

Introduction

WE HAVE CONTINUOUSLY sought ways to improve our evaluation practice, and our varied experiences have reaffirmed the importance of using collaboration in evaluation efforts. Collaborative evaluation is an approach that offers many advantages, including access to information, quality of information gathered, opportunities for creative problem solving, receptivity to findings, and use of evaluation results. From a broad perspective, collaborative evaluation belongs to the *use* branch of the evaluation theory tree described by Alkin in *Evaluation Roots* (2004), concerned with enhancing evaluation use through stakeholder involvement. We wrote this book to help you involve stakeholders collaboratively throughout the evaluation process.

Over the past decades, stakeholder involvement in various phases of evaluation has received increasing attention, and the literature has reflected this through a number of publications outlining the primary assumptions of the stakeholder approaches to evaluation, their historical chronology, their practical applications, their constraints, and their benefits (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012a). Stakeholder approaches to evaluation typically imply the incorporation of stakeholders in one or more components of the evaluation process (for example, in evaluation design or interpreting evaluation results) with the goal of increasing utilization, promoting development, or both. Examples of these approaches are responsive evaluation, democratic evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation, and collaborative evaluation.

Theory and practice of evaluation are still evolving, and evaluators from a wide variety of backgrounds have been expanding current thinking about these stakeholder approaches and formalizing their components. This has provided opportunities for unique insights in a purposeful and systematic way. Also, this has brought together evaluators and stakeholders to exchange knowledge on

how collaboration can be used as a strategic tool for fostering and strengthening evaluation practice.

National and international evaluation associations have contributed to the steady maturation of several stakeholder approaches. For example, in 1995 the American Evaluation Association (AEA) created the Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation Topical Interest Group (CPE TIG). Since then, this TIG has provided a forum for evaluators to exchange experiences about the many ways in which these approaches can be used. In an attempt to reach consensus, a comparison of the essentials of collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation (as a result of this TIG discussions) has helped in further clarifying their similarities and differences. For example, each approach is designed to enhance evaluation use and organizational learning capacity; however, they differ in the way they pursue these goals.

After a thorough examination of the CPE approaches, and taking into account the audience's feedback at several AEA meetings, proponents have cautiously developed definitions. Specifically, **collaborative evaluators** are in charge of the evaluation, but they create an ongoing engagement between evaluators and stakeholders, contributing to stronger evaluation designs, enhanced data collection and analysis, and results that stakeholders understand and use (Rodríguez-Campos & O'Sullivan, 2010); **participatory evaluators** view control of the evaluation as jointly shared by evaluators and program staff—participants are involved in defining the evaluation, developing instruments, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting and disseminating results (Shulha, 2010); and **empowerment evaluators** view stakeholder participants as in control of the evaluation—empowerment evaluators are critical friends providing advice and guidance to maintain rigor and keep the evaluation on target (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2010).

While the stakeholder approaches have influenced and shaped the evaluation field, they are not the answer for every evaluation. An evaluator who wishes to use these types of approaches should be flexible and tolerant of contextual difficulties and variations in stakeholders' willingness to participate (Garaway, 1995). To optimally use the stakeholders' approaches to evaluation, or any other approach, there needs to be clear expectations of their advantages and disadvantages based on the specific situation. In any case, the benefits gained by adopting a stakeholder approach to evaluation should outweigh the potential difficulties that may ensue.

Among other stakeholder approaches, the future of collaborative evaluation looks promising, as there are an increasing number of evaluators and clients interested in this type of approach. Our primary goal was to write a user-friendly book that included detailed explanations and illustrations of how to apply collaborative evaluation in daily practice; a book that could be used by anyone with a certain degree of familiarity with how to conduct evaluations. In other words, we want to make collaborative evaluations accessible to you.

This book is intended to help you gain a deeper understanding of how to build collaborative relationships within an evaluation while recognizing that the level of collaboration varies for each evaluation. We introduce the Model for Collaborative Evaluations (MCE) for transforming evaluations into a joint responsibility process between you (the evaluator) and specific collaboration members (CMs). When people are involved in a collaborative process and develop a nuanced appreciation for aspects beyond their tasks, they are more willing to assume responsibility for the entire effort. The MCE creates precisely this kind of commitment, and we share our experiences in a way that will enable you to apply the information in this book immediately.

As we have traveled around the world, attempting to speak in other languages, we have experienced that people initially make assumptions about our choice of words. It is only after they recognize our positive intentions that they invest the time and effort to thoroughly understand the meaning of the words we use. It is our hope that we can transmit the meaning of the MCE beyond just the words used to present it in Figures I.1 and I.2. Before we explain the characteristics of the model, let's review some important terms to establish a common understanding and a foundation for the chapters that follow.

Evaluation is a systematic study designed and implemented to determine the value (such as merit or worth) of an evaluand, providing a basis for guiding the decision-making process. **Evaluand** is anything evaluated, such as a system, organization, program, project, or personnel (also called *evaluatee*). **Evaluator** is the individual (such as you) who accepts responsibility for the overall evaluation and its results, employing defensible criteria to judge the evaluand value.

Collaboration is a process in which two or more people actively work together in a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship in order to achieve a vision not likely to occur in isolation. It is more than simply sharing information or coordinating efforts toward a mutually beneficial end. It brings together

resources, strategies, and ways to address concerns or create something new (Wilson, 2000). **Collaborative evaluation** is an evaluation in which there is a substantial degree of collaboration between evaluators and stakeholders in the evaluation process, to the extent that they are willing and capable of being involved (see, for example, Cousins, Donohue, & Bloom, 1996; Rodríguez-Campos, 2005, 2012b).

Collaboration members (CMs) are specific stakeholders (possessing unique characteristics) who work jointly with the evaluator(s) to help with particular tasks in order to achieve the collaborative evaluation vision. Although the number of CMs may vary, the group size has to be manageable (for example, a limit of six CMs) to maximize the benefits of their contributions. For large or complex evaluations, several groups of CMs can be created to represent a greater range of expertise and to minimize delays in the evaluation.

Model is a term loosely used to refer to a conception or approach or even a method of doing evaluation (Scriven, 1991). It is “[a] thing or person to be imitated or patterned after; that which is taken as a pattern or an example” (*Webster’s Dictionary & Thesaurus*, 2000, p. 629). In addition, a model “characterizes its author’s view of the main concepts and structure of evaluation work . . .” (Stufflebeam, Madaus, & Kellaghan, 2000, p. 19).

The **Model for Collaborative Evaluations** (MCE) is a framework for guiding collaborative evaluations in a precise, realistic, and useful manner. This model revolves around a set of six interactive components specific to conducting a collaborative evaluation. It has a systematic structure that provides a basis for decision making through the development of collaborative evaluations. The MCE helps to establish priorities in order to achieve a supportive evaluation environment, with a special emphasis on those factors that facilitate collaboration.

The MCE core components have emerged from a wide range of collaborative efforts that we have conducted in the business, nonprofit, and education sectors. Figure I.1 provides the conceptual framework for viewing the MCE components interactively: (1) identify the situation, (2) clarify the expectations, (3) establish a collective commitment, (4) ensure open communication, (5) encourage effective practices, and (6) follow specific guidelines. The center of the MCE includes the phases or stages of the evaluation, with the arrows representing the interdependent flow in order to facilitate collaboration. (Note that Chapter 2 will help you understand how to clarify the evaluation process.)

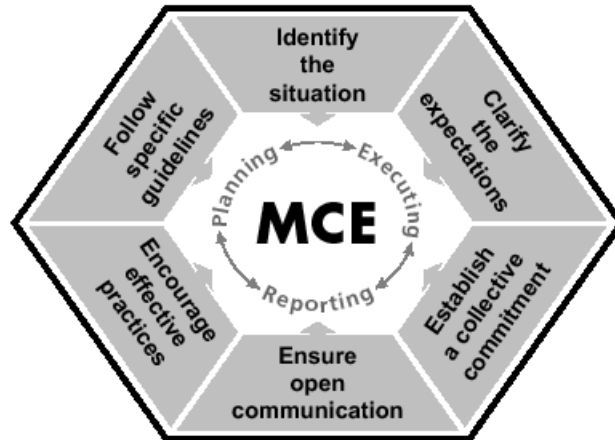


Figure 1.1 Components of the Model for Collaborative Evaluations

The novelty of the MCE resides in the way in which each of its elements (components and subcomponents) influences the others and, as a consequence, the overall collaborative evaluation. Even though the MCE could create an expectation of a sequential process, it is a system that incorporates continuous feedback for redefinition and improvement in which changes in one element affect changes in other parts of the model. To accomplish a comprehensive collaborative evaluation, we recommend the interactive use of the MCE elements on a rotating and remixing basis. However, you may also gain new insights by using each of the model components individually to reap some of its benefits.

The MCE helps to perform a systematic, careful examination of where the evaluation stands in terms of the subcomponents, present within each MCE component (see Figure 1.2). The model is a constant source of information because it provides a simple and innovative way of presenting the activities that have to be carried out, avoiding possible tensions among you and the CMs about when and whether to make decisions on potentially sensitive topics.

Each of the MCE subcomponents, shown as bullet points in the outer ring circle of the figure, includes a set of ten steps suggested to support the proper understanding and use of the model (for example, when and how the various MCE elements need to be used). The MCE also serves as an iterative checklist that provides consistent guidance for the collection of relevant evidence to determine the value of the evaluand (see the Appendix for a more traditional formulation of such a checklist). Checklists reduce the chance of forgetting to

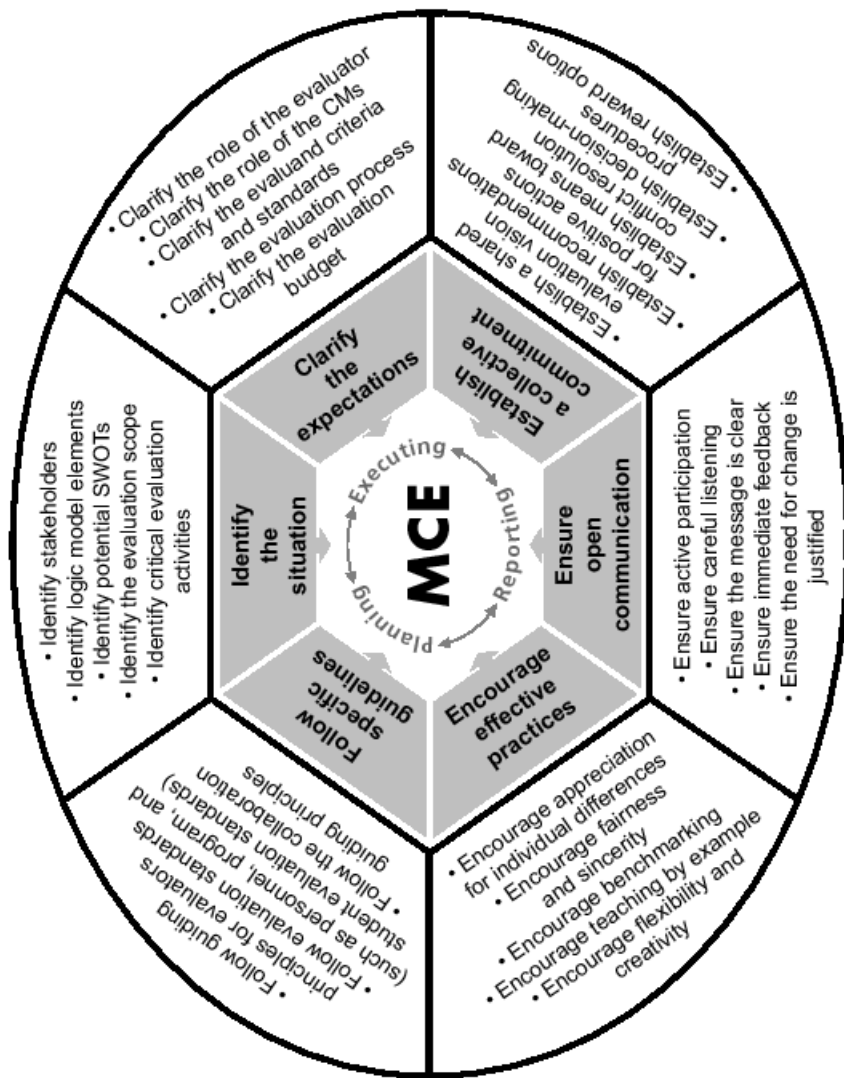


Figure 1.2 Model for Collaborative Evaluations

check something important, are easier for the layperson to understand, and reduce the influence of the halo effect by forcing the evaluator to consider each relevant dimension of merit (Scriven, 2005).

The MCE has been developed in such a way that, while keeping its design intact, its feedback mechanisms help to foresee and manage the unintended events that can appear along the way. In other words, this model establishes a solid basis for auto-analysis, because each component of the MCE and its sub-components can be continually revised as necessary. In collaboration, people keep coming back to the beginning in order to build on and improve what they have been doing (Winer & Ray, 2002).

In our experience, the implementation of the MCE has been very effective, because it is possible to make adjustments during execution as well as to immediately recover from unexpected problems; for example, the extent and various levels of collaboration required throughout the evaluation. The versatility of this model can help you to handle “surprises” that may arise and also ensure that possible flaws or deviations with regard to the evaluation plan can be controlled through the use of feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, the MCE facilitates training, reducing the costs for professional development and selection of new CMs.

The MCE has a wide potential applicability for conducting collaborative evaluations because different aspects of it will have greater relevance in certain cases depending on specific contextual factors. For instance, each program evaluated will have its own unique group of people, interests, and disagreements. Thus the subcomponent “Establish Means Toward Conflict Resolution” could be more relevant in one evaluation than in another. To reinforce interconnectivity among the MCE elements, we have included some reminders throughout the book to illustrate the relationships among them. For example, when we explain “Clarify the Evaluation Budget” in Chapter 2, we connect it with “Encourage Benchmarking” in Chapter 5 by writing, “See Chapter 5 on how to encourage benchmarking.”

In this book, we blend theoretical grounding of the MCE with practical tips for “real life” applications. The aim is to increase the quality of your evaluation, because you can establish a more open and shared evaluation culture while attending to the intended and unintended effects of the collaborative relationships. Specifically, the book consists of six chapters; each chapter contains a description of one of the components of the model with its corresponding subcomponents and activities laid out in a step-by-step fashion. Each of the

chapters can be visited individually as needed because they are easy to follow and allow for quick guidance. However, we recommend reading all the chapters in the book first to clearly understand the MCE before using it.

To further illustrate the application of the MCE in particular situations, we invite you to explore the MCE through recurring vignettes about several fictional evaluators (Eliot, Ernest, and Evelyn) and their evaluation clients who decide to use a collaborative evaluation approach. These short, simple, and realistic stories appear in each chapter, bringing the MCE to life in a practical way while showing how it emphasizes a systematic stakeholder engagement throughout the evaluation process. They are composites based on lived experiences, and represent an attempt to capture the essence of the MCE from various perspectives in order to produce a valuable understanding of the different stances that often arise in this type of evaluation and to provide a useful basis for decision making.

This book is presented in a way that allows you to clearly understand how to conduct collaborative evaluations in your own work. It is not intended to address all extant alternatives for collaborative evaluation. Rather, the intention is to deepen and share new knowledge, contributing to and benefiting the collaborative effort with the use of the MCE. The aim of this model is for you to achieve a holistic learning environment by understanding and creating collaborative evaluation opportunities. In such an environment, everyone involved will better understand the evaluation process and therefore be more likely to use its findings. We wish you a superior quality of work in your collaborative evaluations!