

A Retrospective Case Study of Long-Term
Evaluation Capacity Building at Neighborhood House

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Kirsten L. Anderson

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Darcie Anderson, who provided support and encouragement for me to complete this thesis and degree and has always been the biggest advocate for my education.

Abstract

This thesis provides a case study of how evaluation capacity has been built at one mid-size social service non-profit organization over the last eleven years. Through reviewing documents and conducting interviews with current and past staff of Neighborhood House in St. Paul, Minnesota, the author determined the facilitators and barriers to successful evaluation capacity building as well as the indicators and outcomes of successful ECB work in this context. The thesis presents a model, in logic model format, for how ECB has worked at Neighborhood House. The lessons learned over eleven years of sustained ECB work should prove useful to evaluators and ECB practitioners doing similar work.

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Research

Background

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is a trend in evaluation practice that has been growing over the last decade. In 2008 the American Evaluation Association conducted a survey of evaluators that found that 54% were participating in ECB (n=2,657, 49% response rate) (cited in Preskill & Boyle, 2008). This means that it is likely that an even greater majority of evaluators in the United States are currently conducting ECB. Over several years of practicing and refining, the challenge for practitioners of ECB still remains three-fold, to:

- (a) Define what they mean by “evaluation capacity” in the context of local service provider organizations;
- (b) Design and conduct effective interventions to build evaluation capacity; and
- (c) Evaluate how well they have succeeded at this. (Stevenson et al., 2002)

As ECB grows within the US, it is also concurrently growing abroad, in places like Australia, Israel, and the international development sector all over the world. With many and diverse practitioners claiming involvement in the process of ECB, there are a wide variety of models and definitions circulating in the literature. However, there are few empirical studies done on how these models play out in actual Evaluation Capacity Building settings at non-profits and agencies. My research will focus on how one community-based human service organization was able to use various strategies for ECB, some effectively and some not so effectively.

Research Questions

My research questions addressed the gaps in the literature involving empirical studies about ECB. The questions were as follows:

1. What model describes how evaluation capacity building has worked at Neighborhood House?
2. What are the facilitators of sustained ECB at community organizations?
3. What are the barriers to sustained ECB at community organizations?
4. What are the outcomes of ECB at community organizations?
5. What implications does the experience of ECB at Neighborhood House have for the work of ECB practitioners at other community-based organizations?

Description of Neighborhood House

The Neighborhood House was an ideal setting for a study on ECB at community organizations because of its ten plus years' history of ECB efforts, with a consistent presence in Jean King. There have been several strategies implemented, and it is one of the only organizations where long term impact and the impact of several different strategies can be observed. Also, several individuals who had been part of this effort were available in the twin cities area and willing to talk to a student of Jean's.

The Neighborhood House was founded in 1897 by the women of Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul, Minnesota to assist Russian Jewish immigrants fleeing their homeland as a result of mounting bigotry and discrimination. The organization, located and focused on the historic west side of St. Paul, currently serves refugee, immigrant, and low-income individuals and families, with a mission to "help people, families and organizations develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to thrive in diverse communities" (www.neighb.org, 2013).

The “Neighb,” as it is affectionately called, operates programs within the areas of Basic Needs and Life Long Learning (Martin et al., 2013). The Basic Needs program area operates two multi-cultural food shelves, specializing in culturally appropriate food for the many refugees and immigrants they serve. These food shelves distribute over 2,500 pounds of food daily to nearly 12,000 families each year. Close to these food shelves, Neighborhood House also operates family centers, which specialize in crisis intervention and prevention for families at risk for homelessness. These family centers are “one stop shops” for services and referrals, utilizing multi-cultural resources to address whatever needs the family is facing. Within Basic Needs, Neighborhood House also has a program for refugee resettlement (www.neighb.org, 2013). Within the area of Life Long Learning, Neighborhood House operates youth leadership programs, including a gang prevention program, adult education programs including ESL and GED classes, an early childhood education program, and a health outreach program (www.neighb.org, 2013).

In 2006, Neighborhood House was able to open The Wellstone Center, a newly constructed community center from which to operate a majority of its programs. The Center, constructed from new and recycled materials, was designed based on community feedback. The Neighborhood House was able to create a large, inviting structure, complete with a strategy for earning revenue for operating expenses from rental spaces. The Wellstone Center, which has a gym for youth use, has become a bustling community center in the last few years, as well as office space for Neighborhood House staff and other community organizations and businesses. (www.neighb.org, 2013)

Dr. Jean King, a professor at the University of Minnesota, connected with Patrice Husak, the original staff person responsible for evaluation at Neighborhood House, in 2001, and a collaboration for evaluation capacity building was formed. Professor King, who

attends Mount Zion Temple, was immediately interested in helping with evaluation at Neighborhood House and eventually took a position on Neighborhood House's board, where she continues to volunteer as an expert evaluation consultant and ECB trainer. Different staff members have taken on the position of evaluation manager over the last decade; currently Anna Martin serves as a part-time evaluation and grants manager.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following review will focus on describing ECB as well as on effective strategies for ECB within community-based organizations and the outcomes that can be expected from ECB efforts.

What is Evaluation Capacity Building?

Several different definitions of evaluation capacity building have been proposed within the evaluation literature. The following is a sample of how evaluation theorists have defined the term in recent years:

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization's ability to conduct or use evaluation. (Labin, Duffy, Meyers, Wandersman, & Lesesne, 2012)

ECB involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. (Preskill & Boyle, 2008)

The goal of ECB is typically for staff within the target organization to regularly and effectively document the implementation and impact of their programs as a result of increases in evaluation capacity. (Garcia-Iriarte, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, & Luna, 2011)

Evaluation Capacity refers to an organization's ability to bring about, align and sustain its objectives, structure, processes, culture, human capital and technology to produce evaluative knowledge that informs on-going practices and decision-making to improve organizational effectiveness. (Nielsen, 2011)

ECB is not only about developing the capacity to do evaluation, but also, and importantly, the capacity to use it constructively. (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008)

The recurring theme among these and other definitions is the goal of increasing an organization's ability to conduct evaluations for its own activities and programs and the understanding that this is an intentional effort geared towards that goal. Some theorists emphasize the evaluative thinking and formative nature of evaluation in an organization as more important than others; some emphasize the individual outcomes of ECB while others care primarily about outcomes to the organization as a unit (Labin et al., 2012).

Evaluation capacity building models

A number of different models have been proposed for how to understand and go about the evaluation capacity building process. Some of these working models have been proposed in the evaluation and other literature, while others have yet to be explored in academic journals and other published mediums. Within my research into the evaluation literature, four major models emerged as dominant.

Catalyst-for-Change Model

This model (Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2011) involves designating one staff member in a non-profit or agency as the evaluation expert. This individual is trained in evaluation methods and theory with the understanding that he or she will pass along this knowledge to the rest of the staff. This individual "catalyst for change" or evaluation champion is responsible for bringing a culture of evaluation to the entire organization. The catalyst serves as a conduit for evaluation capacity building, internalizing and then disseminating evaluation knowledge and skills. Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) note that this approach has been effective in moving organizations from a focus on funder reporting needs to the organization's needs for information and program improvement. The individual catalyst, to be effective, should also be in a leadership role, have support from other leaders within the

organization, and be committed to disseminating evaluation knowledge and skills to their staff (Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2011).

Collaborative Immersion Model

This model involves immersing staff in evaluation activities in order to teach them the fundamentals of evaluation (Huffman, Thomas, & Lawrenz, 2008). The basis for this model is social-constructivist learning theory. This theory states that learning happens when students are put into a situation where they are forced to challenge their existing perceptions. This experience forces the individual to create new ways of understanding. In terms of evaluation capacity building, the student is a staff or other stakeholder of the organization or agency, and the situation that challenges his or her existing perceptions is participation in an evaluation project. This approach has been used in K-12 educational settings, a good fit because of its emphasis on pedagogical theory. Empowerment and participatory approaches to evaluation, which have been used frequently with community-based organizations and other social change efforts, share much with this model. Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) also document the use of this model at an agency serving adults with intellectual disabilities as an aspect of their Catalyst-for-Change Model.

Multidisciplinary Model

Preskill and Boyle (2008) propose a model for evaluation capacity building that involves using multiple strategies simultaneously, considering particularly which strategies will be most appropriate for any given context. They visualize their multidisciplinary model using the diagram below, emphasizing the two-way relationship between evaluation practice and training. Therefore, training and skill building increase the ability to practice evaluation sustainably, and the practice of evaluation actually functions to increase skills as

well. The multi-disciplinary nature of this model is not clear, despite the name, and concrete examples of how to apply this model are lacking from this article.

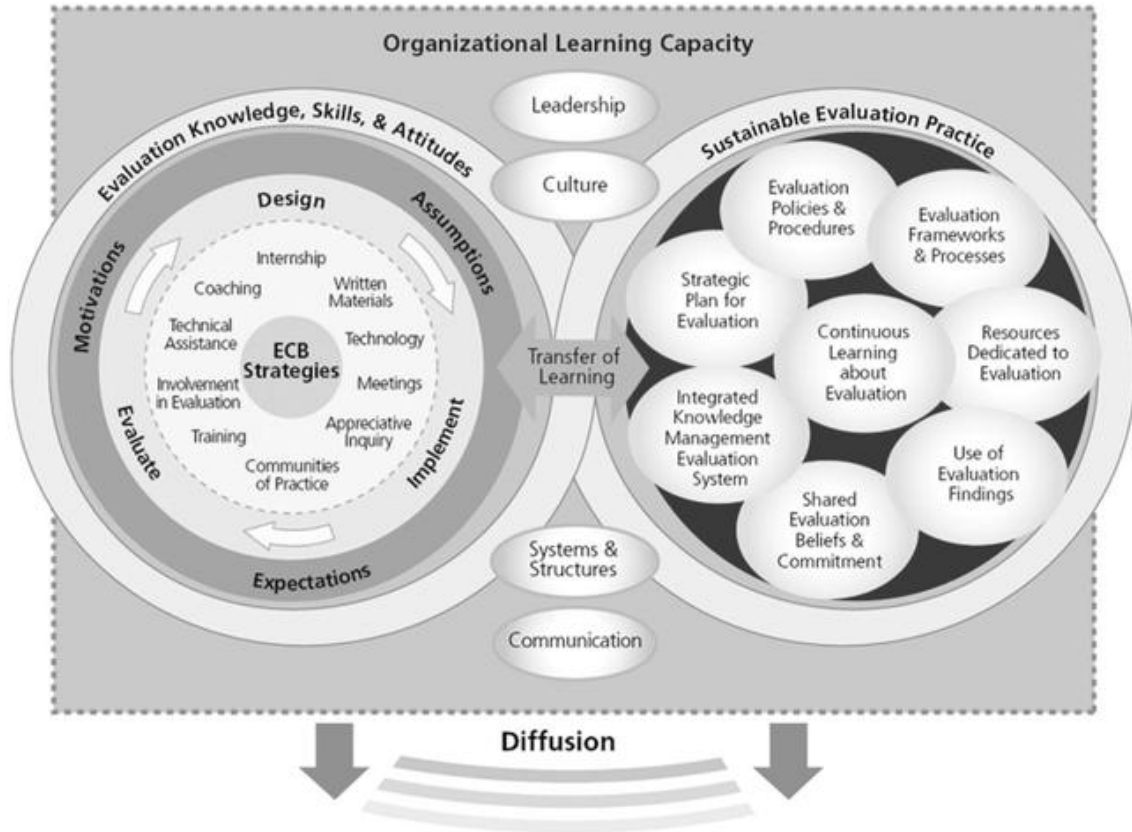


Figure 1. Preskill and Boyle's Multidisciplinary Model of ECB

King and Volkov's Grounded Framework for ECB.

This framework was created from work with three different entities in evaluation capacity building, including Neighborhood House, and consists of three major factors contributing to ECB efforts. The three elements are: Resources, Organizational Context, and Structures, all three of which have proven to be necessary in building evaluation capacity. Volkov and King further subdivided these domains into factors. This framework makes an effort to consider learning theory and therefore the variety of learners and their contexts

and needs in pursuing improved evaluation capacity. They posit that ECB “is a context-dependent, learner-dependent, and learner centered intentional action system” (King & Volkov, 2005, p. 15). The diagram below displays this model (King & Volkov, 2005).

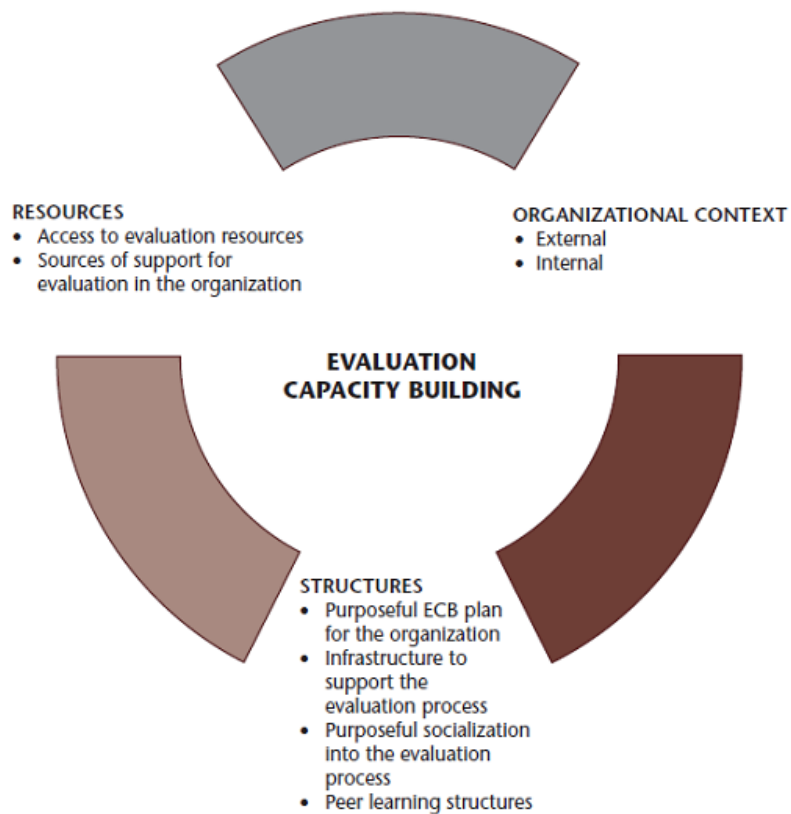


Figure 2. King and Volkov's Elements of a Grounded Framework for ECB

ECB Checklist.

King & Volkov (2007) also created a checklist, developed from case studies and literature, for pursuing ECB within an organization. It involves eight items to be checked off within three categories, designed to address all the major facilitators and barriers involved in an ECB process, and drawing on aspects from the different ECB models. The categories with which an organization needs to work to sustain evaluation work are: Organizational Context, ECB Structures, and Resources, similar to their categories in their model above (King & Volkov, 2007).

Evaluation Capacity Index Model

This model was created using data from the Danish Evaluation community (Nielsen, Lemire, & Skov, 2011). The main premise of this model is that evaluation capacity is dependent on both supply and demand for evaluation. Therefore, the evaluation capacity of an organization can be measured through measuring both of these factors. The following diagram illustrates the index model:

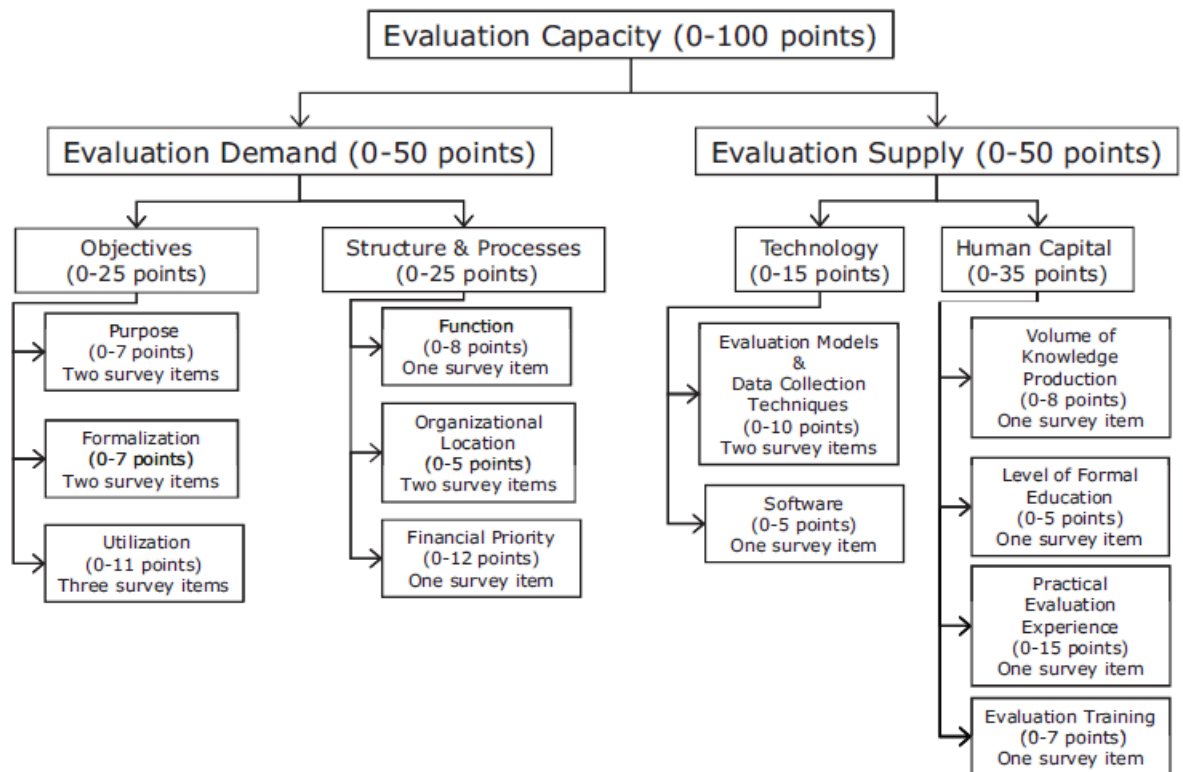


Figure 3. Evaluation Capacity Index

Compliance-Investment-Advancement Model

This model involves three stages that build on each other. Compliance, the first stage, involves merely complying with funding requirements and structures for reporting, with no real internal motivation or use for evaluation. In the Investment stage, an

organization's leaders and staff have taken on ownership of evaluation projects and understand the value of evaluation. In the final Advancement stage, the organization exhibits "institutionalized support" for evaluation and conducts more and more sophisticated evaluation projects (Gibbs et al., 2002).

Integrative ECB Model

Labin et al. (2012) propose a model that integrates all of the ECB literature and previous models into one comprehensive model. This model is displayed (appropriately) using a modified logic model framework, below (Labin et al., 2012). Their research, bringing together the work of various other theoretical and empirical researches in evaluation capacity building, found a large amount of consistency in the literature. They organized their themes into Needs, Activities, and Results for evaluation capacity building. They then urged the evaluation community to come up with more standards and measurements for ECB work, maintaining that the time was right (Labin et al., 2012).

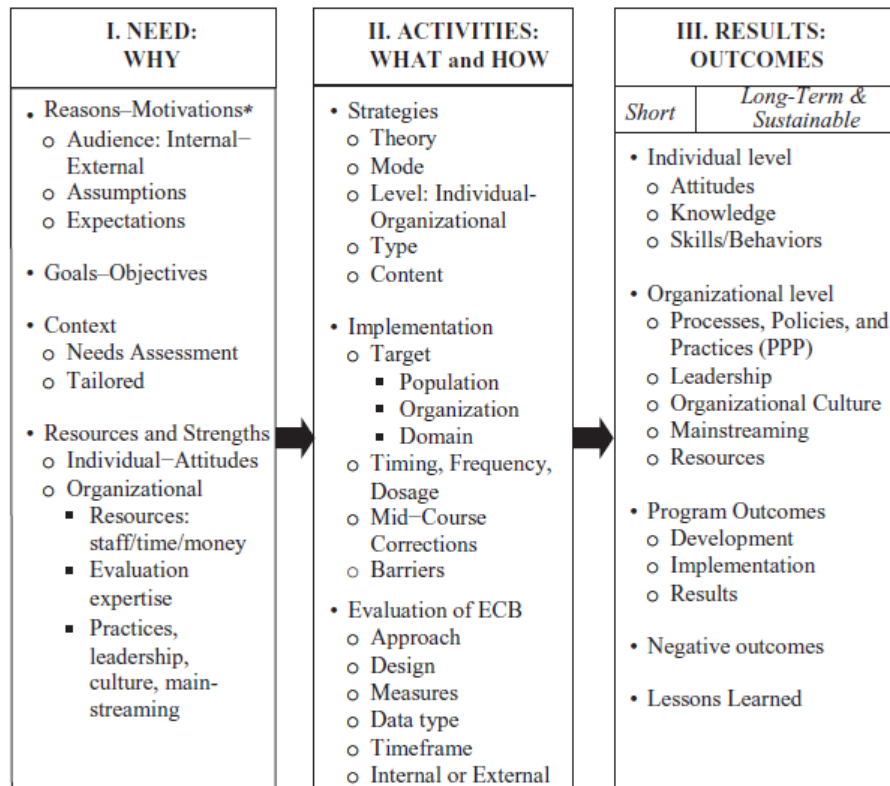


Figure 4. Labin, Duffy, Meyers, Wandersman, and Lesesne's Integrative ECB Model

In looking at these models and further empirical and theoretical literature, I noticed a lack of empirical data and case studies that relate to ECB. While several theories and models have been proposed, the data to support their relevance and effectiveness has not been sufficiently gathered. With the existing literature, I pulled out the commonly mentioned facilitators, barriers, and outcomes to ECB in order to compare them later with my primary data.

Facilitators of sustained evaluation capacity

Throughout the literature, several researchers and practitioners were focused on the facilitators, or factors that contribute to the success of, sustained evaluation capacity.

The facilitators commonly mentioned involved factors internal to the organization, as well as external; those in control of the administration, as well as those not.

Organizational learning culture

Cousins (2008), in surveying Canadian evaluators, found that those organizations with a learning culture were more likely to be successful with their evaluation capacity building efforts. Preskill and Torres (2001) found similarly that an organizational learning approach to ECB was most effective. This kind of organizational learning culture is also an outcome of ECB, indicating that ECB and OLC feed into each other. An organizational learning culture is described as a culture where learning is valued and change is embraced as a necessary element of constant improvement (Cousins, 2008; Labin et al., 2012; Preskill & Torres, 2001).

Pro-evaluation context

The local, regional, and national context being supportive of evaluation is a major facilitator for ECB work within an organization (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008).

Staff attitudes about evaluation

When beginning any ECB effort, if the staff is already in a favorable mindset regarding evaluation, they will most likely learn more from any training activities (Higa & Brandon, 2008).

Leadership support

Without the support of the organizational leaders for evaluation and ECB activities, ECB is not often sustainable or even initiated (Preskill & Torres, 2001). This factor is one of the primary facilitators for ECB (Labin et al., 2012; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; King & Volkov, 2005). Leadership support in turn leads to other facilitators such as resources (financial and

otherwise) and staff time allocated to evaluation activities. Supportive leaders are also often able to recruit and influence staff to participate in evaluation activities (Gibbs et al., 2002).

Dialogue between internal and external evaluators

Rosenstein and Englert (2008) note that this dialogue was a major facilitator for success in ECB. When the roles of internal and external evaluators are clearly articulated and carried out collaboratively, the organization benefits immensely (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008).

ECB structures and activities

The organization must make an effort to put into place structures for encouraging evaluation within the organization. This includes expecting staff to participate in activities (Preskill & Torres, 2001), as well as implementing training and other activities for staff that enhance ECB (King & Volkov, 2005). Rosenstein and Englert (2008) found that formal trainings and curriculum were particularly useful for sustaining ECB. Higa and Brandon (2008) found that the more staff at K-12 schools that participated in ECB trainings, the more individuals were likely to internalize evaluation concepts, skills, and behaviors.

The presence of an evaluation champion

An evaluation champion is someone internal to the organization who is excited about evaluation and carries that enthusiasm to the rest of the staff. This is a key facilitator of ECB that has also been previously cited in literature specifically about Neighborhood House, as well as other organizations (King & Volkov, 2005).

Funder expectations

What pressure funders put on an organization to conduct evaluation can determine how much effort an organization will want to or can justify putting into evaluation capacity building and evaluation efforts. However, these expectations can also be seen as pressure, which can have negative effects on the kind of evaluation and ECB that is possible (Gibbs et al., 2002). If funders are open to a more flexible approach to outcomes and indicators for accountability, this is often very helpful for sustained ECB efforts (Preskill & Torres, 2001; King & Volkov, 2005).

Summary of facilitators

Facilitators of ECB within the literature fall mostly within the culture of an organization and their staff's willingness. An organization can further facilitate the process by organizing events and training around evaluation. Also, the external pressure of funders is often the needed catalyst for ECB within an organization.

Barriers to sustained evaluation capacity.

Several barriers to evaluation capacity being built were also mentioned in the literature. These are the factors, often the flip side of the facilitators, that may make ECB impossible, despite the best of intentions. These range from obvious issues, to less obvious pitfalls that organizations might fall into.

Lack of evaluation resources

If funding, technical assistance, software, and other resources for evaluation are not available, ECB efforts will be forestalled and usually ineffective (Stevenson et al., 2002; Gibbs et al., 2002). The lack of evaluator expertise can also seriously hamper ECB efforts (Preskill & Torres, 2001).

Over-structuring

In his survey of Canadian evaluators, Cousins (2008) found that a high score on the Organizational Support Structures scale meant a lower Organizational Culture of Learning, and therefore was less desirable as a characteristic for an organization trying to facilitate evaluation capacity building (Cousins, 2008). Over structuring means that an organization has put so many rigid formalities for how things work into place that the adapting and exciting nature of evaluation is not able to thrive.

Staff turnover

Non-profit and community based organizations have very high turnover rate among staff, meaning that keeping current staff trained requires considerable ongoing investment. This is a major barrier to ECB efforts (Stevenson et al., 2002).

Limited staff availability

Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) note that the lack of available time for staff to devote to evaluation can be a serious threat to ECB efforts. The ability to take staff away from their regular work duties for training and evaluation activities is extremely difficult and, without the support of administration and staff themselves, near impossible (Preskill & Torres, 2001). Within this construct is a frequent belief that it is not within a staff member's responsibility to be conducting evaluation or ECB (Stevenson et al., 2002; Preskill & Torres, 2001).

Over-complicated processes

ECB training and activities need to be simple enough to be understood and utilized by all participants. ECB terminology and processes are often made too complicated and too full of jargon for lay people to feel empowered to participate. Lennie (2005) found that this

over-complicated aspect of ECB was a serious barrier to meaningful participation of community members in evaluation activities.

Over-evaluation

When organizations participate in an excessive amount of evaluation activities, the usefulness of data and the motivation to participate often drop off (Rosenstein & Englert 2008).

Resistance to change

Often, staff and leadership of an organization are resistant to the new ways of doing and thinking that are inherent in any evaluation capacity building effort (Preskill & Torres, 2001). The ability of an organization to improve evaluation capacity is often directly dependent on the organization's staff to change and adapt (Stevenson et al., 2002; King & Volkov, 2005).

Summary of barriers

These barriers mentioned in the literature are often inherent aspects of operating in the non-profit sector (such as a lack of time and resources), as well as aspects of human nature (such as resistance to change). Some of these barriers, like the over-evaluating, and over-structuring aspects, can be controlled by a well-run evaluation team or champion.

Outcomes of evaluation capacity building

Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) and Taut (2007) categorize outcomes of evaluation capacity building as Cognitive – increases in understanding of evaluation processes and thinking, Behavioral – ability to use evaluation skills, and Affective – increased positive attitudes about, and ownership of, evaluation. This framework can be used to categorize the outcomes of evaluation capacity building that are seen in the literature. Labin et al. (2012) called these categories knowledge, skills, and attitudes. One other major category of

outcomes also arose in the literature, which I will call “organizational outcomes” – the ways in which the entire organization changes as a unit as a result of ECB. The outcomes that I found within the literature I will categorize within these groupings.

Cognitive outcomes

Understanding of evaluation concepts

When staff or stakeholders trained in evaluation are able to understand evaluation concepts and apply them in their work, ECB has been successful (Stevenson et al., 2002). This kind of understanding can be reached with various different strategies, but has been an important goal of ECB practitioners throughout the history of the practice.

Behavioral outcomes

Capacity to do evaluation

Cousins (2008) refers to the capacity to do evaluation as one of the major desired goals and outcomes of ECB. Effective ECB work results in staff members who are able to conduct their own evaluations (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008). Staff with evaluation expertise is necessary for sustained evaluation capacity (Stevenson et al., 2002).

The ability to construct logic models is one skill that is important for ongoing evaluation processes. Increases in skill level with logic models were observed following ECB efforts (Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2011; Stevenson et al., 2002).

Capacity to use evaluation

The capacity to use evaluation was another major goal and outcome of ECB mentioned by Cousins (2008). If individuals are able to use evaluation in their work and decision making, the organization will be much closer to being able to do so. Rosenstein

and Englert (2005) observed in a case study of an Israeli school that the school was entirely restructured due to evaluation findings and process as a result of ECB efforts.

Empowering behavioral outcomes

Lennie (2005) conducted a study evaluating an ECB effort for rural IT initiatives in Australia. Within her findings, she outlined several empowering and disempowering impacts of the ECB work. The empowering outcomes (or positive shifts on these spectrums) were much more frequently supported in the interviews than the disempowering outcomes (Lennie, 2005). Lennie found that technological and social skill increases were outcomes of ECB, as well as participating in policy advocacy work and working to change stereotypes.

Affective outcomes

Staff taking ownership of evaluation

Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) noticed that their ECB efforts contributed to the staff deciding to meet on their own to work on evaluation challenges, a clear sign that they had taken ownership of the process. King and Volkov (2005) also noted that this was a clear positive contributor to ECB work, as well as an indicator of success.

Recognition of the importance of evaluation

In working with an evaluation champion within an agency, Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) noticed a shift in the way that this individual perceived the importance and necessity of evaluation, as a result of the ECB efforts.

Empowering affective outcomes

In her work with empowering and disempowering impacts, Lennie (2005) also found that those who participated in ECB work often had shifts in attitudes regarding their

place in the political process, their social interactions, their ability to utilize technology and its benefits, and their moods, motivations and self-esteem.

Organizational outcomes

Processes, policies, and practices

ECB is understood as contributing to the development of standardized versions of these three Ps, which is an important part of instituting evaluation within an organization and the most frequently mentioned outcome in the existing literature (Labin et al., 2012). Data collection and reporting plans and processes are important outcomes included in this category (Stevenson et al., 2002).

Mainstreaming

Labin et al. (2012) in their analysis of hundreds of articles on ECB determined that mainstreaming was a major outcome of ECB efforts and in fact the second most mentioned in the existing literature. Mainstreaming can be defined as routinizing evaluation within the organization and making it part of staff responsibilities (Labin et al., 2012).

Evaluative inquiry

Cousins (2008) notes that an important impact of evaluation capacity building is a culture of Evaluative inquiry. This outcome is noted frequently elsewhere in the literature (Rosenstein & Englert, 2011). Evaluative inquiry can be described as “systematic inquiry leading to judgments about program (or organizational) merit, worth, and significance in support of decision making” (Cousins, 2008). This outcome is also frequently a facilitator of further ECB efforts and success (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008).

Organizations should begin to demonstrate this characteristic after sustained evaluation capacity building efforts (Rosenstein & Englert, 2008). In one agency, major decisions about the continuation and pursuit of different programs were made, as well as

the way that billing was done. These major decisions based on evaluation were able to make the organization more effective and financially stable in their work (Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2011).

Organizational learning culture

According to Preskill and Torres (2001):

Organizational learning is a continuous process of growth and improvement that (a) uses information or feedback about both processes and outcomes (i.e., evaluation findings) to make changes; (b) is integrated with work activities, and within the organization's infrastructure (e.g., its culture, systems and structures, leadership, and communication mechanisms); and (c) invokes the alignment of values, attitudes, and perceptions among organizational members

Garcia-Iriarte et al. (2011) noted that their ECB efforts contributed to the development of an organizational climate more focused on learning. This effect was noted by several other evaluation and ECB theorists writing about the outcomes of ECB (Labin et al., 2012). It is also seen by some evaluation theorists as a facilitator for ECB, creating a continuous loop between organizational learning and evaluation capacity (Preskill & Torres, 2001).

Defined measurable outcomes

If ECB is successful, the literature posits that an organization will have measurable, agreed upon outcomes towards which they are working (Stevenson et al., 2002). These outcomes help an organization gel towards a common mission and in turn make decisions about programming and the organization's direction.

Improved program outcomes

The linkage between ECB and improved program outcomes has been stated in the literature, but not comprehensively explored. The literature posits that if an organization is collecting data on common outcomes and working towards these common outcomes with

better information on what needs to be improved, their programmatic outcomes will continue to improve (Labin et al., 2012).

Evaluation resources

If ECB is successful, the literature posits that resources for evaluation activities will be available, including funding. The idea is that organizations demonstrating good evaluation systems will be more attractive to funders because of their ability to demonstrate their program's effectiveness, and the funders' ability to trust the data they gather (Labin et al., 2012; Stevenson et al., 2002).

Summary of Literature Review

The literature mentioned several different models for pursuing evaluation capacity building with an organization, based on many theories on what ECB would bring to an organization, and on learning theory and organizational change theory. While various overlapping ideas of facilitators, barriers, and outcomes of evaluation capacity building are posited, very little data has been gathered on the actual processes and results of a sustained evaluation capacity building effort within one or more organization. At best, literature outlines the intentions of a particular ECB effort, but does not take a longitudinal or in depth view of its impacts and the actual trajectory of the effort over time. My research addressed this hole within the literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology

For this case study on evaluation capacity building, I needed to construct a picture of the last several years of ECB at Neighborhood House. I also needed to gather qualitative data on the perceptions of those involved in the ECB work to answer my research questions. To address these data needs I conducted a review of historical documents in the possession of Jean King, a review of other documents and files compiled by Neighborhood House staff, and conducted nine interviews with individuals involved in the ECB work at Neighborhood House. The following table details my data collection needs related to my research questions.

Table 1. Explication of methodology by research question

Research Question	Info Needed	Source	Method
1. What model describes how evaluation capacity building has worked at neighborhood House?	Record of activities, insights from NH employees	Interviews, Historical Documents	Document Review, Thematic Interview Analysis
2. What are the facilitators of sustained ECB at community organizations?	Insights from NH employees	Interviews	Thematic Interview Analysis
3. What are the barriers to sustained ECB at community organizations?	Insights from NH employees	Interviews	Thematic Interview Analysis
4. What are the outcomes of ECB at community organizations?	Insights from NH employees	Interviews	Thematic Interview Analysis
5. What implications does the experience of ECB at Neighborhood House have for the work of ECB practitioners at other community-based organizations?	Model of ECB	Model of ECB	Analysis of model implications

Document Review

I reviewed documents from Jean King's personal files on Neighborhood House dating back to the year 2000. These documents helped me construct a rudimentary timeline of activities at Neighborhood House and get an idea of the progression of ECB. This document review yielded a story of evolving evaluation group meetings, evaluation trainings, and evaluation topics, all with the common thread of Jean King's participation.

Interviews

I selected ten individuals to interview about ECB at Neighborhood House using a snowball sampling method. Jean King, who has been involved with the ECB work with the organization for over eleven years, suggested several individuals to interview who had been involved in the work over the several years' history of the efforts. Those individuals in turn recommended other individuals to interview. In most cases, these recommendations overlapped with Jean's, but in some cases a new informant was recommended. One of the recommended informants I was unable to reach for an interview, but I was able to speak to all nine of the others. All interview participants were current or former employees of Neighborhood House who were involved in evaluation capacity building at some time and in some capacity. I talked to members of the original Evaluation Platoon, as well as an early database manager and evaluation manager on staff. The following table details the roles and names of interview participants in alphabetical order, all of whom gave permission to use their names.

Table 2. Interview participants in alphabetical order

Name	Role	Member of original Evaluation Platoon?
Rena Oswald-Anderson	Former Vice President of Community Development	
Armando Camacho	Current President	

Brad Hasskamp	Former English Language Learners Program Manager	X
Patrice Husak	Former Evaluation Manager	X
Ed Kegel	Current Director of Finance and Human Relations	X
Anna Martin	Current Evaluation Manager	
Barbara Merrill	Former Program Evaluation Manager	
Susan Rostkoski	Current Director of Donor Relations	
Cindi Yang	Current Director of Programs	

I used a standard structured interview protocol for my interviews (See Appendix I) that was structured for an hour-long interview. However, some questions were dropped in two interviews due to time constraints. The questions addressed the experiences of the interviewees in ECB efforts and their observations about what was helpful and a barrier to ECB work. I also asked questions to get a description of the activities (formal and informal) that had been part of evaluation capacity building at Neighborhood House.

Interview analysis

After conducting the nine interviews, I partially transcribed all interviews, paying attention to particularly articulate and meaningful quotations. I then coded the quotations and thoughts of my interviewees according to the themes present. The major coding categories were subdivided as needed into different facilitators, barriers, indicators, and outcomes, and then further subdivided if different aspects of those themes were mentioned.

In my findings section I report on the themes that were mentioned by more than one individual. I focused on answering four major research questions:

1. What are the facilitators of successful evaluation capacity building?
2. What are the barriers to successful evaluation capacity building?
3. What are the indicators of successful evaluation capacity building?
4. What are the outcomes of successful evaluation capacity building?

Using the findings from these research questions, I constructed a logic model of evaluation capacity building, as it has worked at Neighborhood House. This model can be used to help similar organizations implement ECB efforts.

Limitations of the Research

For a few reasons, my research cannot be considered a comprehensive study of ECB activities at Neighborhood House. Due to the limitations of the memories of my interviewees and the limitations of the documents preserved over the last several years, I was not able to construct a highly reliable timeline of ECB activities. There was a large amount of disagreement and ambiguity about the dates or even sequence and recurrence of certain activities, therefore my timeline is a rough estimate.

Another limitation to my study was the extent to which all of these individuals were connected to each other and to my advisor Jean King, with several of them currently working at Neighborhood House. This was confounded by my connection with Jean and obvious interest in ECB, perhaps served to bias their responses, despite assurances of confidentiality. Also because of these connections my interviewees all shared, having been themselves involved in the work, a somewhat common understanding and value for evaluation and ECB emerged, which was apparent in their interviews.

To get a more thorough understanding of how ECB had impacted the organization, it would have been valuable to gather data from a wider variety of stakeholders, particularly those not directly involved in the ECB efforts (as my interviewees were). It would also be valuable to interview some of the staff or other stakeholders who were more resistant to ECB. Of course, the one recommended informant I was not able to talk to, as well as one other individual whom I was told I could not contact, would have possibly had valuable and unique insights as well.

Chapter 4

Findings

The following section details what I have found in my interviews to answer the research questions. I begin with the model for evaluation capacity building that seems to function according to what I have heard from Neighborhood House employees about their experience over the years of ECB work. I created this model as a logic model because I believe that is a format easily understood by evaluation practitioners, including myself, and will help in replicating ECB efforts at a different organization. Following the logic model are the frequently mentioned themes I found in my interviews with explanation and representative quotations.

A (Logic) Model for Evaluation Capacity Building

In my attempt to answer my research questions, I also came up with my own model for evaluation capacity building, as it has worked at Neighborhood House. This model answers one of my original research questions (What model describes how ECB works at Neighborhood House?) using my interview data. It will also be useful for other ECB practitioners trying to learn from the wisdom of many years of Neighborhood House's experience in implementing ECB strategies. It may be particularly useful to evaluation and ECB practitioners because of its formatting as a logic model.

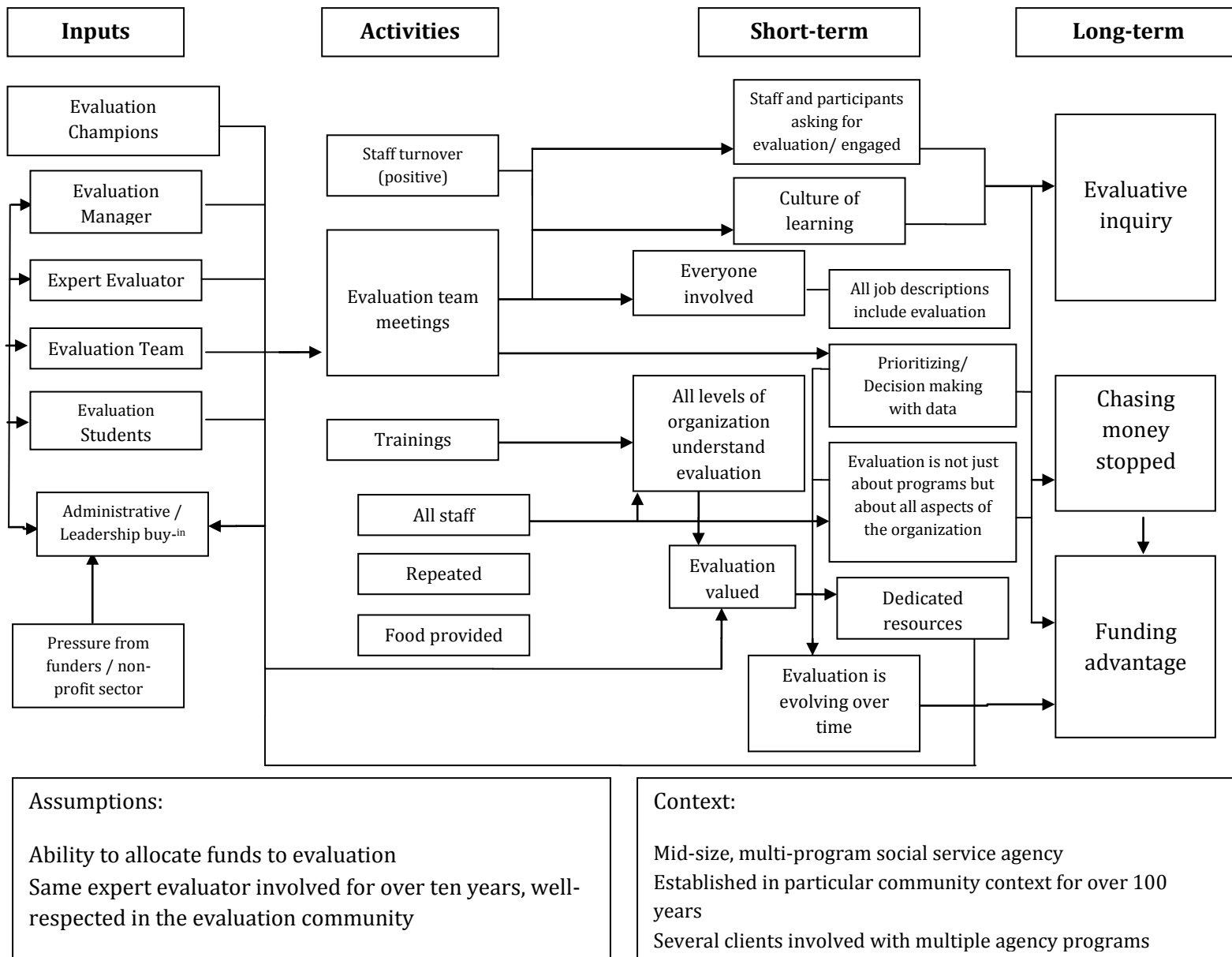


Figure 5. Evaluation Capacity Building as Effective at Neighborhood House: A Logic Model

Facilitators of Successful Evaluation Capacity Building

The major facilitators of evaluation capacity building that my interviewees often talked about were in large part people. Several categories could probably be included under the major theme of “evaluation champions.”

Evaluation champions

While we want it institutionalized, we also realize that one person can make a huge difference, you know, so when Anna’s time comes and she’s no longer here, hopefully we can find another person who’s just as passionate about it as Anna....Institutionalizing is about getting more people on board so they can be champions of evaluation.

Several interviewees mentioned that one individual or a group of individuals that was passionate about the evaluation and the ECB cause made a huge difference in the attempts for the organization to build capacity. The specific ways that those individuals are included in the ECB efforts mostly fit into the following categories:

Jean King / Expert evaluator

Having Jean King, Jean King would join our group once a month and discuss some of our efforts and give some guidance in that very enthusiastic, Yoda-like way that she can sometimes do. She just bubbled with enthusiasm as well, and I think that really helped sustain our efforts.

And getting Jean involved really helped to put that expert model, because you program people all don’t know what you’re talking about, you don’t have evaluation experience, but to get Jean in there, and she had a great way of being the expert model, but also being able to answer all their questions, their objections, so we can’t do it because this this and this, and Jean was able to say, what’s going to happen if you don’t do it? There’s a cost to that also.

Jean was seen as an essential impetus to the evaluation work at Neighborhood House by six out of the nine interviewees. Jean started work with Neighborhood House in 2001 as a board member and evaluation consultant volunteer. She worked with some initially interested evaluation champions at Neighborhood House to begin their ECB work.

She has been a consistent anchor for the organization's evaluation and ECB work since that time, providing an unheard of continuity within non-profits and evaluation consulting work. Her role was seen by interviewees as so valuable because:

- a) She has been involved in the effort for several years
- b) She is a respected expert in the field, therefore having authority in ECB work
- c) Her position as an external volunteer consultant gave her more authority and distance
- d) Her enthusiastic and personable characteristics made her able to pull several more evaluation champions into the ECB work

Evaluation students to help with projects

Tied in with Jean, three interviewees noted that the evaluation students from the University of Minnesota that Jean had given them access to had been a major help with ECB work. They were seen as neutral, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and helpful for including staff in non-threatening evaluation activities. A former evaluation manager said of the students:

I had a lot of student interns, and that really helped...through Jean...it really helped in building the logic models. I didn't have to go in and impose my will. There was a student that came in and they could do a lot of logic model building that I think helped particularly at a couple programs, that it removed the angst that somebody was looking over their shoulder at their program, from management. It was an intern that could make it pretty and was in there learning, and so it was a learning experience for both of them as opposed to something from on high that they had to do, and it did really help.

A dedicated evaluation team

Most interviewees mentioned one of the various groups that had been formed with the purpose of building evaluation capacity at Neighborhood House. The first group formed was called the “Evaluation Platoon” and was comprised of program managers. This group was initially brought together by Patrice Husak, the first evaluation manager at Neighborhood House. She informally brought together this group of her friends to do more evaluation work. They met almost weekly and brought in the higher level administration and Jean to comprise a monthly “Evaluation Task Force.” This group provided some guidance and answer questions. When Patrice left, the Vice-President for Programs and the new evaluation manager continued the monthly meeting of program managers to discuss evaluation.

Over time this group lost some of its perceived effectiveness, and it was disbanded by the current evaluation manager, Anna Martin. Then a new group, the PEP (Promoting Evaluation Progress) Squad was formed. This group was comprised of the “natural evaluation champions” from every department within the organization. Therefore staff members at every level as well as community members and board members were represented. Another positive aspect of this team structure was that because everyone involved had opted in because of their interest in the evaluation work, the evaluation manager didn’t need to “push water up stream” with this group. The characteristics of the evaluation work groups that seemed to be most effective are described below.

Structure evolving/adapting

One interviewee noted that it is helpful for the structure of the group to be adaptable and to always reassess how the structure is functioning in order to make sure it is effectively meeting the needs of the organization.

Relationships

Almost all interviewees who had participated in these evaluation groups, particularly the original Evaluation Platoon, noted that the deep personal bonds and social aspect of the group were a huge part of what made it work and held it together. Some of the Evaluation Platoon members described the relationship-oriented dynamics of that initial team:

When Patrice was here, we were really intense. We had nicknamed ourselves the Evaluation Platoon, there was a lot of team building within that, and I think this group of managers...we developed extremely close working professional relationships. I've had deeper conversations with them than any of my other colleagues since.

Quite honestly, most of the people that were meeting with us then, the program managers, they were my friends, they were within my age bracket, we all kind of hung out after work, and that's not the way it came together. It just happened that those were the people that needed to be at that meeting, although you can't demand that.

Taking ownership

Another important aspect of an evaluation team is their ownership of the evaluation process and evaluation capacity building. The individual members need to be excited about the work they are doing on an individual level, not just because their presence at meetings is required. As one interviewee described:

The formation of the platoon was like a declaration by managers that "we believe in this and we are taking this forward. We're owning this process, we're not just doing it at these monthly meetings where we're required to attend, we're taking this further to meet once a week to do this." I think that was us taking ownership of the process.

One interviewee explains her vision for, and experience of, an effective evaluation team in the following way:

I was not interested in this committee in pushing any kind of water uphill. I wanted this group to be the natural evaluation champions of the organization and that then

with that group, we could strategize about how to push the rest of the water uphill. You know, I didn't need that on my committee. And that was kind of what the task force had become to feel like, of like trying to convince people that this was a good thing. I didn't want to convince anyone. I wanted a group that could surround me, support me, support me strategically, with energy, with ideas. Occasionally that I could hand work off, too, that kind of thing, and it has been so much fun.

Representatives from different roles across the organization

Another important aspect of an effective evaluation team has been the way, as mentioned above, that different roles and different departments are represented within the team. This gives broad representation for the entire organization within the evaluation efforts.

Focused work plan

An agreed upon agenda for evaluation work was seen as essential for keeping the momentum going and ECB happening effectively. Currently, Neighborhood House is working on the ECB checklist that Jean King and Boris Volkov published in 2007 as a basis for its current evaluation work plan. Some interviewees also noted that when the focus is lost, you lose people's enthusiasm and involvement as well (even with mandatory meetings), and ECB work is doomed.

7-8 people

A few interviewees noted the importance of an appropriate size for an evaluation work group. The general consensus was that 7-8 people is perfect. This size group was seen as large enough to have wide representation, different ideas, and the ability to get work done, but also small enough to be effective in discussion and focusing their energy.

Evaluation manager position

Almost all interviewees noted that the position of an evaluation manager, or someone devoted to evaluation within the organization, had been key in sustaining evaluation capacity building efforts. As one interviewee put it:

I think having the staff member specifically is why it stay here. Honestly, I'm not sure we could sustain it without someone called an evaluation manager. As much as we talk about integrating and embedding it, the position matters, it kind of keeps it at the forefront...

The important characteristics and aspects for the position and person filling it are detailed below:

Interpersonal Skills

The following quotations illustrate how interpersonal and relationship building skills were imperative for the evaluation manager in conducting effective ECB work.

[Someone] to whom people can go when they have questions, want to gripe about it, that point person has been really crucial, because that person might not sit in the meeting and not say, well I don't know why we're doing X, but they might go privately to the staff member and say, you know this is all messed up for me, help me out here....someone who's a good coach, to give them confidence, not only that can they do it, but there's a huge benefit, because then their program gets funded. Really there's a direct line.

They also have to be on that same level of integrated with, part professional and part friendly level with everyone they're going to be working with. They have to have personality, to be frank, they have to be somewhat liked by the people that they're going to be working with, because there is that air of value judgment that comes with evaluation. It's not something you can learn, I guess you'll either fit into an organization or you won't... [There have to be] relationship building qualities with the staff and the clients so that there's a trust. If there's a trust there, they will let you do pretty much whatever you want. If there's a lack of trust, then you might not get authentic information. Again not something that can be taught

[I've] built relationship with them, [and] the relationship is a huge facilitator. So I honor their expertise, I honor their schedule and their time demands. I try to be

realistic about where I fit in with their job and their context. Over time you show that respect and that sensitivity...

Evaluation staff person in position of management/power

One strategic decision that Neighborhood House has made is to put the evaluation manager directly under the President. Most interviewees noted that this had been extremely helpful for ECB work because of the direct relationship that Anna, the current evaluation manager, was able to have with the highest level of administration. This has given her more clout, as well as more insight into the workings of all aspects of the organization. While it was noted that it was somewhat of an extra burden to have the evaluation manager supervisory role as part of the President's responsibilities and that it was a temporary best solution, almost all interviewees saw this as a very positive development for ECB.

Energy/enthusiasm

Several interviewees noted the need for a high energy personality in the evaluation manager position. They noted that enthusiasm and energy were key for creating buy-in from other staff and motivating people to pursue the vision of ECB.

Training

Neighborhood House has conducted several staff trainings in Evaluation over the last 11 years. They mainly fell under the headings of "Evaluation 101" and "Evaluation 202." Evaluation 101 has been repeated most frequently and involves Jean's introduction to evaluation "chocolate chip cookie exercise." Evaluation 202 has been repeated less frequently and involves discussing Patton's techniques for utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2010).

The following aspects of training were seen as important for its success:

Repetition

Because staff turnover at non-profits is so prevalent and because it often takes multiple learning experiences over a long period of time for evaluation concepts to really sink in, repetition was seen by a few interviewees as important to the training process.

For whole organization /all staff

Several interviewees noted the importance of including all staff, not just program staff, in the trainings. They thought it sent a message about administrative support and evaluation culture, as well as that all parts of the organization were included. One interviewee recalled of one staff training about logic modeling: “We had the custodians there, we had everyone, this was something that everyone was going to do...the building shut down for a couple hours. It was a shut down everybody was doing this day.”

Food

Providing food was seen as an important aspect of training as well. One interviewee noted that the chocolate cookie exercise was so effective because of the combination of evaluating and eating cookies that creates positive associations with evaluation. Another interviewee explained:

Food is important. I hate to make it so simple, but when you bring people together and you give them food and make them happy, it breeds a sense of importance, that we're able to spend the money on this, but it also makes people more happy and more willing to listen. We always had food at the Platoon meetings, and we carried that to the trainings as well.

Whole organization buy-in

A common theme in interviews was the need for buy-in from the whole organization, not just a few individuals. While this could possibly be categorized as an

outcome or an indicator of success, it also was seen as a necessary condition for success.

One interviewee remarked:

We all take ownership for it, so we're not dependent on [one] person. When you lose someone as critical, it is a huge loss, but how can you move forward? Only if everyone in the organization, or a good chunk of people believe in what you're doing.

Another interviewee also agreed that:

Any program needs buy-in, the supervisors, the people who run the program, everyone needs to agree that some method of gathering this information is valuable.

Administrative/leadership buy-in

Along with whole organization buy-in, administrative and leadership buy-in was seen by almost all interviewees as an extremely important piece of ECB work. Some ways that leadership demonstrates this is showing up at evaluation meetings, events, and trainings, as well as sending reminder e-mails to staff about what is needed from them for evaluation purposes. Also mentioned was that leadership needs to be willing to allocate staff time and organizational resources to evaluation activities, which is often a struggle, and seen as something unique at Neighborhood House. As one interviewee put it, "No other entity that I know of is willing to have their managers participate two hours a week in a platoon to develop logic models for their programs." Board support is another aspect of leadership support that was mentioned as important for ECB's success.

Pressure from funders / non-profit sector

A couple of interviewees mentioned that funders and a national evaluation culture were an important impetus for ECB and evaluation activities. United Way was seen as one of the first funders to introduce the need for evaluation to the non-profit community in Saint Paul, including Neighborhood House.

Staff turnover

Interestingly, a couple of interviewees saw staff turnover as potentially a positive thing for ECB. One interviewee summed up this effect:

I think, too, as the population changes, people left as the organization changed and we get new people in who assume that since they're asked to do it, that's what they're supposed to be doing. Not digging their heels in again, sometimes transition helps.

Barriers to Successful Evaluation Capacity Building

The following barriers came out of my interviews. Many of these barriers were factors that are inherent in the non-profit world, meaning that there is not much that an organization can do to change things. However, several interviewees also mentioned concrete things about educating staff that could potentially be remedied by an organization that puts evaluation as a priority.

Programmatic change

A couple of interviewees mentioned the challenge of programs constantly changing and morphing to adapt to things like community needs and funder expectations. This means that evaluation frameworks and methods are also constantly needing to be reworked.

Staff turnover

Almost every interviewee noted the problems that come with staff turnover in trying to build evaluation capacity. As many interviewees also noted, staff turnover is a prevalent problem in the non-profit sector and makes keeping staff trained in evaluation close to impossible. Training needs to be done on a continual basis, and buy-in from new staff needs to be earned. Turnover within the evaluation team can also have drastic consequences.

Staff resistance

Most interviewees mentioned the barrier of staff resistance as particularly problematic. A few frequently mentioned reasons were given for this resistance:

Too much work

Several interviewees mentioned this as a reason for staff pushback to ECB efforts.

One interviewee details his own initial reluctance to participate in evaluation activities:

I saw this as additional work. I had trouble seeing this as building my capacity, but I was initially seeing this as I already do all this evaluation work, I already have all this required evaluation work. I don't understand why I need to build this additional work for myself through this process, because I thought they were going to build additional things that I would have to measure for my program, that I was reluctant to because when I started there I was the only staff person in that program, I was the manager of a one person program...I'm going to have to do everything.

Interviewees noted a prevailing attitude among non-profit staff that was negative towards evaluation because it was just seen as more paperwork, which gave them less time for doing what they perceived as their actual job. This attitude is something that has been recognized in the culture of other non-profits, as well as educational programs for social work.

Lack of staff training/understanding

Interviewees recognized a huge barrier as staff not understanding why they needed to do evaluation, or what the importance was to their community-based work. Interviewees thought that even trainings were not necessarily enough to ensure that staff understood the concepts and importance of evaluation. One interviewee explained:

It took a few years I think for program supervisors to even understand the basics. I know for me I'd go through evaluation 101 and 202 and I was still confused. I couldn't connect that to the work that I was doing. And I just felt like there was so much work and so much information we had to gather, but then what are we supposed to do with this?

Taking it personally

Often staff were reluctant to participate in evaluation activities because they perceived them as threats to individual persons. This was not expected by the ECB teams that were running these activities, but it was a hard perception to shake. One interviewee recalls:

People, when we talked about the volunteer program, and when we were evaluating, a lot of the staff were evaluating the manager who ran the program, which was kind of an aha moment for the PEP squad. We're trying to have folks understand this tool and give them two or three different skills and tools to use about evaluation, but people were taking it personal[ly], and like it was targeting the manager.

Part of this perception was a feeling of staff being threatened in their autonomy, as if evaluation would tell them they were doing their program wrong and would tell them they had to do things differently. This was not very welcome to many staff, according to one interviewee:

People who do programs with really good intentions aren't always open to finding out if they're really meeting their goals. That's not to say they aren't meeting some positive goal, but they may not be meeting the goal their program intends, and it gets very personal. Any time you're working with people, it doesn't matter what field you're in or what non-profit you're at, your job becomes very personal, and to have it evaluated feels very personal.

Danger of not keeping it fresh

One perhaps surprising barrier that was mentioned was excessive institutionalization. If systems for evaluation become too entrenched and people stop thinking and evaluating the evaluation tools, the ECB efforts may be in serious danger. One interviewee describes this danger and the need for "tension":

If it's so institutionalized, people don't really look at it, it's just kind of there. So it does need some tension to really make people thoughtful about what they're doing and why they're doing it, and why today is different than yesterday.

Time

Setting aside the time to participate in evaluation activities will always be a pressing challenge for non-profits. In a sector where staff members are almost always overtaxed, doing the work of two or possibly three people, time is at a premium. Also, when the organization's work is something so important for the community, it is often hard for a non-profit to justify the time spent on evaluation activities. One interviewee explains:

Time, time is always...our staff is so overworked, there is absolutely no duplication in this agency right now... it feels luxurious to sit in a room and talk about a logic model, when there are pressing needs outside of this wall, and so for these two hours when we're talking about the logic model, that's in two hours downstairs in the food shelf we can serve somewhere between 16 and 25 families with food. That's a pretty big cost-benefit, and so finding the time for that, evaluation activities to percolate to the top of the priority list is really challenging, and to really make every evaluation encounter for that staff the most meaningful that it possibly could be because otherwise you don't deserve to have those hours, that's kind of what it comes down to, and it's just high stakes, that's kind of what it comes down to. It's exhausting, it's very challenging to make the argument constantly that it is important enough to set those things down, that's kind of what you're always up against...

More specifically, interviewees noted that more evaluation manager staff time is instrumental in ECB efforts, as would setting aside the time for evaluation meetings among the staff on the evaluation team. The current twenty hour a week position of evaluation manager was seen by most as not ideal. The ability to hire a salaried, full-time employee for that position would contribute significantly to ECB in the opinion of interviewees. There was a general consensus that good evaluation takes a good amount of time, which is often lacking.

Funding

Of course money was seen as a barrier, as is almost always the case in non-profit organizations. Interviewees noted the difficulty of maintaining steady funding to evaluation

efforts when budgets are being cut, potentially cutting into their ability to run programs. Often it was seen as a trade-off between “keeping the doors open” and evaluation, and the competition for resources is often lost by evaluation. Neighborhood House has been fortunate to keep its evaluation running due to a program “tax” that devotes a percentage of funding from each program area, but when funding gets tight, evaluation still suffers. This was also seen as a grave problem because of the fact that evaluation was necessary for securing more funding.

Database limitations

Something that Neighborhood House experienced, particularly in its evaluation program’s early years, was the difficulty of acquiring a database that would be able to integrate information across all of their many programs. A few fits and starts led them to their current system. Another difficulty with databases has been the proliferation of funder databases that has/had required staff to enter data in multiple databases for the same program information. Also, staff have not always correctly entered information, causing more effort for data cleaning.

Indicators of Successful Evaluation Capacity Building

Several different indicators of successful ECB work were brought up by interviewees. These are something like the intermediate outcomes on a logic model, which display that good things are happening in terms of evaluation, but are not necessarily the ultimate goals or outcomes.

Evaluation valued

Interviewees noted that it was apparent that leadership and staff mostly now valued evaluation and that this was an important indicator of success. This was itself evident by the way that the organization now participates in evaluation regardless of funder

requirements. One interviewee details the organization's understanding of evaluation's value:

This is an organization in which you just know that evaluation is happening. It's not an add-on, it's not a burden, it's not "gee, do we have to keep that?" it's part of the culture of the organization, that evaluation is valued and it's what we do....if you were to say we're not going to do evaluation anymore, I think you'd have an uprising on your hands. It would never occur to them [staff] not to do that.

Dedicated resources

Another indication that evaluation is valued by the entire organization is the way that resources have been dedicated to evaluation efforts. Seven percent of every program budget is dedicated to evaluation efforts, ensuring the survival and demonstrating a value for evaluation. One interviewee noted that if program managers did not understand the value of evaluation, they would never allow that money to be dedicated to it.

Culture of learning

This might also be a precursor to successful ECB efforts, in that the organization needs to value learning and change. ECB and evaluation were also seen as contributing to a culture of learning.

Prioritizing / decision making with data

Interviewees noted that ECB had improved the organization's ability to make decisions using data. One example was given of the way that one interviewee had been able to look at food shelf attendance data and divide clients into three different groups that needed different targeted services. They were able to target the majority of their services to those who had come three to five times to the food shelf, conserving their resources for those who were most able to benefit from them. Another example given was how data about the ethnicity of Neighborhood House customers, when finally tracked, was able to help

make decisions about what language skills were needed for staff and what amount of culturally appropriate foods were needed in the food shelf.

Everyone involved

An important aspect of ECB that was mentioned by a few different interviewees was that everyone within the organization was involved in the process, so that there were no outsiders. This means that board members, staff, volunteers, and community members of varying levels of power and involvement within the organization are all part of the process and owning the process.

Job descriptions include evaluation

An indicator that everyone is involved in the evaluation work is the fact that all job descriptions with Neighborhood House have some sort of evaluation component.

Evaluation is not just about programs, but about all aspects of the organization.

Several interviewees mentioned that at Neighborhood House, evaluation had gone beyond just programs to encompass all areas of the organization. For them this includes things like their earned income rental facilities, volunteers, and maintenance. A couple of interviewees mentioned a cross-agency report that is produced every year and asked for again every year by staff.

Evaluation is evolving over time

Interviewees also felt that it was a good sign that evaluation activities would change over time and not stay static. As one interviewee puts it, “[Evaluation is] always being adapted, it’s never stuck, it’s never stopped in formation. It’s always developing, revising, improving.”

All levels of organization understand evaluation

One interviewee explained:

The same culture of learning also had to be brought into the board. So the results of our program evaluation got brought to the program committee, and they really looked at it and distilled that and spent some time saying, 'What are our learnings? What does that mean?' So it had to be done at all levels of the organization. When you want to create a learning organization it means all levels of the organization.

Staff and participants are engaged/asking for evaluation

Almost all interviewees discussed this as an indicator of success. They noted that this had happened at Neighborhood House and how instrumental it had been in driving further evaluation work. One interviewee described this as part of the ECB strategy: "We want to create higher demand for data. People want information so that they can make decisions and to try to get the demand to come up so that we can supply it."

Another interviewee also noticed the demand for data percolating through the staff:

Yah, people are very eager to see what the next steps are, so for example the all staff retreat, after that they want to know how we are going to use this information, to make sure that it's not just an activity and people forget about it. So people are asking and that's a sign to show that people are involved and thinking about it.

Reputation in community for evaluation

Funders and the non-profit community now expect Neighborhood House to do high quality evaluation, indicating success in their ECB efforts. Other non-profits have often asked for advice from Neighborhood House on evaluation capacity building.

Outcomes of Evaluation Capacity Building

The three major outcomes of ECB work were what we can call evaluative thinking, more funding generated, and the ability for the organization to remain stable in the programs it offers because it does not need to be chasing money anymore.

Evaluative thinking

One interviewee describes her vision of agency-wide evaluative thinking as follows:

Building evaluation capacity within every individual where they're that much more intentional about asking a question or thinking critically or using a piece of information to inform what they do, all of that I consider to be part of evaluating, not just the formal, a lot of the time it misses the point of what we do.

Another interviewee similarly details what ECB did for the evaluation team and the staff of Neighborhood House:

It changed our mentalities. We developed an evaluative mind, an evaluative reasoning process. Like in law school they talk about how you have to develop the language of law and the legal reasoning like mind. I felt like this process through Neighborhood House helped us redevelop our minds in how to think in evaluation terms, to be more logic-minded, like if this happens, this is going to happen and here's how I can articulate this.

Funding advantage

Interviewees saw that evaluation was helpful for grant writing and securing funding, even if they could not point to specific examples of when evaluation had made the difference in a funding decision. This was an acknowledged goal and outcome for the ECB work.

Chasing money stopped

A perennial problem of non-profits is having to chase grant funding to keep their doors open. Neighborhood House employees saw their ECB work as a way to escape that vicious cycle. With concrete evaluation data, they felt they were able to apply for more targeted grants and to work with funders to ensure that both the organization and funder's needs were met when funding a program at Neighborhood House. Also over time, the evaluation data collection and reporting was able to stop chasing funders and become something run by Neighborhood House's own evaluation questions.

Chapter 5

Discussion

My research with Neighborhood House combined with my literature review allows me to look for common themes and trends in knowledge about ECB. There are several commonalities between the existing literature and my research, as well as a few areas that Neighborhood House was unique in recognizing. The following tables illustrate the overlap (and lack of overlap) between my interview findings and my research in the ECB literature. Only major findings from my interviews are presented in these tables (meaning they were mentioned by more than one individual).

Table 3. Facilitators of successful evaluation capacity building

Literature	Neighborhood House Interview Findings
Organizational learning culture	
Pro-evaluation context	Pressure from funders / non-profit community
Staff attitudes about evaluation	Whole organization buy-in
Leadership support	Administrative/leadership buy-in
	Board support
Dialogue between internal and external evaluators	
ECB structures and activities	Evaluation trainings
	Evaluation manager position
	Evaluation work group
	Evaluation students
	Expert evaluator
Evaluation champion	Evaluation champion
Funder expectations	Pressure from funders / non-profit community
	Staff turnover

Table 4. Barriers to successful evaluation capacity building

Literature	Neighborhood House Interview Findings
Lack of evaluation resources	Funding, database limitations
Over-structuring	Danger of not keeping it fresh
Staff turnover	Staff turnover
Resistance to change	Staff resistance

Literature	Neighborhood House Interview Findings
Limited staff availability	Time
Over-complicated	
Over-evaluation	Staff resistance: Too much work
	Programmatic change

Table 5. Indicators/Outcomes of successful evaluation capacity building

Literature	Neighborhood House Interview Findings
Cognitive: Understanding of evaluation concepts	
Behavioral: Capacity to do evaluation	Ability to implement evaluations
Behavioral: Capacity to use evaluation	Ability to interpret data
Affective: Staff taking ownership of evaluation	Staff and participants are asking for evaluation/engaged
Affective: Recognition of the importance of evaluation	Evaluation valued
Empowerment outcomes	
Org: Processes, policies, practices	Functional evaluation tools
Org: Mainstreaming	
Org: Evaluative inquiry	Evaluative thinking
Org: Organizational learning culture	Culture of learning, Culture of innovation
Org: Defined measurable outcomes	Ability to define success
Org: Improved program outcomes	
Org: Resources	Dedicated resources
	Chasing money stopped
	Funding advantage
	Prioritizing/decision making with data
	Evaluation is not just about programs, but about all aspects of organization
	Everyone involved

It is apparent from these tables that while themes are often named differently, there is a great amount of overlap between the literature and my findings. However, my findings give some extra detail and nuance, particularly in the context of a mid-size, multi-program non-profit.

At the Neighborhood House, some themes that emerged distinct from the literature involved utilizing evaluation students, and including all staff in all departments in the evaluation activities. The organization making evaluation about more than just programs,

but an agency wide endeavor was not something mentioned in the literature. Neighborhood House interviews also brought up how important the personality of the evaluation champions are. Their enthusiasm, personability, and trustworthiness were seen as important. Also, the Neighborhood House data gives a much more detailed understanding of how an evaluation work group effectively works. Specifically the ideal size of seven to eight people, and the importance of including people belonging to different programs and areas within the organization was new and concrete information.

Programmatic change was also a barrier that had not been mentioned in the literature, but was seen as a barrier to non-profits when setting up evaluation and ECB activities.

Implications for Practice

The many ECB practitioners working with community organizations could use the data and findings I have compiled to be more effective in their practice. My data suggests that evaluation champions (with the right combination of enthusiasm, patience, and personability) working in and with an organization are the most effective means of increasing evaluation capacity. An evaluation manager position, an external but long term dedicated expert evaluator, evaluation student interns, and particularly an evaluation work group were very effective ways of engaging the organization in ECB work.

My data also supports the literature in showing that administrative buy-in is necessary for sustained and effective ECB efforts, and that staff resistance is often a potent barrier to ECB efforts. My data also uncovered some examples of how ECB genuinely serves an organization by giving them the ability to make data-informed decisions in terms of programming and pursuit of funding. These benefits have conserved the agency's resources

and helped Neighborhood House weather some financial hard times and stay true to their mission and clients.

One major finding of my data (also somewhat supported by the literature) is the necessity for ECB efforts to be constantly adapting. When work teams and strategies become too routine and accepted as is, the enthusiasm for evaluation and therefore its ability to be useful to an organization wane. In this sense, staff turnover, while still maintaining a consistent evaluation champion expert, has given Neighborhood House the unique ability to continue their work while not becoming too static.

Evaluation practitioners should be able to use my ECB logic model in order to guide their future efforts, while hopefully keeping an eye to how their own particular context might differ from that of Neighborhood House.

Future research

Further research on ECB could focus on programmatic change as a barrier and data-driven decision making as an indicator of success. These themes did not come up in a literature review, but were seen as important by many of the interviewees at Neighborhood House.

Also further research could focus on the particular role of an evaluation team within an organization. Gathering information on a variety of different team models and their effectiveness in different settings would be helpful for ECB practitioners in structuring their efforts. More quantitative research should also be conducted to get an idea of how many ECB practitioners and community-based organizations are in fact encountering these themes in their work. Of course, this kind of research should also be conducted at several more community organizations and other entities working with ECB to determine how widely applicable these findings are.

Further data could also be gathered on the amount of hours and time invested in the process of ECB at Neighborhood House, as well as a more quantifiable impact on the funding received by Neighborhood House, to determine a Return on Investment of these activities.

Conclusion

In examining the inner workings of one specific community organization through in depth interviews I have been able to investigate some of the concrete factors and strategies that contribute to ECB efforts. This more specific understanding of how different strategies have met with facilitators, barriers, and outcomes of ECB within a community organization is useful for practitioners and researchers concerned with evaluation capacity building. My research provides some empirical data with which to evaluate the various ECB models that have been proposed in the literature. It also provides a new grounded model with which to understand and conduct evaluation capacity building within mid-size community organizations.

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Appendix I: Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this interview. We will be discussing your experiences and insight regarding Evaluation Capacity Building at Neighborhood House. I will be using what information you can give me for my Master's Thesis, which is a case study of how Evaluation Capacity Building works in a large non-profit, using Neighborhood House as the case. Just to clarify, your responses will not be associated with your name or any identification in anything that I write or in any discussion with others, so please feel free to be candid. Would you feel comfortable if I recorded this interview? I will also not be sharing these recordings with any other individuals.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

(If permitted, proceed to record)

1. How long have you been/were you at Neighborhood House and what brought you to the organization?
2. When you arrived what was the status of evaluation at Neighborhood House?
3. What does evaluation mean for an organization like Neighborhood House?
4. What does it take to sustain the evaluation process?
5. What are the barriers?
6. What are the facilitators?
7. How would you define evaluation capacity building?
8. Why do you care about evaluation capacity building? What got you on board?
9. What events do you remember that were key in building evaluation capacity?
Which ones were most key?

(work together to fill in / reconstruct time line of events)

10. Do you remember...? (if so, please describe it and what you think it did for NH)
 - a. Community conversation
 - b. Eval 101
 - c. Eval 202
 - d. Evaluation task force meetings
 - i. Specific ones?
 - e. Evaluation focused staff meetings
 - i. Specific ones?
 - f. Any others?
11. What makes an event key in building evaluation capacity?

12. What does success in terms of evaluation capacity building look like?
13. Do you remember any particular moment where you or another individual / program made a breakthrough in their understanding or attitude about evaluation?
14. What would it mean if evaluation were institutionalized?
15. How would that happen?
16. What are the challenges in getting evaluation to be institutionalized?
17. How do you think Neighborhood House is doing now (in terms of evaluation capacity building)?
18. What do you wish could still be done to build Neighborhood House's evaluation capacity?

Thank you so much for being part of this process. Would you like me to send you a copy of the Thesis when it's finished or otherwise keep you in the loop about what I will do with my results?