

Hallie Preskill and Darlene Russ-Eft. (2016). *Building Evaluation Capacity: Activities for Teaching and Training*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. 418 pages. (ISBN: 978-1-4833-3432-5)

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Domestic and international donors as well national governments around the world have shown an increased interest in evaluation over the last decade. Consequently, the demand for evaluation services has grown alongside the number of related academic courses and professional workshops. However, the supply of evaluation services has not evolved as rapidly, and its quality is still questionable, partly due to the limitations of the educational and instructional programs in evaluation that have proliferated globally over the last few years.¹ Among various possible factors explaining these shortcomings, three stand out: the excessive reliance on traditional instructions methods (e.g. lectures), which do not let trainees exchange with and learn from others; the curricula's limited coverage of evaluation topics that are not technically oriented but relevant to successful evaluation work; and a paucity of specific textbooks supporting evaluation trainees learning in a fun, effective, and sustainable way. Given the ubiquity of capacity-building, and the ever-present need for better capacity-building programs, any book whose intention assists teachers and facilitators with meeting these needs is particularly welcome. Such is the case of the recently published second edition of *Building Evaluation Capacity: Activities for Teaching and Training*.

Co-written by two evaluation professionals with extensive teaching experience, this 418-page book provides readers with 89 capacity-building activities whose use is recommended in the course of both evaluation workshops and academic courses. Sixty of the activities highlighted in the first edition from 2005 were revised or updated for this edition, supplemented by the addition of 24 completely new activities. Activities are grouped into 12 different sections corresponding to different evaluation process stages. As a result, readers can either read the book cover to cover or proceed to the chapter in which they are most interested.

After an opening section that provides an overview, the first two main sections cover introductory topics (the Politics and Ethics of Evaluation Practice; Culture and Evaluation), which the majority of evaluation textbooks and manuals rarely touch upon. The five subsequent sections (sections 4–8) are more technical in nature and cover standard curriculum included in evaluation capacity-building

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programs (topics include, among others, how to identify the objectives and focus of an evaluation and how to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative evaluation data). Section 9 explores innovative modalities to better communicate during evaluation processes and improve reporting; section 10 includes activities whose objective is to strengthen learners' evaluation management skills. The last two sections ("Building and Sustaining Support for Evaluation" and "Reflections on Learning") provide a more systemic perspective on evaluation capacity building. Among the activities presented at the book's conclusion, those pertaining to how to cope with stakeholders' resistance to evaluation and how to maximize organizational learning through the use of evaluation were particularly stimulating.

Despite a few shortcomings, I would recommend this book to other evaluation and capacity development specialists for three reasons. Well aware that the potential of this book is still far from having been fully realized, I hope that the limitations discussed below will be addressed in future editions.

First, I especially liked the interactive nature of the book, as illustrated by the consistent integration of participatory pedagogical approaches into all the recommended activities (who would think that candies could be used to develop qualitative data analysis categories and themes, or that evaluation logic could be learned with the help of chocolate chip cookies?). Far from being a traditional evaluation manual providing dry evaluation notions, this book encourages experience-based learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), thanks also to the use of real-life scenarios. Using mind maps, visualization exercises, and role-playing, the book offers unique opportunities to discover, explore, and discuss evaluation topics through collective exercises and reflection. This book consequently is more suitable to being "experienced" and "played around with" by students and workshop participants. Moreover, the guiding questions provided at the end of each activity foster the same creative and unexpected learning that was once attained through the Socratic questioning method (Paul & Elder, 2006). However, as no solution to the exercises is provided, there is a risk that many of the exercises' key messages and solutions might be missed, especially when facilitators are insufficiently skilled at synthesizing group discussions or unable to infuse substantive knowledge in the exchanges with their trainees. Therefore, it would have been helpful to make the exercise solutions available to readers.²

Second, all sections provide readers with detailed and easy-to-follow instructions on how to perform suggested activities. Even so, the successful completion of the recommended exercises still rests on the facilitator's or teacher's background technical knowledge. To address this limitation, it would have been beneficial if each chapter had included bibliographic references drawn not only from peer-reviewed literature but also from grey literature (e.g. online resources).³ This would be beneficial to those facilitators with limited access to scientific journals, especially in the Global South.

Third, the book is well balanced in that it focuses on strengthening individuals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes through group exercises. In so doing, the recommended activities enhance learners' ability to contextualize evaluation within

organization settings in which they are already working or expect to work in the future. That said, I wish that a more detailed background note on the different levels at which Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) could occur (Tarsilla, 2017) had been included and that some related exercises combining activities at the three ECD levels (micro, meso, and macro) had been added.

To conclude, this second edition is a considerable improvement over the first, which I have used extensively over the last decade. In light of its sound structure, clarity, intellectual creativity, and interactive nature, this book would certainly be a valuable addition to all evaluation professionals' personal library. The impact of the book on practice will still depend, though, on the level of knowledge and dedication of those teachers and facilitators who will be using it.

NOTES

- 1 The need for better evaluation capacity programs is so pervasive that, during numerous evaluation missions overseas, I often have to improvise ad hoc evaluation sessions for other team members who, despite their evaluation qualifications, either have not been exposed to the evaluation fundamentals by their respective teachers or supervisors or have not had the opportunity to refine these evaluation soft skills.
- 2 The book does provide a limited number of solutions for selected activities. For example, in the case of activity 45 on survey development (p. 227), a cheat sheet highlights how to tell a good survey from a bad survey.
- 3 A few of the activities in the book do include references to online material, namely Activity 75 on “six-word presentations of program success” or Activity 81 on “Most Significant Change.”

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