Decision-oriented Evaluation: A Review of Various Models of Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

As the modern societies become more advanced, they also encounter new challenges and complex issues. To address these challenges, countries have created programs and policies to provide solutions. In order to figure out whether these programs/policies were achieving their designated goals, evaluation was the only mean to get the job done. Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) define evaluation as "the identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object's value in relation to those criteria" (p. 7). Since the 1800s, people have been using evaluation through various different approaches. While some evaluators use evaluation to judge the worth of something, some others think of it as a scientific way to inform decision making. This paper will look at two major decision-making evaluation approaches: Stufflebeam's CIPP model and Patton's utilization-focused evaluation.

These evaluation approaches are meant to provide effective evaluative information to assist decision makers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). In the mid-1960s, Stufflebeam was one of the first evaluators to draw attention to the use of evaluation. He argues that the evaluator must work side by side with the administrator to pinpoint the decisions the administrator should make. From his perspective, the success of evaluation is dependent upon the collaboration between the administrator and the evaluator. After Stufflebeam, in 1978 Michael Patton published a book emphasizing the use of evaluation and decision (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Patton argues that the primary task of the evaluator is to identify who might be interested in the evaluation and has the power to use it in the decision making process. In the coming parts of the paper, these three different approaches will be examined closely.

THE CIPP EVALUATION MODEL

Stufflebeam has been an advocate for a decision-oriented evaluation emphasizing the importance of involving administrators in the evaluation process as the outcome of the evalua-

tion is to help them make informed decisions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Evaluation is "the process of delineating, obtaining, reporting and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object's merit, worth, probity, and significance to guide decision making, support accountability, disseminate effective practices, and increase understanding of the involved phenomena," argues Stufflebeam (2005, p. 61). In his definition, Stufflebeam highlights the importance of judging the merit as much as accountability and dissemination.

Basically, CIPP stands for Context, Input, Process, and Product evaluations. The CIPP framework looks at these four different forms of decisions that administrators usually make. Context evaluation assists administrators making decisions at the early stage of a program before it is even planned. This approach facilitates defining the goals and objectives of the program. As the name implies, context evaluation seeks to answer questions like: what are the needs or problems of the stakeholders and what resources does the organization have in order to address these problems or needs? Answering these questions properly will lead to identifying the goals and intended outcomes of the proposed program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

After the needs and problems have been identified and the organization is aware of its available resources, the input evaluation assists administrators in designing and structuring interventions to solve the problems or address the needs. Another major purpose of this evaluation is that it contributes to the implementation in a sense that it stimulates administrators to plan some strategies in order to implement the proposed interventions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Put differently, in a formative evaluation this type of evaluation would serve best in assessing different strategies to solving the problem, but in a summative evaluation it would compare the program's intervention to other competitors' plans and strategies.

Moving into the third type of the CIPP model, process evaluation is used when the program is already up and running. Once the program has started, process evaluation helps identify whether the program is going on the intended direction (Stufflebeam, 1971). Some of the possible questions of this type

of evaluation include, but not limited to: Is the program on schedule? Do the staff members need extra training before the end of the first program cycle? Are the resources being used appropriately? What are some of the barriers that the program faces during its first cycle? Answers to these questions would ultimately provide ways to observe, adjust, and refine procedures to ensure the success of the whole program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Product evaluation occurs in a mature stage of the program. It is used to assess whether the program is doing what it is supposed to do. In other words, product evaluation helps determine the degree to which the program's objectives have been achieved (Stufflebeam, 1971). Some of the questions that product evaluation would ask are: What improvements were observed? To what degree were the needs reduced? Should the program continue? Should it be improved? Overall, produce evaluation looks at the degree of success of the program in attaining the intended results designated to it in the first place.

By and large, if we look closely into these four types of evaluations, it is conspicuous that each one focuses of a certain life stage of the program. Furthermore, Stufflebeam (1971) defined six general steps that these types of evaluations should follow starting from focusing the evaluation all the way to the administration of the evaluation. Nevertheless, Stufflebeam (2004) argues that "the CIPP model is a work in progress" (p. 245). Therefore, there has been some contributions to this model (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Some of the most significant contributors are Alkin and Christie. They reviewed evaluation theories using a three-branch tree – use, methods, and valuing. When they reviewed the CIPP model, they categorized it under the use branch.

UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION (UFE)

Patton defines UFE as "a process for making decisions and focusing an evaluation on intended use by intended users" (Patton, 1994, p. 317). In a more recent review of the UFE, Patton (2008) argues that "evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses" (Patton, 2008, p. 37). Patton's utilization-focused evaluation was designed based on two main assumptions: (1) the end goal of evaluation is to inform decision making and (2) evaluation is most likely to be implemented if the evaluator could identify stakeholders who are willing to use the evaluation and have the authority to implement it (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Patton refers to the second assumption as the personal factor. He argues that "the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates" constitute the gist of evaluation (Patton, 2008, p, 66).

Although the nature of UFE might seem like a participatory approach of evaluation since it works closely with stakeholders, Patton acknowledges the fact that many people consider it a decision-oriented approach (Patton, 1994). It is referred to as a decision-based type of evaluation due to its focus on the intended use of evaluation to inform decision making. The argument that Patton brings to the table is that when stakeholders are primarily involved in the evaluation process, they gain a sense of authorship and ownership and therefore they use the results of the evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

UFE starts with identifying the stakeholders who care about the results of the evaluation. This is the first step in UFE and it constitutes the personal factor (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). In identifying those stakeholders, Patton suggests that the evaluator looks mainly at two things: (1) the individual or group's interest in the results of the evaluation and (2) how much power they hold in the program to be evaluated (Eden & Ackerman, 1998 as cited in Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Obviously, the ideal candidate(s) would be someone with high interest in the evaluation results as well as high influence and power in the program. These two qualities must be present to have a successful candidate. Throughout the remaining steps of UFE, the evaluator is instructed to involve the stakeholders in the evaluation process as much as possible.

This involves finding their interest and narrowing down the focus of the evaluation to meet these interests. After all, they are the clients and the evaluator's task is to get them what they need. Moreover, stakeholders are involved in designing the data collection steps and that they are aware of methodology used so that it reflects their values. Finally, stakeholders are highly involved in the last stage of the evaluation. They take active part in interpreting the results and follow them by decisions based on the recommendations that the evaluation provided. This stage of evaluation is crucial to the personal factor as the evaluator maintains a good personal relationship with the stakeholders in order to meet their needs and interests (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

Evaluation is viewed differently by different people, and that led to the existence of many approaches towards evaluation. These approaches differ basically by how they define the purpose of evaluation. Among the many different approaches, decision-oriented approach to evaluation cares mostly about how evaluation can be used to inform decision making. Within this form of evaluation, there has been some pioneer evaluators and some outstanding models that existed for a while and proved to be successful, although not perfect. Stufflebeam's CIPP model and Patton's UFE approaches were discussed briefly in this paper referring to them as paragons in the field of evaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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