

EVALUATION USE AND INFLUENCE – A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews research on the use of evaluation and evaluation influence. The literature review located 36 publications that met minimum standards. It examines different definitions of evaluation use and influence provided by different evaluation researchers and theorists and offers a taxonomy of use and influence. Evaluation influence as a next generation term is proposed as an alternative to the concept of evaluation use due to its limitations in meaning, coverage, and mechanisms. In addition, the paper describes the evolution of the evaluation influence construct as well as the theory of evaluation influence. The review of this paper offers the theoretical framework for research related to evaluation use and influence.

Keywords: *evaluation influence, evaluation use, literature review, research on evaluation, theory of evaluation influence*

1. Introduction

The past 50 years have seen advances in the field of evaluation. The primary goal of evaluation is social betterment (Mark and Henry, 2004). One of the purposes of evaluation is to fulfil the objective of accountability, especially in the public sector. The use of evaluation has been of interest to evaluators and funders of evaluation work since the beginnings of the evaluation profession (Preskill and Torres, 2000). Criticism from the United States congressional members in the late 1960s regarding the lack of use of evaluation results in decision making stimulated evaluation researchers to seek a better understanding of the full range of evaluation use (Preskill and Torres, 2000). Since the beginning of 2000s, scholars have proposed to use the term “evaluation influence” instead of “evaluation use” to broaden the scope of what is to be understood as evaluation use (Kirkhart, 2000; Henry and Mark, 2003; Mark and Henry, 2004). How evaluations are used and the influence of

evaluation on social development can affect the way the public sector spend their resources. This paper provides a review of the literature related to evaluation use and influence.

This paper is structured as follows. The second section presents the method used for the literature review. Different scholars have proposed different definitions on evaluation use and influence, and the third section discusses these different definitions. The fourth section explores different types of use and influence. The fifth section highlights the evolution of evaluation influence and presents the theory of evaluation influence that offers a framework for the study of evaluation influence. The paper concludes with some remarks.

2. Method for the review

Searches of articles and book chapters were conducted for the terms “evaluation use”, “evaluation utilisation”, “use of performance information” and “evaluation influence” mainly in *ISI Web of Science*. The findings

were narrowed down to evaluation-related and performance information related journals, including American Journal of Evaluation, Evaluation, Evaluation Review, Evaluation Practice, Evaluation and Programme Planning, New Direction for Evaluation, Public Administration Review, Public Performance and Management Review, and Public Administration.

The searches returned over 135 journal articles, and book chapters. After scanning publication titles and abstracts, irrelevant publications were removed. A closer review was conducted to see whether the publications met either of these criteria: (1) Focus on programme or policy evaluation, (2) Empirical research study, (3) Published journal article, or book, and (4) Inclusion of “evaluation utilisation”, “evaluation use”, “evaluation influence”, or “use of performance information” as at least one of the variables under study.

The process continued with an abstract review, identifying 36 publications that were applicable for a full-text review, applying the above-mentioned four criteria. This process produced a set of articles which formed a basis for the analysis. A lot of the empirical research studies identified for the review were conducted in education, health and social services. Empirical studies which specifically focus on evaluation influence are available but limited in number.

3. Definition Of Evaluation Use And Influence

Extensive research on evaluation use has been carried out since the 1970s, whereas research on the topic of evaluation influence is more recent and dates back to the 2000s. Numerous scholars have defined evaluation use and influence. According to Rich (in Weiss, 1977: 200) the term “use” refers to “information entering into the policy making process.” If use is exercised, there is a potential of influencing a decision; and if information is used, it is influencing policy decisions (Rich in Weiss, 1977). Agawala-Rogers (1977: 328) defines utilisation as “the process by which research results are produced to answer practitioner needs, and

communicated to practitioners for their use.” Similarly, Caplan (in Weiss, 1977: 353) defines utilisation as “efforts on the part of the decision maker to put policy-relevant social science information into use.” The above definitions do not put an emphasis on *change* as a requisite of evaluation use but rather focus on the *process*. This is in contrast with a number of other authors who emphasize change.

In their review of 65 empirical studies in education, mental health, and social services, Cousins and Leithwood (1986) indicate that there are two conventional definitions of evaluation use or utilisation, including: (1) use as support for discrete decisions, and (2) use as education or enlightenment for decision makers (e.g. influencing perceptions of current and ideal programme structure). They pointed out that evaluation use was described in an even more basic manner to comprise psychological processing of the evaluation results without necessarily informing decisions, or changing thinking or actions (Cousins and Leithwood, 1986).

Johnson et al. (2009: 378), in their review of 41 empirical studies of evaluation use from 1986 to 2009 using Cousins and Leithwood’s 1986 framework, define evaluation use or utilisation “as the application of evaluation processes, products, or findings to produce an effect.”

King and Pechman (in Patton, 1997: 82) define use as “intentional and serious consideration of evaluation information by an individual with the potential to act on it.” In his comment upon King and Pechman’s definition of use, Patton (1997: 82) highlights that evaluation is only one input among many in the “taking of an action or making a decision.” Patton further assures that it is reasonable to consider that an evaluation has been used if it has been “seriously considered and the findings are genuinely taken into account” (Patton, 1997: 82). Such a definition makes sense when evaluators are “trying to study use after the fact, and sort out relative influences” (Patton, 1997: 82).

Since the beginning of the 2000s, some scholars have attempted to expand the concept

of evaluation use to a broader construct called “evaluation influence” (Henry and Mark, 2003; Kirkhart, 2000; Mark and Henry, 2004). According to Alkin (in Mathison 2005: 436) evaluation influence refers to the “impact on an external programme, which may or may not be related to the programme being evaluated or to the impact of the evaluation at some future time.” Mark (2011: 113) contends that “evaluation influence explicitly includes both changes that take place at the location and general time frame of the evaluation and changes that take place elsewhere and later.”

Kirkhart (2000: 7) thus characterises *evaluation influence* as “intangible or indirect” unlike *evaluation use* which he considers to be more “tangible and direct.” Alkin and Taut (2003: 9) point out that while the likelihood of evaluator’s actions increasing evaluation use is great, the likelihood of evaluators’ actions increasing influence is not, given the fact that influence is by definition “unintended”, and “outside the domain of the evaluator to affect such possible evaluation influences.” Furthermore, distinction is made between evaluation use and evaluation influence in terms of awareness. That is to say, the “awareness of evaluation’s intended and unintended impacts of use”, as opposed to the “unawareness and unintentionality of evaluation’s influence” (Alkin and Taut, 2003: 10).

Mark (2011: 111) adds to the distinction between “use” and “influence” that use is more restricted to “local effects of evaluation”, and that it implies “a kind of intentionality and awareness”, but that evaluation can have “important consequences that are removed from the location of the evaluation” for which he prefers the notion of “influence.”

From the above review, it can be summarised that there are different perspectives in defining evaluation use and influence. Early definitions of use were narrow and more process oriented. Later definitions of use were broader and identified change as a core aspect in the definition. The term “influence” has been proposed as a broader alternative to use.

4. A Taxonomy Of Use And Influence

One of the fundamental themes of research on utilisation in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the exploration and conceptualisation of types of use (Preskill, 1991). Researchers have identified three broad types of use that can be distinguished by their purposes: instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive (Leviton and Hughes, 1981). Over time, other types of use were identified as process use and imposed use (Patton, 1997; Preskill et al., 2003; Weiss et al., 2005).

Instrumental use dominates studies on evaluation use (Alkin et al., 1979). In this manner, evaluation results are expected to “affect decision making or problem solving purposes” (Rich in Weiss, 1977: 200). Instrumental use represents the traditional or “mainstream” type of use (Preskill, 1991: 5). This type of use suggests that the evaluation findings are put into “direct, concrete, and observable use” (Preskill, 1991: 5).

Conceptual use, or enlightenment, as Weiss (1977) termed it, refers to “influencing a policymaker’s thinking about an issue without putting information to any specific, documentable use” (Rich in Weiss, 1977: 200). Rossi et al. (2004: 411) put conceptual use as “the use of evaluations to influence thinking about issues in a general way.” In this definition, evaluation results or findings are not expected to directly result in any action or decision. According to Mark (2011: 108) conceptual use refers to “changed or new understandings or new ways of thinking.” In conceptual use, information does not lead to any immediate action but influences the user’s thinking over time (Leviton and Hughes, 1981; Preskill, 1991). Clearly, conceptual use of evaluation results for general enlightenment demand much less of the users than instrumental use.

In addition, scholars have proposed “persuasive use” as another type of evaluation use (Leviton and Hughes, 1981). It involves “drawing on evaluation evidence in an attempt to convince others to support a political position or to defend such a position in attack” (Leviton and Hughes, 1981: 528), or refers to “enlisting of evaluations results in efforts

either to support or to refute political positions” (Rossi et al., 2004: 411). In this manner, evaluation results can be used to influence or convince others in terms of providing evidence. Weiss (in Leviton and Hughes, 1981: 530) argues that “using research to delay decisions, to allow policy makers to appear concerned about a problem, or to jockey a political position are not considered instances of use.” In addition to instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive uses discussed above, process use has been proposed as an alternative type of evaluation use (Greene, 1988; Patton, 1997; Preskill et al., 2003). Patton (1997: 90) refers to process use as “individual changes in thinking and behaviour, and programme or organisational changes in procedures and cultures, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of learning that occurs during the evaluation process.” The author suggests four primary process uses: (1) enhancing shared understandings, (2) supporting and reinforcing programme interventions, (3) increasing engagement, self-determination, and ownership, and (4) programme or organisational development (Patton, 1997: 91). By proposing these, the author means that: firstly, the evaluation helps clarifying expected outcomes, and the ways in which the efforts can be made towards accomplishing the expected outcomes. Secondly, the evaluation can be integrated into programme processes to reinforce and enhance programme interventions. Thirdly, by participating in and exposing the evaluation process, participants have the opportunities to engage, and exercise their self-determination and ownership of evaluation results. Finally, the evaluation process helps to stimulate changes in organisations by engaging participants in real settings. In this way, it helps them to think empirically, and make sensible decisions (Patton, 1997).

In addition to instrumental, conceptual, persuasive, and process use, Weiss et al. (2005: 16) also use the notion of “imposed use” to refer to a “type of use that comes about because of pressure from the outside.” Imposed use can be considered another kind of

instrumental use while it can also be understood as “incentives for using evaluation results” (Weiss, 2005: 26). Mark (2011: 110) states that imposed use occurs when “people are mandated to use the results of evaluation, or at least believe they are mandated.”

The literature on evaluation use shows that the concept has evolved considerably (Preskill and Torres, 2000), while the literature on evaluation influence is still limited but growing.

Mark and Henry (2004) propose a theory of influence, characterising a change mechanism of evaluation influence that is directly or indirectly affected and mediated by evaluation inputs, evaluation activities, environment, and evaluation outputs to achieve social betterment.

Mark and Henry (2004) identify a change mechanism of influence that can operate at a different level of analysis, and specify different kinds of consequences that evaluation can have. Mark and Henry (2004) have labelled these kinds of consequences to be cognitive/affective and behavioural consequences. These labels correspond to the most discussed forms of use, that is, conceptual use and instrumental use. Other types of consequences include general influence processes, and motivational processes (Mark and Henry, 2004). General influence processes include elaboration, salience, justification, policy consideration, policy change, diffusion, etc., while motivational processes include things such as personal goals and aspirations, social reward, and structural incentives (Mark and Henry, 2004). These types of consequences or processes may take place at individual, interpersonal, and collective levels (Mark and Henry, 2004). More specifically, Mark and Henry (2004) offer a schematic theory of evaluation influence. Table 1 presents a complete set of influence mechanisms (also called framework of mechanisms) categorised in four types of process or outcome (general influence, cognitive and affective, motivational, and behavioural types), and three levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, and collective levels) (Mark and Henry, 2004).

These influence processes are expected to mediate the effects of evaluation activities on evaluation outcomes (Mark and Henry, 2004).

Table 1. A model of alternative mechanisms that may mediate evaluation influence

Type of Process/Outcome	Level of analysis		
	Individual	Interpersonal	Collective
General influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaboration • Heuristics • Priming • Skill acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification • Persuasion • Change agent • Minority-opinion influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ritualism • Legislative hearings • Coalition formation • Drafting legislation • Standard setting • Policy consideration
Cognitive and affective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salience • Opinion/attitude valence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local descriptive norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda setting • Policy-oriented learning
Motivational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal goals and aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injunctive norms • Social reward • Exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural incentives • Market forces
Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New skill performance • Individual change in practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative change in practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme continuation, cessation, or change • Policy change • Diffusion

Source: Mark and Henry (2004: 41)

Mark and Henry (2004: 43) view each of the entries in Table 1 as an “outcome of an evaluation; each can also be an underlying mechanism, leading in turn to some other outcome.” In other words, the entries or elements in Table 1 can play the dual roles of an outcome of evaluation and a mechanism that stimulates other outcomes and are referred to as “processes” (Mark and Henry, 2004: 43). For example, to know that a reader elaborated on the findings of a public service delivery programme evaluation does not necessarily tell you if any significant and important change occurred (Mark and Henry, 2004). General influence processes are of more interest as they may (or may not) help stimulate the

outcomes of greater interest, that is, changes in beliefs, motivations and actions (Mark and Henry, 2004).

In addition, Mark (2006) proposed and tentatively labelled “relational consequences” as an additional category of evaluation consequences or processes to the Mark and Henry (2004) framework (Mark in Alkin, 2013). According to Mark (in Alkin, 2013: 151), the *relational consequences* comprise evaluators’ efforts to “modify not behaviour or attitude but aspects of ongoing relationships, structures, and organisational processes.” For example, it contains potential consequences such as individuals’ self-perception of their empowerment (Fetterman, 1996), the creation

of a democratic forum for deliberation (House and Howe, 1999), and the facilitation of the learning organisation (Preskill and Torres, 1998).

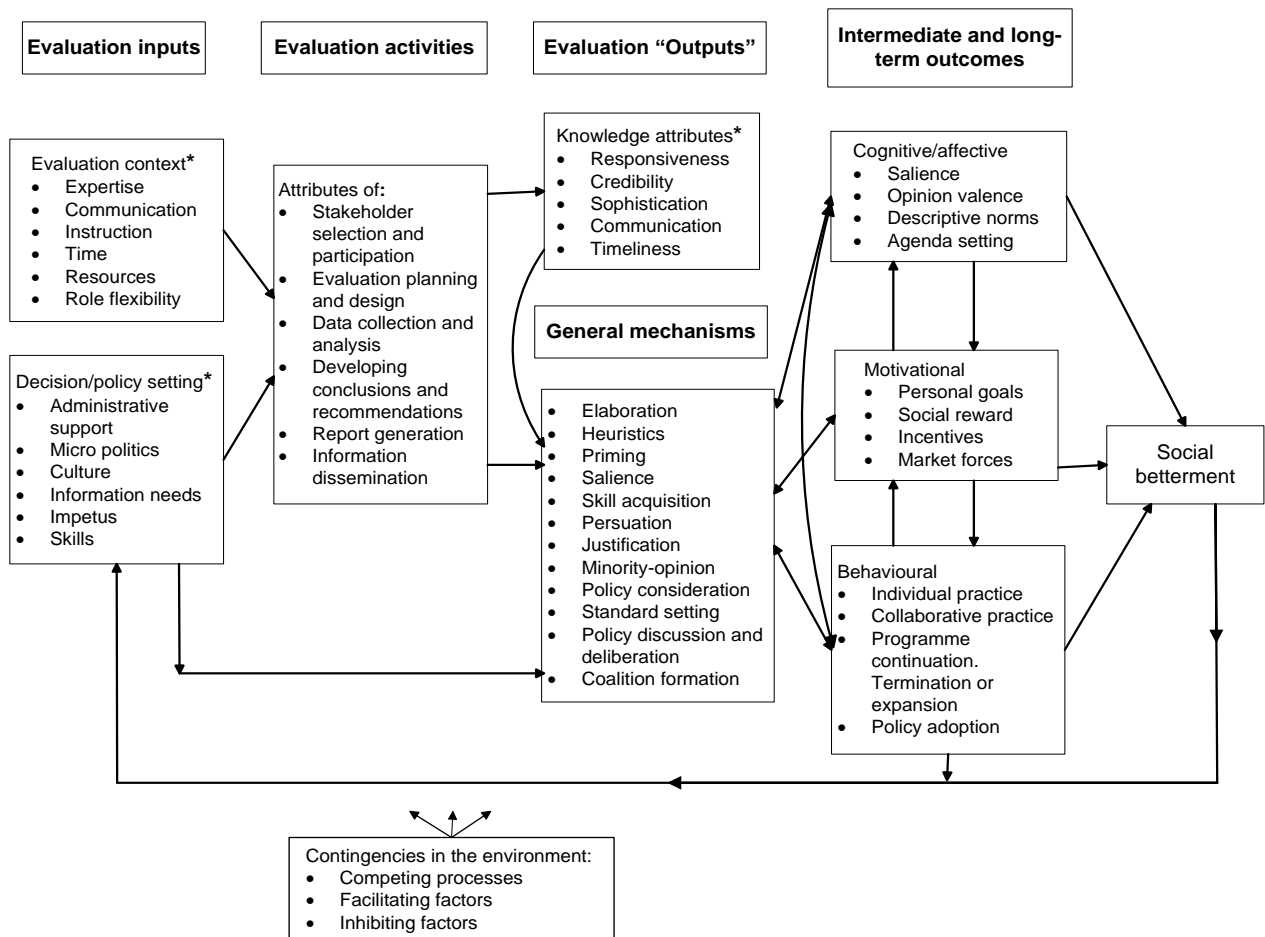
In sum, a central taxonomy of evaluation use includes instrumental use, conceptual use, persuasive use, process use, and imposed use. It seems there is no universal definition on types of use. Instrumental use is among the first to be identified and it dominates evaluation literature. Conceptual use refers to changed or new ways of thinking. Persuasive use is the third type which involves interpersonal influence, persuading or convincing others to go along with implications of evaluation. The taxonomy of evaluation use further identifies process use and imposed use. Process use is not considered a distinct type of use, it is rather a different source of use, and can take place at different points in time. Imposed use occurs when people are mandated to use the results of evaluation. As regards evaluation influence, it explicitly includes both changes that take place at the location and within the general time frame of the evaluation as well as changes that take place elsewhere and later. Relational consequence is proposed as an additional type of evaluation influence. These types of evaluation influence or process may take place at individual, interpersonal, and collective levels.

5. Evolution of evaluation influence and theory of evaluation influence

The literature on evaluation use has been considerable, and stable progress has been made to improve our understanding of evaluation use (Johnson, 1998). The evolution of evaluation use has been signified by an “increasing recognition of its multiple attributes” (Kirkhart 2000: 5). However, existing conceptualisations of use still have significant gaps and shortcomings, especially insufficient attention has been given to change processes and provisional outcomes (Henry and Mark, 2003). Describing the changes that occur as a result of an evaluation as

“evaluation use” has limitations, and they are better described and understood if referred to as “evaluation influence” (Henry and Mark, 2003; Kirkhart, 2000; Weiss et al., 2005).

Henry and Mark (2003) have supported Kirkhart’s idea regarding the needs to reconceptualise evaluation use and the conception of influence. Their agenda is to move beyond use and build from Kirkhart’s model a theory of evaluation influence that includes multiple levels, pathways and mechanisms in an attempt to explain influence (Mark and Henry, 2004). Compared with evaluation use, empirical studies of evaluation influence are still limited and relatively little is known about how evaluation influence may impact on decision makers’ attitudes and actions (Mark and Henry, 2004). Concretely, Mark and Henry (2004) have proposed a preliminary theory of evaluation influence. This theory describes that evaluation influence is affected by various factors either directly or indirectly (Mark and Henry, 2004). These factors include evaluation inputs (including evaluation context and decision/policy setting), evaluation activities (including stakeholder selection and participation, evaluation planning and design, data collection and analysis, developing conclusions and recommendations, report generation, and information dissemination), evaluation knowledge (including responsiveness, credibility, sophistication, communication, and timeliness), and contingencies in the environment (competing processes, facilitating factors, and inhibiting conditions (Mark and Henry, 2004). As shown in Table 1 in section 4 above, Mark and Henry (2004: 43) also argue that “each of the evaluation process/outcome can be an *outcome* of evaluation, and can also be an *underlying mechanism*, leading to some other outcome.” Thus, each individual process can be a “short-term, intermediate or long term evaluation outcome in the pathways to social betterment” (Mark and Henry, 2004: 43). Figure 2 presents the schematic theory of evaluation influence.



Note: * Selected elements from Cousins (2003). Categories in bold taken from Table 1.

Figure 1. Schematic theory of evaluation influence

Source: Mark and Henry (2004: 46).

The proposed theory of evaluation influence by Mark and Henry (2004) was preliminarily developed. There have been studies using this theory with an attempt to establish empirical basis and evidence for the practice of evaluation influence. These studies include those by Weiss et al. (2005), Christie (2007), and Gildemyn (2014). The first two studies reported that all three types of evaluation information (including large-scale evaluation study data, case study evaluation data, and anecdotes) “influence decision makers’ decisions” (Christie, 2007: 22), and “evaluation evidence travelled to influence decisions about D.A.R.E¹” (Weiss et al., 2005: 27). These two studies were both conducted in the US educational sector. Gildemyn’s study

(2014) is about influence of monitoring and evaluation by civil society organisations in the health sector in Ghana.

Mark and Henry (2004) have also realised that there are still some limitations in their general framework (as presented in Table 1, Section 4). The noteworthy limitations include (1) the general framework is still not a final product and could be tailored to a specific context, (2) various complexities that impinge on evaluation influence processes have not been adequately focused although these complexities are partly represented by the “Decision/policy setting” box in Figure 2 (Mark and Henry, 2004: 50). With regard to the first limitation, Mark and Henry indicate that future conceptual frameworks and empirical work may lead to modifications of this framework (Mark and Henry, 2004). As

¹ D.A.R.E stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education programme.

far as the second limitation is concerned, they indicate that the complexities are partly represented by the “Contingencies” box in Figure 1, and all change processes are contingent, i.e. they will operate in some circumstances and not others (Mark and Henry, 2004). They further state that by acknowledging such contingencies, evaluators may be more modest with respect to their aspirations for evaluation as a source of influence that may contribute to social betterment (Mark and Henry, 2004).

6. Concluding Remarks

The literature review of evaluation use and influence offers a theoretical framework for studies related to evaluation use and

influence. It presents the definitions of evaluation use and influence, types of use and influence, and theory of evaluation influence. Scholars have extensively discussed about the definitions and types of evaluation use. Evaluation influence as a next generation term is proposed as an alternative to the concept of evaluation use due to its limitations in meaning, coverage, and mechanisms. This has led to a new area for debate between evaluation use and evaluation influence. Finally, conducting a study on evaluation use and influence may be a challenge as effects of evaluation use and influence can appear in various contexts, timing, and forms.

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