INTERNAL EVALUATION IN NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES ON THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

Leanne M. Kelly and Alison Rogers

Routledge

"The co-authors – two incredibly thoughtful internal evaluators – present an extensive set of practical ideas to enhance evaluation practice in non-profit organisations. Building on their own practice and on an understanding of the scholarly literature that grounds internal evaluation, they have produced a highly usable guide that will enable other evaluators to build evaluation capacity both for themselves and for their organisations. I am eager to use this book in my own work".

Jean A. King, *Professor Emerita, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development/Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute, USA*

CHAPTER ENDORSEMENTS

"It felt really nice to be reading something that speaks so directly to where I am at in the early stages of my evaluation journey. It has given me some useful food for thought".

Kate Baker, *Evaluation Project Manager, HealthWest* (Chapter 2)

"These uniquely practical guidelines and reflections are essential to read"

Phyo Pyae Thida (Sophia) Htwe, *Community Development Evaluator, GraceWorks Myanmar* (Chapter 2)

"What a complete joy to read this!"

Yoland Wadsworth, *Professor (Hon), RMIT University, Australia, and author of the best-selling* Everyday Evaluation on the Run (Chapter 4)

"The content shows the value of combining research, theory and practice, and the importance of NGOs actively contributing to global understandings by sharing knowledge through publications. Genius!"

Stephanie Harrison, *Evaluation Consultant, Pandanus Evaluation* (Chapter 5)

"I was actually quite inspired to use theory more in my work after reading it!"

Catherine Malla, *Knowledge Management Advisor, The Fred Hollows Foundation* (Chapter 5)

"This chapter addresses an important topic – the need for all evaluators, not just internal evaluators working in the NFP sector, to do much better at integrating theory/research with practice when planning, conducting and using evaluations".

Brad Astbury, *Director, ARTD Consultants* (Chapter 5)

"This is a great practical resource with valuable lessons learnt for guiding how external and internal evaluators can combine their expertise together to conduct evaluations in non-profits".

Kathryn Dinh, *Director, Lotus Evaluation* (Chapter 6)

"A practical and useful guide on how to think about utilisation and apply this to data collection and evaluations. Working in M&E in a large organisation with varying knowledge and skills around evaluation utilisation, I found this incredibly helpful!"

Lauren Lombardi, *National Monitoring and Evaluation Lead, Emergency Services, Australian Red Cross* (Chapter 7)

"I think I've had an epiphany! This was so well written, enjoyable and reaffirming".

Marcia Nawar, *Program Quality State Lead (NSW/ACT), Australian Red Cross* (Chapter 7)

Internal Evaluation in Non-Profit Organisations

Focused on the interpersonal aspects of internal evaluation in non-profit organisations, this book presents practice-based discussions centred on six key topics identified through the authors' experience as evaluation practitioners.

Internal Evaluation in Non-Profit Organisations: Practitioner Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice is not a step-by-step how-to guide; instead, each chapter unpacks an aspect of internal evaluation in non-profits that is paid insufficient heed in the existing literature. Written by and for internal evaluation practitioners, the book contains a plethora of practical strategies and critical analysis of thought-provoking topics that are of particular interest and importance to internal evaluators in non-profit settings. The authors understand the pressures facing practitioners and non-profit organisations and share their insights around improving evaluation's ability to be efficient, embedded, useful, and meaningful.

This book will be of interest to researchers, scholars, and students focusing on non-profit management and will hold specific value for internal evaluators who want to harness their unique and influential position to help organisations achieve their goals. Further, this book is ideal for individuals wanting to think critically about evaluation and improve evaluation utilisation by developing their professional capability, building teamwork skills, using informal everyday data, incorporating theory, and developing fruitful relationships with external evaluators.

Leanne M. Kelly currently holds a postdoctoral research fellowship at Deakin University and is an internal evaluator at the Australian Red Cross.

Alison Rogers is an evaluation consultant and scholar affiliated with the University of Melbourne's Centre for Program Evaluation, Australia.

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Internal Evaluation in Non-Profit Organisations

Practitioner Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice

Leanne M. Kelly and Alison Rogers

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Foreword

Perhaps the greatest joy of reading *Internal Evaluation in Non-Profit Organisations: Practitioner Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice* is to find thoughtful deeper attention to what I think really constitutes the "ground of being" of evaluation in Leanne Kelly and Alison Rogers' observation that those who are closest to practice are "already collecting data and evaluating all the time".

This was the same conclusion that drove my writing *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*, which was based on my 1980s participatory action evaluation research experience in the disability and community health areas. This was also the same conclusion I had come to working with staff and community members in the 1970s, in child and family services, which led to my own PhD studies and the writing of the prequel: *Do It Yourself Social Research*.

Like Leanne and Alison, I worked with the connections both *upwards* to central departmental policy-making (the Knox early childhood services project being the pilot evaluative research for what became state-wide local government-level service provision), and *downwards* to service development and refinement *on the ground*. Here I learned that I was not the only evaluative researcher, but everyone else was too – from young parents and their children, to frontline professional staff, to central departmental administrators and government policy-makers.

Specialist evaluators necessarily base all their work on this characteristic of the *inquiring human* if they are not to start service and programme evaluations from scratch every time. Indeed, they will repeatedly frustrate collaborating stakeowners and stakeholders and not bring vital life to the services and systems if they fail to work with the implications of this.

As the authors observe in Chapter 4:

> staff are talking to community members and eliciting their feedback; unpacking challenges in team meetings, reflective practice sessions, and one-to-ones with their supervisors; and using those findings to make changes. Building on these established practices supports staff to consciously recognise their evaluative actions and helps them build on these practices to enhance the rigour of the data and their ability to translate it for use.

In this way the book not only abounds with the fruit of their own empirical studies and the writers' years of evaluation experience, but also builds effectively on the previous nearly 60 years of published experience of those from whom they have learned.

There is so much here that echoes my generation's experience, but also clear evidence of the sophistication of evaluation and specialised thinking that has been built since – in this case regarding application in non-profit organisations.

For example, whereas *Everyday Evaluation on the Run* needed to provide step-by-step guidance for how groups can conduct their own evaluation, this book supports deep critical reflection on these practical processes from the perspective of people working within organisations. As such, this new contribution supports and extends the literature in a way I would anticipate practitioners will find most helpful.

Throughout the book, the authors also make connections between empirical experience and theoretical ideas and incorporate new ways of seeing things into deeper more nuanced definitional understandings. They present this information in an engaging way peppered with anecdotes and distil key takeaways to help readers take the ideas into their practice by building bridges of connection between complex theory and daily practice. This includes supporting readers to grow professionally, connect effectively with their colleagues and other stakeholders and the all-important stakeowners, see and nurture useful evaluative data in the everyday, improve evaluative rigour by drawing from research, theory, and practice, cultivate productive relationships with external consultants, and consider different ways to increase evaluation's utilisation. These topics are highly relevant to the daily life of an internal evaluator and readers will be rewarded with insights that will help them to be more effective evaluators, supporting them to help their organisations fulfil their purposes of serving their end-user communities.

In my view Leanne Kelly and Alison Rogers are among the brightest young minds in contemporary Australian evaluation research; and their book – based on their own practice and their doctoral studies – offers to assist the field find ever-better pathways to a methodologically sound, practically useful, and ethically responsive future. I wish them well and thank them for their contribution to these same three purposes that have been my own guiding star for the past 50 years too.

Yoland Wadsworth, BA, PhD, FAES

Evaluation research practitioner, methodology theorist

Adjunct Professor, RMIT University and author of
Everyday Evaluation on the Run, *Do it Yourself
Social Research*, and *Building in Research and Evaluation:
Human Inquiry for Living Systems*

Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Dr Leanne Kelly has spent nearly 20 years working in community development and social service non-profit organisations across four continents. She has worked for non-profit organisations in a broad range of disciplines (from housing and emergency services to child protection and peacebuilding) with the majority of her roles focused on evaluation. Leanne has also worked as an external evaluator for non-profit organisations, most recently in Myanmar. She has a PhD degree from Deakin University on evaluation in small international and community development non-profits and has published over 25 scholarly papers and a book: *Evaluation in Small Development Non-Profits* with Palgrave Macmillan. She currently holds a postdoctoral research fellowship at Deakin University and is an internal evaluator at the Australian Red Cross.

Dr Alison Rogers has worked in community development, health, nutrition, and public health for 20 years. She spent over 15 years of this time working in non-profit organisations including as an internal evaluator and an external evaluator. She has a PhD degree from the University of Melbourne's Centre for Program Evaluation that investigated evaluation advocates in non-profit organisations. Alison also has a Master of Evaluation degree, among several other tertiary degrees in philosophy, health, education, and science. She has published 13 scholarly papers, many of which focus on aspects of evaluation. She was the convener of the Northern Territory branch of the Australasian Evaluation Society from 2012 until 2019. She is currently an Honorary Research Fellow with the University of Melbourne.

1 Internal Evaluators: An Influential Position

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight our positionality as internal evaluators in human-focused non-profits and provide a definition and discussion of evaluation and evaluators. As part of this discussion, we unpack the reasons why internal evaluation is a worthy activity, highlight what makes conducting evaluation within non-profit organisations particularly challenging, and note the tensions between internal and external evaluation. We conclude by introducing the reader to the topics covered in this book.

This book is written by internal evaluation practitioners in non-profits who have an experiential understanding of what it is like to try and muddle through alone. The evaluation literature provides limited guidance for internal evaluators and the discipline largely focuses on evaluation as an action conducted by external consultants. This information is still useful; however, internal evaluation is much more than a point in time epoch of engagement with evaluation users. The internal evaluation role is comprised of numerous tasks that are not expected of external evaluators, particularly around continuous evaluation capacity building, promoting ongoing utilisation of findings, developing an evidence base for work undertaken, and cultivating organisationally embedded evaluative processes and thinking (Volkov, 2011a). Importantly, internal evaluators' immersion in the organisational setting gives them an interesting advantage in terms of creating sustainable change. This level of influence is unusual for people in roles that tend to be mid-range in the organisational hierarchy and highlights the potential for internal evaluators to create positive and lasting change. This requires patience, as it can take years of (sometimes exasperating) labour, but internal evaluators have the power to transform individual and organisational thinking.

In our experience, the career of an internal evaluator can be frustrating at times. On those occasions when colleagues are reluctant to engage with evaluation (see Chapter 3), when managers avoid prioritising community recipient perspectives (see Chapter 5), or when evaluative

recommendations languish unaddressed (see Chapter 7), we might feel like it is time for a career change. The realisation of this frustration is often gradual, layering up resentment over time. For others, the realisation hits suddenly; the multitude of incremental disappointments that they had swept under the carpet reveal themselves simultaneously when the carpet is pulled back in a moment of clarity. While not blaming the evaluator (or their colleagues) for these frustrations, we hold that it is the evaluators' obligation to attempt to address and reframe them. We offer ideas from theory, research, and practice throughout the book as suggested remedies to help internal evaluators set realistic timelines and expectations to achieve goals and highlight positive practices to help internal evaluators celebrate small wins along the way.

We raise this problem here to let internal evaluators know they are not alone and to help them reframe their frustrations. Instead of being disappointed when our efforts seemingly go to waste, we should see this as an opportunity for deep self-reflection (see Chapter 2) and a chance to pivot our positionality to walk alongside frontline workers and community recipients, starting where they are at and building on their small-scale embedded everyday evaluative activities (see Chapter 4). We can channel our frustrations towards understanding more about the different standpoints between us, our colleagues, community recipients, evaluation in the non-profit sector, and the evaluation discipline in general. Understanding more about how dominant narratives embed assumptions around the *best* types of evidence and the *most worthy* methodologies can help internal evaluators surface these assumptions and assess their consistency with the needs and values of colleagues and community recipients (Eyben et al., 2015; Ife, 2013; Kelly, 2021a).

This book acknowledges the joys of supporting colleagues and community recipients to capture their progress, broadcast their innovations, and improve their programmes. Additionally, we note the great skill and artistry that evaluators require to juggle scientific expectations of rigour and credible evidence against the practice realities and values inherent within non-profits (see Chapter 5). Exposing and being keenly aware of the potential paradigmatic disunity between the evaluation discipline and the non-profit sector can help us start to navigate a path through this quagmire in a manner that remains firmly dedicated to and consistent with organisational values. Throughout the book, we note the centrality of interpersonal skills and relationships in internal evaluation (see Chapter 3). Foregrounding the interpersonal and relational, evaluation in this book is repositioned away from methodological rigour, evidence hierarchies, and the latest fad in measurement (while still noting the importance of these) and instead focuses on people and organisational values such as social justice, community-led development, and redistribution of power. This positioning is core to the relevance and meaningfulness of internal evaluation in non-profits as these organisations were often established to fulfil

purposes surrounding social betterment. As such, it stands to reason that non-profit's evaluation should follow suit and align with the organisational values espoused (Kelly, 2021c).

The Point of Difference: The Authors are Internal Evaluators Working in Non-Profits

We begin by recognising the inspiring and seminal work of Preskill and Torres (1998), who made the link between evaluation and organisational learning and suggested that *evaluative inquiry* was an approach to learning that fully integrated evaluation into the way an organisation operates. However, since then books on internal evaluation are often based on the profession within the public and private sectors, in large organisations, with reference to evaluation *units* (Laubli Loud & Mayne, 2014; Love, 1991; Sonnichsen, 2000). These books are valuable as they outline how internal actors can develop systematic and efficient internal evaluation, particularly to help managers with decision-making. However, we saw a definite gaping hole in these and other evaluation tomes surrounding the interpersonal aspects of internal evaluation. Information is lacking on conducting rigorous evaluation in ways that align with non-profit organisational values, which are often divergent from the values of profit- or power-seeking organisations (Eyben et al., 2015; Ife, 2013). We noted the need for a book that explicitly unpacked the components of internal evaluation that are often more prominent in non-profit organisations than other settings. These elements include limited resources (staff, funds, and time), high levels of diversity (around demographics but also educational levels, skills, and technological aptitude), intricate and multiple competing compliance and accountability needs, low coordination across and between organisations, largely passionate and altruistically driven personnel, and a focus on resolving or alleviating complex and intractable social problems.

Clarifying that the non-profit context is different from other settings where internal evaluators may work highlights the need for and focus of this book. There are many *how-to* evaluation books in the market, so we do not intend to replicate that work here. Instead, we offer guidance and prompts to undertake practice improvement beyond the step-by-step stages of procedural evaluation work. As such, we have moved away from generalist and methodological discussions that are well-covered in the existing literature. We focus specifically on providing critical analysis of thought-provoking topics that are of special interest and importance to internal evaluators in non-profits. Further, we sought to contribute a new publication to the general internal evaluation literature from the practitioner's perspective to update Sonnichsen's 20-year-old and Love's 30-year-old contributions. This addresses the identification that "the voice of those working inside the [organisations is] often silent" (Laubli Loud,

2014, p. vii). Lastly, in contrast to Sonnichsen and Love's male perspectives, we consider it fitting that two female authors wrote this book since the majority of employees and volunteers in the non-profit sector are women (Productivity Commission, 2010).

Between us, we have worked for a wide variety of non-profits across four continents, including public health, peacebuilding, international and community development, family violence, child protection, humanitarian action, emergency services, disability, housing, and homelessness, among others. We have both undertaken doctoral-level research on internal evaluation in non-profit organisations (Kelly, 2019; Rogers, 2021). Our focus is on non-profits that provide direct support to people, rather than those supporting the environment and non-human animals, or providing research or advocacy. As our research and experiences cover a large portion of the various human-centred social issues addressed by non-profits, we are confident that the information and guidance provided throughout this book is applicable across the suite of non-profits providing social programmes.

Defining Evaluation

Evaluation is a systematic judgement of the quality, worth, significance, and merit of an evaluand, which may be a programme, project, or other entity under scrutiny (Mertens, 2009; Scriven, 1991; Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). We distinguish evaluation from research; research focuses on describing what is occurring while evaluation has an explicit and intentional focus on making value judgements (Mathison, 2008). Throughout this book we usually refer to the evaluand as a *programme* for simplicity but note that this is reductionist. Rigorous evaluative processes collect relevant data from appropriate sources to base judgements on sound evidence and reasoning. These judgements should consider stakeholder values, perceptions, and context and provide credible and trustworthy information that can be used for improvement, learning, accountability, knowledge generation, and advocacy (Mikkelsen, 2005). Evaluation can uncover whether the right things are being done, whether they are being done well, and whether they are having the desired impact.

Evaluation is usually considered a formal process conducted at specific intervals in the programme cycle such as baseline, interim, and final at programme end. Interim evaluations are typically formative and provide recommendations to improve the programme. Final evaluations are typically summative and draw evaluative conclusions about the programme to feed into the design of future programmes and provide accountability to stakeholders (Alkin, 2011; Patton, 2011; Scriven, 1967, 1991; Stake, 2013). Developmental evaluation offers a third category of evaluation, which occurs iteratively throughout the programme cycle and provides real-time learning-action feedback loops to facilitate ongoing

improvement (Patton, 1994, 2011). Developmental evaluation is particularly applicable to work undertaken in non-profits providing social programmes as it is highly adaptive and suitable for measuring non-linear, complex, emergent, and dynamic contexts (Togni et al., 2015). Unlike the formative-summative binary, which sees programmes as reaching an end point and measures them against rigid, pre-determined outcomes and indicators, developmental evaluation sees programmes as undergoing continual change and supports them to adapt to context and innovate to meet emerging needs (Patton, 2011, 2015). Summative and formative, with the increasing inclusion of developmental, are regarded as the standard overarching types of evaluation across most disciplines (Davidson, 2005; Patton, 2011; Scriven, 1991).

Evaluation is frequently paired with monitoring, and they work symbiotically. Monitoring is captured in the many acronyms used to describe evaluation focused work such as M&E (monitoring and evaluation), MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning), MERL (monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning), and MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning). While not judging quality, worth, significance, and merit, monitoring can help make real-time evidence-driven programme improvements by highlighting concerns and demonstrating trends (Kelly & Reid, 2020; Owen, 2006). Monitoring data is usually utilised as a foundation for evaluation, which incorporates this data in addition to data from other sources (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016; Mikkelsen, 2005). At its most basic, monitoring refers to regular collection of data and the act of checking that data at certain short intervals to access how the programme is tracking against expectations (Owen, 2006; Rossi et al., 2004; Scriven, 1991). Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) argue that monitoring is "the planned, continuous and systematic collection and analysis of program information able to provide management and key stakeholders with an indication of the extent of progress in implementation, and in relation to program performance against stated objectives and expectations" (p. 12). Their identification of monitoring as an analytical activity moves it away from simplified definitions; however, other scholars such as Nielsen and Ejler (2008) clarify that evaluation has a "deeper heuristic and penetrating nature" than monitoring (p. 176). That said, internal evaluators often have oversight of monitoring processes and are able to guide development of monitoring systems that provide quality data for evaluative analysis.

Throughout this book, evaluation refers to programme evaluations that could be formative, summative, developmental, or undefined. We recognise that internal evaluation can be used to make judgements about a specific programme, project, service, or policy, as well as determining if the organisational aims are being achieved and establishing systems for ongoing organisational learning (Rogers & Williams, 2006). Noting the grey boundary between monitoring and evaluation, this book identifies

activities as evaluative when they include processes of reflective and inter- pretative judgement that consider quality, worth, significance, and merit. As such, this incorporates a range of analytical activities including infor- mal, small-scale forms of evaluation conducted within organisations that may not typically be considered *evaluation*, such as decisions made during reflective practice or through community feedback (see Chapter 4), as well as formalised evaluations. Within this frame, an *evaluation* is much more than process to produce a tangible report; conducting evaluation could include anything from learning circles and dialoguing sessions, through to methodologically advanced experimental research projects led by external technical specialists.

Internal Evaluators: To Be or Not to Be?

Before delving into the role of the internal evaluator, it is important to outline the inconsistencies facing people in this role. To begin with, it is uncommon for internal evaluators to bear the formal title of *internal evaluator* and many do not even have the word *evaluation* in their title. Often, positions may link to research and development, insights, out- comes, evidence and impact, strategy and influence, quality improvement, or measurement. As such, it is not clear who can be classified as an evalu- ator (Davies & Brümmer, 2015; Davies & MacKay, 2014).

Definition is particularly unclear in the grey area between profession- alised evaluators who conduct "professionally demanding evaluation as their primary job responsibility" (Scriven, 1996, p. 159) and evaluation advocates who promote and use evaluative information to make judge- ments and decisions on a regular basis as part of their non-evaluation focused job role (Rogers, 2021). These advocates for evaluation, or every- day evaluators, could be project officers who weigh up evidence every time they offer a suggestion or put forward a recommendation, or they could be people who collate survey responses, review programmes, and have responsibility for reporting. These people may not consider themselves evaluators or have any desire to be labelled as an evaluator. However, they may value systematic ways of analysing evidence to make judgements and recognise that they incorporate elements of evaluation in their work (Rogers, 2021; Rogers & Gullickson, 2018). The grey area between these two – the professional evaluator and the thoughtful practitioner – is the area where many internal evaluators are situated. Often our roles may involve more than evaluation alone, much of our time may be taken up with non-evaluative work, but still, we do enough monitoring and evalua- tion, evaluation capacity building, commissioning of evaluation, and eval- uative planning for it to be a significant part of our professional identity.

This adds to the confusion felt by many internal evaluators who ques- tion their right to proclaim themselves evaluators (Rogers et al., 2019b), a query not helped by eminent evaluation scholars such as Scriven (1996)

who list an intimidating set of skills required for "entry into the club" (p. 151). The professionalisation agenda aims to ameliorate these issues, but in doing so could alienate evaluators who operate incognito and create "barriers to innovation, creativity, caring and intellectual openness" (Davies & Brümmer, 2015, p. 3). What professionalisation could provide is the ability for evaluators to assess their skill levels and support more credible and rigorous evaluation (Donaldson, 2019). While this would be useful, proactive evaluators can already improve their practice through engaging in training, networking, and reflective practice (see Chapter 2). Additionally, they can assess their skills against the competencies outlined by many national and global evaluation societies (e.g. AES, 2010, 2013; CES, 2010; Gollan & Stacey, 2021; IDEAS, 2012; King & Stevahn, 2020; OECD-DAC, 2010; Russ-Eft et al., 2008; UNEG, 2016; Wehipeihana et al., 2014).

In this book, we align, but do not limit, our understanding of internal evaluators with Love's (1991) identification that they are people with "ongoing responsibility for evaluation in the organization" (p. 2) and that they are supervised internally, usually "independent of the program they are evaluating, but, nonetheless they are part of the overall organization" (p. 2). Similarly, we agree with Volkov (2011a) on the multiplicity and elasticity of roles of the internal evaluators, which include the roles of "change agent, educator about evaluation, evaluation capacity building practitioner, decision-making supporter, consultant, researcher, advocate and organizational learning supporter" (p. 38). Fundamentally, for the purpose of this book, if you think you probably are an evaluator, then you are. If your work involves assessing the quality, worth, significance, and merit of programmes and projects within non-profit organisations, or if you have an interest in critically reflecting on this work, then this book is for you.

Internal Evaluation in Non-Profit Organisations

Specific challenges exist in non-profits that make uptake of evaluation more difficult than in other types of organisations. We define non-profits as self-governing and independent organisations that usually involve volunteers at either the workforce or board level, operate for social rather than economic profit, and have altruistic intentions to deliver a beneficial purpose for society (O'Brien & Craig, 2020). Non-profits are often trying to solve some difficult social problems, may have unsecure short-term income, may face rigid accountability demands from donors, and, while the workforce are likely enthusiastic and highly motivated, they can be resistant to change and reluctant to question their assumptions (Gilchrist & Butcher, 2016; Gill, 2010; Lyons, 2020; McBratney & McGregor-Lowndes, 2012). These underlying issues that pervade through the daily operations of non-profit organisations mean that it can be difficult to

encourage staff to engage with the concept of evaluation. Past negative experiences, cross-cultural communication barriers, challenging jargon and strange terminology, and a disconnect between employee priorities and time-consuming evaluation, all make for a dynamic that is not always conducive to embedding evaluation (Chaudhary et al., 2020; Donaldson et al., 2002; Kelly, 2021c; Mason & Hunt, 2018).

The almost paradoxical situation that non-profits find themselves in is that these challenging circumstances mean they have a lot to gain from being able to do evaluation well. Evaluation can assist non-profit organisations to access credible evidence about what they are achieving, answer questions about the value of their work, and know if they are making a difference (Carman & Fredericks, 2010; Harman, 2019; Hutchinson, 2016; Smith, 2021). Evaluation can help organisations monitor their progress and improve their services to better meet the needs of their programme recipients. Importantly, particularly for non-profit organisations, evaluation can increase the probability that the organisation will be sustainable in the long term (Bach-Mortensen & Montgomery, 2018; Campbell & Lambright, 2017). In environments where non-profits must compete for the attention of donors, being able to share evaluative information in different formats that will be meaningful for different audiences is essential and can provide an advantage over other organisations (Rogers & Malla, 2019). Evaluation is a source of information that can convince donors of the quality, worth, significance, and merit of the interventions they fund. Deliberately building organisational evaluation capacity that contributes to focusing organisations on learning and constantly improving can mean that organisations find that they are able to answer questions about their value (Cousins et al., 2014). Programme recipients, staff, executive management, board members, donors, and the public will always be asking questions about the work non-profit organisations are doing; evaluation is a tool that can help find the answers. Potentially, as organisational cultures of evaluation develop and aggregate their evaluative findings, the non-profit sector will be in a stronger position to justify its contribution to improving social issues across our society (McCoy et al., 2013).

Rising Above the Internal Versus External Debate

Having established the value and importance of internal evaluation as a means of increasing the likelihood of organisational sustainability, it is curious that internal evaluation is often ignored in the evaluation literature. In general, books and articles discussing evaluation either implicitly or explicitly illustrate the evaluator's role as external to the organisation where the evaluation is occurring (Conley Tyler, 2005; Rossi et al., 2004). When internal evaluators are mentioned, they can be accused of being too entwined with the evaluating organisation to be able to offer rigorous, independent, and objective judgements (Jakupec & Kelly, 2016). This

obfuscates the fact that all people, whether internal or external, carry bias and cannot be truly objective (Rashid et al., 2019). In some circumstances, it is possible that external evaluators have incentive to provide positive results, as pleasing their commissioners may secure their future contracts (Conley Tyler, 2005). Alternatively, internal evaluators may not have the same pressure to produce positive results as organisations that prioritise and fund internal evaluative positions may be seeking to learn and improve their practice. However, internal evaluators may experience pressure to present pleasing results depending on whether the purpose of the evaluation is for organisational learning or for external accountability. As such, they should remain cognisant of these pressures and potentially remove themselves from an evaluation or bring in an outsider to peer review if necessary (Sonnichsen, 2000). Through maintaining a critically reflective stance on their practice, internal evaluators with integrity can be transparent about their positionality and seek to reduce or ameliorate bias by considering their views, explicitly documenting potential bias, and purposefully setting assumptions aside for the sake of the evaluation.

We disagree with the suggestion that internal evaluators present a conflict of interest due to their collegial relationships with fellow staff members (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Many internal evaluators do not have direct involvement with the programmes or projects they are evaluating (Love, 1991). This gives them a level of independence similar to that of an external evaluator who could be contracted to work with the same organisation over the long term and who could become embedded as part of the programme and cultivate strong relationships with staff (Fetterman et al., 2015; Patton, 1994). Rather than seeing collegiality as problematic, qualitative investigation with 50 non-profit staff members found that these long term embedded external evaluators were considered far more valuable to the organisations who contract them than external evaluators engaged for the short term (Kelly, 2021b). However, even if internal evaluators do have direct involvement in a programme, this can assist the evaluator to provide relevant, timely, credible, and methodologically rigorous evaluative information. As developmental evaluation has shown, co-creation and high quality long-term engagement with the evaluator embedded in the team is a fundamental principle that can assist with ensuring evaluative questions are asked and data is examined, analysed, and fed-back in a timely and useful way (Patton, 2015). A sentiment from Love's conversation with Volkov (2011b) resonates strongly with us:

> My audience cannot imagine how an external evaluator – a perfect stranger, who does not have firsthand knowledge of the program, its politics, its people, its limitations, and its values – can do an evaluation in a relatively short period of time and produce findings that are meaningful to anybody.
>
> (p. 8)

External evaluators tend to be thought of as inherently capable of providing independent and objective judgements (McCoy et al., 2013), while internal evaluators have to work to establish their trustworthiness and credibility over time (Bourgeois et al., 2011; Yusa et al., 2016). Wadsworth (2011) terms this assumption the "false credibility for outsiders" (p. 31). This book will not focus on the debate around the pros and cons of internal and external evaluation, which are covered elsewhere (Conley Tyler, 2005), but instead will focus on how to cultivate collaborative and effective working relationships between internal and external evaluators in ways that harness the special skills and expertise of both (see Chapter 6). Our position is that no one is free of bias; it is the evaluator's skills (both *soft* and *hard*), understanding, and values that are important to ensuring credibility, rather than their status as an employee or a contractor (Sonnichsen, 2000; Volkov & Baron, 2011).

Outline of the Book

In line with the *Joint Committee Standards for Program Evaluation* (Yarbrough et al., 2011), and the various evaluator competency frameworks that identify the need for critical self-reflection and meta-evaluation (e.g. AES, 2013; Garcia & Stevahn, 2020; Gollan & Stacey, 2021; IDEAS, 2012; Stevahn et al., 2005), this book seeks to ignite reflective practice to strengthen and nuance the role and practice of internal evaluation through provision of thought-provoking topics. As experienced practitioners and scholars who have undertaken research into internal evaluation, we offer readers insights into ways of dealing with common frustrations. The final chapter, Chapter 8, attempts to answer the overarching question: How can theory, research, and evidence from practice assist internal evaluators to help organisations achieve their goals? Each chapter attempts to provide a more detailed response to a specific component of this question, as outlined in Table 1.1.

Chapter 2 launches this journey by offering ideas for the professional growth of internal evaluation practitioners who often muddle through their roles without sufficient support or mentorship. This chapter asks readers to stop, consider their positionality, and reflect on their experiences in preparation for critically engaging with the subsequent chapters.

Central to this book, Chapter 3 unpacks the theme of interpersonal relationships, noting the fundamental essentiality of developing these skills for effective evaluative practice. While some evaluators outside of the non-profit setting have argued that these *soft skills* are superfluous to evaluation (Scriven, 1996), we disagree wholeheartedly in general, but even more so in the non-profit context where relationships are core.

Juggling and enhancing relationships to derive the full potential of evaluation is also a key subject in Chapter 4 on informal *everyday* evaluation. We identify informal evaluation as a vital, but potentially untapped,

Table 1.1 The key question answered in each chapter

	How can theory, research, and evidence from practice assist internal evaluators to . . .
Chapter 2	grow professionally?
Chapter 3	form meaningful interpersonal relationships around evaluation?
Chapter 4	incorporate evaluation into everyday operations?
Chapter 5	enhance the level of rigour?
Chapter 6	work effectively with external evaluators?
Chapter 7	use evaluation to its full potential?
Chapter 8	help organisations achieve their goals?

contributor to organisational change and improvement. Harnessing practices of informal evaluation meets frontline practitioners and community recipients where they are at on the evaluation journey, acknowledges the value of small-scale embedded evaluative actions, and helps internal evaluators build on practices that are relevant, feasible, and more likely to be sustainable.

Chapter 5 notes the challenge internal evaluators face surrounding expectations to provide evidence that divergent audiences, including community recipients, non-profit employees, donors, and other stakeholders, will accept as trustworthy and rigorous. This chapter outlines how theory, research, and practice can integrate and reinforce one another in a manner that exceeds the value of the individual parts.

Chapter 6 focuses on how collaboration between internal and external evaluators can enhance the perceived credibility of the evaluation, increase efficiency, and enable an appropriate balance of contextual and technical skills. The chapter celebrates the occasions when mutually beneficial and effective internal and external partnerships occur. The enabling factors are outlined and a summary of the practical considerations for procurement, contracting, inception, implementation, and dissemination in collaboration with external evaluators are discussed.

Chapter 7 provides a framework to help non-profits assess and strengthen their use of evaluative processes and findings to draw out evaluation's full potential. This chapter examines how internal evaluation has been heralded as a way of enhancing evaluation utilisation due to context-sensitivity, existing rapport, increased potential for follow-up on recommendations, and opportunities to develop organisational evaluation literacy (Bourgeois et al., 2011; Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010; Rogers et al., 2019a; Yusa et al., 2016).

As noted earlier, the final chapter, Chapter 8, analyses the key points raised throughout this book and discusses the implications for theory and

practice of internal evaluation to help non-profit organisations achieve their goals. This concluding chapter clarifies and consolidates the key takeaway messages to provide a roadmap for implementation.

Conclusion

The sentiment that runs strongly through this book surrounds our conviction that internal evaluators hold a unique and influential position. We do not understate the challenges, problems, and barriers that internal evaluators constantly face in the non-profit sector, but we do focus on using theory, research, and practice experiences to assist with untapping the potential for people in these positions to make meaningful and important contributions to their organisations. We hope that the examples presented throughout this book resonate and inspire readers to further their practice towards understanding whether their work is of value, determining if they are making a difference, incorporating improvements, and demonstrating findings. Above all, this book aims to furnish readers with a heightened understanding of the interpersonal and relational aspects of evaluation, take comfort that they are not alone in the challenges faced on their evaluation journey, and provide access to practical ideas and frameworks with which to continually improve their practice.

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