Capacity Building Spillover: Uptake and Innovative Use of Systems Evaluation Protocol Tools and Skills

Monica Hargraves, PhD (mjh51@cornell.edu), Miranda Fang, Claire Hebbard (cer17@cornell.edu)
Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation, www.core.human.cornell.edu

Abstract:

The Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation (CORE) has developed a protocol for evaluation planning known as the "Systems Evaluation Protocol" (SEP).[1] Since 2006, CORE has trained 200 individuals from 48 organizations in this approach to program modeling and evaluation planning. As part of the training, participants use an on-line tool called the "Netway" for completing certain steps of the Protocol. The research presented here analyses data from Netway logs and selected participant interviews to explore patterns of use of the SEP evaluation steps and the Netway tool outside of participants' training process. We refer to this further use as "spillover" from the training and capacity-building effort. We are particularly interested in learning about the purposes that motivated spillover use of the Netway system and about which parts of the Protocol and which components of the Netway have been most useful. Results of this pilot study point to durable uptake of several components of the SEP evaluation steps and to innovative adaptation of SEP tools, particularly the visual modeling process.

Conclusions

The presence of 114 Spillover Programs is a positive development following the Evaluation Partnership trainings. Much more work needs to be done in order to fully understand the patterns of usage and non-usage that we observe in the data collected to this point. Nevertheless, several elements of the pattern stand out at this point:

- The number of **organizational spillover cases considerably exceeded the number of individual spillover cases**, though this was driven largely by the strong activity of a few organizations. The role of organizational leadership and internal "champions" appears to be very important.

- The **overwhelming majority of spillover use was for the program modeling functions, and particularly the visual pathway modeling.** Evaluation planning did not appear to have the same inherently compelling "draw" that the Netway modeling components have.

- There have been **several really innovative applications of the Netway pathway modeling function** for non-evaluation and even non-program development purposes. The basic algorithm within for pathway modeling that is built into the Netway fosters its use in other contexts in which connections or logical flow is an important thing to understand of make visible.

These voluntary non-evaluation uses of the Netway are interesting in their own right, but are also encouraging from the point of view of efforts to build evaluation capacity and evaluation culture within organizations. Since these program modeling and logic modeling activities are essential components of evaluation, a case can be made that evaluation planning processes have multiple valuable side-benefits. Highlighting and integrating these multiple payoffs should be a larger part of evaluation capacity-building efforts, to make the evaluation work both more palatable and more feasible in time-pressed organizations.