

Book Reviews

Rodriguez-Campos, L. (2005). *Collaborative evaluations: A step-by-step model for the evaluator*. Tamarac, FL: Lumina Press.

Reviewed by Wes Martz

Successfully conducting an evaluation requires serious and systematic attention to four distinct factors: the needs, motivations, expectations, and engagement of key stakeholders. By addressing these elements throughout the evaluation project, support for evaluation activities is strengthened, and the potential for utilization of the evaluation findings is enhanced. In the book, *Collaborative Evaluations: A Step-by-Step Model for the Evaluator*, Rodriguez-Campos skillfully brings together leading thinking from project management, organizational psychology, and other disciplines with evaluation-specific methodology to stimulate thinking and present a model for collaborative evaluation that sets the stage for conducting a successful evaluation.

The model for collaborative evaluations (MCE) developed by Rodriguez-Campos is based on a wide range of collaborative efforts the author has conducted in the private sector, non-profit organizations, and institutions of higher education. The model incorporates real-world experiences with aspects of several approaches to evaluation and provides a step-by-step model for planning and conducting a collaborative evaluation. In addition, Rodriguez-Campos illustrates the value of utilizing project management best practices as an integral component of the collaborative evaluation used to inform the collaboration members and to aid in planning and management of the evaluation.

The MCE is a comprehensive framework that revolves around six major components specific to conducting a collaborative evaluation. The components of the model are: (1) identify the situation, (2) clarify the expectations, (3) establish a shared commitment, (4) ensure open communication, (5) encourage best practices, and (6) follow specific guidelines. As suggested in the foreword written by former American Evaluation Association (AEA) president James Sanders, "One of the great strengths of this book, in addition to Dr. Rodriguez-Campos' writing style, is the attention to detail given to aspects of evaluation that many evaluators give very little care or attention" (2005, p. iii). Indeed, the model includes no less than 28 factors and 10 steps addressing these factors, providing the reader with explicit detail and clear direction on how to conduct a collaborative evaluation.

Although Rodriguez-Campos suggests that using each of the model components individually can provide insight to the evaluator, she emphasizes the interactive use of the model's elements on a "rotating and remixing basis" to carry out a comprehensive collaborative evaluation. This interactive approach incorporates continuous feedback and is intended to recognize the effect that changes in one part of the subsystem can have on the total system.

The introduction to the book begins with a brief overview of evaluation-specific terms and presents the background and context of the model. The first component in the MCE begins with a detailed explanation of how to identify the situation. This includes identifying stakeholders and their specific needs, understanding the elements of the logic model of the evaluand, defining the scope of the evaluation, and identifying the critical evaluation activities. Rodriguez-Campos also suggests the use of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, commonly used in business strategy and planning activities, to better understand the evaluand's strengths and weaknesses and the potential constraints and opportunities that may impact the evaluand or the collaborative evaluation process.

After addressing the issue of identifying and clarifying the evaluation questions, Rodriguez-Campos introduces several project management-specific concepts into the MCE to aid with determining subsequent actions and assigning responsibility to those involved in the collaborative evaluation. Concepts such as work breakdown structure (WBS), responsibility assignment matrix (RAM), and scheduling techniques using Gantt and milestone charts and network diagramming are recommended for use with developing the evaluation plan. This component of the model also considers issues related to the applicability of collaborative evaluations to ensure a collaborative approach is appropriate given the current situation.

The second component of the MCE establishes guidelines for determining the criteria and the standards to be used to determine the merit, worth, or significance of the evaluand. By first clarifying the expectations and the roles of the evaluator and the collaboration members, the expectation is that the project gains clarity and improves the potential for a successful collaborative evaluation. Within this section of the book, Rodriguez-Campos introduces a number of topics related to organizational psychology in an effort to highlight the importance of interpersonal factors inherent in a collaborative evaluation. The final pages of this chapter include brief references to data collection techniques and reporting, and a detailed review of budgeting and its importance to clarifying expectations.

The third and fourth components of the MCE tackle the unique behavioral elements found when collaborating. These sections of the book address group behavior and communication strategies with an emphasis on engaging collaboration members, listening, and providing feedback. Issues related to conflict resolution, decision-making, reward systems, positive behavior, and change management are covered in detail. These collaboration concepts are carefully integrated with other components of the model reinforcing Rodriguez-Campos' argument that the model is dynamic and intended to be viewed as an interactive model to guide the evaluation.

The fifth component in the model encourages and promotes best practices in an effort to maximize the quality of the evaluation and ensure an effective process. The factors within this section focus not only on external benchmarking, but also include best practices for engaging

collaboration members through appreciation of individual differences, encouraging fairness and sincerity, and teaching by example.

The final component in the MCE presents specific guidelines that serve to strengthen collaborative evaluation processes and outcomes. The guidelines include reference to the AEA's guiding principles for evaluators (American Evaluation Association, 2004), the program, personnel, and student evaluation standards prepared by the Joint Committee for Evaluation Standards (1988, 1994, 2002), and Rodriguez-Campos' 'collaboration guiding principles.' The collaboration guiding principles are based on the author's personal experiences. Its major facets include development, empowerment, involvement, qualification, social support, trust, and understanding. To support and encourage the proper use of the model for collaborative evaluations, a comprehensive checklist is included in the appendix along with a glossary highlighting the key terms associated with the MCE.

A review of Rodriguez-Campos' book was submitted by J. Bradley Cousins (2006) and subsequently published in the September issue of the *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*. To minimize external influence, I did not read the Cousins submission prior to writing this review. However, after reading his comments, I have additional points to include in my review that specifically address the issues raised by Cousins that appear to have influenced his analytic review and led to his criticisms of the text.

The first paragraph of Cousins' review opens with an admission of entering the assignment with a biased opinion about the book: "To be completely honest, my enthusiasm turned to skepticism, even before I had cracked the cover" (Cousins, 2006, p. 113). A preconceived notion is also found with his statement "Up front, I counted no less than 26 testimonials from persons who appear to be practicing evaluators...Having read through them [positive comments] first, I must say, I was a bit dubious starting out" (Cousins, 2006, pp. 115-116). These statements are the literal form of "judging a book by its cover," and raise questions with respect to a complete and fair assessment, impartial reporting, and justified conclusions. According to Stufflebeam (1999), "It is recommended that an evaluation be failed if it scores Poor on standards P1 Service Orientation, A5 Valid Information, A10 Justified Conclusions, or A11 Impartial Reporting" (p. 1).

Cousins succinctly outlined his vast experience and significant contributions to the theory, research, and practice of collaborative evaluation, and then suggested that Rodriguez-Campos' book "did little to persuade" him that the field is ready for a step-by-step model (Cousins, p. 114). This statement suggests that Rodriguez-Campos' mission should have been to change the reviewer's preconceptions of the book, rather than summarize all her years of experience in collaborative evaluation and present them as "an informal reference to perform collaborative evaluations" as she claimed (Rodriguez-Campos, p. 193). These statements from Cousins' review bring in to question the fairness of the reviewer at the outset of the review.

Following his introductory admission of negative bias, Cousins included a number of complimentary statements regarding *Collaborative Evaluations*. For example:

I will say that the book is highly structured and well organized, thorough, systematic and comprehensive with regard to collaborative evaluation processes. I have no doubt that Rodriguez-Campos has a wealth of experience with

collaborative approaches and a very good working knowledge of a variety of domains of inquiry that she brings to bear on the topic (Cousins, 2006, p. 115).

...Rodriguez-Campos does succeed in bringing to bear on the business of collaborative evaluation many interesting principles and contributions from a variety of streams of inquiry that have had variable exposure in the evaluation literature to date. Specifically, while principles of organization behavior are no strangers to evaluation discourse, the explicit integration of wisdom from project management and systems engineering domains have been less frequent and obvious, at least to me. Rodriguez-Campos integrates principles from these and related fields with evaluation theory, writ large I would say, to offer systematic, step-by-step practical advice for evaluators (Cousins, 2006, p. 116).

The author does introduce a variety of tools and devices that could be usefully applied in such contexts. Some examples are Gantt charts, network diagrams, precedent diagrams, arrow diagrams, responsibility assignment matrices, decision trees and management maps (Cousins, 2006, p. 116).

...Rodriguez-Campos succeeds in drawing our attention to important aspects for consideration...(Cousins, 2006, p. 119).

I agree with the positive statements made by Cousins in his review of *Collaborative Evaluations*, but disagree with the issues he suggested were not addressed in the model. I have grouped those into the following categories: (i) the appropriateness of collaborative evaluations, (ii) the identification and role of collaboration members, and (iii) the role of the evaluator. I address each of these items below by including the specific quote from Cousins and my perspective of the issue supported by excerpts from the Rodriguez-Campos text.

The Appropriateness of Collaborative Evaluations

Cousins' first questioned the appropriateness of collaborative evaluations:

First, the very brief introduction does little to set the stage for when and under what circumstances a collaborative approach would be appropriate or desirable...my point here is that Rodriguez-Campos is silent on the issue and indeed about the circumstances in which collaborative forms of evaluation are likely to be the prudent choice (Cousins, 2006, pp. 116-117).

Not only does Rodriguez-Campos define collaborative evaluation in the introduction to the book, she also discusses the appropriateness and limitations of using a collaborative evaluation approach within each component of the MCE. For example:

Collaborative evaluation is an evaluation in which there is a significant degree of collaboration between evaluators and stakeholders in the evaluation process (e.g., Cousins, Donohue, & Bloom, 1996; O'Sullivan & D'Agostino, 2002). (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 1).

The situation sets the foundation for everything that follows in the collaborative evaluation. If people are going to collaborate within the evaluation, it is necessary to understand what level of collaboration will be required depending on the

situation. The better you understand it and analyze the problems, the easier your evaluation will be. This section will provide you with step-by-step instructions on how to analyze information in order to understand the current nature of the evaluand, its surroundings, and the scope for the collaborative evaluation (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 8).

...some conditions under which evaluation studies are inappropriate are when: (a) the evaluation would produce trivial information; (b) the evaluation results will not be used; (c) the evaluation cannot yield useful, valid information; (d) the evaluation is premature for the stage of the program; and (e) the propriety of the evaluation is doubtful (e.g., it will strain or violate professional principles). When you and the CMs identify the WBS, you may find information that leads you to make the decision that it is inappropriate to conduct the evaluation at this time (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 34).

Although the external evaluator is the perfect candidate for a summative evaluation, sometimes the collaboration of internal evaluators is allowed if there is not a problem with credibility issues. Whenever possible, it is beneficial to combine external and internal evaluators within formative and summative evaluation efforts. Some evaluations may benefit from a combination of knowledge of the internal staff and the objectivity of the external contractor (Sonnichsen, 1999) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 28).

The Identification and Role of Collaboration Members

Cousins' second issue focused on the identification and role of collaboration members:

She is equally silent about differential access to power among CMs—'collaborative members' as she calls them—and indeed sketchy about how and why they are identified for participation in the first place (Cousins, 2006, p. 117).

On the second half of this comment, note that in the introduction, Rodriguez-Campos defines the term "collaboration members" (2005, p. 1) and in chapter one of her book goes into detail presenting specific steps regarding how to identify general stakeholders (2005, pp. 10-12) and then how to identify collaboration members (2005, pp. 12-14). The identification of CMs is one of five factors included as part of the first major component of the MCE. Rodriguez-Campos further clarifies the role of the CMs in the second component of the MCE (2005, pp. 58-64) and also with statements such as:

Collaboration members are specific individuals (possessing unique characteristics) who work jointly with the evaluator(s) to help with particular tasks in order to achieve the evaluation vision (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 1).

It is important to be able to identify individuals with varied skills and power to facilitate the achievement of the evaluation vision. However, the CMs should be carefully selected in order to facilitate interaction within the collaborative evaluation (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 13).

...who does what (roles) and who decides what (responsibilities) should be closely linked to the scope definition, and these may vary over time (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 34).

With respect to the differential access to power among CMs, Rodriguez-Campos includes details on this topic in the second component of the MCE, specifically in the factors “clarify the role of the evaluator” and “clarify the role of the CMs” (2005, pp. 58-64). For example:

Power is the force or capacity you and the CMs have to affect others’ behavior in the way in which you want and would otherwise not get. The power of leaders is voluntarily granted by followers because they are convinced that the leader can represent them well (Owens, 1998) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 56).

You and the CMs have to clearly understand each other’s responsibilities, rights, and distribution of power so evaluation results can realistically be attained. In order to create a mutual understanding, you and the CMs should clearly recognize who you are, and the implications of the work you do if the evaluation is to succeed (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 50).

Make sure that there is a balance of power within the collaborative evaluation so everyone feels represented in an appropriate and fair way (see Section 5 on how to encourage fairness and sincerity) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 113).

The Role of the Evaluator

The role of the evaluator was the third issue questioned by Cousins:

Another aspect of the model that I find quite troublesome is the implicit privileged position of the evaluator. To be sure, MCE is highly evaluator-directed, despite its allegiance to open communication and feedback all along the way (Cousins, 2006, p. 118).

I believe it is the professional evaluator’s moral obligation to facilitate, provide expert advice, and lead the collaboration team’s efforts to ensure the evaluation is conducted in a manner consistent with ethical, legal, and professional standards of evaluation. Rodriguez-Campos clarifies the role of the evaluator in the second component of the MCE (2005, pp. 51-58) and throughout the book. Within the model she consistently encourages a sense of self-efficacy among the evaluator(s) and the CMs with suggestions such as “foster a collaborative environment in which everyone can contribute appropriately” (2005, p. 63). Rodriguez-Campos provides further explanation on the role of the evaluator as seen in the following excerpts:

An evaluator is the individual (e.g., you) who accepts responsibility for the overall evaluation and its results, employing defensible means to judge the evaluand’s value (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 1).

A successful evaluator is both a manager and a leader, and to get the best from the CMs it is essential to set a credible example yourself...be aware that your role may change from evaluation to evaluation depending on its particular needs (see Section 4 on how to ensure the need for change is justified) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 57).

...everyone involved in the collaboration has responsibilities and authority to make decisions on specific tasks...the level of involvement varies among everyone who collaborates in the effort (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, pp. 186-187).

...foster a group dialogue of openness and exploration that continues among the CMs themselves (even outside formal meetings) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 113).

...avoid making an important decision until every CM, as appropriate, has been heard and can agree to support a particular choice as the best course of action (see Section 3 on how to establish procedures for decision-making) (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005, p. 57).

Based on the above amplifications, the issues raised in Cousins' review seem unjustified.

Conclusions

With this book review I have attempted to provide a synopsis of *Collaborative Evaluations*, assess the model presented in the text, and specifically address Cousins' claims made in his review. The model for collaborative evaluations developed by Rodriguez-Campos emphasizes the merit and importance of collaboration when conducting an evaluation in an effort to give structure to the evaluation process, achieve engagement of the key stakeholders, and improve the odds that the evaluation findings will be used.

As Rodriguez-Campos reaffirmed in the conclusion to the text, the information contained in her book was based on her professional evaluation experiences and is intended to serve as an informal reference to perform collaborative evaluations. Her request for feedback on the MCE is refreshing and represents what worthwhile evaluators seek in their endeavors to improve their work and make a difference. By integrating key elements from project management and organizational psychology into the model for collaborative evaluations, Rodriguez-Campos presents pragmatic and thoughtful perspectives for approaching an evaluation. The well-documented concepts, real-world evaluation experiences, and in-depth research make this a significant contribution to the field of evaluation for serious consideration by new and seasoned evaluators.

James Sanders, former president of the AEA, summed up his impressions of the book this way: "This book points the way for evaluators to engage those with whom they work in the evaluation process...it is a significant next step in the evolution of the practice of evaluation. In my judgment, this contribution to the evaluation literature is excellent. Dr. Rodriguez-Campos should be congratulated on a job well done" (2005, p. iii). I agree with Dr. Sanders' evaluation and strongly recommend this book to evaluators who are searching for new insights and direction to guide their collaborative evaluations.

About the Reviewer

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