



# Application of an organizational evaluation capacity self-assessment instrument to different organizations: Similarities and lessons learned



Isabelle Bourgeois<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jane Whynot<sup>b</sup>, Étienne Thériault<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> École nationale d'administration publique, University of Québec, 283 boulevard Alexandre-Taché, Gatineau, QC, Canada J8X 3W7

<sup>b</sup> Whynot & Associates Evaluation and Research Consulting, 824 Dickens Avenue, Ottawa, ON, Canada

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 14 October 2014  
Received in revised form 19 January 2015  
Accepted 31 January 2015  
Available online 9 February 2015

### Keywords:

Evaluation capacity building  
Organizational evaluation capacity  
Evaluation utilization  
Government  
Non-profit

## ABSTRACT

Organizational evaluation capacity (EC) has received significant attention in the evaluation research literature in the past decade. Much of the focus has been on defining organizational evaluation capacity, which can be thought of as the competencies and structures required to conduct high-quality evaluation studies (capacity to do), as well as the organization's ability to integrate evaluation findings into its decision-making processes (capacity to use). This paper seeks to contribute to this growing body of knowledge through a multiple case study of EC across three different organizations (e.g., non-profit, provincial government and federal government, herein named sectors); the novelty of this particular study is that each case study is based on the use of a common measurement tool developed by Bourgeois, Toews, Whynot and Lamarche (2013). The cross-case analysis presented in the paper reveals that evaluation capacity tends to be higher, both in terms of capacity to do and capacity to use, in organizations that have developed systematic mechanisms to institute an evaluation culture within their walls. Interestingly, however, we also found that capacity to use does not first require capacity to do, as evidenced in the non-profit organization under study.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is typically defined as “a context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality program evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices within and/or between one or more organizations/programs/sites” (Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002, p. 8). For more than a decade, evaluation practitioners and researchers alike have explored how organizations conduct quality evaluations and use them towards organizational improvement. Initially, the emerging field of ECB research was characterized by reflective case narratives of capacity building efforts in specific organizations, typically written from the perspective of the evaluator leading these efforts. These accounts enabled us to better define evaluation capacity, identify some of the strategies that support ECB, and learn from early attempts at developing organizational capacity to do and to use evaluation (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014). Over time, empirical research was developed to explore evaluation capacity (EC) in a more systematic fashion; these efforts gave rise to

various models and instruments (e.g., Labin et al., 2012; Preskill & Boyle, 2008) meant to identify and measure the dimensions of evaluation capacity in a particular subset of organizations. These research efforts continue to this day and provide interesting paths worthy of exploration. Generally, however, studies aiming to measure organizational evaluation capacity tend to focus on a particular type of organization (for example, Danish municipal government organizations found in Nielsen, Lemire, & Skov, 2011). Very little work thus far has focused on measuring evaluation capacity in different organizations, in order to identify some of the transferable lessons that can be applied in various organizational contexts. This paper provides a summary of an early attempt to measure EC in three different organizations by using a common, empirically-derived measurement instrument. The organizational evaluation capacity self-assessment instrument (herein referred to as the Instrument), developed by Bourgeois et al. (2013) was used to measure EC in a non-profit organization, a Canadian provincial government department, and two Canadian federal government agencies. A key challenge faced in this study was the applicability of such an instrument across varying organizational contexts; the adaptation made to the Instrument in order to render it useable for the purposes of this study are described below.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 819 771 6095x2231.

E-mail addresses: [isabelle.bourgeois@enap.ca](mailto:isabelle.bourgeois@enap.ca) (I. Bourgeois), [jwhynt@magma.ca](mailto:jwhynt@magma.ca) (J. Whynot), [etienne.theriault@gmail.com](mailto:etienne.theriault@gmail.com) (É. Thériault).

## Literature review

The literature on ECB is composed of different types of studies, each seeking to define, explore, and validate key concepts associated with organizational evaluation capacity building. Case narratives, or descriptions of specific ECB interventions, remain highly popular amongst academics and practitioners alike. This type of publication, as mentioned previously, made up most of the early literature on ECB; although other types have emerged since, recent publications continue to feature such studies. Case narratives generally describe an ECB intervention occurring in a specific organizational context and highlight challenges to implementation and lessons learned; because these feature particular organizations, they can be found in various sectors. For example, recent papers published by [Lawrenz, Thomas, Huffman, and Clarkson \(2008\)](#) and [Haeffele, Hood, and Feldman \(2011\)](#) describe evaluation capacity efforts in schools, while other papers focus on government organizations (for example, see discussions of ECB in the Canadian federal government by [Bourgeois and Cousins \(2008\)](#) and [Bourgeois, Hart, Townsend and Gagné \(2011\)](#)); an example of ECB in the area of rural development in Spain by [Díaz-Puente, Yagüe, & Afonso, 2008](#); and an ECB initiative involving 100 mental health projects in Australia by [Naccarella et al., 2007](#)). Finally, other papers published in the last few years focus on ECB efforts in the non-profit sector, such as interactive evaluation training in child and youth mental health organizations ([Sundar, Kasprzak, Halsall, & Woltman, 2010](#)), a catalyst-for-change approach to evaluation training ([García-Iriarte, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, & Luna, 2011](#)), and ECB development in a community health centre in Australia ([Bamberg, Perlesz, McKenzie, & Read, 2010](#)).

Although much can be gleaned from these rich accounts of ECB experiences, other studies have focused on modelling evaluation capacity and ECB as a means to create a common understanding of the finite dimensions and aspects of organizational evaluation capacity. Once again, these studies are situated within a particular organization or set of organizations. For example, as identified above, [Nielsen et al. \(2011\)](#) have developed a model and measurement tool used to map evaluation capacity in Danish public sector organizations. Along the same lines, [Bourgeois and Cousins \(2013\)](#) and [Bourgeois et al. \(2013\)](#) have developed a framework of evaluation capacity as well as a measurement tool meant for Canadian federal government departments. In the non-profit sector, [Taylor-Ritzler, Suarez-Balcazar, Garcia-Iriarte, Henry, and Balcazar \(2013\)](#) have developed an instrument designed to assess individual evaluation capacity among staff of non-profit organizations.

In all of these cases, measurement activities are limited to a particular organization or sector. None of these instruments or models has been used across different types of organizations. Part of the difficulty in using such models in different organizations lies in the applicability of certain dimensions from one organizational type or sector to another. For example, non-profit organizations may have particular characteristics (i.e., lack of full-time evaluation staff) that do not transfer to public sector organizations. However, a few studies exploring evaluation capacity in different types of organizations have been conducted and suggest that with properly adapted frameworks and tools, this is possible. In their comparative study of evaluation capacity in the voluntary and public sectors, [Cousins, Goh, Elliott, Aubry, and Gilbert \(2014\)](#) report on the findings of a pan-Canadian survey of evaluators working in organizations (internal evaluators) or organization members with evaluation responsibility; for instance, these authors report that government evaluators had higher self-reported levels of evaluation knowledge than evaluators working in the voluntary sector; however, voluntary sector evaluators rated their organizations more favourably in terms of broader,

organization-wide supports for evaluation than their government counterparts. The analysis reveals interesting differences in capacity between sectors. In a different type of comparison, [Cousins and Bourgeois \(2014\)](#) summarize the findings of a multiple case study of organizational evaluation capacity. The multiple case study was based on a common framework of evaluation capacity and features eight different organizations across the educational, government and non-profit sectors. A cross-case analysis provides a number of transferable lessons in ECB across sectors. In both of these studies, however, no empirically-derived measurement tool was used to assess ECB, as none had been developed when these two studies were originally conducted<sup>1</sup>.

In light of the success of these early efforts at studying EC in different types of organizations (through the use of a survey and a multiple case study), it seems as though a study focusing on the measurement of EC in different types of organizations, based on a single measurement instrument, is a logical next step. The research objectives that drove the study reported here are therefore to:

- apply the organizational evaluation capacity self-assessment instrument to varying organizational contexts;
- identify the organizational characteristics that are specific to each organizational type and that may have an impact on evaluation capacity.

The research objectives were achieved by using a combination of key informant interviews and the organizational evaluation capacity self-assessment instrument. The following section describes each of the participating organizations, as well as the methods used in more detail.

## Research methods

### Participants

This study features a multiple case study founded upon the application of the organizational evaluation capacity self-assessment instrument. Four organizations were recruited to participate, based on earlier contacts with the research team as well as particular organizational characteristics. The participating organizations (a non-profit organization, a provincial government department, and two linked federal government agencies) are described in detail in the following sections. In all cases, the individual responsible for evaluation within the organization served as the main contact point for the research team.

### Case A: Not-for-profit organization (NFP)

The not-for-profit organization that was chosen for the multiple case study is a regional organization working in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development, located in the province of Quebec. The organization was created in 1990 and, since then, has developed strong linkages with other environmental NFPs, various municipal governments, the provincial government, and also acts as a regional leader in environment and sustainability. Its mission is to promote the environmental preservation and conservation of natural resources in line with the principles of sustainable development. The broad mandate of the organization supports a wide range of activities, such as managing environmental projects, providing advice and services related to waste management and recycling, delivering outreach workshops on environmental issues, and leading public consultation processes. Its stakeholders include community organizations, businesses, individuals and local governments interested in

<sup>1</sup> Although the [Cousins and Bourgeois \(2014\)](#) case studies were published recently, the field work was conducted in 2007–2008, at a time where no ECB measurement instruments had yet been published.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/319408>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/319408>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)