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A Collaborative Evaluation of Employment Services for an Ageing Community

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ARTICLE HISTORY	ABSTRACT
	This article examines the Model for Collaborative Evaluations (MCE)within the context of employment services that promotes development of individuals, their physical abilities, and their career interests focused on an evaluation of Employment Services for an Ageing Community. It highlights how a collaborative approach can benefit an ageing population who is in need of positive self-image, and it provides specific lessons learned through the evaluation experience. Particularly, anevaluation was conducted to ascertain professional development history, strengths, and needs of the specific ageing population, in order to ensure and maintain the highest quality of services possible by trained, competent professionals. The MCE emphasized the involvement of all relevant stakeholders impacted by the work of the organization, thereby increasing the chances that evaluation recommendations are utilized by the organization. Challenges and successes are discussed to provide an understanding of the collaborative effort. *Keywords: affordable housing, ageing, employment, Model for Collaborative evaluation, positive self-image*

INTRODUCTİON

Chronological age and functioning age often have a gradually broadening gap. For example, a person can be 60 years old, yet function as a 30-year-old, and vice versa. It is widely understood that the treatment and acceptance of the ageing community varies from one geographical society to another. In the global workplace, however, an individual is typically defined by their chronological age more so than their demonstrated capabilities and attitudes. Employer attitudes towards the ageing workforce have become strongly associated with economic conditions of the society (Taylor, Brooke, McLoughlin, & Di Biase, 2014).This will become a critical workforce issue, since a more age-diverse workforce is expected to create a substantial generational imbalance by 2050 (Christensen, Doblhammer, Rau, &Vaupel, 2009). In 2012, the overall labor force makes up for individuals 55 and older comprised of 40.5%; this is just half of the percentage of the workforce of those 25-54 years of age (Toossi, 2013).Concurrently, the 76 million individuals that represent the baby boom generation are now transitioning into the older workforce age group with many choosing to retire (Boveda& Metz, 2016). To address and ameliorate concerns over financial and social impact, Szinovacz, Martin, and Davey (2013) recommend keeping a larger portion of the elderly population employed longer. Maintaining employment strengthens the benefit of financial independence, while it also encourages a positive self-image. There are various opportunities to provide employment services for the ageing population that include job-interviewing strategies, resume-writing services, career fair information, and overall career education. With 14.15% of affordable housing renters ages 65 and older and 30.08% ages 45-64 years of age ("Tenure of Age by Household", 2014), affordable

housing provides suitable housing facilities for those with modest means. Such programs promote opportunity for households to improve both financial development and better health outcomes for families and individuals through a supportive environment (Lubell, Crain, & Cohen,2007). In addition, many affordable housing units often offer an active community that provides employment services for those in search of work. Employment services offered through an affordable housing program (Supporting Community Affordable Living: SCAL) will be the focus of this article.

THE COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION

Based on the collaborative discussions with key stakeholders and a review of the materials provided by the SCAL, the following evaluation questions were developed: *(1) How areemployment services provided to the ageing community? (2) How are ageism and positive self-image addressed in the ageing community? What is the level of involvement for the housing mentors, tenants, and community? (3) What are perceived strengths and areas for improvement for career interest education based on living community member's feedback?* It was beneficial to have an evaluation atmosphere where there was a balance of power and everyone felt represented in an appropriate and fair way. Having a clear understanding increases everyone's involvement because they are confident about the expectations and the quality of the collaborative evaluation is automatically increased. The value of the decisions within an evaluation depends on clearly defining, with the appropriate stakeholders, the evaluation in terms of all the possible ways to solve it. A collaborative approach using the model for collaborative evaluations (MCE) was used in this formative evaluation to actively engage the key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. The MCE is a framework for guiding collaborative evaluations in a precise, realistic, and useful manner (see, for example, Rodríguez- Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2013; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Zukoski, 2017).This model was selected because key stakeholders embraced evaluation as a learning process for program improvement. The following are the MCE components[1]: (a) identify the situation, (b) clarify the expectations, (c) establish a collective commitment, (d) ensure open communication, (e) encourage effective practices, and (f) follow specific guidelines. Figure 1 provides the conceptual framework for viewing the MCE's components interactively. Additionally, each of the MCE subcomponents, shown as bullet points in the outer ring circle of the figure, includes a set of ten steps suggested to support the proper understanding and use of the model (a sample checklist with these steps is available at *http://www.collabeval.com).* The implementation of the MCE has been very effective, because it is possible to make adjustments as well as to immediately recover from unexpected issues; such as, the extent and various levels of collaboration required throughout the evaluation. The six components of the MCE provided direct influence and encouragement during each of the three phases (planning, execution, and reporting) of the evaluation. It was through these six interactive components that it was produced high quality understanding and insights about the program. The MCE helped evaluators to perform multiple roles. Encouraging a multitude of responsibilities expanded and strengthened the multifariousness of contributions. These evaluators benefited from credibility that is ever-evolving and sustaining, all while building relationships with the collaboration members (CMs).Next, we will discuss each of the six components and how they were directly applied to the evaluation career interest education of SCAL.

Identify the Situation

The situation is a combination of formal and informal circumstances determined by the relationships that surround and sustain the evaluation. It sets the foundation for everything that follows in the collaborative effort. This component of the model also considers issues related to the applicability of collaborative evaluations to ensure this approach is appropriate given the current situation. An early warning of the situation with the potential constraints and benefits (for example, funds, staff, materials, and time needed to support the process) will help to better manage the evaluationand be prepared to overcome barriers. This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) identify stakeholders; (b) identify logic model elements; (c) identify potential SWOTs (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats); (d) identify the evaluation scope (for example, evaluation questions, work breakdown structure); and (e) identify critical evaluation activities. When evaluating employment services for an ageing community, for instance, developing a logic model provides organization and efficiency with measurable objectives. The model could include available resources, currently implemented employment service activities, results from participants receiving employment services (e.g., Did participants succeed in finding

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[1]This section abstracts material that is presented thoroughly in COLLABORATIVE EVALUATIONS: STEP-BY-STEP, Second Edition, by Liliana Rodríguez-Campos and Rigoberto Rincones-Gómez, published by Stanford University Press, www.sup.org.

employment?).Among others, identifying the situation requires two critical items: (a) confirming the stakeholders' willingness to collaborate; and (b) ensuring that the evaluation process is moving in the right direction. Priority should be given to identifying stakeholders, evaluation scope, and critical evaluation activities.
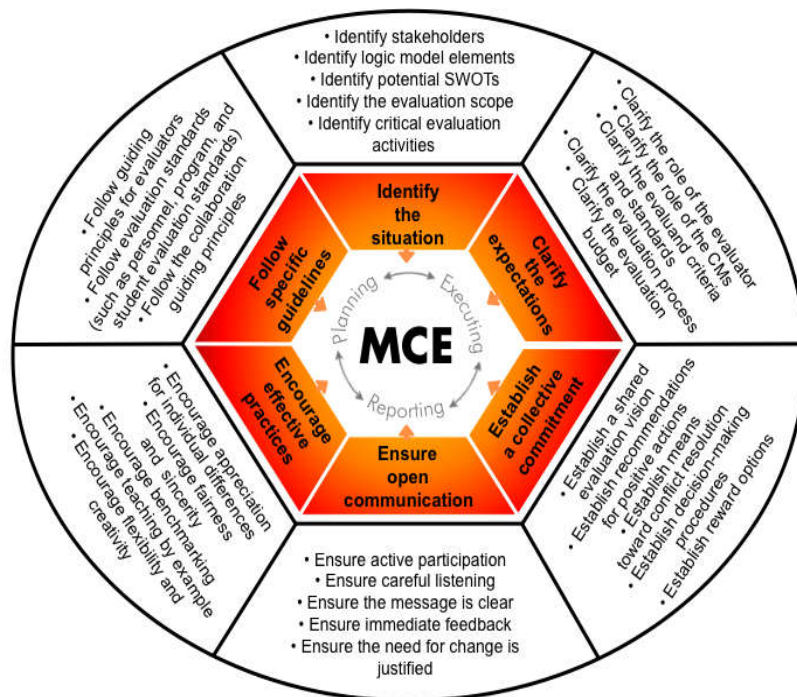

Figure 1.The Model for Collaborative Evaluations.
(*Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez. Collaborative Evaluations Step-by-Step, 2013*)

Clarify the Expectations
An expectation is the anticipation that good (or bad) may come out of the collaborative evaluation. It is the assumption, belief, or idea we have about the evaluation and the people involved. A clear expectation is very important because it influences all the decisions made during the evaluation. By clarifying the expectations, everyone understands which issues must be addressed and what the best ways are to achieve desired results in order to make effective contributions. As a result of clarifying the expectations, it is possible to understand the implications of each evaluation choice made. In addition, a control process can be followed to show whether evaluation activities are being carried out as planned. This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) clarify the role of the evaluator; (b) clarify the role of the CMs; (c) clarify the evaluand criteria and standards; (d) clarify the evaluation process; and (e) clarify the evaluation budget. This is a component of the MCE that clarifies what issues should be addressed and what way is most effective in addressing those concerns. In terms of collaborative evaluation, clarifying the expectations promotes clarity so that the CMs have the ability to prepare for successes and dilemmas of the collaborative decisions. To this end, conflicts can be ameliorated, while efficiency, confidence and trust are more likely to be seen in the CMs throughout the collaborative evaluation.

Establish a Collective Commitment
A collective commitment is a compromise to jointly meet the evaluation obligations without continuous external authority or supervision. In a collaborative evaluation, there is a need for this type of commitment in order to promote a desire to take responsibility and accountability for it. Through a collective commitment, you and the CMs gain a sense of ownership of the effects of this process and its continuous improvement. This increases awareness of your own interactions and the willingness to make adjustments to enhance the quality of the collaborative evaluation. Love and Russon (2000) stated, "...evaluation will remain one of the world's best kept secrets unless we build strong coalitions that go beyond our own backyards." (p. 458). This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) establish a shared evaluation vision; (b) establish recommendations for positive actions; (c) establish means toward conflict resolution; (d) establish decision-making procedures; and (e) establish reward options. A critical element to an effective collaborative evaluation is the consistent intent to ensure that each involved person hasa sense of ownership so that they feel as though they are a valuable contributor

to the process. In order to do this, each involved person needs to ensure they feel genuinely motivated, and engaged from the start of the evaluation process to the end (Botcheva et al., 2009). It can be shown through fostering an atmosphere where the CMs are committed to their evaluation experience. For instance, seeing employment services in action, the CMs can witness first hand the welfares and decision-making procedures of the services they are assisting in evaluating. Also, a shared vision can be promoted through specifying an understanding of the benefits of employment to the aging community on positive self-image, financial independence, and overall general health. Finally, the CMs who feel motivated through a collective commitment in the evaluation will ultimately engage in the assigned tasks and the success of the evaluation.

Ensure Open Communication

Communication is a process of social interaction (such as speaking, listening, or writing) used to convey information and exchange ideas in order to influence specific actions within the collaborative evaluation. Both formal (evaluation-related) and informal (personal) communication strategies must be planned to reflect the diverse styles of you and the CMs (and other stakeholders) within the collaborative evaluation. Effective communication involves understanding others as well as being understood. Thus, it is important to foster a group dialogue of openness and exploration that continues among the CMs themselves (even outside formal meetings). This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) ensure active participation; (b) ensure careful listening; (c) ensure the message is clear; (d) ensure immediate feedback; and (e) ensure the need for change is justified. Maintaining the ability to comfortably exchange information on a regular basis allowed the opportunity to identify and address issues that arose throughout the evaluation process. In an affordable living environment, resources are available but are limited to employees. Volunteers, community organizations, and even donors provide opportunities for service growth. With these diverse amounts of resources, flexibility in communicating was necessary. As a result, the ability to act quick and problem solve efficiently was more than likely than if communication was limited. To this end, multiple means of communication such as Skype, e-mail, phone calls, texting, and face-to-face meetings were available options to both evaluators and the CMs.

Encourage Effective Practices

Effective practices are sound established procedures or systems for producing a desired effect within the collaborative evaluation. Among others, this can be accomplished by balancing evaluation resource needs. Also, fostering an atmosphere in which everyone is supportive of everyone else's capabilities increases recognition that each individual provides important input to the evaluation process. As a result, people feel empowered and able to actively interact in the collaborative evaluation activities because (e.g., by focusing on strengths) there is a belief that each contribution makes a difference. This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) encourage appreciation for individual differences; (b) encourage fairness and sincerity; (c) encourage benchmarking; (d) encourage leading by example; and (e) encourage flexibility and creativity. Following the MCE method will help set the foundation for effective practices. The MCE allowed the opportunity to highlight the strengths and interest of the CMs, which ultimately would motivate the CMs to bring forth their best effort towards a comprehensive evaluation of the employment services program. Just as individuals have different ages, they have different abilities and strengths. The MCE aided in doing this by providing more adaptive options rather than a one-size-fits-all protocol. As a result, the MCE encouraged learning and interpersonal development that had an ultimate goal to support creativity, differences, fairness, and positive self-image.

Follow Specific Guidelines

Guidelines are principles that direct the design, use, and assessment of the collaborative evaluations, their evaluators (such as you), and their CMs. Guidelines provide direction for sound evaluations, although they alone cannot guarantee the quality of any collaborative evaluation. By identifying and addressing where the collaborative evaluation meets the necessary guidelines, the evaluator(s) and the CMs demonstrate a clearer understanding of what the process is about and how it should be carried out. These guidelines provide a shared vision about sound collaborative evaluations, and (if adopted and internalized) may serve as a model for you and the CMs to use and improve them. This MCE component is divided into the following subcomponents: (a) follow guiding principles for evaluators; (b) follow evaluation standards (such as program, personnel, and living community member evaluation standards); and (c) follow the collaboration guiding principles. The collaboration guiding principles list practices that have potential to maximize the excellence and output of the collaborative evaluation team. These guidelines have a universal approach that makes it versatile and applicable to an evaluation setting.In general, guidelines set the pathway for the evaluation and encourage high-quality contributions. Intended to be initiated and planned from the start to the finish of the program, the CMs were introduced to the guidelines supported by the collaboration guiding principles (Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez,

2013), the guiding principles for evaluators (American Evaluation Association, 2004), and the program evaluation standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2011). These guidelines were followed throughout the evaluation of the affordable living community's career interest initiative.

Lessons Learned from the Evaluation

The MCE provided insight on how the evaluation was going to be implemented. This ensured a collaborative understanding that promoted an effective and superior evaluation. The MCE framework offered a detailed methodology for the evaluation and helped promote the buy-in of the affordable living community that would continue to implement the organization's career education program long after the evaluation was complete. Throughout this evaluation, there was much reflection on the strengths and areas of perceived improvement of SCAL. It accomplished what key stakeholders considered their most important goals, stipulated organizational feedback, and offered direction for a sustained development for potential planning and growth. Moreover, this formative evaluation and its collaborative approach made a priority to engage stakeholders, CMs, and evaluators together. The three groups worked collaboratively and as a result, we're able to capture a deeper understanding of the program through various perspectives; thus, the evaluation outcomes offered a practical foundation for the managerial activity. Initiating and implementing this type of approach embraced an appreciation for the learning process for program improvement. The findings from the evaluation were used to reflect on the most important lessons, and assist in helping the career education program and its stakeholders to improve the implementation of the program. To this end, the following are some recommendations specifically pertaining to SCAL's employment services and career education program:

a) **Stratification Strategies**. For future activities, it was recommended that stratification strategies that foster the consideration of demographic and diversification opportunities be incorporated. Employment service opportunities that are versatile to the various abilities, ages, races, religious beliefs, and the gender of students would provide a broader and more inclusive learning opportunity. This broadening of opportunities would also decrease the likeliness of stereotypes.

b) **Reflection Activities**. Receiving feedback and reflection from those in the living community, local employers and businesses, and members of the community are valuable ways to tailor and develop the employment services program. Areflection activity could be distributed within the allotted time frame of a recent employment services event. To increase the likeliness of a higher response rate, this type of activitycan also be offered via online.

c) **Counsel**. Included in the exploration process, community members that may have limiting physical capabilities need to recognize the level of medical risk relative to diseases and physical restraints when it comes to career opportunities.

d) **Support**. The community is novice to the idea of employment services and career education; however they are eager to collaborate. Appointing a community member who could provide innovative support and helping the living community to either independently or collaboratively develop career education opportunities would greatly benefit the program.

e) **Evaluating.** For continual development, it is of benefit to have formative and summative evaluation activities be incorporated into the normal operation of SCAL's employment services career education program. These evaluation efforts will continue to foster a sense of accountability, celebrate the successes, and identify the areas for suggested improvements.

CONCLUSION

Using the MCE for this collaborative evaluation of SCAL's employment service and education program influenced the quality of the evaluation by providing and maintaining an open and shared evaluation environment. The MCE aided users in understanding the intentions and expectations of the stakeholders in their nature of work. The findings from the evaluation offered an advantageous foundation for managing the decision-making process. As a result, the model promoted shared ownership that directed users towards a greater distinction of evidence for decision-making from the outcomes. Reflecting on these findings and previous evaluation experiences, a well-developed collaborative evaluation such as this has led to stronger inquiries, resolutions, and outcomes, which ultimately benefit the employment services offered to the aging community.

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