Book Reviews

Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2001). *Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Reviewed by Wes Martz

The application of evaluation in organizations is a topic that various theorists, researchers, and practitioners have explored over the past several decades. Russ-Eft and Preskill took on the challenge of writing a book that attempts to convey the importance of evaluation within organizations and describe how evaluation can be used to inform decision-making for improving organizational performance. In their book, *Evaluation in Organizations: A Systematic Approach to Enhancing Learning, Performance, and Change*, Russ-Eft and Preskill do a wonderfully articulate job of reviewing the evolution of evaluation and describing their view of the future of evaluation within organizations.

The first part of the book, chapters 1 to 4, provides the background and context of evaluation and is a good refresher for those who are looking for well-defined, non-

technical explanations of what evaluation is and what it is not. The section concludes with a comprehensive review of the major approaches to evaluating learning, performance, and change initiatives and a brief outline of the political and ethical issues associated with evaluation.

Part two, chapters 4 through 12, presents a concise tutorial on designing and implementing evaluations. Much of this content details data collection methods that are not specific to evaluating organizations, but can be applied to evaluating various types of evaluands. This includes sampling, observations, interviews, surveying, and other issues related to data collection.

The final section of the book explores evaluation use and includes a chapter written by Rosalie T. Torres highlighting the intricacies of communicating and reporting evaluation activities and findings. The final chapter of the book redirects the message back to evaluation issues that are specific to evaluations in organizations. Russ-Eft and Preskill reinforce the importance of getting "buy in" and commitment for the evaluation work and stress the value of participatory and collaborative approaches while being cognizant of the evaluation context. The appendix includes Preskill's and Torres' readiness assessment tool, "The Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation Instrument (ROLE)," based on the book *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations* (Preskill & Torres, 1999). In addition to the assessment tool, an explanation of its use and purpose is included.

Despite the strong introduction and the practical overview of evaluation the book provides, Russ-Eft and Preskill quickly narrow the focus of the book from evaluation in organizations to evaluating organizational learning and human resource development (HRD) initiatives. Albeit a respectable job is done on this

specific topic, the title of the book gives the impression the book considers more than HRD initiatives.

The missing component that would have catapulted the insights of Russ-Eft and Preskill squarely into new perspectives of evaluation in organizations is that of presenting the topics beyond that of organizational learning and HRD activities. Integrating the seminal work exploring criteria of merit for evaluating organizational effectiveness conducted by management scholars Campbell (1977), Cameron (1983, 1986a, 1986b), Quinn & Rohrbaugh (1983), Steers (1975) and others would have given the reader insight into the inimitability of evaluation in organizations. It would also reinforce the relevance of comprehensive evaluation to organizations by illustrating its use, value, and significance with respect to guiding business strategy and decision-making.

Although these management scholars rarely referred to their work as evaluation in organizations, their research and subsequent writings on assessing organizational effectiveness and performance include numerous attempts to define criteria of merit for determining "good" organizational performance and even delve into the logic of evaluation without referring to it as such (Lewin & Minton, 1986).

Many organizations today do not consider evaluative criteria beyond profitability or productivity when assessing their operation. This ill-conceived and myopic approach to enhancing organizational effectiveness, learning, and long-term survival is where serious evaluation can provide the greatest service to business and industry. Introducing a broader perspective for determining values (i.e., sources of standards) and the ability to synthesize the factual data with the relevant values is a value-added element that serious evaluation provides to organizations

seeking to optimize performance. Unfortunately, Russ-Eft and Preskill missed the bigger opportunity for expanding evaluation's application and impact on organizations with this book.

Despite the retreat to evaluating HRD initiatives, *Evaluation in Organizations* offers a useful review of many aspects of evaluation and its application within organizations. It is an engaging and quick read for the practitioner, evaluator, and the business professional seeking enlightened ways of enhancing organizational performance through evaluation. The book certainly deserves its place in an evaluator's library, and has a genuine place in mine.

About the Author

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