

Evaluator Learning in Small Organizations

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Overview

- Potential barriers and strategies for engaging in effective learning
 - Small organizations/workplaces special?
 - 5 steps for developing an effective plan
- Case examples
- Discussant
- Discussion



The Small Organization/Workplace

- Adopts HR solutions as a reaction rather than a strategy (Cassell et al. 2002)
- Less likely to provide formal training due to size specific barriers (Westhead 1998)
 - access, release time, relevance, financial resources, employer incentives
- Prefers informal learning approaches (Dawe & Nguyen 2007)...

Formal training vs. informal learning

Formal learning can be identified as learning which follows a pre-determined plan, is instructor led, and is monitored and recorded by a training provider.

Informal learning, on the other hand, can be understood as initiated by the learner or by the circumstances, to address occurring issues.

(compare to Dawe & Nguyen 2007)

Informal learning

- Traditionally lower status than formal training
- Can cope with organizational barriers to formal training
- Can often become more effective and reach its potential if structured and use purposefully

1. Identify desirable competencies

- Self-assessment tools
 - *Ghere, Gail; King, Jean A.; Stevahn, Laurie & Minnema, Jane (2006). "A professional development unit for reflecting on program evaluator competencies," American Journal of Evaluation, 27 (1), pp. 108-123.*
 - *McGuire, Martha & Zorzi, Rochelle (2005). Evaluator competencies and performance development. Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 20(2), pp. 73-99.*
 - *List:*
<http://consultation.evaluationcanada.ca/pdf/ZorziCESKnowledge.pdf>
- Check lists
 - E.g., www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/
- Discussions with others

Some Extracts...

Competency	Competency Level		
	Self Rating	Required	Learning Goal
Experimental, quasi-experimental, non-experimental			
Longitudinal			
Case study			
Ethnography			
Naturalistic inquiry			
Phenomenology and epistemology			
Program review			
Survey research			
Mixed method			
Ruling out alternative interpretations			
<i>Sampling and Measurement</i>			
<i>Competency</i>			
Probability sampling			

Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators							
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Entry / Novice							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing awareness / building knowledge Limited repertoire Limited experience Unaware of potential problems Unaware of questions to ask 							
Proficient / Skilled							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying knowledge routinely Basic repertoire Moderate amount of experience Solves problems as they arise Aware of questions to ask and able to access resources to answer the questions 							
Mastery / Expert							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using knowledge fluently and effectively Advanced repertoire Extensive experience Anticipates problems before they arise Poses questions to the field Sought out for input 							
L0 Professional Practice							
1.1. Applies professional evaluation standards	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.2. Acts ethically and strives for integrity and honesty in conducting evaluations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.3. Conveys personal evaluation approaches and skills to potential clients	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. Prioritize and set goals

- Which competencies are/will be most important for your position?
- What is your organizations' priorities and anticipated needs?
 - Learning solution = business solution
- Assess your current level (self-assessment tools, tests, performance reviews)

3. Understand the context

To help selecting strategies that will work:

- Supply of formal training opportunities
- Organization's informal learning processes
 - E.g., the workplace informal learning matrix: www.wilm.ca/en/index.html
- Learner's personal learning style

3. Understand the context

To help selecting strategies that will work:

- Potential organizational barriers (small businesses/organizations)
 - Lacking financial resources
 - Lacking access
 - Need for customized learning
 - Lacking employer incentive

4. Select methods and indicators

- Revise your goals and make them SMART
- Brainstorm strategies, e.g.,
 - Evaltalk; learning networks (internal, cross organizational); teaching; mentoring; reading journals, books, websites; action learning; lunch and learn; peer review committee; formal or informal client or associate feedback
- Prioritize and select – make it fit together
 - Blended more effective than single

5. Ensure accountability for plan

- ***Initially:*** build into performance review or other agreement with supervisor/associate
- ***Ongoing:*** Do learning activities meet expectations? If not, make adjustments
- ***3-6 months after learning activity:*** Have you integrated learning in practice as planned? If not, make adjustments.
- ***Annually:*** Sum up, evaluate, re-plan

References

Cassell, C., Nadin, S., Gray, M., & Clegg, C. (2002). *Exploring human resource management practices in small and medium sized businesses. Personnel Review*, 31(5-6), pp. 671-692.

Dawe, S., & Nguyen, N. (2007). *Education and training that meets the needs of small businesses: A systematic review of research. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.*

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Discussion Questions

- What are some examples of informal learning activities you have done?
- What are some challenges when structuring informal learning approaches?