A PRACTICAL PROGRAM EVALUATION MODEL FOR THE LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

A Thesis Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy Degree

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this first to Ephraim Muneri and Emelina Funzani for providing me the inspiration to pursue a dream, the support of unconditional love as parents can give, and for their guidance as ageing husband and wife. Together they have found ways to make my dreams come true, through their wisdom, perseverance, patience and creation of joyful times. Thank you, Rev. and Mrs. Madzivhandila.

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**Abstract**

**Key Words**

1. **Introduction**
2. **Contextualization of the Valuing Theory**
3. **What is Value Judgment?**
4. **Valuing Theories**
   - 4.1. Meta-theory
   - 4.2. Prescriptive values theory
   - 4.3. Descriptive values theory
5. **Dichotomies in the Valuing Component of Evaluation**
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**Abstract**

**Key Words**

1. **Introduction**
2. **Context and Point of Departure**
3. **Evaluation Use Theory and Related Issues**
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   - 3.2. Evaluation use and influence theory
     - 3.2.1. Source of influence
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**Abstract**

**Key Words**

1. **Introduction**
2. **Point of Departure**
3. **Knowledge Bases of Evaluation Practice Theory**
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   - 3.2. The purpose of evaluation
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<td>Australian Centre for International Research</td>
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<td>CI&amp;I</td>
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Abstract

This thesis explores practical program evaluation (PPE) that contributes to creating value (quantity and quality) for social betterment. The purpose is to propose a PPE model for the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (LDA). The perceived low use of program evaluation process and results has been a major concern in the South African public service in the recent decade. The study addresses the issue in question by first reviewing the Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWM&ES) at the national level. The GWM&ES is a policy framework guiding program evaluation roll-out across all spheres of government. Secondly, the history and evolution of program evaluation theory is reviewed. Trends and lessons show where the field is heading to help prevent mistakes of the past. The GWM&ES and theory are fundamental forces shaping the type of PPE model that can be proposed. We noted that the GWM&ES is still underdeveloped and the theory is moving towards utility of evaluations rather than objectivity.

The thesis indicates that PPE is underpinned by five epistemic elements of programming, knowledge construction, valuing, evaluation use (influence) and evaluation practice.

- Our programming strategy proposed logic models as a heuristic way of designing social betterment initiatives which in turn simplifies the evaluation making it practical.
- To construct knowledge, our position is in the realist paradigm – adopting an eclectic view – suggesting the mixed-method approach which is pragmatic, contextual, responsive and consequential. We reconcile the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy.
- We posit that evaluation of social betterment is value-laden; therefore evaluations should be explicit about values. Further, they should advocate issues of democracy, justice and equality while considering cultural differences.
- Utility of evaluation for social betterment rests on its use and influence. The literature noted low evaluation influence. The major findings surrounding evaluation use (and misuse) are highlighted. However, two simple factors remain the most important: tailoring evaluation to stakeholders needs and involving program staff in the design and implementation of program evaluation.
- Given the time, budget and skills constraints when conducting an evaluation, we addressed how evaluation practice theory supports PPE. We presented (i) ways to commission an evaluation, (ii) the purpose of evaluation, (iii) the role of an evaluator, and (iv) the questions that should be asked.
To establish the context-mechanisms-outcomes of the agricultural research, development and extension at LDA, various national, provincial and organizational policy, strategy and annual reports documents were analyzed using Leximancer™ to allow themes, ideas and patterns to emerge. Results showed that only strategy documents were misplaced. Further, a descriptive content analysis was carried out of the evaluation system and its adaptation at the LDA using the Segerholm (2003) theoretical frame; establishing that: the agricultural RD&E programs are important primary components in the national economy, especially for the South African rural community; the LDA operates within a multi-layered and complex arena – inter-organizationally with other organizations and stakeholders and intra-organizationally between branches; and the development of an evaluation process is inadequate, indicating that the LDA still does not have a well configured evaluation process in place.

The central aim of the study is to propose a systematic PPE model for the LDA. Therefore, we described how social betterment programs can be evaluated systematically and practically. Our proposed PPE model includes three complementary phases, each with a number of steps, activities and critical factors to consider. That is, PPE should: (i) start by presenting aspects important to consider when establishing the context for the evaluation; (ii) contain the steps that need to be tailored into the evaluation process; and (ii) encompass critical factors that underpin the success of an evaluation.

Further, a conceptual framework has been constructed as having the potential to ease intra-organizational implementation if PPE is introduced to LDA. To enhance evaluation culture, the steps include: determining PPE participants and their roles, justifying and defining its function and status – initiation, adoption, diffusion to bridge the chasm, institutionalization, and tracking and refining the implementation process. We also posit that the LDA must navigate change-confounding issues in order to evolve from its ‘undesirable current state’ to its ‘desired future state’. We present that without change at the individual level, change cannot be achieved at the organizational and/or governance in the public sector levels.

Lastly, program evaluation standards – of utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy – provide a framework for the meta-evaluation. We found that there is non-use or low use of some standards at ACIAR suggesting that even for an organization with a long history of evaluation; it is difficult to consider equally and emphasize all the PES. Therefore, the design of a meta-evaluation should be grounded in a set of contextualized standards.