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Translating Evaluation Policy into Practice: Intersections with Evaluation Capacity Building

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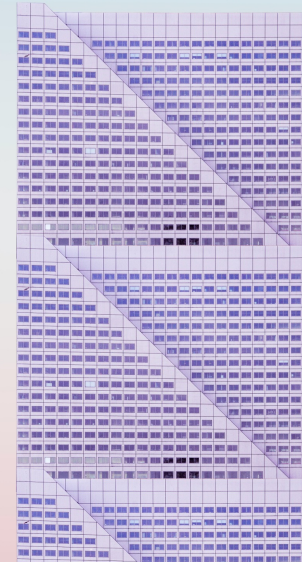
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Background





Study objectives

Evaluation policies are often used by organizations to structure and harmonize evaluation practices across multiple departments or branches.

Limited empirical work has been done on the extent to which these policies translate into concrete evaluation practices.

Study sought to examine the extent to which evaluation policy shapes departmental evaluation practice, as well as the barriers and facilitators to policy implementation.

02

**What are
evaluation
policies?**





Definition

Evaluation policy is a set of rules or principles embedded in legislation or other documents that are used to guide evaluation practice (Mark, Cooksy, & Trochim, 2009).

Can be more or less formal and explicit, depending on the needs of the organization.

Purposes of evaluation policies

Guiding the work of evaluators

Evaluation policies identify what is evaluated, how, how often, and by whom

Communicating expectations about evaluation

Evaluation policies signal the importance of evaluation across the organization and its role in learning and accountability

Transforming organizational evaluation practices

Evaluation policies focus on specific requirements and direct decision-making related to evaluation

Supporting the establishment of an evaluation culture

Evaluation policies highlight expectations related to evaluation participation by program staff and managers

Key components of evaluation policies

- Goals or purposes of evaluation
- Participation or involvement in evaluation
- Procedures and methods for conducting evaluations
- Roles and responsibilities for conducting and using evaluations
- Resources for evaluation
- Evaluation ethics
- Evaluation capacity building

Drawn from AEA Policy Task Force, 2007; Al Hudib & Cousins, 2022; Datta, 2009; Trochim, 2009.

03

Evaluation in the Canadian federal government



Evaluation Oversight

- Each department and agency has its own evaluation function, guided by a government-wide evaluation policy
- Requirements related to evaluation date back to 1977 and have evolved over time
- Policy on Evaluation (2009) sought to address issues related to evaluation availability and coverage; reviewed in 2015
- Policy on Results (2016) addressed some weaknesses of the previous policy and has a broader scope
- Work underway to review and update the Policy on Results to reflect changes in evaluation approaches and practices

Key components of the Policy on Results (2016)

- Fewer coverage requirements
- Flexibility in choice of evaluation focus (issues) and approaches
- Heavy emphasis on informing decision makers, especially Deputy Heads
- Prioritizes quality performance information to feed into evaluation
- Oversight by departmental evaluation committee
- Requirement for five-year rolling departmental evaluation plan
- Continued requirement for “neutral assessment” every five years

Neutral assessments

- Implemented in 2009 with Policy on Evaluation
- Evaluations of the evaluation function conducted every five years
- Flexibility in approach but should comment on policy compliance
- Usually conducted by external experts
- Rely heavily on internal stakeholder views
- Cover evaluation utilization to some extent
- Submitted to Deputy Head – no publication or sharing requirement

Reference: Bourgeois, I., & Maltais, S. (2022). Evaluating the evaluators: what have we learned from 'neutral assessments' of the Canadian federal evaluation function? *Canadian Public Administration*, 65(1).

Research Questions

How have the elements of the *Policy on Evaluation* (2009) and the *Policy on Results* (2016) been **implemented** by federal evaluation functions?

To what extent do these policies appear to **shape evaluation practice** in the Canadian federal government? What are some of the **barriers** faced by evaluation functions in implementing evaluation policy?

04

Conceptual framework and methodology



Conceptual framework



Adapted from; Datta, 2009; Trochim, 2009, GoC Policy on Evaluation, 2009, Policy on Results, 2016.

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis of 41 reports from 28 different organizations

Creswell (2014) data analysis approach conducted with NVivo



- 1 Organization and data extraction
- 2 Reading the data
- 3 Coding and data reduction
- 4 Thematic analysis based on conceptual framework
- 5 Interpretation and generation of findings

**1278
data
points**

05

Key findings



Overall findings









Policy implementation

By and large, the two federal evaluation policies have been implemented to some extent by all of the organizations featured in the reports examined.

Locus of control

Policy elements that are closer to the locus of control of senior executives tend to be more fully implemented than those further down the executive line.

Policy Implementation Status

	Status	Details
Oversight of evaluation function		Mostly: oversight committees, report and DEP approval processes, designated Head of Evaluation
Competencies of evaluators		Mostly: integrity, ethics, technical competencies, professional development
Evaluation function management		Partially: contracting, fiscal decision-making
Evaluation project management		Partially: timeliness, steering committees, quality assurance, monitoring
Evaluation coverage and issues		Partially: consideration of gender and language
Evaluation quality		Partially: scoping, approaches and methods, parsimony, findings and recommendations
Integration of performance measurement		In progress but not achieved: ongoing challenge
Evaluation dissemination and use		Partially: external dissemination, internal decision-making across programs

Does policy translate into practice?

- Policy does translate into practice in some instances and not others
- Policy implementation is not necessarily done in the same way in all organizations; adaptations are required based on organizational size, mandate, and purpose within the federal government
- Lack of guidance in policy can lead to non-existent evaluation practices (for example, evaluation approaches)
- Need to look at extent of implementation, not just whether a policy element is implemented
- Need more primary data to determine whether policy translates into practice

Barriers to policy implementation

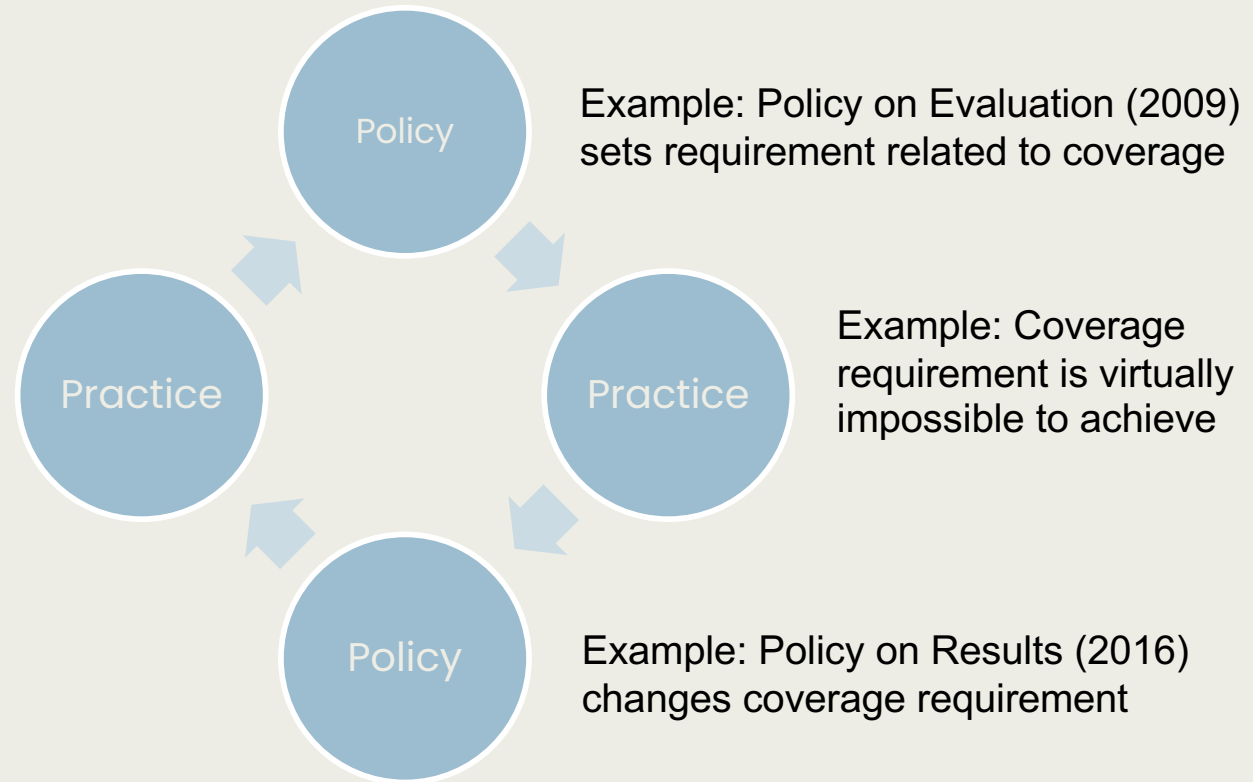
Purview of the evaluation function

Some policy elements are not under the direct control of the evaluation function, such as performance measurement; implementing these elements requires coordination and collaboration across functional groups

Availability and retention of evaluators

High turnover rate in the function creates challenges in meeting evaluation commitments in a timely manner and impacts knowledge retention within the organization

Practice can also shape policy



06

Intersections with ECB

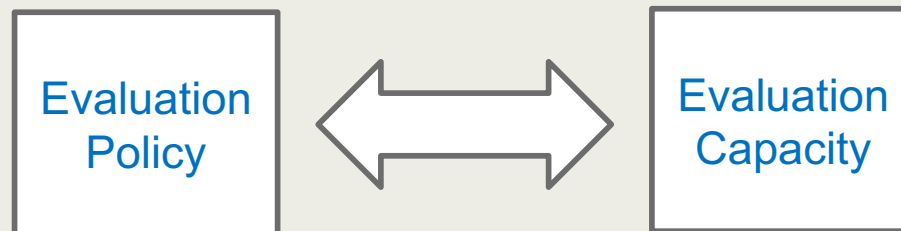


Evaluation Capacity Building

Defined as “the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (Stockdill et al., 2002, p. 14).

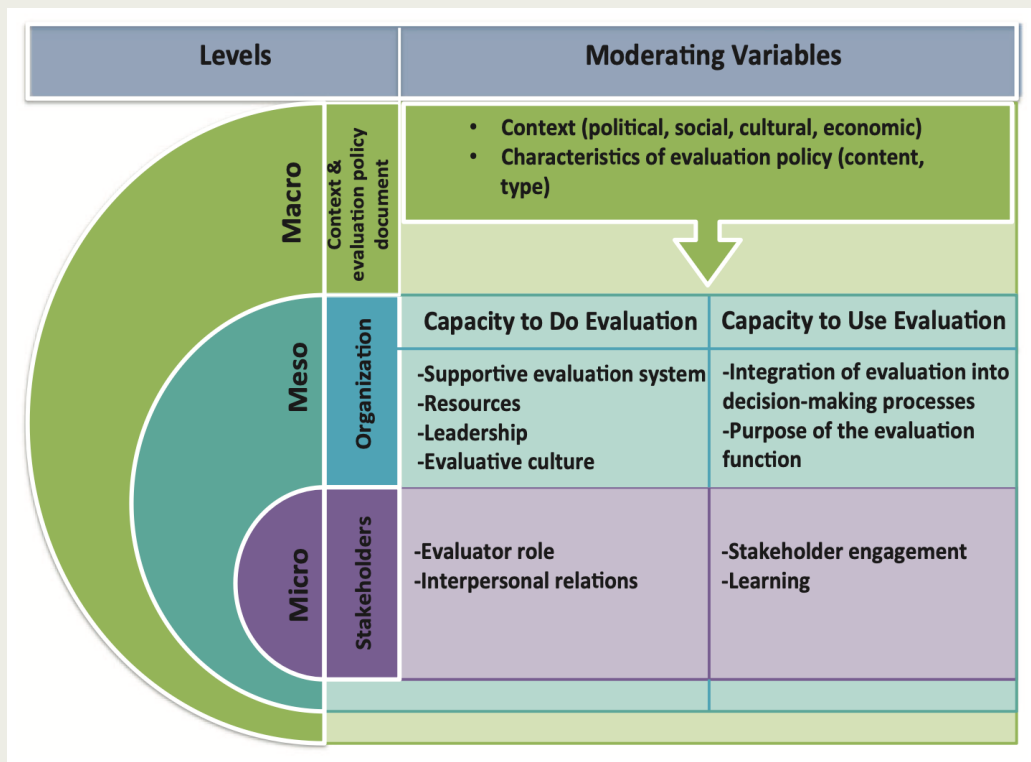
Evaluation capacity (EC) is the outcome of ECB activities and can manifest at an individual or organizational level

Evaluation policy can be thought of as a mechanism to increase organizational evaluation capacity, or as a result of evaluation capacity building activities



Moderating variables

(Al Hudib & Cousins, 2021)



Ecological framework of moderating variables that explain the relationship between evaluation policy and organizational capacity for evaluation.

Key takeaways



- Evaluation policy focuses on what evaluations should be conducted, how, with what resources, when, etc.
 - Can be formal and explicit or informal and implicit
 - Sets requirements and expectations that can facilitate evaluation practice and use across the organization
- Some individual and organizational evaluation capacity might be needed before a policy can be developed and implemented
 - Policy needs to be adapted to current capacity and target increased levels of capacity to be effective in improving evaluation practices and uses

Implications for practice

My organization has an evaluation policy

- Assess extent to which it has been implemented
- Identify pressure points in translating policy into practice
- Additional ECB may be needed for full implementation

My organization does not have an evaluation policy

- Assess current levels of EC using instrument or discussions
- Identify areas requiring increased EC and develop ECB strategy
- Consider developing an organizational evaluation framework or policy as part of the ECB strategy

Conclusion

- Developing an evaluation policy is one way to build evaluation capacity in an organization
- Sometimes, ECB is needed before an evaluation policy can be developed to address foundational issues and/or lack of capacity
- Evaluation policies help to set expectations around evaluation practice and use and are helpful in communicating shared values pertaining to evaluation
- Policy does not always translate as intended into practice; this can signal need for additional capacity or need to change/scale the policy based on organizational context and evolution
- Assessing extent to which policy does translate into practice can be a useful exercise for organizations

Thank you!

Stay in touch!

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