Evaluation in Organizations: Book Review

EHRD 618: Evaluation in Organizations

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Introduction

The field of evaluation has come a long way since it was first recognized as a profession in the 1970s. Its importance and relevance across fields has made it a key topic within organizations today; thus the field continues to grow and evolve into a “well respected and valued enterprise” (Russ-eft & Preskill, 2009, p.v). However, in order to continue expanding and gaining worldwide recognition, it is important for researchers to continue contributing to the field. It is the scholarly work and contributions of these individuals that help solidify the concept of evaluation into the well-developed profession it has become today.

Purpose of the Book

Russ-eft and Preskill (2009) made their contributions to the field by publishing their book *Evaluation in Organizations*; which seeks to “demystify and clarify what evaluation is and isn’t, and explain how evaluation can be conducted in ways that provide useful information within any organizational context” (p.1). Russ-eft and Preskill published an earlier version of this book in 2001, but with the rapid changes in the field they felt the need to publish a version that contained more current issues and updated information. Therefore, the main purpose of this book is to explain new theories and approaches to evaluation and to increase organizational interest in building evaluation capacity.

Methodology

The authors of the book begin with a chapter dedicated to explaining evaluation. Russ-eft and Preskill (2009) suggest there is more to evaluation than most people think and know. While performance reviews, audits, and statistics commonly come to mind when one thinks of evaluation, these are only a few components. The field evaluation is much more intricate and complex to be limited to such minimal aspects. Therefore, Russ-eft and Preskill (2009) discuss
the meaning and implications of evaluation, what can be evaluated, why it is important to evaluate, and the different kinds of evaluations that exist. They also delve into the evolution of evaluation as a profession in order to help readers understand the background and history of the field. Their overall message in the first segments of their book is that evaluation is a process for enhancing knowledge and decision making, it differs significantly from research, and though the profession is fairly new, the concept of evaluation has been around for “millennia” (p.69).

In the later sections of the book Russ-eft and Preskill get more specific with their content. They reveal how evaluation is deeply embedded in politics, discuss the importance of remaining ethical in the evaluation process, and explain how to choose evaluation designs and data collection methods. One other key learning point from this book is that conducting competent evaluations across cultures has become challenging in an increasingly global society. The fact that organizations and corporations around the world have established global networks has heavily impacted the field of evaluation. Collins and Hopson (2007) suggest that the topic of cross-cultural evaluation competence has been the subject of much discussion and writing in the evaluation profession over the recent years. This global aspect of evaluation has caused program evaluators to consider developing policies and ethical standards that are suitable and widely accepted across different countries.

The last segments of the book focused more on the statistical and analytical aspects of program evaluation. Russ-eft and Preskill (2009) discuss the importance of conducting valid, reliable, and overall effective evaluations. The authors discuss sampling, information analysis, and further explain the key differences between evaluation and research. After explaining the “what” and “why”, the last sections of the book focused on explaining the “how”, by helping readers understand the proper protocol and procedures for conducting sound evaluations.
Conclusions / Strength of Book

This book is replenished with valuable information and resources. One of the greatest strengths of this book is its applicability to evaluation in the 21st century. The topics on cross-cultural evaluation and increasing the capabilities of organizations to conduct their own internal evaluations are essential contributions to the growth and development of this profession. Another major strength of this book is its use of details and examples. Many of the chapters contain charts, figures, tables, and appendixes that were helpful in further making sense of the information provided in the text. The book also does an excellent job of shedding light on the negative aspects of evaluations, such as its heavy involvement with politics. Such discussions are helpful because they encourage readers to keep these kinds of things in mind when conducting evaluations to help reduce the influence of politics in the evaluation process.

Limitations of Book

The title of this book is deceiving because it leads readers to believe that it will discuss a variety of evaluations used within organizations. Nonetheless, it limits its discussions to program evaluation. Other forms of evaluation, such as employee performance evaluations, are not discussed. This book could have been more useful if it covered other kinds of evaluations or if its title was more indicative of what it really covers.

Usefulness of Exercise

I have read a lot of material for this course in the last four weeks, and this assignment helped me reflect on the main learning insights that I gained. It probed me to consider what I took away from the book and how I can apply it in the near future. Lastly, it motivated me to look further into other types of evaluation and how they compare to program evaluation.
References
