Content

- Methodology employed to address relevance and develop guidelines
- Definition and purpose of Relevance
- Theoretical origins of relevance
- Conditions for relevance
- Relevance Test
- Conditions for credibility
- Sources of typical evidence
- Relevance practices in evaluation
- Typical relevance questions
- Data Collection and Measurement of Relevance
- Challenges and considerations
- Draft Guideline
- Reference list
Methodology

- Web-based keyword search:
  - Relevance - assessment, utility, methods, techniques, standards, guidelines, rules, definitions, conditions, origins of, theory of, philosophy of, in program evaluation
- Program Evaluation, Philosophy literature
- Limited number of federal department evaluation reports
- Renown schools and scholars in program evaluation and philosophy sought through grey literature, such as:
  - Claremont Un, Western MI, IDRC
  - Patton, Shriven, Greene, Shufflebeam, etc
The Focus of Relevance

- Relevance theory is based on:
  - a definition of relevance
  - two principles of relevance:
    - Cognition-based (individuals are geared to maximization relevance)
    - Communication-based (relates to processing information)
Origins

- Law
  - Jurisprudence?
  - Acceptable evidence

- Education
  - Motivating students to learn
  - Keller (1983) theoretical model

- Cognitive and communication theory
  - Information retrieval/ science

- Audit – focusing on performance measures
Definitions

- **Relevance** –
  - “bearing on or having reference to the matter in hand” (Cdn Oxford Dictionary)
  - an assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context (Sperber & Wilson, 1986)
  - (in eval) the extent to which a program effectively addresses a demonstrable ongoing or emerging need for stakeholder's
  - (in law) a relation to the matter at hand

- **Need** – conditions or thoughts that are necessary or useful for fulfilling a defensible purpose (Shufflebeam, 2001)

- **Probative** – signifies ‘tending to prove’; evidence ‘seeks the truth’

---

2 in law, relates to evidence
3 in law, if evidence is not probative (doesn’t tend to prove the proposed for which it is proffered) it is inadmissible
Conditions for Relevance

- Credible evidence
  - Is evidence strong enough, consistent, credible? (Tiep, 2009)
  - Accurate data/info (OAG BC, 2005)
  - Use sound criteria for assessing relevance and evidence (Epstein, 2010)
  - Provide reliable and neutral information ...credible information... (TBS, 2010)

- Triangulation of data sources to support each finding
  - Multiple sources of evidence
  - Evidence-based
  - What if evidence sources are conflicting? (Tiep, 2009)
  - Program logic aligned to foundation mandate

- Context specific
  - Threats to internal validity

- Links to notions of topic, interest, concern (Wilson, 1999, Strawson, 1964)

- Rules of logic and reasoning apply (Cheng, 2000)

- Measuring relevance judgements: full, partial, none
  - Not an all or none matter (Wilson & Sperber, 2002)
  - Fuzziness on nature relevance led to confusion in identifying appropriate measures, criteria, methods etc (Taube, 1965).
Relevance Test

Start

Credible Evidence

Context Specific

Need-Links to topic, interest, concern

Evidence

Logical Reasoning

Turpin Consultants, Inc 8
Conditions: What is credible evidence?

- For evidence to be useful, it not only needs to be credible, but actionable in order to guide decision making and organizational action.

- Concerned with the research methodology and data sources used to establish a high degree of harmony between the raw data and the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions.

- The issue of Credibility has begun to surface similar to the old paradigm wars of quant/qual; eval vs research; RCT/non-RCT. In fact, credibility is subsumed in each of these, so it is not a paradigm but a quest. If anything, it is an opportunity to take stock and deepened our understanding of the difference between eval in the 20th and 21st centuries.

- The level of credibility necessary or useful to guide action depends on the situation.
  - So evidence in one context studies may be questionably relevant for guiding actions in other contexts.
Sources of Typical Evidence

- **Types of Sources:**
  - Stakeholder interviews
  - Document review
  - Case studies
  - Focus groups
  - Survey
  - Administrative data
  - Literature review: best practices, benchmarking
  - Government documents

- **Develop Evidence Search Strategy as:** (TEIP, 2009)
  - Academic/research lit
  - Content advisors
  - Grey literature
  - Informed colleagues/practice networks/stakeholders

- **Evidence Collection Spreadsheet**
Relevance Practice in Evaluation

- Program consistent with federal roles & responsibilities
- Existence of continuing need for the program
- Alignment with government/dept priorities
- Program theory as a ‘base’ (Lamarche et al, 2010)
  - Streamlined logic models don’t explain theory
  - At least 3 parts to consider
    - Theory (understanding of) the issue / problem / need
    - Theory of the mechanism or ‘policy instrument’ (carrots, sticks, sermons, etc.)
    - Theory of implementation / action (how delivered with whom)
Challenges and Considerations

- How to determine when/what evidence is relevant/irrelevant
  - Can’t be determined by syllogistic reasoning (i.e., if/then statements) logic alone ([Evidence (law) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm](Evidence (law) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm))
  - Assessment of R requires judgement about probabilities or uncertainties
  - Many feel that common-sense reasoning plays an important role
  - Needs to be credible

- Distinction between relevance and marginal relevance\(^1\) ([Carbonell & Goldstien, 1998](Carbonell & Goldstien, 1998)); albeit this was about documents, but raises the issue of degrees of relevance, and who decides on acceptable degrees

- Relevance can be explicit or implicit ([Sperber & Wilson, 1986](Sperber & Wilson, 1986))

- Measuring relevance

- Pervasive Tensions between
  - Identifying credible science in a highly charged political environment ([Keller, 2009](Keller, 2009))
  - Relevance and credibility ([Keller, 2009](Keller, 2009))

- Can one validate opinions and by using what value; they decided not to ([OAG BC, 2005](OAG BC, 2005)).

- Evidence – doctrine of corroboration (Scots law meaning) that there must be two different and independent sources in support of each crucial fact ([Evidence (law) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm](Evidence (law) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm)).

\(^1\) whether the docu still has distinctive usefulness after the user has looked at other docs
Data Collection and Measurement of Relevance

- Develop evaluation questions that reflect perspectives, experience, insights of relevant stakeholders (Preskill and Jones, 2009)

- For each evaluation question, document the link to the Program Logic Model

- Relevance of performance measurement criteria are (OAG, 2005):
  - Aligned – linked to mission, goals, objectives
  - Complete – include essential aspects
  - Useful – timely, understandable, comparable, responsive to change, meet broad needs of users
Next Steps

- Development of a process map that reflects the logical analysis of relevance applied to evaluation

- Develop a relevance checklist, where for each step in the process map, the essential sources of evidence and analysis technique is identified
References