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Evaluation and Program Planning is a quarterly publication aimed at a broad audience of professional evaluators, individuals involved in program planning and management, and academic social scientists. Its contributors come from a wide range of backgrounds, fields, and viewpoints such as government, public health, education, policy, professional evaluation, and the non-profit sector. One consistent feature, a requirement that submissions address a practical “lesson learned”, helps make this journal especially useful in the promotion of hands-on evaluation practice, since even articles with a narrow focus must contain material that is relatable to the broader world of evaluation. Additionally, many issues also devote a substantial portion of the journal to a specific topic, making a wide range of subject-matter perspective easily available to the reader.

The latest issue of *Evaluation and Program Planning* (volume 29 issue 2, 2006) contains a special topic section on “Program Capacity and Sustainability” that will be of particular interest to those involved/with non-profit sector organizations. The topics covered are related to practical issues such as maintaining funding for non-

profits, program survival, and approaches to measuring and evaluating the capacity and sustainability of organizations.

In particular, two articles from this special topic section stand out for attention. One entitled “Daniel and the rhinoceros” takes a creative approach to critiquing the growing popularity of requiring the use of randomly controlled trials (RCTs) in evaluation. The author, who comes down against the practice of mandating RCTs, uses a classic story as a way of explaining his argument that evaluations can, in some cases, be very successful without the need for utilizing a RCT methodology. Regardless of your field of interest or current stance on RCTs, this article is a worthy read, providing clear insight into one side of an ongoing methodological debate.

As one might guess from the title of the article, “Daniel and the rhinoceros” (pp. 180-185), author David E.K. Hunter makes use of a traditional biblical story to make a non-traditional point regarding the reliance of randomly controlled trials (RCTs) in evaluation. The story in question is from biblical times, consisting of what Hunter refers to as a “focused, high-stakes evaluation of a dietary program undertaken some 2600 years ago” (p. 180). In his tale, Daniel is a Jewish man selected to serve in the government of the new King of Babylon—a position that requires those selected to appear healthy and wise.

Daniel and others selected for a role in the royal government were expected to eat the same diet as the King—a selection of meats, wine, and other foods thought to ensure the best possible health. However, Daniel and the other Jews selected to serve the King were subject to Jewish dietary law, which happened to disallow much of what was on the menu. Instead of angering the King or violating dietary

law, Daniel instead proposed an evaluation wherein they would be allowed to consume a simple meal of porridge and water for 10 days, after which time their health would be assessed and compared that of others who consumed the royal diet. Of course, to no big surprise, the outcome was positive; Daniel and his Jewish friends appeared to be at least as healthy as the others and were allowed to continue eating their simple meals.

So, for the evaluator, the story of Daniel illustrates one case where a study which lacked proper random selection and an appropriate control group still provided the necessary information for the situation. Daniel and the other Jews who ate the simple porridge diet were healthy enough to appear before the King and thus were allowed to refrain from the meats and other foods which would have violated their religious beliefs. Hunter's point is that RCTs are not always necessary in all situations, and therefore should not be encouraged as an across-the-board requirement for modern evaluation projects. In the case of Daniel, he was not trying to evaluate his diet as superior to the King's in all instances, but merely to show that it kept him adequately healthy. Of course, this is not to say that a RCT approach does not have its place, but merely that it is an approach not necessary or appropriate to apply to all situations. Luckily for Daniel, he was over two-thousand years ahead of the current debate.

Secondly, for readers interested in gleaning practical information on non-profit organization capacity and sustainability I recommend reading "A framework to assess the development and capacity of non-profit agencies" by Russell G. Schuh and Laura C. Leviton (pp. 171-179). This article covers the creation of a framework that can be used in the evaluation of a non-profit organization's development and capacity. Whether or not you actually adapt the authors'

framework approach, the article is worth reading as a broad overview of the factors related to organizational capacity.

Those just starting to work within the field may find useful many of the basic elements laid out by the framework. Schuh and Leviton do a nice job of defining non-profit organizational capacity and organizational development, as well as explaining how these can go beyond the mere ability of the organization to deliver service or address a clientele. Often forgotten are the basic roots of what sustain an organization: operational governance, finance issues, and organizational skill sets. These elements may be overlooked as unsexy or unrelated to the larger social issue or goal that the organization was founded to address, even though they have a direct effect on the ability of the organization to perform.

For those already heavily involved in non-profit sector evaluation activities, Schuh and Leviton's framework provides a system that can be used to ensure adequate coverage of the topics of development and capacity. These include a listing of key features related to development, as well as a rubric designed for use in scoring an organization's stage of development based on the level of maturity that particular attribute has attained. Whether this framework is used as is, or as an inspiration for one's own evaluation approach, the authors' focus on operational aspects of non-profit agencies is a useful addition, given that much work in this sector is focused on evaluating specific programs or policies operated by organizations.

Finally, as always, *Evaluation and Program Planning* also includes several general interest articles. In keeping with the Journal's broad focus, the current issue contains three pieces on very different topics. These include a report on the cost-effectiveness of mammograms among female veterans, a piece on methods for

developing logic models, and an article on how cultural issues can and should be considered in performing a formative program evaluation. Although I lack the room to provide a proper synopsis here, each article has merit both for those readers interested in the specific subject matter, as well as providing a more generalized evaluation section for those readers not drawn in by the special topic section.

Lastly, four books were also reviewed:

- E.J. Davidson, *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*, Thousand Oaks, Sage (2005). A strong review describes this book as “thorough, challenging, clear, and focused on how to evaluate “and highly recommended” (Bolland, pp. 142).
- F. Furubo, R. Rist and R. Sandahl, Editors, *International atlas of evaluation*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ (2002). Reviewer Craig Russon gives this edited volume a mixed review, initially lamenting weak coverage of many third-world regions and lacking information on the world’s evaluation associations. However, he ultimately recommends the book as a worthwhile acquisition to those interested in the differences between national evaluation approaches, stating that the authors and editors “performed a valuable service to the international evaluation community” (pp. 144).
- A. Fink, *Evaluation fundamentals (2nd ed.)*, Insights into the outcomes, effectiveness, and quality of health program, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA (2005). Described as “useful for novice evaluators involved in designing studies aimed at determining the effectiveness of health programs” (Sidani

pp. 146), this review lacks a definitive evaluative conclusion beyond lamenting the inadequacy of the author's coverage of research design and describing other topic coverage, such as for data handling or significance, as "adequate" (pp. 146).

- Rosalie T. Torres, Hallie Preskill, Mary E. Piontek, *Evaluation Strategies for Communicating and Reporting: Enhancing Learning in Organizations* 2nd Edition. An overall strong review, Cleek concludes that this book is "a wonderful resource...a true staple for any new evaluator's library" (pp. 149) despite wishing for deeper coverage of some evaluation topics. Furthermore, the reviewer also warns that the title is not truly appropriate to the focus of the book, stating that "this is not a text about evaluating communication...[but] how to best communicate with stakeholders around the topic of evaluation and report findings" (pp. 149).

Overall, *Evaluation and Program Planning* is a great journal for readers with a wide range of evaluation interests. Although the special topic section makes the current issue especially important for readers involved in the non-profit sector, the journal remains a relevant read for a general evaluation audience.