Competitive Champions Versus Cooperative Advocates: Understanding Advocates for Evaluation

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Background: Evaluation offers non-profit organizations an opportunity to improve their services, demonstrate achievements, and be accountable. The extant literature identifies individuals who can enhance the uptake of evaluation as evaluation champions. However, a paucity of detail is available regarding how to identify these individuals and the support they require.

Purpose: This research investigated the characteristics and motivations of evaluation champions and examined how they promoted and embedded evaluation in organizational systems.

Setting: Australian human and social service non-profit organizations.

Research design: Drawing upon the literature and social interdependence theory, the research took an interpretivist perspective to collaboratively generate knowledge about evaluation champions. The aim was to understand and develop a reconstruction of the characteristics of individuals who are considered evaluation champions. This article constitutes a component of a larger research project.

Data Collection and Analysis: This research used purposive sampling to recruit champions working in Australian non-profit organizations. Individuals were identified via descriptive criteria gleaned from a literature review. The research involved interviewing 17 participants, 4 of whom also participated in organizational case studies. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews and case studies generated information about the activities, strategies, motivations, and attributes of individuals who championed and advocated for evaluation.

Findings: This article argues that evaluation advocate is the preferable descriptor for a person with no or limited evaluation knowledge, skills, abilities, or responsibilities who is attempting to embed evaluation by cultivating mutually beneficial interactions and cooperative working relationships. We define evaluation advocates as individuals who motivate others and provide energy, interest, and enthusiasm by connecting evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and organizational goals to make judgments about effectiveness. This article includes a field guide to facilitate identification, recruitment, support, and development of evaluation advocates.

Keywords: evaluation advocates; evaluation champions; cooperative teamwork; social interdependence theory; non-profit organizations.

Introduction

In 2018, *The Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* published a literature review focusing on *evaluation champions*, highlighting the paucity of literature on how to identify and support them to enhance the uptake of evaluation (Rogers & Gullickson, 2018). The article proposed a definition of an evaluation champion. It included a list of practical indicative activities based on the literature and theory to help answer the question, "How would I know an evaluation champion if I bumped into them on the street?" (p. 56).

The definition and indicative activities helped evaluators and colleagues "bump into" champions; they were able to nominate research participants who matched Rogers and Gullickson's description. In this article, we present findings from research that investigated individuals nominated as evaluation champions: their activities, strategies, motivations, and attributes aimed at increasing understanding, support, and uptake of evaluation within their organizations. We have combined empirical evidence, literature, and theory to address the following question: What are the characteristics of evaluation champions working in non-profit organizations? Whilst investigating individuals nominated as champions, we found a group of individuals who preferred the descriptor "advocate." We argue in this article that there is a need for a delineation between "evaluation champion" and "evaluation advocate." Below, we provide a brief background of the study, followed by the research design and the findings in relation to the participants' activities, strategies, motivations, and attributes. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and implications, drawing upon literature and theory, and closes with future research opportunities.

Background

This study's context was Australian human and social service non-profit organizations aiming to improve people's lives by providing health, community development, and social services; these types of organizations address inequalities and human service issues by fulfilling unmet community and social needs (Doherty et al., 2015). The research involved interviewing 17 participants and conducting four case studies with the purpose of examining whether the representation of evaluation champions in the literature and theory resonated with individuals working in organizations.

We drew upon social interdependence theory to assist with understanding how goals and actions can influence interpersonal dynamics and how, in relation to evaluation, group members can make meaningful connections (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). This theory from social psychology can be useful for understanding groups, teamwork, interpersonal dynamics, and changes over time (Johnson & Johnson, 2015; King & Stevahn, 2013). Cooperation and competition are essential tenets of the theory; positive interdependence (cooperation) occurs when individuals believe goal success is only possible by working with others, and negative interdependence (competition) occurs when an individual succeeds only if others fail (Deutsch, 2011).

Evaluation

The *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* defines evaluation as "an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan" (Fournier, 2005, p. 140). However, so as to not exclude any forms or approaches, we adopted Rogers' and Williams' (2006) options for what evaluation in organizations could involve: (a) an implicit understanding or reasoning about why the approach to evaluation is appropriate in that context; (b) evaluation to determine whether strategic ambitions are being achieved; (c) evaluation of programs and services; and (d) the establishment of evaluation systems for learning and improvement.

Non-Profit Organizations

The research focused on non-profit organizations. They were defined as standing separate from government, having formal self-governing structures, potentially having some voluntary contribution from members or a board, not operating for the direct or indirect gain of members, and reinvesting profits to carry out their purpose (Australian Taxation Office, 2019; Salamon & Anheier, 1992). While non-profit organizations are using evaluation to assist in meeting the demand for information for learning, improvement, demonstration of effectiveness, and accountability (Alaimo, 2008; Carman & Fredericks, 2010; Ronalds, 2016), these organizations are also a particularly challenging context in which to embed evaluation and make it relevant, meaningful, and useful for non-evaluators. Barriers to meaningful

evaluation and evaluation use can include structural issues, resource constraints, and interpersonal challenges (Bach-Mortensen et al., 2018; Campbell & Lambright, 2017; Gilchrist & Butcher, 2016; Norton et al., 2016). Specifically, people may resist becoming involved because of the lack of dedicated resources, disconnected priorities, previous negative experiences, feelings of distrust and anxiety, and difficulties with evaluation concepts and terminology (Chaudhary et al., 2020; Donaldson et al., 2002; Mason & Hunt, 2018; Whitehall et al., 2012).

Evaluation Champions

In these challenging circumstances, there are some individuals who are not evaluators, but who display a positive attitude toward evaluation and seek to incorporate it into their practice. Referred to in the literature as "evaluation champions," these individuals advocate for evaluation, understand the context, encourage the involvement of others, and use the evaluation findings (King & Volkov, 2005; Labin, 2014; Preskill & Boyle, 2008a, 2008b; Taylor-Powell & Boyd, 2008). Research specifically focusing on evaluation champions has shown how important they are for the success of an evaluation initiative and for supporting evaluation to be embedded into the routine operations of organizations (Silliman et al., 2016a, 2016b).

The phrase "evaluation champions" originated in two stages. In 1963, Schön referred to "champions" in a study of emergent leaders in relation to innovation in organizations, and the concept has since been used in the health, education, environment, and business sectors (Benton et al., 2020; Coakes & Smith, 2007; Gattiker & Carter, 2010; Solitander et al., 2012). Across the organizational development literature, champions are also called emergent leaders, change agents, opinion leaders, advocates, or policy entrepreneurs (Flodgren et al., 2019; Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Howell, 2005; Markham, 1998; Taylor et al., 2011)**.** In 1998, Preskill and Torres made reference to evaluation champions as people who support evaluative inquiry. In 2002, *New Directions for Evaluation* released an issue on evaluation capacity building; three out of seven articles mentioned champions. From that point on, many researchers have mentioned the importance of identifying and engaging champions during the implementation of an evaluation initiative (Bourgeois et al., 2015; Brandon et al., 2011; Chaudhary et al., 2020; Guerra-López & Hicks, 2015; Mayne, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2011; Wandersman, 2014).

In 2018, Rogers and Gullickson (2018) proposed a definition of an evaluation champion based on the evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking literature and existing models of other roles that may have functions similar to champions' (Buckley et al., 2015; King, 2005, 2007; King & Volkov, 2005; Preskill & Boyle, 2008b; Silliman et al., 2016a; Stockdill et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2011). The review defined an evaluation champion as "an employee who practises reflection and critical thinking, and promotes evaluation among colleagues" (Rogers & Gullickson, 2018, p. 55). Evaluation champions might engage in the following activities: advocate for support and resources; motivate others; provide energy, interest, and enthusiasm; provide or access tools, resources, networks, and expertise; help others to apply evaluative thinking, use evaluation findings, and create opportunities for reflection; assist, train, mentor, and support evaluation while considering different perspectives and encouraging others to contribute; consider how evaluation can be strategically promoted and used for organizational change; ask and encourage others to ask critical questions and initiate discussions and debates; and develop engaging ways to explain details and develop common visions (Rogers & Gullickson, 2018).

The current research study aimed to test the extended definition of "evaluation champion" to look for representative individuals, to see whether this definition resonated with those individuals, and to explore any other aspects of their characteristics, motivations, and behaviors that may surface through the research.

Research Design

We determined that qualitative methods would be the best way to jointly generate detailed and nuanced characteristics about evaluation champions with participants, their colleagues, and evaluators (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We sought to explore the underlying feelings about evaluation as experienced by participants and placed emphasis on understanding the ways in which participants interpreted their social interactions (Bryman, 2012). We jointly created and interpreted the findings with participants (Benner, 2008; Denzin, 2001), and also examined the discoveries in light of formal theory to help interpret the social situations and interpersonal interactions occurring among people working in organizations (Gay & Weaver, 2011).

We conducted a qualitative investigation which consisted of two concurrent parts, with the

individual as the unit of analysis. The first part captured the viewpoints of identified individuals through semi-structured interviews. Interviewing offered a way of elucidating individual perspectives and eliciting information that could not be ascertained by observation alone (Patton, 2002). In the second part, four case studies triangulated the initial findings by researching the experiences of selected individuals in real-life situations (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Stake, 2006). Interviews and multiple case studies were appropriate methods because the research involved understanding the challenging relationships between multiple systems (social, organizational, and interorganizational). The interviews focused at the individual level, and the multiple case studies examined the characteristics and behaviors of interviewed individuals in relation to their interactions with colleagues in an organizational context; triangulating participant interviews with case study data strengthened confidence in results.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the research design. The two purposes for the interviews were to (a) collect data with the individuals and (b) identify potential case studies. An initial report was written to answer a question that was useful for the organization. Then a case study report for each case was written answering the question posed in this research, which was then combined into a multicase report. The final stage was focused on synthesis whereby the findings from all the interviews were combined with the multiple-case-study cross-case analysis. Figure 2 presents a diagrammatic representation of the connection between interviews and case studies. The interviews and case studies were congruent; the interviews focused at the individual level, and the case studies provided in-depth analyses of four of these interviewees, examining their characteristics and behaviors in relation to their interactions with colleagues in an organizational context.

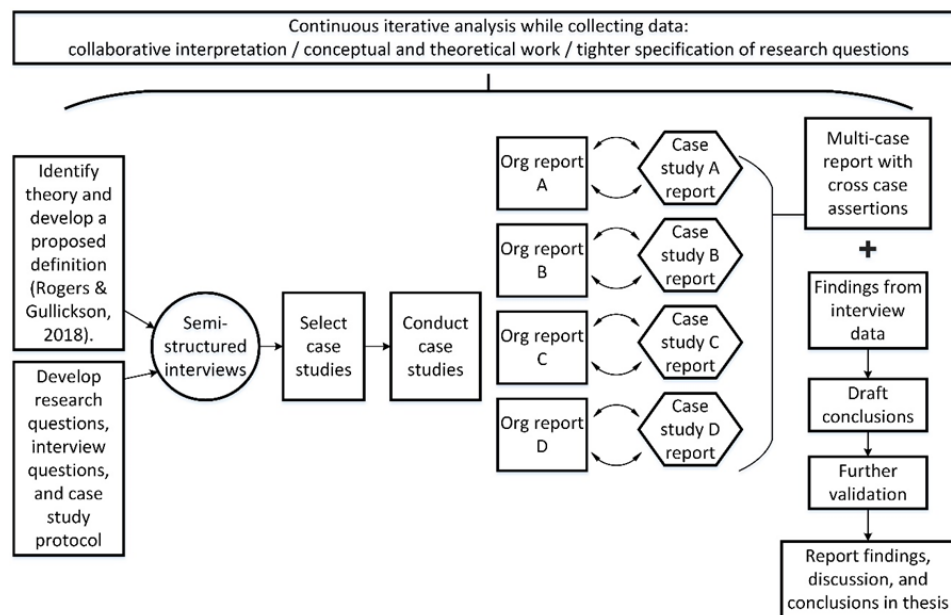Figure 1. Overview of the Research Design Highlighting the Continuous Iterative Analysis
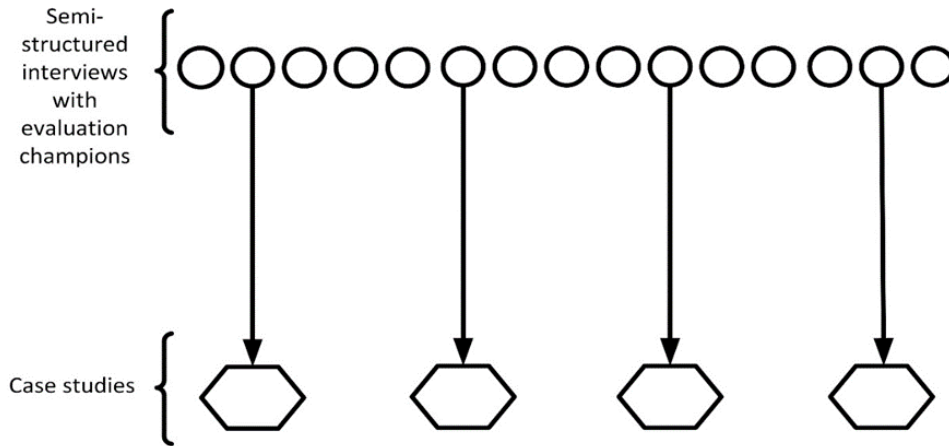
Figure 2. Relationship Between Interviews and Case Studies

We used professional networks to identify a purposive sample of certain types of individuals in Australian organizations (Bryman, 2012). In accordance with the ethics approval granted by the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC: 1647875), the process involved emailing to 35 evaluators in our networks a statement that included the proposed definition, a list of indicative activities, and an explanation of the research process without the use of jargon. Evaluators then used the proposed definition and list of indicative activities to purposefully identify potential participants. The key criteria were that participants be employed in a non-profit organization, not have any reference to evaluation in their job title, and be nominated by an evaluator or colleague who considered them champions of evaluation based on the indicative activities listed in the Rogers and Gullickson (2018) literature review. When the potential participants, a total of 17, contacted the researchers directly or indicated their willingness to the evaluators, their eligibility was checked, and they were formally invited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

The final sample was 17 participants, all of whom were experienced professionals. The ten women and seven men had been employed in their organizations for more than five years and had been working in the non-profit sector for at least ten years. Four participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and two stated they grew up outside of Australia, one in the United Kingdom and one in a western African nation. Most participants did not have management responsibilities for direct reports. The participants worked in registered charitable organizations that supported the elderly, homeless people, families in crisis, and minority groups to overcome barriers to accessing services. Some developed community-driven projects, and others supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve equity. Table 1 displays details about participants with pseudonyms and selected demographics.

Table 1.

Pseudonym	Gender	Level of position	Purpose of organization	Size of organization *
Fred (Case study)	Male	Senior	Community development	Small
Mary	Female	Project	Community development	Small
Sally (Case study)	Female	Middle	Family support	Large
Wendy	Female	Middle	Health	Small
Jenny	Female	Middle	Community development	Large
Serena	Female	Project	Health	Small

Duncan	Male	Project	Health	Small
Allan	Male	Project	Community development	Small
Charles	Male	Senior	Family support	Large
Karen	Female	Project	Health	Small
Michael (Case study)	Male	Senior	Family support	Small
Judy	Female	Senior	Youth development	Small
Kelvin (Case study)	Male	Senior	Family support	Small
Alice	Female	Project	Family support	Small
Sophia	Female	Middle	Family support	Small
Jack	Male	Middle	Legal support	Small
Tahlia	Female	Project	Health	Small

* Small: fewer than 50 employees. Large: national

Interviews were conducted with the 17 participants over an 18-month period, prior to the pandemic, from 2017 to 2018. Participants chose the locations of the interviews; seven interviews occurred over the telephone due to large geographical distances, and ten were face-to-face in private areas at the participants' workplaces. They lasted an average of 70 minutes, but ranged from 30 to 99 minutes. Although an hour was scheduled for each interview, most conversations continued after formal questions had completed, and some participants were able to respond to all questions in less than an hour.

We asked a total of 10 participants if they would be willing to be the subject of a case study with their organization because their interviews contained illustrative examples with the potential for access to a substantial quantity of organizational documents. Four accepted. Lack of time and organizational support from managers were some of the reasons the participants provided for declining. Consistent with the qualitative research strategy, case study data collection involved semi-structured interviews with evaluators and colleagues working with the participants, a document analysis, and site visits.

The document analysis included evaluation reports, minutes from meetings, organizational charts, annual budgets, communication logs, work plans, internal reviews, and reports from public and private sources. These provided information about organizational context, how evaluation was being used, and changes over time. A site visit of one day occurred at each of the four organizations, with the primary purpose of conducting the interviews. A site visit report, including observations about the work environment, was written immediately following each visit. A brief research case study report was also produced for each case, with the purpose of providing background specifically to assist with answering the research questions:

history, context, issues, and data collection details. Interviews that were not able to be undertaken during the site visit were completed via telephone. These data sources were deliberately chosen because of the time constraints evident for non-profit organizations and to ensure as minimal a disruption to normal work routines as possible. Collating these several sources of data provided an opportunity to find evidence in support of what participants had said or critically review materials with information to the contrary (Stake, 2006).

We used Stake's (1995) suggested approach of collecting and analyzing data simultaneously and followed his recommendation to aggregate categories into themes. Although each case was considered as an intrinsic unit of analysis, we used a cross-case analysis to highlight differences and similarities between cases. The multiple-case-study report drew upon specific tools that were adapted from Stake's (2006) multiple-case-study analysis approach to find patterns in the data. In this research, the process was iterative; themes were coded under categories as the data were collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, cited in Bryman, 2012).

Findings

In this section, we present the collated findings from the interviews and case studies by presenting the data in the form of examples and illustrative quotations. Overall, responses to the interview questions were consistent across the sample. There were minimal differences among participants at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, among different genders, or among different culturally and linguistically diverse participants. Distinct patterns emerged where participants responded negatively to a few of the questions and then, in contrast, provided consistently positive

responses to several of the other questions. Our interpretation of these patterns was that participants were answering the questions with a high degree of honesty and openness. They felt comfortable to challenge the underlying intent of the question when required and to provide their own insights.

We begin by detailing how the use of the proposed definition helped to find participants and describing the extent to which this representation resonated with participants. In the second section, we present the self-reported attributes derived from the interviews to help understand the inherent features that enabled participants to effectively work with their colleagues around evaluation. In the third section, we examine why participants were motivated to include evaluation in their everyday practice. In the final section, we examine how participants worked with their coworkers in greater depth by documenting their strategies for promoting evaluation.

Activities: What Participants Did in Practice

As outlined above, the proposed definition and list of indicative activities of evaluation champions were key tools in the recruitment of participants. Evaluators gave positive feedback and remarked that the list was useful for helping them to articulate in detail why it was so important to have people undertaking those activities on their evaluation team. Participants also provided positive feedback in relation to the definition and listed activities. They recognized a connection between themselves and the definition, and nearly all participants responded with strong affirmation when asked which of the activities resonated with their practice. This response from Kelvin was the most definite: "Sure. Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep. A hundred per cent. My God! Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely—every one of those things and that's been the whole journey—I'm seeing me there. That's fantastic!"

While not all participants thought that they undertook all the activities all the time and in equal measure, there was unanimous agreement that, overall, the list was indicative of the types of activities they undertook. Responses included, "I'm certainly in that space. Yep. I think I do that. Um—yep. Yes, definitely" (Judy); "Yeah, quite a lot of them" (Karen); "They all do" (Serena); "When I read it, I kind of thought, yeah I'm doing all that [laugh] sort of" (Wendy); "Yeah, definitely, all of those ... but not from a technical standpoint" (Charles); "They all gel. They are all pretty spot on" (Fred); "I think I do all of those, and I think the difference is that there are higher percentages of

effort, and lower percentages at a particular time" (Jenny).

Participants agreed that thinking critically, practicing reflection, and promoting evaluation among colleagues, the three key elements of the definition, were indicative of what they did in practice. Participants particularly emphasised that they highly valued taking time to stop and reflect on their work, including self-reflection about how they were working with others. As Karen expressed it:

> I often reflect on it myself ... if I'm getting more enthusiastic than other people, if I'm getting more pushy, if I prioritize something that other people haven't prioritized, you've got to be always aware of that. So always assessing the environment where people are at.

Hence, there was evidence that supported the list of activities and proposed definition: "an employee who practises reflection and critical thinking, and promotes evaluation among colleagues" (Rogers & Gullickson, 2018, p. 55).

Resistance to the Label of "Champion"

Although participants unanimously accepted the wording in the definition and list of activities, there was strong resistance to the "champion" label. Initially, some participants reacted positively to the fact that an evaluator or colleague had nominated them as an evaluation champion. They took pride in the notion that they were promoting evaluation: "I do definitely see the value in evaluation and the outcomes that it can achieve if you do evaluation" (Sally). Some reluctantly and with hesitancy accepted the champion label: Wendy said, "I want to be one. I don't know. A mini-one?" and Sophie hesitantly said, "I suppose I do—yes." However, only four participants uttered these hesitant indicators of agreement.

The majority of the participants gave at least one reason, if not several reasons over the course of the interview, as to why they disliked the label. One reason they did not want to be called champions was because of the term's connotations of technical expertise. At least half of the participants said they saw the label of "evaluation champion" belonging to someone who was an *expert,* the *go-to* person for assistance or the person who is responsible for doing evaluation. Jack said,

> I think the obvious risk is the idea that everyone gets which is, "Oh, yeah. He'll do the evaluation, so I won't have to do anything." You know, then that misinterpretation of the word, champion, rather than championing as a verb—but champion as in the expert in doing

it—"Great, we'll just leave it all there [with the champion]!"

Some participants said that to be worthy of the champion title, they would have to increase their specific evaluation skills, undertake formal training, or obtain qualifications, because they proclaimed to have low evaluation technical proficiency. Evidence from evaluators interviewed as part of the case studies concurred with participants, and they did not suggest the participants' technical evaluation abilities were at a high level. Judy said,

> The risk is not feeling like you're stepping up to that point. But I think what it might do is to provide impetus to make sure you have it up front and dedicate more time to it, or whatever is required to make you feel like you're worthy of such a title.

Tahlia similarly reiterated this sentiment: "'cause they're going to think I'm really smart, and they think I'm going to know everything. What if I don't? I don't want to disappoint people, especially myself. Anyway, it's like I know what I know. So, it's a very humble thing."

> However, the main reason for the rejection of the evaluation champion label was because it had connotations with competition, sport, winners, and losers. According to participants, it was inappropriate because it was not conducive to facilitating teamwork. Participants considered such a label to be culturally inappropriate, to not align with the concept of humility, and to have negative connotations associated with winning and losing. Humility featured strongly in the self-descriptions, and colleagues and evaluators corroborated these statements. Participants reported that it was not useful to be singled out when they were trying to create cooperative team environments where everyone could contribute. Alice said, "Everyone is part of the success. It's never a one-off, and to isolate a person, or even a group, and say, 'Oh, you're the achievers. You're the champions.' It's not really helpful." In relation to group dynamics among coworkers, Jack said using a term like "champion" could be detrimental:

> Any kind of elitism or power imbalance is a risk and sucks away space from other people to potentially take it on.... We know that if you appreciate people, then they grow in their confidence and competence to do things. But you don't want to overdo that and also exclude others.... If you think about all that work in Aboriginal communities, and you think about anyone being spotlighted, or highlighted, or drawn out from the crowd [as inappropriate], and so working in a culturally competent

sensitive manner, identifying champions is probably a huge risk.... More importantly, it might be just getting everybody into championing evaluation in their everyday in small ways.

Participants preferred team approaches that valued everybody's contribution, and there was a sentiment that identifying a single champion could go against the work of making evaluation part of everyone's role.

Participants also gave examples of times when management had imposed the title of champion upon individuals during the rollout of a new system or change management process unrelated to evaluation. Without enough resourcing or training, according to Charles, it was not a proper process and could be considered superficial: "No resourcing, no training, no help. Lots of meetings, an incredible amount of work on top of their job. So it has connotations as token."

Without prompting, three participants mentioned they preferred the term "evaluation advocate." Serena said, "I'd be an advocate. I wouldn't be a champion because I think 'champion' implies that you're number one.... Advocate for evaluation." Sophie similarly mentioned "advocate" and "champion" in the same sentence, "I certainly see myself as an advocate for evaluation, but I don't know about a champion." Tahlia gave her reasoning for preferring "advocate": "An evaluation advocate. You can be like an advocate of evaluation. It's just a promoter."

Attributes: Features that Enable Participants to Promote Evaluation

Attributes in this research were the inherent features that enabled participants to promote and engage with others around evaluation. We grouped the interviewees' self-reported attributes, in response to questions about their personal features and qualities, into three categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Participants said they were adept at brokering knowledge among different groups. For example, participant Karen said that she seeks out expertise and implements new knowledge:

> I'll always go back to any evaluations that we've done and say 'Well, what have we done with that, and have we refreshed the strategy based on what the evaluation said?' so I won't let things sit on shelves.

This research pointed to the idea that participants were experiential lifelong learners. Allan said, "I tend to want to capture—I want to capture learnings from the stuff that I've done so it doesn't

go to waste." Their skills were reportedly about supporting coworkers and facilitating the engagement of other people's talents and expertise, promoting evaluation with others, and using their networks to find the expertise needed to implement the task; they supported, encouraged, and promoted evaluation to others. Participants also said they needed to demonstrate positivity and perseverance to work in a context where there was resistance to evaluation. They were tenacious, resilient, and patient, as illustrated in this quotation from Michael:

> Don't be afraid of it [evaluation], but just be patient and just work out, just unpack the different, be patient in understanding the different frameworks, and the different language, and the different approaches. It's not rocket science.

Strategies: How Participants Worked

The main ways participants promoted evaluation among their coworkers was by finding shared goals, providing encouragement, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives. To help coworkers incorporate evaluation, participants showed individuals how they would personally benefit and, in combination, demonstrated how evaluation could help achieve organizational goals. As Jack said,

> We have to do this [evaluation] because we need to somehow justify it [the program]. And we want to do it [evaluation] because we want to know if it's [the program] useful. And we think you want to feel good about what you're doing and keep doing it.

Serena made the connection between evaluation and her coworkers' everyday roles:

> Context is always good, because if you can't put it into the context of that person's everyday job, then they will totally miss it. So, they need to figure out – well, you need to bring them into the equation so that they take on that ownership.

Participants also identified the underlying reasons why their coworkers might resist evaluation, such as fear, dislike of change, risk of personal criticism, or time pressure. Then they found strategies that alleviated these issues and jointly found a place for evaluation in their shared scope of work, such as sharing analogies, playing participatory games, ensuring people had ownership over the process, learning together through experience, and undertaking group problem solving activities.

Participants provided many examples of how they enthusiastically encouraged and supported their colleagues to engage with evaluation. Participants highly valued their positive working relationships with their coworkers. A mutually beneficial working relationship was the basis from which participants could encourage their coworkers to listen to what they had to say, engage them to assist, influence their work practices, bring their resources, harness their expertise, influence other people's behavior, and persuade them of the potential for evaluation to assist the organization in achieving its goals. Making interpersonal connections among coworkers to find appropriate ways of incorporating evaluation was fundamental, as illustrated in this example from Sophie:

> It's trying to show them that this is about value-adding and minimizing the work that they're doing rather than maximizing—rather than workload overload. Like it's not about giving them more work to do. This is a way of simplifying things that they are doing.

To ensure the highest quality evaluation initiative and work of the organization overall, participants recognized the value of facilitating the inclusion of as many people with different worldviews as possible. Participants provided numerous examples of communication tensions and disconnects in their workplaces. However, while they understood the potential for there to be communication barriers in a non-profit context, they were more concerned with how to include their coworkers' views and encourage, support, and empower others to participate and contribute in meaningful and appropriate ways.

Motivation: Why Participants Were Interested in Evaluation

Making a positive difference to others in society was the link between why participants were working in the non-profit sector and why they were interested in evaluation. Participants responded in three main ways when asked about the reasons they worked in the non-profit sector: a desire for social justice, connections to community, and personal experience. Participants' motivations regarding evaluation related to their overarching aspirations for why they worked in the non-profit sector.

The connection with evaluation came from the key notion of making a difference. The concept of evaluation resonated because all participants reported being intrinsically interested in documenting the value or worth of the project, program, or policy they were undertaking, and in making comparisons with alternative options or approaches. Jenny succinctly stated the sentiment

in this way: "It was about our work and how we could improve it for the betterment of others." Participants said they were not content with just working hard, being busy, and feeling like they were doing good work. They were not satisfied with just thinking or believing they were doing a good job, but were searching for ways to prove to themselves and others that they were achieving the desired change.

Participants were generally open to engaging with a variety of other people to seek supervision and constructive criticism. Charles noted that this way of working is not explicitly incorporated into the way non-profit organizations routinely operate: "That's all practice, which is linked to supervision, which is part of an ongoing reflective practice … something that is just crucial in our sector, and we don't do enough of."

Discussion

This research was initiated to understand more about the characteristics of evaluation champions. Whilst investigating individuals nominated as champions, we found that most of these individuals preferred the descriptor "advocate." An evaluation advocate supports the process and use of evaluation within their organization through reflective practice, evaluative thinking, organizational mechanisms, and relationships with colleagues. In this discussion, we examine why, drawing upon the evidence from this research, the literature, and social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2015), the label "champion" was not conducive to establishing cooperative working relationships, and we elucidate the differences between champions and advocates. We conclude this section by presenting a revised definition and field guide that could be useful to facilitate identification, recruitment, support, and development of evaluation advocates.

A Competitive Champion Versus a Cooperative Advocate

Although participants matched the description of evaluation champion from the literature as they thought critically; reflected; and promoted, valued, accessed, and used evaluation, they did not want to be labelled evaluation champions. Even though the proposed definition resonated with participants, the label of "champion" did not. Some participants welcomed the use of "championing" as a verb, but the majority disliked the term as a noun. In the

Macquarie Dictionary (2016) the first two definitions of "champion" relate to competition: "someone who holds first place in any sport" and "anything that takes first place in competition" (para. 1). The next two definitions relate to confrontational situations, "someone who fights for or defends any person or cause: a champion of the oppressed" and "a fighter or warrior" (para. 1). When participants discussed their understanding of the term, they were more likely to describe themselves in ways that resembled the verb in the fifth definition: "to act as champion of; defend; support" (para. 1).

This fifth definition also aligned with the participants' ways of interacting on an interpersonal level, avoiding competitive situations and opting for cooperative strengths-based approaches. Individuals instigating conversations around evaluation need to be sensitive, as evaluation can make non-profit employees feel threatened and anxious, resulting in unhelpful attitudes and creating situations that are based on negative interdependence (Donaldson et al., 2002). With the potential for peers to feel anxious and reluctant to become involved with evaluation, promoting evaluation in a non-profit workplace for these participants involved acknowledging that pre-existing underlying attitudes may contribute to a competitive starting point or negative interdependence, where individuals work against each other.

One of the founders of social interdependence theory, Deutsch (2011), identified that the underlying attitudes of an individual are an important concept for understanding whether a situation is likely to be one of cooperation or competition. This research has shown that participants attempted to use their positive attitude to develop cooperative situations with their colleagues. The findings align with Deutsch's (2011) suggested tenets for positive interdependence: "we are for each other," and "we benefit one another" (p. 25). They also align with the need to avoid the competitive situations that can be associated with evaluation, "we are against one another" and "you are out to harm me" (p. 25). If there was negative interdependence, participants might have needed to emphasise the positive relational elements and not draw any attention to competitive circumstances. Thereby, they perceived that the label "champion," with its sporting connotations and potential to draw attention to an individual, was not conducive to creating a supportive environment for teamwork.

Some literature provides examples where the title of champion has been bestowed upon people without the appropriate resource allocation,

support, or consultation, to detrimental effect (Chubinski et al., 2019; Knight, 2017; Pascale & Sternin, 2005). Evidence from participants is in alignment with the literature that suggests that top-down approaches do not result in positive outcomes and may do more harm than having not nominated champions (Chubinski et al., 2019; Knight, 2017). Even when Warrick (2009) generated guidelines for training, developing, and using champions, participants suggested keeping the process informal and carefully considering the implications of using the title because it may not be acceptable for employees. Hence, the label "champion" is only appropriate when the individual has subject matter expertise in an area, when they can provide technical assistance to staff, when decision makers provide resources and support, and when the individual is willing to be identified as a champion. If any of these conditions are not in place, then the label may have unintended negative consequences. This research has shown there was an incongruence between how participants viewed themselves and what they understood the term "evaluation champion" to signify.

"Evaluation Advocate" Was a Preferable Descriptor

As an alternative to "evaluation champion," this research suggests that the term "evaluation advocate" may be a preferable title. In the Macquarie Dictionary (2016) "advocate" is defined as a verb: "to plead in favour of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly" and "to support or argue on behalf of a person or group, or their position" (para. 1). It is also used as a noun: "someone who defends, vindicates, or espouses a cause by argument; an upholder; a defender" and "someone who pleads for or on behalf of another" (para. 1). When discussing internal evaluation, Volkov (2011) suggests that being an advocate overlaps with being a change agent and includes "strong interest in and responsibility for the

evaluation use" (p. 36). These definitions are similar to the use of the word "champion" as a verb and correspond with the participants' self-descriptions.

Advocating for support and resources for evaluation was an activity that resonated with the participants. "Advocate" also frequently appears alongside "evaluation champion" in the literature. One example comes from Silliman et al. (2016a), who found advocating to be the most highly recognized role of a champion: "Advocacy included 'speaking up' in policy groups but more often—and perhaps more effectively—interpreting the value of and opportunities for evaluation to peers, especially in mentoring, project teams, and professional settings" (p. 13). Another example comes from Taylor-Powell and Boyd (2008): "We have found that working with these individuals over time, cementing relationships, and encouraging reflective practice help to build a cadre of key advocates that can communicate the value of evaluation and share ECB responsibilities" (p. 61).

Our findings indicate that the field of evaluation should delineate between champion and advocate. Evaluation advocates may be less likely to have recognition or resources allocated from leadership; have limited subject matter expertise in evaluation and minimal interest in training on how to do evaluation; and not have a desire to do more evaluation tasks, and thus not be willing to offer evaluation technical assistance. Evaluation champions may have a higher level of evaluation technical expertise; be willing to assist colleagues to do and use evaluation; and receive recognition, support, resources, and encouragement from people in leadership positions. If the intention is to work in cooperative teams to encourage everyone to contribute and make evaluation part of everybody's roles and responsibilities, then this is more likely to be successful if an individual holds the label "evaluation advocate." Table 2 provides a summary of this paragraph to delineate between the two labels.

Table 1. Distinguishing Between an Evaluation Champion and an Evaluation Advocate

Task	Evaluation champion	Evaluation advocate
Willing to advocate for evaluation	✓	✓
Willing to be responsible for evaluation use	✓	✓
Desires training on how to use evaluation	✓	✓
Undertakes activities listed in proposed definition	✓	✓
Has technical evaluation expertise	✓	–
Willing for others to ask them for technical assistance	✓	–
Willing to do evaluation	✓	–
Desires training on how to do evaluation	✓	–

Has recognition, support, resources, and encouragement from leaders	✓	Optional
Desires to develop cooperative team environments around evaluation where everyone can contribute	May desire, but less likely to be effective	✓

An implication of this research is that evaluators and decision makers could use "evaluation advocate" as a label instead of "champion" to appropriately engage with and invite non-evaluators in ways that are welcoming to more people and more appropriate when establishing cooperative teams. In regards to more general organizational change management, decision makers in organizations could also carefully consider the circumstances in which they label an employee as a champion before they allocate such a title. Decision makers need to ensure that all enabling factors, including support, employee's and peers' acceptance, and resources are present before imposing such a label, as it may produce negative consequences in relation to team dynamics.

A Revised Extended Definition

Participants reported that the label of "evaluation champion" undermined their efforts to develop mutually beneficial interactions and cooperative working relationships. This study proposes that "evaluation advocate" is more appropriate and acceptable; the label does not draw unwanted attention, does not allude to any claims about specific technical evaluation skills, and avoids placing responsibility for evaluation upon the shoulders of an individual. As discussed earlier, the definition of an advocate that most accurately relates to participants in this research is "someone who defends, vindicates, or espouses a cause by argument; an upholder; a defender" (Macquarie Dictionary, 2016, para. 1). While this definition is relatively straightforward and self-explanatory, many different definitions of advocates across different sectors exist because of the different levels of advocacy and the multifaceted nature of reasons for being an advocate (Freddolino et al., 2004;

Wiede, 2011). However, to overcome the lack of clarity, this research drew upon a definition of a social work advocate (Freddolino et al., 2004), and the definition of "evaluation champion" from Silliman et al.'s (2016a) research, along with the proposed definition from the literature review, to develop a revised definition of an evaluation advocate.

Table 3 is an extension of the original definition of "evaluation champion" put forth in the Rogers and Gullickson (2018) article. It divides the published definition into activities (what they did in practice) and strategies (how they worked) and draws upon the literature to find evidence for attributes (inherent features) and motivations (why they were interested in evaluation). The table maps the relevant definitions alongside the findings from this research to develop a revised definition of an evaluation advocate. The revised definition replaces Rogers and Gullickson's "Practices reflection and critical thinking" and "Promotes evaluation among colleagues" with the primary activity derived from this research: "Motivate others and provide energy, interest, and enthusiasm," and the primary strategy, "Connecting evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and the organizational goals." We include the word "personal" in recognition of the participants' understanding their coworkers as individuals and creating intentional one-on-one relationships to discover what motivated each individual. The other change from the definition proposed by Rogers and Gullickson was to replace "employees" with "individuals" in acknowledgment that, particularly in the non-profit sector, evaluation advocates can be volunteers or board members. The prominent activity from this research, "Advocate for support and resources," was not included, because the label "evaluation advocate" captures the activity.

Table 3. Defining an Evaluation Advocate

Component of definition	Proposed definition [a]	Evaluation champion [b]	Social worker advocate [c]	Evidence from findings	Revised definition
Activity: What they do	Practices reflection and critical thinking	Serves as a catalyst for building evaluation capacity within an organization	Champions the rights of others, defending others from abuse or dehumanizing circumstances	Motivates others and provides energy, interest, and enthusiasm	Motivates others and provides energy, interest, and enthusiasm
Strategies: How they worked	Promotes evaluation among colleagues	Mentors their peers in program evaluation skills and competencies	Overcomes bureaucratic barriers to service or entitlements	Connects evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and the organizational goals	Connects evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and the organizational goals
		Advocates for the importance of program evaluation		Advocates for support and resources	*Included in the label*
Attributes: Inherent features		Models good evaluation behaviors	Facilitates access to resources or opportunities	Skill: Models desired behavior	*Included in the field guide*
				Skill: Uses networks	
Motivations: Why participants were interested in evaluation				To make judgments about effectiveness	To make judgments about effectiveness

[a] Adapted from "Evaluation Champions: A literature review," by A. Rogers & A Gullickson, 2018, *The Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation, 14*(30), p. 55. [b] Adapted from "Evaluation Champions: What they do, why they do it, and why it matters to organizations," by B. Silliman, P. Crinion, & T. Archibald, 2016a, *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension, 4*(3), p. 1. [c] Adapted from "A differential model of advocacy in social work practice," by P. P. Freddolino, D. P. Moxley, & C. A. Hyduk, 2004, *Families in Society, 85*(1), p. 120.

The revised definition is, therefore, based on three components: what participants do in practice, how they achieve their intentions around evaluation, and why they are motivated to incorporate evaluation into organizational operations. Thus, an evaluation advocate is "an individual who motivates others and provides energy, interest, and enthusiasm by connecting evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and the organizational goals to make judgements about effectiveness." To facilitate their identification, recruitment, support, and development, the revised definition is accompanied by a practical field guide for evaluation advocates.

Acknowledging that "field guide" usually pertains to a guide for identifying flora and fauna, we deliberately chose this title in recognition that evaluation advocates are hard to identify. We chose an intentionally provocative and quirky title for this practical framework of characteristics to spark the interest of both evaluators and evaluation advocates. The field guide (Table 4) is comprised of

the definition; a statement about the underlying motivations advocates' interest in evaluation; a summary of activities; a list of strategies; and lists of advocates' underlying, enabling attributes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). We present the activities in a reprioritized order that reflects their level of support among this study's participants. The five strategies are prominent examples from this study and relate to the underlying theory. The listed attributes encapsulate some of the critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes documented in the findings.

Table 4. A Definition and Field Guide for Evaluation Advocates: Who, Why, What, and How?

Evaluation advocate: An individual who motivates others and provides energy, interest, and enthusiasm by connecting evaluation with colleagues' personal aspirations and the organizational goals to make judgments about effectiveness

Why they do it: Advocates look for systematic approaches to analyze evidence and make judgments about the effectiveness of their work

What they do:	How they do it:	Attributes:
Activities	**Strategies**	**Knowledge**
- Motivate others and provide energy, interest, and enthusiasm.	- Cultivate relationships and use personal connections to clarify the purpose of the interaction and make evaluation relevant for that individual.	- Experiential lifelong learner
		- Someone who seeks out expertise and implements new knowledge
- Consider how evaluation can be strategically promoted and used for organizational change.		- Critical thinker
	- Start small and find simple and quick tangible wins by finding the projects and people that are ready to use evaluation.	- Generalist
- Assist, train, mentor, and support evaluation while considering different perspectives, and encouraging others to contribute.		- Adapter of information and tools for different audiences
		Skills
	- Use analogies, metaphors, or simple explanations that connect short-term tasks with a long-term, big-picture perspective regarding the benefits of evaluation.	- Supports, encourages, and promotes evaluation to colleagues
- Advocate for support and resources.		- Uses networks
- Ask and encourage others to ask critical questions and initiate discussions and debates.		- Listens and communicates effectively
	- Provide training, instruction manuals, short guides, and/or peer support mechanisms, and incorporate accountability into work plans.	- Models desired behavior
		Attitudes
- Develop engaging ways to explain details and develop common visions.		- Positive
	- Incorporate evaluative questions in routine meetings and general conversations to normalize making judgments and reflecting upon teamwork dynamics.	- Persistent, tenacious, resilient, patient
- Help others to apply evaluative thinking, use evaluation findings, and create opportunities for reflection.		- Self-motivated, versatile
		- Enthusiastic, passionate
		- Curious, open to change and challenges, asks questions
		- Willing to take risks and make mistakes
- Provide or access tools, resources, networks, and expertise.		- Visionary
		- Willing to drive the process

The field guide is not exhaustive; it provides a sample of possible activities and strategies. Likewise, an individual may not need to do everything listed to consider themselves an evaluation advocate. As advocates often work in an invisible way with quite intangible characteristics that are often difficult to articulate, the examples presented above may be of value for helping them to recognize their important contribution. Many advocates may not realize the full extent of their contribution until they see these characteristics explained in a way that defines their repertoire of

knowledge, skills, and attitudes more holistically. Just as participants reacted positively to reviewing the activities listed in the proposed definition, the field guide that includes strategies and attributes may also be useful for evaluation advocates. It could potentially assist with self-identification and self-assessment, as individuals could reflect on their own personal strengths and weaknesses. This table could also complement existing professional development resources (Mintrom, 2019; Silliman et al., 2016b; Warrick, 2009) and enable evaluators and decision makers in organizations to identify, recruit, retain, and support advocates more effectively. Using the table to develop a job description or professional development plan, identify training opportunities, or provide recognition of individuals' efforts may well be worthwhile.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The unique value of this research study comes from our focus on people who advocate for evaluation in organizations in the non-profit sector. The literature does not delineate between evaluation champions working in different sectors, and they can be found in many different organizational settings: schools, health centers, government agencies, and even for-profit organizations. However, undertaking research in the non-profit sector where there are challenges embedding evaluation was ideal for elucidating interpersonal dynamics and understanding why and how interactions were happening in a real-world context. Unfortunately, because of the limited resources in the non-profit sector, organizations could allocate only a minimum level of time to the research, and this meant that extensive observation and opportunities to view participants in action were simply not available. However, these limitations were partially able to be overcome and sufficient high-quality data obtained because of the researchers' personal characteristics. Alison Rogers had worked in a non-profit organization in an internal evaluation position and had developed extensive networks and spent years building rapport, developing trust, and establishing mutually beneficial interactions with evaluators and people working in non-profit organizations.

Future research might aim to validate the term "evaluation advocate" and then explore questions such as: What are the similarities and differences among advocates, champions, and internal evaluators, and under what circumstances do people transition from one role to another?

Evaluation advocates, evaluation champions, and evaluation practitioners may have different levels of evaluation skills, degrees of inclination to formally engage with the field, sets of competencies, and levels of evaluation literacy (Bourgeois, 2008; Rogers et al., 2019; Shaw & Faulkner, 2006; Silliman et al., 2016b). Silliman et al.'s (2016b) research found that while evaluation champions had a perceived need for basic evaluation skills, what champions specifically asked for was training on planning an evaluation and understanding the evaluation process (p. 29). This provides an indication that different sets of participants may have different development needs. Future research on this topic might help elucidate the differences in training needs and determine whether reluctance to do evaluation was unique to the sample of participants in this research. It would be beneficial to explore the enablers and barriers to developing evaluation skills, and to understand more about the reasons behind advocates' preferences for different skill sets.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the knowledge base of evaluation through information and analysis about individuals who advocate for evaluation in their organizations, who prefer to be known as evaluation advocates. Social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2015) provided an explanation for why these individuals were so focused on supporting cooperation instead of competition, especially in relation to the topic of evaluation. Collating their activities, compiling the interpersonal strategies they used to promote evaluation, and examining their underlying motivations and attributes resulted in a revised definition and a field guide for identifying evaluation advocates. The results of this research could be used to identify, understand, support, develop, and encourage these individuals to increase the uptake of evaluation in organizations.

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