



Building evaluative culture in community services: Caring for evidence

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ABSTRACT

An organization with a strong evaluative culture engages in self-reflection, evidence-based learning and experimentation. It sees evidence as essential for managing well, but building such a culture is challenging. Community service organizations seek to provide effective services for their clients. To build an evaluative culture, they need to acquire basic monitoring and evaluation capabilities, be provided with opportunities for using these capabilities and be adequately motivated to care about evidence as a means to improve services to their clients. Leadership along with a phased in approach are key in bringing about these behaviour changes.

1. Introduction

I have argued elsewhere (Mayne, 2008, 2009) that an evaluative culture is essential for effective results management in an organization; that without a robust evaluative culture, an evaluation capacity would be hard to build and certainly to maintain. Here I will argue that this earlier framework is a good basis for discussing evaluative culture in community organizations, but needs to be adapted for the case at hand.

The setting being examined here is:

- Community groups working to help individuals with a variety of brain disorders.
- Activities based for the most part on volunteerism and caring.
- The groups face challenges articulating the 'success' of their efforts.
- There is limited experience with and resources for monitoring and evaluation along with limited resources, but an interest in building capacity.
- Many of these organizations have uncomplicated management structures.

Some of the arguments from those earlier writings will be used to first describe and discuss just what an evaluative culture entails and discuss some of the key implications. An extension of that earlier work will build a behaviour change model—a theory of change—on what is needed to bring about such a culture. This model is then applied to the community group setting to better understand the nature of an evaluative culture in community service settings and implications for building this culture.

A word on terms. I use *results* to include both outputs and the collection or chain of subsequent outcomes of an intervention. *Results management* is managing inputs and outputs with a view to maximizing

the likelihood that the benefits intended from the program or intervention are realized. *Results information* is information and data on results gathered from monitoring and evaluation. *Adaptive results management* is proactively gathering results information on a regular basis to inform decisions on implementing activities and delivering services.

1.1. What is an evaluative culture?

Based on a review of the literature at the time, I argued that an organization with a strong evaluative culture undertakes the practices outlined in Table 1. I think this remains a good description of a strong evaluative culture. In practice, of course, an organization with an evaluative culture may not undertake all of the specific elements set out, but would engage in forms of self-reflection, evidence-based learning and experimentation.

As I described it earlier:

Thus, an *evaluative culture* denotes an organizational culture that deliberately seeks out empirical information on its performance in order to use that information to learn how to better manage its programs and services, and thereby improve its performance. Such an organization values empirical evidence on the results—outputs and outcomes—it is seeking to achieve. It is these evidence-seeking behaviours that characterize an evaluative culture and distinguish it from a more general learning culture. (Mayne, 2009: 6)

2. Bring about behaviour changes

Most interventions seek to change the behaviour of individuals and/or organizations. Yet surprisingly evaluation of interventions has not made much use of the quite large social research literature on behaviour change theories and models. One review of that literature is by

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Table 1
Practices of an Organization with a Strong Evaluative Culture.

- engages in self-reflection and self-examination (i.e., self-evaluation):
 - deliberately seeks evidence on what it is achieving, such as through monitoring and evaluation
 - uses results information to challenge and support what it is doing
 - values candour, challenge and genuine dialogue
- engages in evidence-based learning:
 - makes time to learn
 - learns from mistakes and weak performance
 - encourages knowledge transfer
- encourages experimentation and change:
 - supports deliberate risk taking
 - seeks out new ways of doing business (Mayne, 2009: 5)

Darnton (2008).

There are exceptions. Bennett's hierarchy has been used in the evaluation of education programs (Bennett 1975; Bennett & Rockwell 1995). The hierarchy includes an imbedded behaviour change model where by changes in capacity of knowledge, aspirations, skills and attitudes (KASA) are seen as leading to practice changes. Steve Montague has used the Bennett hierarchy in a variety of evaluation settings (Montague 2000; Montague & Lamers-Bellio 2012; Montague & Valentim 2010).

In a recent article (Mayne, 2015), I used the NOA (Needs, Opportunities and Abilities) model of Gatersleben and Vlek (1998) discussed by Darnton (2008) as a key part of a useful theory of change model. Darnton's review of behaviour change models notes a key aspect, namely that all of the capacity change elements in the models are necessary to bring about behaviour change. How the capacity change elements are organized and grouped differ among different models, but are essentially referring to the same set of capacities. The NAO model argues that needs and opportunities lead to motivation which when combined with abilities leads to behaviour change.

A more recent behaviour change model seems even more intuitive and is specifically aimed at behaviour change interventions. The Better Evaluation site discusses this model (<http://betterevaluation.org/comment/68681#comment-68681>). Michie, Stralen and West (2011) set out a COM-B model of behaviour change: behaviour (B) occurs as the result of interaction between three *necessary* conditions, capabilities (C), opportunities (O) and motivation (M).

Capability is defined as the individual's psychological and physical capacity to engage in the activity concerned. It includes having the necessary knowledge and skills. Motivation is defined as all those brain processes that energize and direct behaviour, not just goals and conscious decision-making. It includes habitual processes, emotional responding, as well as analytical decision-making. Opportunity is defined as all the factors that lie outside the individual that make the behaviour possible or prompt it. (Michie et al., 2011: 4)

Their COM-B systems model is shown in Fig. 1. Note that both capabilities and opportunities can influence motivation and all three not only bring about behaviour change but can also be influenced by the resulting behaviour change.

Interventions typically address one or more of capabilities, opportunities and motivation, indeed often just capabilities such as when knowledge and skills are enhanced through education and training. In such a case, the capacity change assumptions would have to include an assumption about adequate opportunities and motivation being in

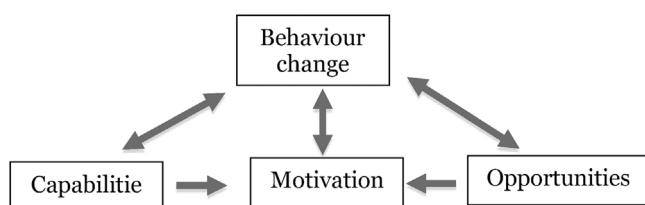


Fig. 1. The COM-B System Model.

place, since a key behaviour change assumption is that the capabilities, opportunities and motivation are all adequate.

In a theory of change context, we would have Fig. 2. Further discussion on this type of behaviour-change based theory of change model can be found in Mayne (2015) and Mayne (2016). I will use Fig. 2 as the basis for analyses of the community service case.

Michie et al. (2011) also identify a classification of types on interventions and policies that are used to change behaviour, based on a review of the relevant literature (p. 7). Here it is the interventions that are of interest. Of the nine set out, two would not seem to be appropriate in our setting given its largely volunteer focus, namely coercion and restriction. The remaining seven, shown in Table 2, could be used in the community group setting. Also noted in the table is which element of the COM-B model the intervention relates to, and examples in the community group setting.

3. The case of evaluative culture and community services

To build an evaluative culture, Table 1 set out the practices we would like to see, which can be applied to a community service organization. Let me summarize these evaluative culture practices as 'caring about evidence':

1. *Seeking evidence* about the results the intervention is bringing about, and
2. *Deliberately learning* from this evidence about how and why things are working or not

While for some these might seem to be obvious good practices to undertake, there may be several reasons why they may not so straightforward:

- Possibly, although unlikely, the community group has no knowledge of monitoring and evaluation, and is unaware of what benefits might accrue.
- There may be a culture of blame in place when things go wrong. Developing practices to find problems may not seem like a good idea.
- Developing these kinds of practices takes time and some resources, seemingly taking attention away from helping clients.
- The experience in results measurement and analyses may not be there.
- There may be a belief that working hard in this important area is good enough; numbers are not needed to know they are doing a good job of helping clients.

To overcome these types of concerns and bring about the desired behaviour change, the COM-B model argues we need adequate capability, opportunity and motivation. Fig. 3 sets out a theory of change model for developing an evaluative culture in a community group. The model assumes that intervention efforts will be needed addressing each of capabilities, opportunity and motivation to bring about an evaluative culture in these groups. The capacity change elements in the model are discussed below, using the generic interventions in Table 2 as a guide.

Capabilities. Knowledge about the basics of monitoring and evaluation along with basic skills in setting up monitoring systems, collecting data and analysing the results information as to its implications. These can be provided through

- appropriate education and training, geared to the context of the community group, and probably are the easiest to provide.

Opportunities. These are the conditions that allow or prompt the desired behaviour, and could entail efforts such as

- occasions to undertake some monitoring activities,

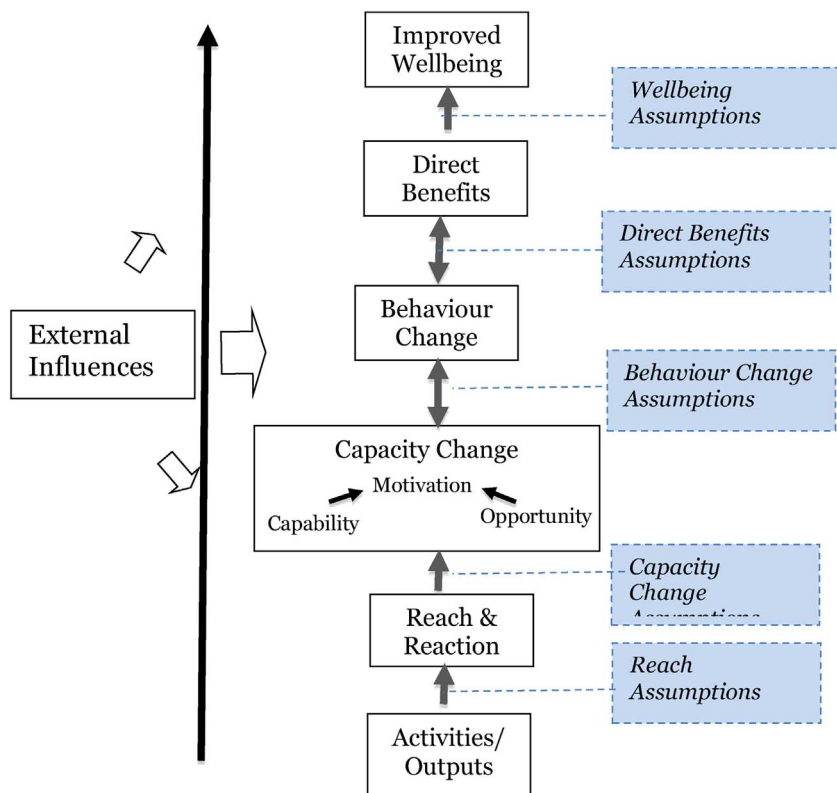


Fig. 2. The COM-B Based Theory of Change.

Table 2
Possible Types of Interventions in the Community Group Setting.

Intervention	Definition	Examples
Education (Capability) Persuasion (Motivation)	Increasing knowledge or understanding Using communication to induce positive or negative feelings or stimulate action	Information and discussions on results information From leadership and/or peers
Incentivisation (Opportunity/ Motivation) Training (Capability)	Creating expectation of reward Imparting skills	Receiving praise; celebrating a contribution On measurement and using results information
Environmental restructuring (Opportunity) Modelling (Motivation) and/or Capability)	Changing the physical or social context Providing an example for people to aspire to or imitate	Introducing structured learning events Seeing results management at work in similar groups; reading convincing relevant cases
Enablement (Capability and/or Opportunity)	Increasing means/reducing barriers to increase capability or opportunity	Hiring some results expertise

- workshops to explore the implications of results information gathered,
- visits to other community groups more advanced in monitoring and evaluation, and
- funding to help with monitoring and evaluation, including bringing in outside expertise.

These opportunities would require group effort and agreement.

Motivation. This is likely the most challenging of the capacity elements. Community groups are certainly motivated, but motivated to help their clients, to work hard and to ‘do good’ by making a difference. This motivation likely can be usefully harnessed in building an evaluative culture. But this type of motivation can as easy be a hindrance since many may think that working hard is enough; that they are working directly with clients who need help and therefore what they do is necessarily useful.

The need here, however, is to be motivated to seek out evidence on what is actual working, which may challenge what they have been doing. The key message has to be that by seeking and using evidence, they will be able to provide even more effective services. Additional messages could be that with evidence they could more credibly

demonstrate to others—others in the group, other groups, supporters, funders—how they are making a difference.

Community groups are working in complex settings, so may realize that what works well is not that well known and that some trial and error is needed (and hence evidence) on the services provided. They are not alone in this type of setting. Many others face similar complexity, and need to undertake forms of adaptive results management. (Loftin, 2014; Wild, Booth, Cumming, Foresti and Wales 2015)

Motivating possibilities here might be

- incentives in the group, such a recognition or additional resources, for valuing evidence and learning from it,
- clear support by the group leadership for tolerating mistakes and learning from them,
- personal experiential evidence that valuing evidence can help them improve services to clients,
- seeing colleagues provide better service using evidence, and
- providing a means to show others effective innovative approaches in client services.

The opportunities mentioned above would likely enhance

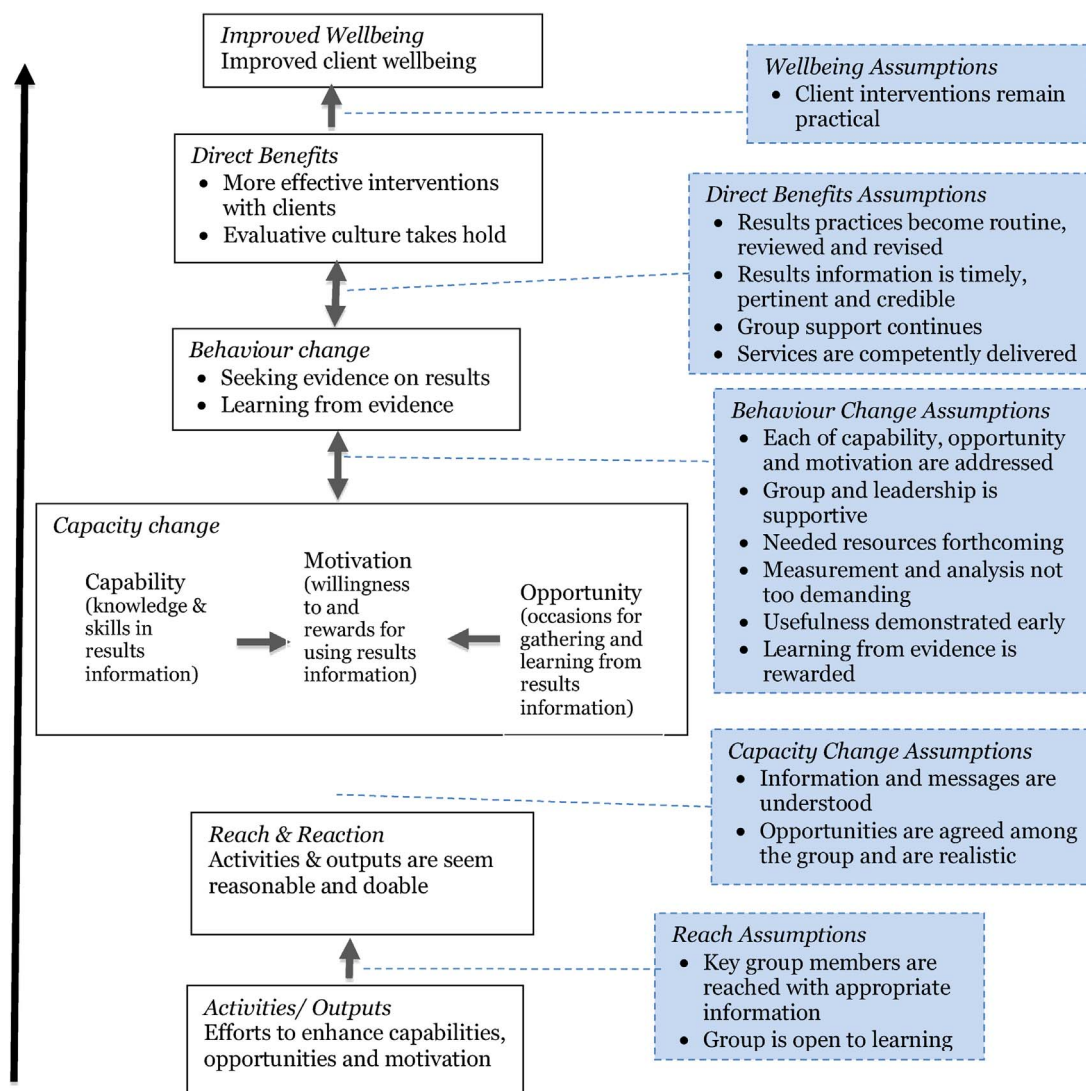


Fig. 3. A Theory of Change for Building Evaluative Culture in Community Services.

motivation to care about evidence as well as their clients. Similarly, better capabilities in understanding and appreciation of results information would likely enhance motivation, being convinced by the arguments that evidence-based learning will result in better client wellbeing.

The above COM elements are expected to combine to lead to the desired practice changes exhibiting an evaluative culture. But for many of the COM elements to occur, still other events and conditions are likely to be needed. In my earlier work (Mayne, 2009: 8), I set out and discussed a number of activities needed in an organization to foster an evaluation culture:

Leadership

- Demonstrate senior management leadership and commitment to results management and evaluation (*motivation*)
- Informed demand for results information (*motivation*)
- Build results measurement and results management capacity (*capabilities*)
- Establish and communicate a clear role and responsibilities for results management (*motivation*)

Organizational structural supports

- Supportive organizational incentives (*motivation*)

- Supportive organizational systems, practices, and procedures (*opportunities*)
- An outcome-oriented and supportive accountability regime (*motivation*)
- Learning-focused evaluation and monitoring

A learning focus

- Build in learning (*opportunities, motivation*)
- Tolerate and learn from mistakes (*motivation*)

Here I have indicated in italics how these activities relate to the COM-B model in Fig. 3. Most of these conditions are included in the above discussion on capabilities, opportunities and motivation. Perhaps missing is the need for overall support by the group leadership in terms of visible encouragement to gather and use results information, which is captured in the behaviour change assumptions.

Table 3 brings together the suggested efforts needed to develop an evaluative culture in these community group settings.

3.1. Lessons learned: a strategy for moving forward

It would be useful to think through the strategy of getting to an evaluative culture in a community group, recognizing that the journey

Table 3
Fostering an Evaluative Culture in Community Groups.

Leadership

- Support and encouragement by the group leadership in seeking out results information and using it to provide better client services.

Capabilities

- Training on results measurement and analysis

Opportunities

- occasions to undertake some monitoring activities,
- workshops to explore the implications of results information gathered,
- visits to other community groups more advanced in monitoring and evaluation, and
- funding to help with monitoring and evaluation.

Motivation

- incentives in the group, such a recognition or additional resources, to value evidence and learn from it,
- clear support by the group leadership for tolerating mistakes and learning from them,
- personal experiential evidence that valuing evidence can help them improve services to clients,
- seeing colleagues provide better service using evidence, and
- providing a means to convince others about their effective innovative approaches in client services.

will take some time with learning along the way. One probably would want to start with a not too demanding level of results measurement and analysis, focusing on a few key variables of interest, and seeing how they match what was expected.

In beginning the journey to an evaluative culture, it is quite helpful, indeed often essential, to have early success stories to provide the with-group evidence that the effort is worth it. Strategies can include looking for champions who are willing to try the new thinking and/or identifying a component within the group to act as a pilot to first try out the suggested approaches without trying to change the whole group at once. Further, it can be useful to bring in some facilitator to help get things going and answer the inevitable questions that will arise.

Learning about results information usually includes trial and error. There is a need for an element of experimentation and a willingness to learn from efforts that don't work out as hoped for. And indeed that is what managing for results is all about.

4. Concluding remarks

Building an evaluation culture is a challenge in any size organization. Community service groups have the advantage of typically being small with minimal bureaucracy, but have limited resources and time.

The aim is to have a type of self-evaluating organization (Wildavsky,

1985), an organizational form that has proven to be a significant challenge. In a small organization this likely means that almost everyone has to become a mini-evaluator, seeking out and using evidence on results to improve service delivery to their clients. They need to see results information as an essential part of their job.

This article has discussed some the initiatives that could be taken to move in this direction. Building an evaluation culture over time in a step-by-step manner is likely key, along with supportive leadership.

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