FOLLOWING A 10-STEP PROCEDURE TO EVALUATE THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES QUALIFICATION CARD PROGRAM

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In this article, the authors describe a 10-step procedure for conducting program evaluation in the human performance improvement (HPI) context, followed by a case study illustrating the procedure taken and outcomes produced. A team of graduate students at Boise State University completed an evaluation study of an administrative services qualification card program in a not-for-profit organization by following the 10-step evaluation procedure. The end result was a set of evidence-based recommendations focused on improving the quality of the program.

HUMAN PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT (HPI) practitioners use systematic and systemic approaches for performance improvement, regardless of the type of industries and organizations where they work. Their systematic practice portrays effective and efficient logical steps that lead to desired outcomes, while their systemic approaches allow them to consider various factors both within and outside their immediate system, as those factors likely influence the systematic process that the HPI practitioners follow.

As illustrated in the human performance technology (HPT) model (ISPI, 2014), evaluation is one of the critical components of HPI process. Evaluation is not only conducted based on various types of data generated from other phases (performance analysis; intervention selection, design, and development; intervention implementation and maintenance; change management) but it also provides valuable input to facilitate successful completion of those phases. As much as HPI requires systematic and systemic approaches, so does evaluation. Considering that performance improvement interventions are implemented in organizations in the form of programs, the type of evaluation conducted in the HPI context is a form of program evaluation, which can be defined as “the systematic and systemic collection and analysis of information about the process and outcomes of a program in order to make improvements or judgments about the quality or value of the program” (Chyung, 2015, p. 83). This article describes a systematic and systemic way to conduct program evaluation in the HPI context, followed by a case study illustrating the procedure taken and outcomes produced.

SYSTEMATIC AND SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

Overall, a program evaluation project can be divided into three phases: identification, planning, and implementation (Chyung, 2017). During the early identification phase, you as an evaluator (or more often with other members as a team of evaluators) learn about the purpose and feasibility of the evaluation. If feasible, you continue with the evaluation planning phase to design an evaluation plan. During this planning phase, you closely work with and gather input from the evaluation client and other stakeholders to determine specific areas to investigate and appropriate data collection methods to use. Upon the stakeholders’ approval of the evaluation plan,
you move on to the evaluation implementation phase to collect and analyze data as planned. You then synthesize the analyzed results and draw conclusions.

This helicopter view of a program evaluation procedure helps lay out specific steps involved in each phase, which, as shown in Figure 1, the 10-step systematic approach summarizes (Chyung, 2017). This 10-step procedure reflects other systematic evaluation frameworks including Scriven’s (2013) key evaluation checklist and Patton’s (2008) utilization-focused evaluation. While following the step-by-step procedure, you would also need to assess the project feasibility, risks, and ethical concerns to monitor any factors that might jeopardize the success of the project. These types of assessments are not listed as a single step to complete as they are meant to be ongoing applications throughout the project. As an analogy, the 10-step systematic approach to evaluation should be immersed in the systemic application of assessments of feasibility, risks, and ethical concerns.

Within this 10-step systematic evaluation procedure, a systemic approach is also observed during the triangulation and evidence-based decision-making process. For example, you would gather information from multiple types of data sources, such as not only the client and other managerial-level stakeholders, but also the program participants, their co-workers, and/or the customers. You would also use different types of data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, and extant data reviews to complement their strengths and weaknesses.

Overall, a program evaluation project can be divided into three phases: identification, planning, and implementation.

Presented in the following section are descriptions of a case evaluation study that a team of evaluators completed as a graduate-level course project in a not-for-profit organization by following Chyung’s (2017) 10-step evaluation procedure.

10 STEPS TO EVALUATE THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES QUALIFICATION CARD PROGRAM

Step 1. Identify the Program to Be Evaluated

The Organization
ProPower (a pseudonym), a not-for-profit organization in the domestic nuclear power industry, conducts a broad spectrum of large-scale operations including evaluations, assistance, training, and accreditation. Due to the economic challenges faced by the industry over a number of years, ProPower has decreased its budget and reduced headcount. As a result, ProPower must be deliberate in pursuing opportunities to improve productivity, strengthen organizational capacity, and increase time on value-producing goals. ProPower changed its organizational reporting structure in early 2015 to centralize the administrative staff under the aegis of the manager of administrative services, who is responsible for aligning the staff around standards, expectations, and processes in support of internal and external customers. The administrators’ varied responsibilities include processing documents, maintaining records, managing calendars, and planning industry meetings for personnel in ProPower’s 29 departments. The administrative services qualification card program emerged from the need to adapt to a changing workplace, which includes decreased headcount, increased workload, and churn in the administrative positions resulting in frequent onboarding of new administrators. The manager requested an evaluation of the administrative services qualification card program to be conducted by an evaluation team comprised of graduate students from Boise State University’s
The administrative services qualification card program, launched in January 2016, is intended to provide a systematic way to orient administrators and facilitate gaining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform increasingly matrixed roles and responsibilities. The manager and a contracted instructional designer developed the administrative services qualification card program using a list of onboarding activities, job descriptions, and position analysis tables (completed by the administrative staff) to determine the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that administrators across the organization require. The administrative services qualification card program is maintained electronically via dynamic spreadsheets and consists of requisite knowledge and skills that administrators must develop and demonstrate to become qualified, as shown in Figure 2. The administrative services qualification card program is designed to accommodate a changing workplace in that knowledge areas or skills may be revised or added to the qualification. In such cases, qualified administrators would be required to complete those items in order to maintain their qualification.

**Step 2. Identify the Program Stakeholders and Their Needs**

After identifying the program to be evaluated, it was important that the evaluation team identify three types of stakeholders for the program in order to not only better understand their needs and clearly identify the purpose of the evaluation, but also estimate appropriate sources of data to be used later in the evaluation.

Several upstream stakeholders, who played a role in deciding to provide the administrative services qualification card program, and performing the actual design, development, and delivery of the program, were the manager of administrative services (the evaluation client), the director of business process optimization, the director of human resources, the vice president of people and culture, an instructional designer, and four area lead administrators. They shared common interests in continuously monitoring the administrative services qualification card program to make it an effective and sustainable program.

The direct impactees of the program were the past, current, and future participants of the administrative services qualification card program, including 27 nonexempt administrative employees located at ProPower, and approximately 40 line managers of the administrators. They needed to receive a structured way to gain their professional knowledge and skills and maintain their qualification as administrators. To make the program sustainable and valued by the program participants, it was also important that the participants perceived the program to be efficient and effective.

Success or failure of the administrative services qualification card program would have an impact on not only the direct impactees of the program but also other groups of indirect impactees, such as:

- The executive vice president of corporate strategy, who is responsible for developing the workforce
- The manager of employee development, who might make adjustments to how other qualification card programs are implemented based on the results of the administrative services qualification card
- The approximately 350 internal customers who closely interact with the direct impactees, as well as a number of external customers from many organizations who receive the products and services from the employees
(e.g., letters, reports, meetings, workshops, seminars, plant performance evaluations, assistance visits, and accreditation team visits)

Step 3. Identify the Purpose of Evaluation Based on How the Evaluation Findings Will Be Used

Based on discussions with the upstream stakeholders, the evaluation team learned that stakeholders would use the evaluation findings in the following ways:

- Revise and improve the administrative services qualification card program
- Justify the time and effort to put into qualifying versus the efficiencies gained
- Understand whether the right specialty qualifications have been developed and are ready for implementation
- Determine what methods should be used to monitor the program on an ongoing basis
- Advertise positive evaluation findings to administrators who have spent the time qualifying to reinforce that their commitment has paid off
- Identify other outcomes that administrators or the organization have experienced because of the administrative services qualification card program
- Consider adapting the administrative services qualification card program for use in other departments

Thus, it was determined that the overall purpose of the evaluation was to conduct a formative evaluation to assess how well the administrative services qualification card program is designed and supported to achieve program goals (including quickly onboarding new administrators and preparing all administrators for success on the job), while also investigating other positive and negative outcomes of the program. Because stakeholders were also interested in reflecting on the influence of systemic factors, the evaluation team also incorporated a goal-free evaluation approach to investigate what other positive and negative, tangible and intangible outcomes have resulted from the administrative services qualification card program.

Feasibility and Risks Assessment

During the evaluation planning stage, the evaluation team conducted a feasibility assessment and concluded that it was a feasible project to complete within the expected timeframe and given resources. The team also identified several manageable risks for the project, which are summarized in Table 1. It was the evaluation team's opinion that the potential costs for dealing with consequences that resulted from the implementation of the administrative services qualification card program without having an opportunity to conduct an evaluation and improve the quality were greater than costs for completing the evaluation project with the identified risks and unknown risks that may have been discovered during the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIKELIHOOD</th>
<th>LITTLE</th>
<th>MANAGEABLE</th>
<th>SUBSTANTIAL</th>
<th>DETRIMENTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(D) Failing to perform effectively as a team</td>
<td>(C) Lack of time for client to participate in evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(A) Failing to meet the course timeframe for project completion</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(B) Lack of time/motivation for administrators to participate in evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>—</td>
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Deliverable 1. Statement of Work and Reflections

At this point, the first deliverable, a statement of work for conducting an evaluation of the program, was submitted to and approved by the client. The statement of work consisted of information about the program to be evaluated, the purpose of the evaluation, the scope of work and timeline, resources to be used by the evaluation team and committed by the client, assumptions and risks, and acceptance signature lines for both the project client and the service provider (the evaluation team).

Evaluation Team’s Reflections

Internal evaluators experience different advantages and challenges compared to external evaluators. A benefit of conducting evaluations as internal evaluators is that the evaluators are more oriented to the communities within the organization while having a connection with the professional evaluation community external to the organization (Mathison, 1999). As illustrated in Figure 3,
the team benefited from having an internal evaluator who was already familiar with the organization and the basis for the administrative services qualification card program. Additionally, the team lead already had an established working relationship with the client. Familiarity with the client, the organization, and the research population, along with the systematic guidance provided by Steps 1–3, helped the team accurately and efficiently gauge the scope of work, timeline, assumptions, and risks related to the evaluation project that were presented in the statement of work.

Client’s Reflections
Looking back, the client found that the initial identification phase of the project gave her an opportunity to reengage with important stakeholders, such as the vice president of people and culture and the manager of employee development, who did not get involved in continuous development of the program after its launch. The statement of work prompted a good conversation among them regarding potential flaws in and transferability of the administrative services qualification card program. The client reflected that the evaluation team lead’s consulting skills in explaining the overall evaluation process and close interaction with her (the client) were crucial for the success of this phase. This naturally put the client in a somewhat passive role, trusting the project objectives and process proposed to her, which she appreciated.

Step 4. Develop or Review a Program Logic Model for the Program
Through communication with the client, the evaluation team helped develop a program logic model based on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s (2004) guidelines, which illustrate the interconnected relationship among program resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. A portion of the program logic model is presented in Figure 4.

Step 5. Determine Dimensions and Importance Weighting
While consulting with the program logic model and reflecting on the stakeholders’ needs identified earlier (i.e., program sustainability and efficiency), the evaluation team assisted the upstream stakeholders to determine four specific dimensions of the administrative services qualification card program to be investigated and the relative degrees of importance among the dimensions for prioritizing purpose. These dimensions and weightings are shown in Table 2.
TABLE 2  
DIMENSIONS AND IMPORTANCE WEIGHTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL</th>
<th>IMPORTANCE WEIGHTING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Program content: How well is the administrative services qualification card program designed to prepare administrators to provide support—aligned with standards, expectations, and processes—across the organization?</td>
<td>Resources Activities</td>
<td>Most Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Program sustainability: How well is the administrative services qualification card program designed and supported for sustainability?</td>
<td>Resources Activities</td>
<td>Fairly Important (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Efficiency-related outcomes: What efficiency-related outcomes have administrators or the organization experienced while and after administrators completed the administrative services qualification card that would justify the time and effort administrators put into qualifying?</td>
<td>Short-Term Outcomes</td>
<td>Very Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other outcomes: What other positive and negative, tangible and intangible outcomes have administrators and/or the organization experienced while and after administrators completed the administrative services qualification card?</td>
<td>Short- and Long-Term Outcomes</td>
<td>Important (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 6. Determine Data Collection Methods
The evaluation team applied Brinkerhoff’s (2006) success case method to the design of evaluating Dimensions 3 and 4, to investigate factors that successfully or unsuccessfully produced efficiency-related or other outcomes. Success case method interviews would reveal the environmental and personal factors (related to Dimensions 1 and 2) that contributed to their successful and non-successful performance outcomes.

While incorporating those frameworks, the evaluation team used multiple sources of data, including the manager of administrative services, two additional upstream stakeholders, administrators (program participants), and several relevant line managers (who have received back-up support from administrators). Additionally, the evaluation team used multiple types of data collection methods, including web-based survey questionnaires, semistructured face-to-face interviews, a focus group, and extant data reviews. The multiple types of data collection methods were selected to complement strengths and weaknesses of each method, and the data collected from multiple types and sources was to be triangulated to draw credible conclusions.

Evaluation Team’s Reflections
As novice evaluators, the team benefited by having a model in the form of Steps 4–6 to serve as a roadmap for collecting the information needed to generate the evaluation proposal. The team, however, wished they had been better prepared to explain the intent and benefit of the logic model, which visually revealed the systemic relationships of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the program, and served as valuable resource in determining dimensions and importance weighting during Step 5. As a formative evaluation, the dimensional questions focused mostly on the administrative services qualification card program’s resources and activities, though the team also took a systemic approach by developing dimensional questions that explored the program’s unexpected outcomes as well as the expected outcomes.

Client’s Reflections
The planning stage provided the client not only the evaluation proposal but also other positive outcomes. First, participating in the evaluation team’s data collection planning process was a learning opportunity for the client. For example, she found the new “tyranny of the mean” concept (Brinkerhoff, 2012) to be useful in her other practices as well. Second, although many resource hours and more than $30,000 were invested to develop the administrative services qualification card program, the client struggled to establish any metrics of her own that she could use to objectively show whether or not the program
was achieving what anyone had hoped. While reviewing the proposal with her director, the client was able to further align the intent and desired results of the program.

Step 7. Develop Data Collection Instruments
The evaluation team developed all required data collection instruments to be used to evaluate the four dimensions, as shown in Table 3.

Step 8. Collect Data
The evaluation team started collecting data as soon as the instruments were ready and approved by the client. Data collection lasted for three weeks, during which time the team also started analyzing data as soon as the data became available. See the Gantt chart in Figure 5.

The team also tested the internal consistency of multiple survey questions used for measuring individual dimensions. For example, survey questions 4 and 6–10 measured Dimension 1, and questions 11–13 measured Dimension 2. As the team intended to use an average score of each set of survey questions in the following step (to analyze data against rubrics), it was important to check that the multiple questions measured the same construct. The team found that Cronbach’s alpha values were .90 and .73 for the two sets of survey questions used for Dimensions 1 and 2, respectively. Since the Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the threshold, .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010, p. 125), the team concluded that satisfactory levels of internal consistency existed among the multiple survey questions in each set. The team did not need to test the internal consistency between the two survey questions used for Dimension 3, as the two questions were success case method questions and the data were analyzed separately.

Step 9. Analyze Data Against Rubrics
The evaluation team developed rubrics to be used to analyze data obtained from individual instruments. For example, Table 4 presents the rubrics used for analyzing the results obtained from the three data collection instruments used for Dimension 2. Based on the fact that the data generated from the three instruments indicated Excellent, Excellent, and Good levels of the dimension, the evaluation team determined that the quality of Dimension 2 was Good.

Step 10. Synthesize Dimensional Results and Draw Conclusions
Using 4-point scale rubrics (excellent, good, mediocre, and poor), the evaluation team found that Dimensions 1, 2, and 3 all fell into a good category, indicating some room for improvement. Dimension 4 provided additional information on positive and negative outcomes of the program. For example, the administrative services qualification card program has contributed to the development of more cooperative relationships among the
FIGURE 5. A GANTT CHART FOR THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

TABLE 4 THE RUBRICS USED FOR ANALYZING DATA OBTAINED FOR DIMENSION 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA COLLECTION METHOD</th>
<th>RUBRIC USED</th>
<th>DATA SOURCE REVIEW AND RATING</th>
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| Web-based survey questions 11–13 (27 admins were invited and 17 participated) | • Excellent [4]: 4.0 ≤ Average score ≤ 5.0  
• Good [3]: 3.0 ≤ Average score ≤ 3.9  
• Mediocre [2]: 2.0 ≤ Average score ≤ 2.9  
• Poor [1]: 1.0 ≤ Average score ≤ 1.9 | • Individual participant average scores ranged from 1 to 5  
• Overall average score = 4.2  
Thus, the data indicate an excellent quality. |
| Interviews with three success and two nonsuccess cases program (four nonsuccess cases were invited and two participated) | • Excellent [4]: Mostly positive interview comments about program sustainability  
• Good [3]: A mix of positive and negative interview comments about program sustainability but more positive comments and no major negative comments  
• Mediocre [2]: A mix of positive and negative comments about program sustainability with more negative comments  
• Poor [1]: Mostly negative comments about program sustainability | Qualitative data revealed mostly positive interview comments about program sustainability. For example:  
• Leadership, including management, sponsor, and area leads, were very helpful.  
• Prescheduled training sessions helped maintain the administrative services qualification card as a priority.  
Thus, the data indicate an excellent quality. |
| Focus group with upstream stakeholders (four were invited; three participated) | • Excellent [4]: Mostly positive interview comments about program sustainability  
• Good [3]: A mix of positive and negative interview comments about program sustainability but more positive comments and no major negative comments  
• Mediocre [2]: A mix of positive and negative comments about program sustainability with more negative comments  
• Poor [1]: Mostly negative comments about program sustainability | Focus group generated a mix of positive and negative interview comments about program sustainability but more positive comments and no major negative comments. For example:  
• Administrative services qualification card program creates efficiency by providing a systematic way to train new admins.  
• More guidance is needed on standards of performance on assessments.  
Thus, the data indicate a good quality. |

administrative staff. Collaboration during and after completion of the administrative services qualification card has resulted in a greater appreciation for other administrators and the work they perform.

While the administrative services qualification card program evaluation revealed many strengths, the evaluation team also identified several opportunities to improve the program. Discussion with the client determined that the area of the administrative services qualification card program’s content was the most important dimension (as shown in Table 2). Even though this dimension has a quality rating of good, the team recommends that this area
be a focus for improvement, as it is a high priority for both the client and stakeholders. The team generated specific recommendations to improve the administrative services qualification card program content. It was the team’s assessment that the recommendations suggested for improving the administrative services qualification card program content would also further enhance the administrative services qualification card program’s sustainability, efficiency-related outcomes, and other outcomes.

**Deliverable 3. Final Report and Metaevaluations**

Final Reports. The evaluation team wrote a final evaluation report organized into the following sections:

Executive Summary

1. Background
2. Program and Stakeholders
3. Evaluation Methodology
4. Feasibility and Risk Assessments
5. Evaluation Results
6. Conclusions
7. Limitations
8. Reporting

References

Appendices

Metaevaluations. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE, 2016) provides 30 program evaluation standards grouped in five categories—utility (8 standards), feasibility (4 standards), propriety (7 standards), accuracy (8 standards), and evaluation accountability (3 standards). The evaluation team adhered to many of the program evaluation standards during the project, such as:

- **Utility standard #2: Attention to stakeholders.** The evaluation team involved upstream and downstream stakeholders throughout the evaluation. Upstream stakeholders helped develop the program logic model and determine dimensions. Both upstream and downstream stakeholders served as data collection sources.

- **Feasibility standard #4: Effective and efficient use of resources.** The evaluation team considered the time constraints of stakeholders, ensured data collection methods were efficient and effective, ensured the privacy of participants involved in the study, and provided consent forms for applicable data collection methods.

The evaluation accountability standards include the practices of fully documenting the negotiated evaluation purposes, implemented designs, procedures, data, and results, and conducting internal and external metaevaluations. A metaevaluation refers to conducting an evaluation of an evaluation project. Prior to delivering their final report to the client, the evaluation team conducted an internal metaevaluation on their final report, double-checking accuracy, clarity, fairness, transparency, confidentiality, reliable instruments, and justified (evidence-based) conclusions. The team also received an external metaevaluation by peers and course instructor, and revised the final report based on their feedback.

**OVERALL LESSONS LEARNED**

The previous section explains the 10-step procedure that a team of evaluators followed to complete a formative evaluation of the administrative services qualification card program used in a not-for-profit organization. Although it was the first full-blown comprehensive evaluation project that the team completed, the systematic 10-step evaluation procedure, the client’s sponsorship, and the educational feedback and support from the course enabled the team to competently and ethically complete the project.

However, the evaluation team also experienced some challenges. One of them was the nonparticipation of some of the main users of the program (informants) and difficulty in fully implementing the success case method. This is related to the risk factor (B) in Table 1. The survey reflected the responses of 17 out of 27 administrative staff members invited. Of those respondents, two non-success cases did not identify themselves on the survey. Two other nonsuccess cases identified themselves, but did not respond to a request for a follow-up interview. The team’s next best selections for nonsuccess cases were not clearly nonsuccessful cases compared to those previously described. This proves the point that seemingly simple data collection methods, such as conducting a short survey and follow-up interviews with success and nonsuccess cases, may not always work as planned.

Although there were ways to motivate the nonparticipatory administrative staff to become informants for the study, the evaluation team also had to consider ethical issues especially because the team lead’s organizational role changed to become the assistant manager of the administrative staff during the course of the study. To avoid unintentionally coercing administrative staff, the team decided it was best to reduce the amount of survey reminder emails and to not send follow-up emails to those who were invited to be interviewed but did not respond. The team also condensed the survey and interview data collection periods of
the study so that these could be completed before the team lead’s position change.

In the end, the team was still able to provide actionable recommendations that will improve the administrative services qualification card program. Both the client and the evaluation team are in agreement that one of the drivers for the successful completion of the project was the positive rapport and trust between the two parties, especially during the identification and planning stages. After the client and other stakeholders were actively involved during the identification and planning phases, the team was able to execute the evaluation plan without difficulties other than a couple of challenges noted above. In fact, at the end of this project, the client reflected on the importance of careful planning of evaluation, involving the right people and addressing the right needs for the evaluation. The client was pleased about the quality of the evaluation project and intends to implement the team’s suggestions in 2017.

Acknowledgments

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References


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