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Using hybrid models to support the development of organizational evaluation capacity: A case narrative

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing need for public sector organizations to enhance their internal evaluation capacity is increasingly resulting in the use of hybrid evaluation project models, where internal evaluators work with external contracted evaluators to complete evaluative work. This paper first seeks to identify what is currently known about internal evaluation through a synthesis of the literature in this area. It then presents a case narrative illustrating how internal and external evaluation approaches may be used together to strengthen an evaluation project and to develop the evaluation capacity of the organization. Lessons learned include the need to integrate internal and external resources throughout the evaluation and to clarify expectations at the outset of the project.

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1. Introduction

The means through which evaluation services are delivered in public sector organizations vary widely. Evaluation units or offices can be situated in different places within an organization's structure, from the imbedded evaluator working directly in a program team to the independent evaluation office reporting directly to its organization's senior management. Along the same lines, evaluative work can be conducted by internal evaluators, by external evaluators, or by a mix of both. The approach adopted by organizations typically reflects external demands for evaluation and internal capacity to conduct and use evaluation. For example, in Canada, the recent implementation by the federal government of a new evaluation policy requiring complete evaluation coverage of direct program spending on a 5-year cycle (Treasury Board of Canada, 2009) has translated into the need for departments and agencies to increase their internal evaluation capacity, especially in cases where organizations have relied heavily on external evaluators in the past. However, very little academic research on internal evaluation has been published since the late 1990s, with the exception of the burgeoning literature on evaluation capacity building (ECB)[1] that addresses some of the issues faced by internal evaluation units (see for example Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002). In order to increase our knowledge of organizational evaluation capacity and how best to build it, we must first better understand internal evaluation and "what it means to be internal evaluator" (Christie, 2008, p. 546). This paper first seeks to identify what is currently known about internal evaluation through a synthesis of the literature in this area. The paper describes key elements of internal evaluation, such as the role of the internal evaluator and the organizational factors that enable successful internal evaluation. It then proposes a model of hybrid evaluation as one mechanism to increase internal evaluation capacity in public sector organizations and to limit some of the disadvantages associated with a purely internal evaluation approach. The hybrid model is then illustrated through a reflective case narrative. The advantages and challenges of using a hybrid model are also presented, based on the results of the literature review as well as anecdotal experience stemming from the case presented. Some recommendations for the application of hybrid evaluation models are also provided for those interested in implementing a similar strategy.

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[1] Abbreviations used: evaluation capacity building (ECB); National Research Council of Canada (NRC); NRC Technology Cluster Initiatives (CIs).

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2. Literature review methodology

A literature search was conducted to identify publications focusing on the role of internal and external evaluators within organizations. Several databases were searched for relevant articles, including Scholars Portal, SAGE Journals Online, and the Social Sciences Citation Index, as well as the Canadian Evaluation Society grey literature database. A variety of search terms were used, including: internal evaluator; external evaluator; evaluation consultant; and in-house evaluator. Other papers were identified based on previous literature reviews conducted by the authors in the area of organizational evaluation capacity building.[2] Overall, 20 items were retained for analysis, with publication dates ranging from 1983 to 2008.[3] Each paper was reviewed systematically, with key concepts and themes categorized and coded in reading notes developed for this purpose by the research team.

2.1. Limitations of the literature reviewed

Before discussing literature review findings, some important observations can be made pertaining to the scope, quality, and contents of the papers retained for review:

- The review was intended to include literature pertaining to both internal and external evaluation. However, very little information was found specifically on external, or contracted, evaluation. Therefore, the review focuses primarily on internal evaluation.
- Few of the articles reviewed were explicit in defining internal evaluation and its operational context. The concept of internal evaluation, seen more commonly in papers dated in the early 1990s, is rarely described in structural and operational terms.
- Several papers stated that internal evaluators are best suited to conduct formative evaluations, while external evaluators should be used to conduct summative evaluations (Clifford & Sherman, 1983; Nevo, 1994, 2001; Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2007). These papers offered no clear rationale for this practice. One notable exception is Mathison (1991b), where this issue is discussed explicitly. According to Mathison, internal evaluators are capable of conducting either formative or summative evaluations. She states that choices made by organizations in terms of the nature of evaluations conducted by internal and external evaluators may be tied more to potential utilization than to a lack of internal capacity to conduct summative evaluations.
- Several papers included a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of internal evaluation (Love, 1991; Lyon, 1989; Mathison, 1991a; Morrell, 2000); however, few methods were suggested to compensate for the perceived weaknesses of the internal evaluation model. These papers did not provide a comprehensive description of the advantages and disadvantages of external evaluation.

3. Literature review findings

Mathison (1991b) defines internal and external evaluation as follows: "internal evaluations are those conducted by individuals employed by the entity that they are evaluating, whereas external evaluators are not." (p. 159). The published literature on internal evaluation generally focuses on types of evaluation units (called here internal evaluation structures), the advantages and challenges of internal evaluation, and the organizational factors that enable or inhibit successful internal evaluation practices. Key findings for each of these themes are presented in this section in an attempt to summarize what is currently known about internal evaluation. These themes will serve as a backdrop to the discussion of the hybrid evaluation case narrative presented in this paper.

3.1. Internal evaluation structures

Various types of organizational structures for internal evaluation offices were identified based on the literature reviewed. Three distinct structures are presented in Table 1 for heuristic purposes; however, it should be noted that variations on these structures also exist in practice, depending on organizational resources and needs.

Regardless of the type of structure adopted by an organization (i.e., centralized, decentralized, or embedded), evaluation studies may be conducted by organizational staff (internal evaluation) or by external resources hired specifically to conduct evaluations on behalf of the organization (external evaluation). In all three structures, internal staff may also design or conduct certain components of an evaluation study and use contracted resources for others (referred to as a hybrid model). The hybrid approach is particularly interesting given the current need for public service organizations in Canada and elsewhere to increase their evaluation capacity. This model will be discussed in greater detail following the literature review findings.

3.2. Advantages and challenges of internal evaluation

Internal evaluation models present both advantages and challenges within an organization. Although the internal evaluation literature is replete with examples of such pros and cons, unique contextual factors can turn advantages into disadvantages and vice versa. These are discussed below.

3.2.1. Knowledge of organizational context

One of the key advantages of internal evaluation units is that they benefit from an in-depth knowledge of the organization and programs that they must evaluate, acquired through years of contact between evaluators and other organizational units. Generally, this is thought to result in a shorter learning curve for evaluators starting new projects (Conley-Tyler, 2005). This level of organizational knowledge may also enhance the analysis of data undertaken throughout an evaluation, lending a more complex layer to the simple interpretation of data and enabling evaluators to push the evaluation boundaries further through multiple evaluations of the same program (Minnett, 1999).

Beyond these practical advantages, the knowledge of cultural and political factors influencing the organization appears to be a significant advantage for internal evaluators, enabling them to situate each program within the organization's complex environment, and sensitizing them to the multiple perspectives existing within the organization (Conley-Tyler, 2005; Lyon, 1989). The contextual and organizational knowledge held by evaluators as well as their relationships with other organizational members also protects them from being co-opted or otherwise influenced out of ignorance (Lyon, 1989).

One potential limitation linked to the organizational knowledge of internal evaluators is that, with time, evaluators run the risk of adhering to a narrow perspective and may not consider external comparators in their work because of their organizational or program affiliation (Morrell, 2000).

3.2.2. Credibility of evaluators

The credibility of internal evaluators can be perceived from two opposing points of view: first, their long-standing presence in the organization enables them to build their credibility over time through their work (Lyon, 1989; Torres, 1991). Second, and

[2] See for example Bourgeois (2008). Understanding the Dimensions of Organizational Evaluation Capacity. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Ottawa.

[3] The papers included in this analysis are marked (*) in the reference section.

Table 1
Types of internal evaluation structures.

Internal evaluation structures	Centralized structure	Decentralized structure	Embedded program personnel
Organizational location	Central evaluation unit that provides services to an entire organization. Located in an administrative or corporate unit independent of program delivery (Lambur, 2008).	Evaluation units or individual evaluators are located within specific program areas (Lambur, 2008).	Program delivery personnel is responsible for the coordination and implementation of evaluation studies. Often found in non-profit organizations where limited resources may not allow for the recruitment of specialized evaluation personnel.
Role of evaluators	Evaluators are typically generalists	Evaluators in these units do not participate in program delivery and management, but rather focus solely on the evaluation of specific programs (Lambur, 2008). Often, the evaluators acquire knowledge and expertise in the evaluation of these programs (e.g., smoking cessation programs).	Individuals responsible for evaluation tasks typically have not been trained as program evaluators. In some cases, an evaluation practitioner may act as a central resource and can provide technical assistance to program staff charged with evaluation and performance measurement (Kennedy, 2003; Mathison, 1991b).
Example of structure	National Research Council of Canada (NRC): specially mandated evaluation unit situated within a corporate branch is responsible for all publicly mandated evaluation activities occurring within the organization.	Health Canada: individual program branches house their own evaluation units, which in turn report to a central coordinating evaluation body.	International Development Research Council (IDRC): evaluations are conducted by program staff, with methodological guidance from a centralized evaluation unit, which is also responsible for more strategic, cross-organizational evaluation work.

perhaps more commonly, the credibility of internal evaluators can be questioned, based on the fact that they depend on the organization for employment and thus may be perceived as less objective than external evaluators (Chelimsky, 2001). When this latter point of view prevails, evaluators encounter serious hindrances in terms of their ability to influence organizational decision making and to make clear statements about their organization's results to an external audience. Decisions about how and if evaluation findings will be disseminated must be negotiated and senior managers may suggest to evaluators that negative findings be removed or rephrased in an evaluation report (Mathison, 1991a). To establish their credibility firmly and counter the undue influence of organizational leaders, internal evaluators are thought to be more likely to use scientifically rigorous evaluation designs (Christie, 2008). This provides an unbiased mechanism through which to circumvent inappropriate pressures and avoid potential role conflicts. In fact, the literature dispels the commonly held assumption that internal evaluators are less objective and credible than external evaluators: "neither internal nor external evaluators have a defensible, monopolistic claim on objectivity" (Sonnichsen, 2000, p. 132). The more appropriate concept here may be that of impartiality, which can be applied by internal evaluators in various organizational settings and enables them to preserve their professional standards while adapting to organizational needs (Conley-Tyler, 2005).

3.2.3. Organizational needs

One advantage of internal evaluators is that they may play multiple roles within an organization depending on its informational needs, most of which would likely be difficult for an external evaluator to play. These include activities that take place before or after an evaluation study, as well as activities that span multiple evaluations (Christie, 2008; Love, 1991; Mathison, 1991a). For example, internal evaluators are often involved in the identification of appropriate indicators and in the establishment of systems and processes to capture evaluative data (Chelimsky, 2001; Clifford & Sherman, 1983). Internal evaluators can also be asked to participate in program planning and development (Minnett, 1999) as well as in disseminating the lessons learned from evaluations across the organization (Owen & Lambert, 1995).

In public sector organizations, evaluation is typically used for accountability purposes. Evaluation, in this context, is meant to inform senior managers on the organization's progress towards desired outcomes (Winberg, 1991). Internal evaluation, in particular, is thought to be particularly well-suited to such a task, given the level of ongoing interaction that occurs between evaluators and senior executives (Clifford & Sherman, 1983). Taken a step further, internal evaluation can be used by the organization to address issues that are particularly difficult to tackle or that external evaluators would not be able to understand clearly in a short timeframe (Minnett, 1999). In addition to this, internal evaluators are often asked to change evaluation plans by senior managers dealing with changing organizational conditions: "Unlike an external evaluation which is based on a negotiated contract, internal evaluators, even when an evaluation plan is negotiated, must be prepared to change that plan" (Mathison, 1991a, p. 174). Although the ability to quickly change established evaluation plans to suit organizational needs is a definite advantage of internal evaluation, such modifications are resource-intensive and can sometimes negatively affect the credibility of evaluation studies and therefore hinder their use (Lyon, 1989).

3.2.4. Evaluation use

A great benefit of internal evaluation rests in evaluation use. Compared to external contractors, internal evaluators are more likely to find opportunities to support evaluation utilization by turning findings into appropriate actionable items, and are better able to follow-through on their recommendations through monitoring activities (Christie, 2008; Love, 1991; Lyon, 1989; Torres, 1991). Beyond the strict use of evaluation findings, however, internal evaluators are more likely to foster process use within their organization and to support organizational learning at a higher level. By involving organizational members in an ongoing process of evaluative inquiry, internal evaluators can play an important role in knowledge transfer and dissemination, and also learn about the most relevant issues to cover in future studies (Minnett, 1999). Internal evaluators may also play a role in maintaining the organization's memory and ensuring that important lessons are not lost over time (Owen & Lambert, 1995).

3.2.5. Evaluation capacity building

From a capacity building perspective, the presence of an internal evaluation function, whether centralized, decentralized or

embedded, appears to be the best mechanism through which to ensure the integration of evaluation activities within program management (Caracelli, 2000; Cousins & Earl, 1992; King, 2002; Sonnichsen, 1999). Compared to external evaluators brought into the organization to work on specific projects for a limited period of time, internal evaluators are better able to facilitate environments that are conducive to learning, to act as change agents focused on organizational improvement and development, and to empower their organization (Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith, & Avery, 2002; Morabito, 2002; Sonnichsen, 1999; Torres & Preskill, 2001; Trevisan, 2002).

3.3. Organizational and contextual factors influencing internal evaluation

As discussed previously, internal evaluation occurs within a specific organizational context and structure that can enable or hinder the ability of evaluators to work with independence and rigour. Internal evaluation is conducted differently in a centralized structure than it is in a decentralized or embedded structure. Beyond organizational structure, however, other aspects of an organization's context are important determinants in the selection of programs to evaluate, how internal evaluations are conducted, and how evaluation findings are disseminated and used. These contextual factors – organizational support, leadership and culture – are further explored below.

3.3.1. Organizational support

As proposed by Chelimsky (2001), a successful internal evaluation office requires significant organizational support, such as sufficient staff and financial resources and, along the same lines, an expressed policy that legitimizes the evaluation function (see also Love, 1983; Sonnichsen, 2000). Such recognition of the importance of evaluation in an organization's management enables evaluators to undertake longer-term, more complex projects that are most likely to yield important and useful information. This further protects evaluation offices from budgetary or other types of interference (Mathison, 1991b).

3.3.2. Organizational leadership

Organizational leadership that supports evaluation and makes deliberate use of evaluation findings is critical to the functioning of an internal evaluation office. Organizational leaders need to persuade staff members that evaluation is part of organizational life in order to gain their support for evaluation activities and build trust in evaluation findings (Boyne, Gould-Williams, Law, & Walker, 2004). Further, organizational leaders need to identify self-reflection and program improvement as key management principles espoused by the organization and encourage staff to engage in these activities through evaluative inquiry (Minnett, 1999). In order for this to happen, the entire organization should be knowledgeable about evaluation (Boyne et al., 2004) and should feel ownership in the evaluation process. Although this may seem contradictory to the expressed need for objectivity and independence, internal evaluators can remain structurally distanced from programs (especially in a centralized structure) and involve other organizational members in evaluative activities when appropriate (Minnett, 1999).

3.3.3. Organizational culture

As seen above, organizational leaders set the psychological climate within which evaluation is conducted in the organization through their attitudes and behaviours. By focusing their efforts on developing a participative organization, characterized by trust, a sense of community and loyalty, they also develop an organization interested in learning through evaluative inquiry (Love, 1983; Preskill & Torres, 1994, 1999; Trevisan, 2002). Evaluators also need to adapt to the culture of the organization by gaining a better understanding of the background, activities, and goals of the individuals that make up the organization (Chelimsky, 2001).

3.4. Literature review summary and next steps

The literature reviewed in this paper clearly identifies some of the advantages of internal evaluation offices, such as a greater understanding of organizational context and the ability for internal evaluators to take on multiple roles benefiting the organization. It also identifies some of the challenges faced by internal evaluation units, such as their perceived credibility and objectivity, as well as requirements to meet the needs of their organization without compromising their professional standards. The literature also outlines some of the organizational factors that hinder or enable successful internal evaluation practices. These include organizational support, leadership, and culture. Although helpful, these factors are all situated at the organizational level and are often difficult for evaluators to influence or control. No factors stemming from the project level are identified in the literature; such factors may be easier to manage for internal evaluation units interested in increasing their capacity and mitigating the challenges identified above. The hybrid model presented in the sections that follow is meant to demonstrate one of the ways in which this can be achieved at the project level. Although the combination of internal and external resources within specific evaluation projects is likely widespread in practice, the literature does not currently address this issue.[4] It is hoped that the model proposed here will in part fill this gap in knowledge and practice-based theory.

4. Combination of internal and external evaluation in specific projects: a case narrative

At this juncture, the paper will expose the potential benefits of combining both internal and external evaluation resources and will demonstrate how a hybrid model can be used to strengthen internal evaluation capacity and mitigate some of its challenges. A case narrative will first be presented to illustrate how hybrid models can be applied in practical settings, followed by a discussion of the advantages and challenges of the model.

4.1. Case background and context

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) is the Government of Canada's premier organization for scientific research and technology development. NRCs research and technology programs span a wide variety of research disciplines and offer a broad array of services. Through its research and services NRC intends to play a major role in stimulating community-based innovation.

In 2000 NRC implemented eleven initiatives meant to establish and develop regional technology clusters. These initiatives, known as the NRC Technology Cluster Initiatives (CIs), focused primarily on the establishment or expansion of laboratories and research facilities, research staff, and information and innovation support services in select regions of Canada. The eleven CIs are located in various types of communities (including small communities and large urban centers) and are focused on the development of technologies in unique areas of science (e.g., fuel cell and hydrogen technologies, nutrisciences, photonics and nanotechnology). These initiatives have been evaluated individually or in small groups over the years due to funding renewal requests and other organizational needs.

[4] Two papers by Nevo (1994, 2001) and one by Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2007) discuss the combination of internal and external evaluation approaches, but the way in which their approaches are described varies significantly from the model presented here.

In 2008, the centralized evaluation unit of the National Research Council was asked to conduct an evaluation of the complete portfolio of CIs as part of a new funding renewal request. The scope of this evaluation was relatively large, given the number of CIs to be evaluated at once (all eleven initiatives) and the need to review each CI's performance from the time of program launch (for some, this represented 8 years of data). Further, the evaluation had to include the review of very distinct elements such as individual research institutes, specialized fee-for-service activities and commercialization centers. The scientific and regional differences between the eleven CIs added additional layers of complexity to what was already considered to be a substantial evaluation project given internal resources.

Operationally, the evaluation project was delayed due to other organizational commitments, which resulted in a compressed 7-month timeline for the study. The timelines for the evaluation were strict, given that the evaluation report is a mandatory component of program funding renewal. NRC's internal evaluation unit, tasked with the design and conduct of the study, therefore faced the need to produce credible evaluation results within a tight timeline and limited budget.

4.2. Evaluation challenges

The evaluation framework developed at the outset of the study concluded that much of the knowledge and skills needed to gather evidence on the eleven initiatives were held by internal evaluators. These evaluators possessed existing knowledge of the organization's management and decision-making structure, its data collection systems, and the results from previous evaluations of the CIs. The internal evaluation function also benefited from the ability to communicate with a large number of program managers and delivery staff in an efficient manner because of its position within the organization (as proposed by Conley-Tyler, 2005). It was therefore able to engage key stakeholders in specific evaluation activities as required (e.g., identification of focus group participants, generation and summarization of program data, liaison with external partners).

However, upon closer examination, it was also determined that the rationale for the project (i.e., program renewal) could lead to some degree of role conflict for the internal evaluation function. As Lyon (1989) proposes, internal evaluators can face such conflicts when their responsibilities as neutral researchers are set against the roles and objectives of program administrators who are focused on organizational survival – in this case renewal of funding to secure ongoing program activity. In such cases, internal evaluators may adapt their roles in order to meet the needs of the organization, which in turn may influence their actions as evaluators. As reflected in the literature,

> as an evaluation office gets socialized by the culture of the larger organization. . .there is some danger that the office may lose its professional skepticism, its intellectual independence, and its ability to dissent, and hence fall short of its fundamental mission to provide a measure of internal accountability to the organization (Chelimsky, 2001, p. 14).

In the case presented here, the internal evaluators' extensive familiarity with the CI program, as well as a potential role conflict due to the organization's reporting structure (the evaluators and the coordinating body of the CIs were part of the same broad organizational unit) might cause them to be viewed as biased. The use of a hybrid approach, where internal and external evaluators work collaboratively to collect, analyze and synthesize information, would serve to mitigate any internal conflicts or biases.

In addition to the need to demonstrate the objectivity of the evaluation process to various organizational stakeholders, the scope of work required in the short time frame available as well as requirements for specialized skill sets to complement existing NRC expertise, required added capacity in the form of external evaluator resources. The inclusion of external evaluators was therefore conceptualized within the project plan as one way to deal with these limitations, as suggested by Morrell (2000).

4.3. The hybrid evaluation model

The challenges posed by this particular evaluation project led to the creation of a hybrid evaluation project team composed of both internal and external evaluators, as well as an external-*internalized* evaluator (i.e., an external evaluator contracted for a finite period to work internally and housed with the internal unit as one of its own members). In addition to the hiring and contracting of additional evaluation resources, the project was conceived to allow for evaluators, whether internal or external, to work collaboratively and as a conjoint unit on some methods. A project organizational chart was created showing the role of each evaluator or firm in the study. Messaging to all evaluators, particularly external, was that they were contributing to an overall evaluation rather than only being responsible for their sub-project or a single line of evidence. Five contracts were put in place to support this evaluation; each is described in more detail below.

4.3.1. Literature review

The evaluation included a literature review that was conducted entirely by an external resource. The deliverable was a stand-alone report, used as a reference in the evaluation report. The interaction between internal evaluation team members and the academic hired to produce the literature review was limited to discussions about the scope of the review and feedback on review drafts.

4.3.2. Case studies

Six case studies were included in this evaluation, with three undertaken primarily by external resources. For these three case studies, internal evaluators supported the contractors by collecting initial project information and selecting the cases to be profiled. The external evaluators continued the data collection and wrote the case reports. Interaction between the internal and external evaluators was somewhat limited; however, internal evaluators provided more extensive feedback on draft documents than for the literature review and enabled contact between the contractors and other organizational members through conference calls. The other three case studies were developed in-house by internal evaluation team members, who coordinated their approach to match that taken by the external evaluators.

4.3.3. Focus groups

Focus groups were held in each of the eleven regions involved in this program. The focus groups were organized and attended by internal team members although external evaluators were retained as discussion moderators. There was a high level of interaction between the internal and external evaluators during specific periods, including the development of moderator guides, the actual focus group sessions, and during an analysis session led by internal evaluators. The analysis session focused on identifying the key findings of the focus group sessions as well as other methods and served to develop the main findings stemming from the evaluation study.

4.3.4. Special leverage study

An economic study focusing on leverage was commissioned to support the evaluation. This study was led by external evaluators

with the support of internal evaluators. This relationship included a high level of integration over a longer period of time as knowledge of the organization's data systems and program was transferred to the external evaluators and knowledge of the economic model and framework was transferred to the internal evaluators. The external evaluators involved in this study also participated in the analysis session for the evaluation described above, as well as team meetings throughout the course of the project.

4.3.5. Integrated resource (internalized external evaluator)

To respond to a change in the level of internal evaluators available to work on the project, a consultant was engaged to work as a team member for the evaluation project. The consultant worked on-site with the internal evaluators and performed many of the same tasks as the internal evaluators. This individual participated in all team meetings, as well as informal discussions with other team members and the evaluation analysis session.

Table 2 outlines the general hybrid model design used in the NRC evaluation project. The table shows the five levels of integration, or involvement, of external evaluators, from the evaluation firm hired to work on a single line of evidence to the external-internalized evaluator working as part of the internal evaluation team. The specific examples from the CI evaluation are also included in the table.

As described above, internal evaluators invited the more integrated external team members to participate in ongoing project progress meetings in order to foster knowledge transfer amongst the internal and external evaluators. Further, although various evaluators and firms had different roles and responsibilities, most evaluation team members (internal and external) were convened to participate in the synthesis of data and information leading to the development of key evaluation findings. The hybrid approach also enabled all team members (internal and external) to verify and validate findings through the entire duration of the project through informal discussion and observation. For instance, the moderation of cluster community focus groups by an external firm, with participation by internal evaluators as observers, allowed for more robust analysis and discussion of findings in the evaluation's analysis phase.

4.4. Application of the hybrid model in the evaluation of the NRC CIs

Overall, the hybrid model was effective in meeting some of the key challenges identified in the evaluation framework developed for the project. Several of these challenges were also identified in the literature review presented earlier. First, the external perspective brought to the project by the hybrid approach was invaluable to the internal evaluators, both in terms of content (i.e., the external evaluators challenged internal evaluators on numerous occasions) and in terms of perceived objectivity (e.g., the external evaluators involved in facilitating community focus groups enabled participants to speak freely about the performance of NRC, even though an internal evaluator was present). Second, the external evaluators brought additional skills to the evaluation and enabled the team to make use of specialized methods (e.g., a leveraging study was undertaken by external evaluators with backgrounds in economics). Finally, the external-internalized evaluator added much needed capacity to the internal evaluation team, faced with a large project that needed to be conducted in a short amount of time.

Table 2
Observed hybrid evaluation relationships.

Attribute	Least integrated				Most integrated
	Contract management	Contract management and support	Joint implementation	Joint design and implementation	Full integration in evaluation team
Contractual arrangement	A contract is awarded to a firm or individual to conduct an entire evaluation study or one of its components	External contractors are hired to implement data collection on one line of evidence	External contractors are hired to work with internal evaluators on the implementation of an approach designed internally	Internal and external evaluators work together on the design and implementation of one line of evidence	External evaluator is hired as a full member of the evaluation team and is co-located with the unit
Interaction between internal and external evaluators	Internal evaluators provide feedback only as necessary; little knowledge transfer occurs between internal and external evaluators; the deliverable is produced entirely by the contractor	Internal evaluators provide direction and guidance and may contribute some of the material but deliverables are produced by the contractor	External and internal evaluators share implementation responsibilities; external contractors participate in working groups and analysis sessions led by internal evaluators; internal evaluators are responsible for the design and the final deliverable with some input from external evaluators	External and internal evaluators share both design and implementation responsibilities; external evaluators attend internal team meetings and participate in working groups and analysis sessions led by internal evaluators; both parties contribute to writing and/or preparing the final deliverable	The external evaluator shares all of the responsibilities of the internal evaluator for a specific project, including design, data collection, analysis and reporting. The evaluator also has full access to internal team meetings and participates in all facets of the project
NRC cluster initiatives evaluation examples	Literature review contracted out to an academic researcher; deliverable was referenced in the evaluation report	Case studies selected internally but conducted externally; deliverables were referenced in the evaluation report	Focus groups were designed internally and moderated by external evaluators, who also participated in a combined analysis session with internal evaluators	Special socio-economic leverage study designed and implemented by internal and external evaluators; knowledge transfer was facilitated by inviting external evaluators to internal team meetings	Individual consultant was hired to provide additional support as a full member of the evaluation team; the consultant was located with the evaluation team and had full access to internal resources; knowledge transfer was facilitated by ongoing participation in team meetings and informal discussions

5. Advantages and challenges of the hybrid evaluation model

Although combining internal and external evaluators within one project is not unique to the case presented here, the literature review identified that very little empirical knowledge has been developed on the use and success of hybrid evaluation approaches. Anecdotally, the model is considered to be in use whenever internal evaluators engage with externally contracted evaluators by participating in evaluation design, data collection and analysis, as well as other evaluative activities. Some advantages and challenges of the hybrid evaluation model in practice are identified here, based on the literature review and the case presented in this paper. The implications of using such a model are also discussed briefly.

5.1. Advantages of the hybrid evaluation model

5.1.1. Mitigation of organizational influences

As outlined earlier, one of the main influences on the ability of internal evaluation units to deliver on their mandate is the structure of the organization itself. In the event that the evaluation unit finds itself ill-positioned and overly influenced by the organization, the integration of external evaluators to internal evaluation projects can help to refocus objectives on the intended purpose and expected neutrality and credibility of an evaluation. Clifford and Sherman (1983) suggest that "an observation is objective if it is the creation of many inquiries with many different points of view" (p. 39), and Minnett (1999) states that "the IE [internal evaluator] eventually becomes part of the culture and loses some perspective in this model, so it is especially critical that we capture multiple perspectives" (p. 357). Both views are suggestive of the value of integrating internal and external resources in evaluation projects. Conversely, the addition of internal evaluation knowledge to external evaluation skill sets is also beneficial. As Lyon (1989) notes, internal evaluators may find significant knowledge gaps in so-called outside 'experts'. By jointly making decisions about evaluation findings and results, internal and external resources can collectively exhibit both a depth of knowledge about a program, and a broad perspective as to its performance in a larger external context.

5.1.2. Greater respect for planned evaluation activities

Typically, evaluations conducted externally are based upon contracted work plans with predetermined budgets and deliverables. However, the internal evaluation function, when carrying out its own evaluation activity, may face situations where work plans are viewed as malleable (Mathison, 1991a). A hybrid approach can help to solidify an evaluation plan because of the requirements linked to external contracts. This was certainly found to be the case in the project summarized in this paper.

5.1.3. Access to specialized knowledge

Internal evaluation units generally exhibit a finite set of knowledge and skills, based on the personal characteristics and background of their individual members. It is unlikely that the unit, unless very large, will possess all of the subject-matter knowledge necessary to evaluate all of an organization's programs. As seen in the case example described above, external evaluators can be used to fill gaps in specialized knowledge or skills for particular evaluation projects. Along the same lines, the hybrid model also enables the integration of innovative or proprietary methods held by external evaluators into an evaluation project.

5.2. Challenges associated with the hybrid evaluation model

While the use of a hybrid model for evaluation is presented here as a favourable alternative to either uniquely internal or external approaches, full implementation of hybrid models can face numerous challenges. Some of these are summarized here.

The involvement of external resources typically involves a contractual arrangement with stipulations and limitations. The contractual mechanism creates a client–contractor relationship rather than the desired peer-to-peer relationship that would be preferable in the hybrid approach. As a result, the external evaluator may feel bound to the views of their client. Conversely, they may feel inclined to refute the views of internal evaluation staff, seeing them as being too proximate to what is being evaluated (Lyon, 1989).

External evaluators also typically work on several contracts at once, which may result in competing priorities from different clients and difficulty in integrating fully with internal evaluators. Further, external and internal evaluators will approach a project with varying levels of knowledge of the program. Engagement of external evaluators mid-stream may limit their exposure and knowledge of program issues, subsequently limiting their ability to engage in detailed enquiry as to a program's performance.

Finally, at a more practical level, a hybrid approach requires the participation of individuals who come from different organizations with their own cultures, processes and technologies. For instance, approval and review processes may vary between organizations, or technology platforms may not be congruent. Meshing these to create harmonious work processes often requires time and effort – elements that may not be available given project constraints.

6. Lessons learned in the application of hybrid evaluation models

Whether internal or external, every evaluator views a new project with his or her own perceptions, expected purpose and potential use of the results. A hybrid model does not equate externally collected data that are adjusted later by internal staff. Nor is a hybrid evaluation one where external evaluators are engaged to undertake selected methods only, followed by this information being used internally to build a larger evaluation report. Rather, it is proposed that the following steps be taken to enable a successful hybrid evaluation process:

- Build a relationship with external evaluators and develop a common work approach over several small projects before engaging external evaluators in a large, complex evaluation;
- Ensure that all evaluators, internal and external, share a common view of the purpose and rationale of the evaluation, as well as the intended use of results;
- Engage external resources in more than one phase of the evaluation project (e.g., planning, data collection and synthesis, reporting and closure);
- Engage external resources in analysis activities and the generation of findings and recommendations; and,
- Ensure that all evaluators agree in principle on the key findings generated by the evaluation. This assumes some level of review by both internal and external evaluators – although reports and other documents may be written by either source.

7. Conclusion

Public service and non-profit organizations are facing increasing demands for evaluation results focusing on the relevance and performance of their programs. Many organizations have responded to this challenge by focusing on developing their internal evaluation capacity; this is often accomplished by instituting internal evaluation offices responsible for designing, implementing, and reporting on evaluation studies. As shown here,

the structure of such internal evaluation units varies from one organization to the next, as do their advantages and disadvantages. Unlike other papers that focus primarily on organizational-level solutions, this paper offers one mechanism through which the strengths of the internal evaluation function can be maximized at the project level. The hybrid evaluation model, composed of a blend of both internal and external evaluators, may be particularly useful in organizations with heavy evaluation loads and relatively small numbers of internal professional evaluators. In such a model, external evaluators can be integrated into a project team at various levels, from an outside contractor responsible for the implementation of one research method, to the fully-integrated external evaluator who is temporarily housed by the organization and who is considered a regular member of the evaluation project team.

It is hoped that the presentation of the hybrid model conceptualized in one recent NRC evaluation project, in addition to the update of the literature on internal evaluation, will stimulate discussion and thought amongst both internal and external evaluators and prompt further applications of this model in government and non-profit organizations. In the case of NRC, there are plans to further explore hybrid models in future evaluations as a way to respond to increased demand for evaluation studies. It is further hoped that this paper will constitute the first step towards defining hybrid evaluation approaches and may serve as a foundation upon which further empirical research on the use and success of such approaches can be developed.

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Disclaimer

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[5] References marked (*) were included in the literature review.