitated evaluation activities. Participant P3 expressed that in her experience evaluation "hinges on the managers."

Bearing in mind that conducting an evaluation is the penultimate goal of evaluation and utilization is the ultimate goal, it is important to recognize that organizational plans to use

evaluation findings may facilitate evaluation in the same way as an influential leader. Plans to use findings may compel stakeholders to support the evaluation. Participants described an ideal evaluation environment in which organizational support facilitates the utilization of findings and, in doing so, focused the efforts of all stakeholders on the evaluation project. When discussing *ideal utilization*, Participant P12 related the following:

> I think in an ideal situation, every employee would be clear about how they contribute to knowing whether the services that they provide are effective or not. So, every single employee would have a measure that they collect, and the information gets fed back to them on an individual basis about how the work that they did translates into some benefit for the client.

In this example of an ideal utilization situation, the feedback is specific and connected to program outputs. Staff can then use the information to directly guide their actions and focus the influence of evaluation stakeholders on completion of the evaluation.

Time Support

Participants stressed the importance of obtaining *program staff* time support and the value of their involvement. For example, Participant P12 indicated that the program staff bring "a diversity of perspective." The involvement of *program recipients* is an essential component of evaluability. Participant P13 described "the willingness of the respondents to participate that's most critical." In practice, this concept often extends to the stakeholders related to the recipients, such as training program participants and their supervisors. Participant P11 described an evaluation of a sales training program. It was important to not only involve the trainers delivering the program (i.e., program staff) but also the "sales management involved in the design of study and get their buy in on what they're looking for, what they expect out of it" (i.e., program recipient stakeholders). Carefully assessing these nuanced organizational time support characteristics can give an evaluator key insight into whether it is possible to conduct a particular evaluation.

In addition to the time of the aforementioned people, evaluators may require the assistance of others in the organization. *People resources* involve the human resources within an organization needed to support an evaluation. Evaluations require time both from evaluators and people within the organization. When discussing resource availability, Participant P7 qualified that it typically refers to "the people who will be supporting these things." The promise of adequate support from project stakeholders may be the only means of assessing their allocation of time before initiating a project.

Material Support

The complement to influence and time support is the allocation of material to support the evaluation. *Material resources* include technology, money, and tools to carry out the evaluation study. These items are easily assessed prior to an evaluation project. The evaluator may then determine if the degree of material support is adequate to accomplish the evaluation objectives.

Organization Data Relationship

The term *organization data relationship* encapsulates comments associated with the relationship between organizational support and the data available for various sorts of evaluation. There appeared to be a synergistic relationship between organizational support and data availability. If organizational leaders supported evaluation efforts, data was increasingly available, facilitating meaningful evaluation and positively contributing to organizational support. Conversely, if organizational leaders did not support evaluation efforts, political barriers to data access remained impenetrable, degrading the quality of the evaluation and further eroding organizational support. Although the organizational support and data availability relationship often begins with organizational support, the cycle can initiate with data availability. For example, inadequate data stores may prevent the ad hoc analysis of an organizational challenge that could demonstrate the value of evaluative activities and enhance organizational support for evaluation. Participant P13 articulated this relationship as, "having that support, by the key stakeholders, is absolutely critical, or else you're not going to get the data." Although the specific relationship between organizational support and data availability can be predicated on data or organizational interest in evaluation, it does appear that an influential evaluation champion is critical to improving the

time and resources allocated to evaluative activities. Leadership involvement is crucial.

Overarching the organization and data relationship is the *culture*. The majority of participants cited the organization's culture as having an effect on the appetite for evaluation and the availability of data. Participant P6 explained that organizations with "highly data-driven cultures…can often have a much easier time both embarking on, supporting, and ultimately implementing the outcomes of analysis study of findings."

Data integration refers to the compatibility of the various data systems expected to provide data for evaluation. Organization interest in evaluation may lead to investments in compatible data systems. These data stores can be internal or external to the organization but are typically internal. A lack of compatibility might inhibit evaluation efforts. Participants related challenges in appropriately aligning data from various systems into a coherent whole that allowed analysis. Participants also expressed the real and potential benefits of organized, easily queried data systems. In response to interview questions related to an ideal data situation, the participants indicated the benefits were generally hypothetical. Participant P3 commented, "Data is spread all over the place; …bein' able to pull that data in, get some level of accuracy, …is a big challenge." A lack of data integration is surmountable, but it is likely to increase the time needed to prepare the data for analysis and evaluation.

Some type of data is necessary for any sort of evaluation. Participant P1 concisely expressed that "you have to have data available to analyze." However, the mere presence of data was not a panacea. *Data suitability* was the code for comments related to having the right data to address the evaluation objectives. Deprived of access to appropriate data, the participants felt the evaluation was unlikely to yield meaningful recommendations. Participant P4 described this as "kind of that garbage in, garbage out mentality." Participants indicated that sometimes it was necessary to revise the evaluation objectives to align with the data reasonably available, but in other situations the evaluation objectives were completely subordinate to data suitability. For example, Participant P5 commented, "I heard it directly from C-level people; they will ask questions like, 'Well, what data's available?'" The *form* of data is a related concept. Study participants mentioned using a variety of data forms, such as databases and other electronic data stores, paper-based data, and improvised mechanisms like Excel spreadsheets. The form had an effect on their ability to successfully complete an evaluation. Participant P4 shared, "Our ability to even manage this evaluation is so compromised, because then you're kind of counting on very laborious systems to collect data."

Technology is the technical aspects of the data environment. Like *data integration*, the present technological state was frequently perceived as an inhibitor of successful evaluation and further investment in superior technical capabilities might enable more effective evaluative efforts. Participants acknowledged that the technology available for evaluation had already improved and that the improvements increased the speed and quality of evaluations. As Participant P12 put it, "Access to more data, and then in a more timely way, those are probably the two key pieces that…technology has really helped with our program management, program evaluation, and improvement systems." The consensus of the participants was that ideal technological circumstance involved a data "cube" that contained constantly refreshed live data.

Several participants discussed their experiences with *organizational bureaucracy* that can help or hinder evaluation activities. Bureaucracy refers to the rules or procedures for gaining access to data. Participant P11 described a project in which the team unintentionally violated procedures to obtain a dataset needed for the evaluation: "All of the data came in, and we got a notice that said you need to destroy all the HR data because we didn't get the proper permissions." The consequence of overlooking the bureaucracy was a halt to the entire evaluation after it was well underway. Although not all organizational support effects are this severe, it is important that evaluators consider the potential influence of characteristics on their ability to conduct an evaluation.

Participants described multiple characteristics related to the data available to facilitate evaluative efforts. Organizational support for a specific program evaluation event may be evident in the influence directed toward project completion, allocation of the time of desirable stakeholders, and assignment of material to the evaluation. Prior to a specific program evaluation, general support for data-driven decision making may manifest as investments in data systems, technology, and forms of data that facilitate analysis. The history of generally supportive activities and investments may be outside the scope of the evaluator's activities, but the resulting data accuracy and suitability for the impending evaluation is certainly assessable and relevant. The evaluation

may benefit from pre-evaluation assessment of these dimensions of data quality.

Table 3
Themes, Codes, and Sample Responses from Interviews

Theme Code	Description	Sample Response(s)
Programs	The types of programs evaluated	N/A
Benefits Programs	Tuition assistance, healthcare benefits, as examples	"Benefits and our offerings and how it ties to our wellness programs"
Human Services	Services provide for people to help their capabilities, limitations, and environment	"Outpatient mental health clinical services, for adults and youth"
Performance Management	Performance appraisal programs, individual goal setting, etc.	"We do a lot a classification, and segmentation of people, so we try to understand who's our high performers, high potentials, you know, whether they're kind of successful career level people or low performers."
Training and Development	For example, sales training or leadership development	"Programs for presupervisory, all the way up to executive director leadership programs"
Process Structure	The process structure of evaluation refers to the existence of a process for conducting evaluations.	N/A
Standardized Process	A set methodology that the evaluators follow when conducting an evaluation	"Methodology that goes from beginning to end and how we deliver the information" "There is a complete methodology that we go through."
Ad hoc Process	The evaluators do not follow a set methodology for each evaluation.	"The programs that we would run on our own, we typically didn't have a standard evaluation." "These working groups are to come up with standard processes for the programs we're evaluating, but we don't really have a standard process for the evaluation of those programs."

Table 3 Continued
Themes, Codes, and Sample Responses from Interviews

Influence Support	The positive and negative influence of people and conditions on the evaluation	N/A
Evaluability Effect	The effect of stakeholder influence on the quality of the evaluation	"A lot of businesspeople in leadership don't understand the statistics involved, so we spend a lot a time justifying the data and the approach before we can even get them to feel comfortable that the process and the survey was the right approach."
Influential Leaders	The influence of a senior leader, e.g. CEO	"Funders and executive leadership really can bring the positive impact or the negative."
Borrowed Authority	The implied importance of evaluation due to leadership support	"As far up the food chain you can go to get the support. One of our most successful studies was…because they have the support of the CEO. And so, it wasn't terribly hard to get all the disparate data from all these different areas, because you have the support of the senior officers saying 'help these guys; this is an important study.'"
Leadership	The organization leadership's support for evaluation	"It all kind of hinges on the managers."
Ideal Utilization	The ideal organizational support and utilization of evaluation results	"An ideal world would be where everyone really has that appreciation for how much…this data can…move people forward, or can implement changes where changes need to be made, etcetera."
Time Support	Commitment of time from various stakeholders to the evaluation	N/A
Program Staff	Program staff support for evaluation	"We have frontline staff, we have support staff; …all different kinds of staff are recruited for these quality improvement teams. So we get a diversity of perspective."
Program Recipients	The program targets or leaders of program targets	"It's the willingness of the respondents to participate that's most critical." "We found, if there was a real lack of support for evaluation, then the feel of the people participating, they pick up on that."
People Resources	The human resources within an organization to support the evaluation	"The availability of resource that we're talking about most times is the availability of the people who will be supporting these things."
Material Support	Commitment of material to the evaluation	N/A
Material Resources	Materials that support the evaluation	"So we have to take the data that we look at into account with staff rapport, with observation, with a number of other things because we do have some limitations in our technology and resources."

Table 3 Continued
Themes, Codes, and Sample Responses from Interviews

Organization Data Relationships	Comments associated with the relationship between organizational support and data availability	"Having that support, by the key stakeholders, is absolutely critical, or else you're not going to get the data."
Culture	Organizational culture of data-driven decision making	"Highly data-driven cultures that are not overly averse to change, can often have a much easier time both embarking on, supporting and ultimately implementing the outcomes of analysis study of findings."
Data Integration	The compatibility of various data systems	"Data is spread all over the place. It could be, you know, in disparate systems, it could be in spreadsheets, it could be in folders. And so, really bein' able to pull that data in, get some level of accuracy, and then be able to tie elements together, and to provide a metrics is a big challenge."
Data Suitability	The suitability of available data for evaluation	"Kind of that garbage in garbage out mentality."
Form	The form of data available for evaluation (e.g. database, paper, etc.)	"The days of us being able to do manually [sic] tracking, like the old Excel spreadsheets, and, and you know, things that people can do on paper."
Technology	Technical aspects of the data environment	"Access to more data, and then in a more timely way, those are probably the two key pieces that…technology has really helped with our program management, program evaluation and improvement systems."
Organizational Bureaucracy	Includes rules and procedures to gain access to data	"All of the data came in, and we got a notice that said you need to destroy all the HR data because we didn't get the proper permissions."

Discussion

The insights from participants provide clarifications of organizational support and data availability as conditions for program evaluability. Thus, the qualitative findings suggest components that yield operational definitions of these domains. Lack of clear methods cited by researchers conducting EA was the problem leading to this study (D'Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, Ridde, 2013; Smith, 2005). Clarifying the domains of EA is necessary to elucidate its methods. The results complement the existing literature by identifying key considerations in assessing organizational support, describing the importance of data integration for EA, and explaining the interdependence between organizational support and data availability.

The findings of this study expound segments of the literature regarding organizational support and data availability. Within the organizational support domain, the literature clearly establishes the importance of stakeholder influence (Patton, 2011). The findings of the present study address specific facets of stakeholder support so that those aspects might be more precisely assessed. Furthermore, the findings are similar to Bryson and Patton's (2011) conceptualization of stakeholder power and interest regarding programs. For example, the notion that power in the form of authority and legitimacy affects stakeholders' ability to pursue interests in a *program* (Bryson & Patton, 2011) is analogous to the participants' experiences with leaders that influence time and material support for an *evaluation*. The findings in the context of the existing literature suggest three organizational support EA considerations: influence, time, and material. Organizational support is then defined by the observable considerations of a time commitment from the desired influential stakeholders and the commitment of the material resources required to conduct an evaluation.

Conversely, while the literature discusses data problems that arise in evaluations (Hatry, 2011) and components of the data availability domain (Wang & Strong, 1996), this study suggests the importance of the overarching concept of data integration to assessing evaluability. Because problems such as accuracy, incompleteness, and lack of integration among data sources (Hatry, 2011) hinder evaluation efforts, assessing for these problems in an EA gives evaluators an opportunity to address the concerns before beginning an evaluation. *Fitness for use* (Strong et al., 1997) provides the framework for assessing data availability within EA. The findings of the present study are consistent with the fitness for use perspective that data quality, specifically the categories of intrinsic, accessible, contextual, and representational quality (Strong et al., 1997), are meaningful criteria relative to the evaluability of a program. Participant comments about data integration directly correspond with issues of accessibility. Participants expressed the challenges of conducting an evaluation if data were inaccessible due to disparate data systems. Contextual suitability also affected the ability to conduct an evaluation. Study participants commented on the improbability of meaningful results if the analyzed data were not relevant to the evaluation. Data availability is then defined by observable considerations: having integrated data sources as indicated by data with appropriate intrinsic and contextual data quality.

Importantly, the findings of this study suggest that organizational support and data availability are interrelated. Wholey (2004) hinted at the organizational data relationship, discussing political and bureaucratic factors that affect evaluation, and the findings of the present study support the notion. Although having available data may not overcome a lack of support, with sufficient material, time, and influence support, the evaluators may be able to overcome data availability issues (e.g., integration among systems) to ensure evaluability. This finding reflects a synergy between organizational support and data availability. For example, if EA reveals problems with data quality, the presence of an influential leader indicates whether these concerns are addressable. This relationship among evaluability domains further demonstrates the need for clearer EA methods and suggests that evaluators conducting EA should consider each domain in light of the other to provide a more complete understanding.

Although the themes related to program type and process structure did not appear to affect evaluability among these participants, other themes do indicate key components in the EA framework and understanding program intent and logic clearly remain critical components of EA. The overall concepts of organizational support and data availability exist in the current body of literature, and the findings help to refine our understanding and assessment of these key considerations. Based on the connections of the present study to evaluability and the EA literature base, the authors propose additional considerations to assess program evaluability, which are presented in the recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for specific evaluability assessment considerations are based on the results of the present qualitative study and a review of the relevant literature. Program considerations (see Table 4) remain critical in the assessment of evaluability, as originally presented by Wholey (1979) and Smith (1989). The structure of the program, degree to which the program is likely to achieve the stated goals, and the extent that goal attainment might be credibly examined remain fundamental evaluability considerations. The clarified characteristics of organizational support and data criteria complement Wholey's (1979) evaluability assessment.

The results of the present study elaborate the need to assess organizational support considerations of influence, time, and material (see Table 4) before initiating an evaluation. While the existing evaluation literature recommends involving stakeholders to enhance utilization (Greene, 1988; Patton, 2011), that recommendation rests on an assumption that stakeholders with desirable influence support the evaluation. Evaluator observation of the involved stakeholders may reveal the depth of engagement and the willingness to provide influence that might facilitate the evaluation effort. If a more structured approach to assessing the degree of influence support is desired, Eden and Ackermann (1998) offer a stakeholder analysis framework. Individuals within the organization may be considered with regard to two dimensions: power to influence the evaluation and interest in the evaluation. Patton (2011) employed this approach and recommended finding individuals with interest and influence to engage the intended users of the evaluation. Furthermore, consistent with the centrality of utilization in Patton's (2011) approach to evaluation, plans to use evaluation results seem to focus stakeholder influence on project completion. From the perspective of interest and

influence, a utilization plan piqued interest and concentrated influence on attaining a common goal. The presence of a credible utilization plan is a tangible indicator of organizational support and the likely extent of influence directed toward the project.

Time and material are critical forms of organizational support (Alkin, 2011). The preevaluation assessment of time support has heightened importance because it is "the most significant resource required of existing personnel and volunteers" (Thurston & Potvin, 2003, p. 465). Program stakeholder time is necessary to clarify outcomes, assist in evaluator understanding of program documentation, and collect data. Prior to evaluation, the adequacy of time support might be assessed through stakeholder commitments to the evaluation project and a stated willingness to allocate more time if these commitments are insufficient. Determining the adequacy of material support may be similarly assessed. Office space, supplies, and other material for evaluation are tangible and their adequacy easily assessed before initiating a program evaluation. The reliance on observation of and conversations with stakeholders to determine the adequacy of various forms of organization support for evaluation reinforces the recommendations by Osuji, Dawkins, and Rice (2010) to include qualitative interviewing techniques in evaluability assessment training.

There is a relationship between certain organizational characteristics and data availability. For example, a culture of data-based decision making may contribute to investments in technology that have a positive effect on data quality. During EA, an evaluator may not be concerned with the degree of data integration, but the evaluator probably is interested in the quality of available data that results from data integration. The present research suggests the organization and data relationship ultimately affects the intrinsic and contextual quality of data available for evaluation (see Table 4). Intrinsic quality refers to objective measures of data quality (Strong et al., 1997; Wang & Strong, 1996). For example, the data must be accurate and complete and consistently represent actual performance to be useful for evaluation. In addition, contextual quality indicates the data's suitability to address the evaluation questions. Relevance indicates that the data pertains to evaluation activities and is complete and adequate for analysis and aggregation (Strong et al., 1997). The categories of data quality developed in the context of information technology may be applicable to other forms of agency records (Wholey, 2011). Moreover, this clarification of EA data considerations reflects the *Program Evaluation Accuracy Standard A5: Information Management*, which indicates that evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2010).

Table 4
Clarified Evaluability Assessment Considerations

Extended Evaluability Assessment Category	Description
Program Considerations	The structure of the program, the degree to which the program is likely to achieve clear goals, and the extent to which the goals might be credibly examined
Organizational Support Considerations - Influence - Time - Material	Engagement of champion with inter-departmental influence. Involvement of organizational stakeholders from the appropriate functional areas with adequate interest and influence. Intent to utilize evaluation findings. Availability of program staff to support evaluation. Potential involvement of program participants. Material resources allocated for evaluation.
Data Availability Considerations - Intrinsic quality - Contextual considerations	Degree to which culture supports data-driven decision making. Expected effect of organizational bureaucracy. Intrinsic data quality includes accuracy, completeness, and consistency. Contextual considerations include accessibility, relevance, and systems integration. The authority and ability data managers have to query and release organizational data.

Conclusion

In response to evaluator challenges with EA methods, this study sought to clarify the aspects of organizational support and data availability suggested in the first three steps of the existing six-step EA process. The findings indicate that involving intended users and key stakeholders requires assessment of the influence, time, and material support provided by the organization. An exploration of the program reality using data available in the organization hinges on the intrinsic and contextual quality of the data. Furthermore, data quality seems to be related to the organization's culture and processes that can encourage investments in technology, systems integration, and increasingly usable forms of data. Although the findings of this study yielded an understanding of the participants' experiences with regard to program evaluability, further quantitative research is needed with a larger sample to generalize findings about organizational support and data availability aspects. Another logical next step is to assess the use of the clarified aspects of the organization and data prior to an evaluation effort and reflect on the merit of this level of specificity. Finally, exploring the relationship between the organization and data was beyond the purpose of the present study and poorly suited to the use of qualitative techniques. EA theory and practice, however, may benefit from additional research concerning the interdependence of an organization's support and its data availability.

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