
An Exploratory Study on Public Sector Program Evaluation Practices and Culture in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: Where Are We? Where Do We Need To Go?

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Background: Little is known about the status of program evaluation culture and practice in the English Speaking Commonwealth Caribbean (ESCC). This study examined the extent of evaluation culture and practice in four small Caribbean nations: Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Purpose: The objective of this study was to learn about public sector program evaluation practices and culture in these four countries.

Setting: Public sector agencies in the four countries.

Intervention: N/A

Research Design: Cross-sectional survey

Data Collection and Analysis: A total of eighty-eight public sector officials participated in a cross-sectional survey study.

Findings: The research highlighted that while program evaluation is being practiced in the public sector in all four countries, the extent of practice varied among the countries. One noticeable factor that affected program evaluation practices was the financial costs associated with program evaluations. This problem was particularly evident in Guyana where program evaluations were conducted primarily to satisfy funding requirements. However, despite the variation in practices, all four countries recognized that program evaluation is a valuable and important activity. Solutions proposed by the study participants to build a more vibrant public-sector program evaluation culture included making program evaluation culture a part of organizational culture, building organizational monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity, and making program evaluation a regular mandatory public sector activity.

Keywords: *Caribbean; evaluation culture; evaluation practice; financial costs; formative evaluation; monitoring and evaluation; program evaluation; public sector.*

Introduction

In recent times, program evaluation has received increasing attention as an important exercise that should inform decision-making. It is now acknowledged that program evaluation plays a critical role in public sector accountability (Blomquist, 2003), and that program evaluation has the potential to be a powerful strategic management tool (Sanderson, 2002). In the public sector in particular, program evaluation is gathering increasing momentum, as evidenced by the numerous calls for program evaluation consultancy services around the globe, including the English-Speaking Commonwealth Caribbean (ESCC) region.

In light of the increased focus on program evaluation in the public sector in recent times, this research was conducted to learn about public-sector program evaluation practices and culture in four countries in the ESCC region. The paper makes two contributions: First, it adds to the literature by examining the public sector program evaluation landscape in four countries in the ESCC region; Second, the paper offers some suggestions, some of which were made by the study participants themselves, that can help strengthen and nurture a more vibrant public sector program evaluation culture.

The paper is structured as follows: Section one provides a brief overview of the evolution and development of evaluation and some contextual information on the research setting; section two explains the methods used for the study; section three discusses the findings from the study; and the final section will offer some suggestions that may be helpful in developing and strengthening public-sector program evaluation culture in the four countries under study.

Evolution and Development of Evaluation

Scriven (1996) and Shadish and Luellen (2005), contend that evaluation is an ancient practice which must have been conducted from time immemorial. Although no written proof exists, there is evidence of "evaluation's signature in stone" (Scriven, 1991, p. 3). Specifically, physical evidence suggests that stone-chippers continuously improved materials and design over time. The more formal origins of evaluation can however be traced to the education sectors in Great Britain and the United States during the 1800s. However, it was only in the 1930s that evaluation started to gather momentum with the accreditation of medical schools and

nationwide testing in North America (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). During the next three decades, evaluation continued to gather momentum in the United States in the educational sector (Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry, 2006), US military programs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011), and as a tool for evaluating social programs aimed at poverty reduction (Khan, 2003).

However, the 1960s is perhaps the era that has most influenced evaluation. By this time, evaluation had established itself as an important profession in the US and was receiving significant funding from government (Shadish & Luellen, 2005). During the 1960s, several different perspectives on evaluation thinking also started to emerge. These perspectives were later classified into three distinct classifications systems which have been made famous in Alkin and Christie's (2004) depiction of an Evaluation Theory Tree. In this Evaluation Theory Tree, Ralph Tyler is shown as the leading proponent on the Methods branch of the tree, Michael Scriven as the leading proponent on the Valuing branch of the tree, and Daniel Stufflebeam as the leading proponent on the Use branch of the tree. These pioneers, among others, have contributed significantly to the way evaluation has evolved and developed as a profession.

The time frame spanning 1970-2000 was also an historic period, as it witnessed the establishment of numerous voluntary organizations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) to advance professional evaluation exchange via dialogue, conferences, and other forums (Kosheleva & Segone, 2013; Rugh, 2013). In 1981, the Canadian Evaluation Society was incorporated (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2018). Five years later in 1986, the American Evaluation Association came into being with the merger of The Evaluation Research Society (1976) and the Evaluation Network (1982) (Mathison, 2005). Shortly after (1987), the Australasian Evaluation Society was formed. The 1990s witnessed the establishment of several more VOPEs including the UK Evaluation Society in 1992, the European Evaluation Society in 1994, and the African Evaluation Association in 1999. In 2000, the International Program Evaluation Network was formed (EvalPartners, 2012) and in 2002 International Development Evaluation Association was born. The EvalPartners initiative in 2012 is however perhaps the most notable attempt to integrate the global community of VOPEs (Kosheleva & Segone, 2013). By the end of 2012, the EvalPartners mapping survey indicated that more than 134 VOPEs populated the global landscape, twenty-three of which were at the regional and international level (EvalPartners, 2012). At that

date, the combined membership of these VOPEs was over 34,000. The VOPE with the largest and most diverse membership is the American Evaluation Association (Rugh, 2013). Today, this VOPE has a membership of approximately 7,300 members with international representation in over 80 foreign countries (American Evaluation Association, 2018).

In addition to the growth of VOPEs, some other noteworthy events occurred during the period covering 1970-2000. These included publication of many academic books and other writings on evaluation (Shadish & Luellen, 2005) including *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994) and *The Personnel Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994; Stufflebeam, 2005). Numerous academic debates on different approaches to evaluation such as goal-free evaluation, empowerment evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, and participatory evaluation, among others, also started to dominate discussion, particularly on VOPE platforms. A number of evaluation journals also emerged including *Evaluation and Program Planning* (Morrell, 2005), and *Evaluation Practice* which later became the *American Journal of Evaluation* (Mark, 2005).

The development of evaluation as a profession which escalated in the 1970s has continued into the 21st Century. Today, evaluation is viewed as a growing profession, as evidenced by the numerous evaluation-specific job positions that are advertised daily, and numerous calls for evaluation consultancies. A number of graduate programs at both the master and doctoral levels are now available at various global universities to provide training to individuals moving into this profession. The evaluation literature has also proliferated significantly over the last 40 years, with evaluation theories becoming considerably more diversified.

Geographic Context: the English-Speaking Commonwealth Caribbean

The ESCC is made up of the island nations of Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. The countries of Belize and Guyana which are located on the mainland Caribbean are also included in this grouping (Meditz & Hanratty, 1987). The land mass size of these countries, as well as their population size, are vastly different. They range from a mere 52,715

people in Saint Kitts and Nevis (Central Intelligence Agency (US), 2018c) to over 2.9 million people in Jamaica (Central Intelligence Agency (US), 2018b). Half of the countries in this grouping have a population of less than 200,000 people. All nations in this archipelago are tied together by a British colonial heritage. The countries in this region have all obtained independence and their political systems all reflect the British Westminster model (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016). A variety of ethnicities populate this region, all sharing similar cultural and religious beliefs (Brereton & Clarke, 2017).

Evaluation Challenges in Developing Countries

All the countries in the ESCC region are classified as small developing states (United Nations, 2018). According to the literature, developing countries often face some unique challenges with respect to program evaluation. First and foremost, financial constraints are a stark reality in these countries. Consequently, program evaluation is accorded little or low priority on political agendas, and expenditure on program evaluation is often viewed as wasting resources which can be better used to fund critical social services (Bamberger et al., 2006). Second, many key stakeholders often perceive program evaluation as an activity associated with bad or negative news. Consequently, in situations where there is great distrust of program evaluation, there is little or no motivation by decision-makers to encourage and support this activity (Blomquist, 2003). Finally, public sector organizations frequently become overwhelmed with data collection for different funders, which are generally quite funder specific. As a result, their own information needs tend to get neglected due to capacity constraint issues (Bamberger, 2001).

Primary Users of Public Sector Evaluations in the English-Speaking Commonwealth Caribbean

A large proportion of all social and economic development programs in this region are funded by international and regional development agencies such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Caribbean Development Bank. These programs are intended to produce tangible and sustainable benefits and are aimed at addressing inequity and poverty in the region (Inter-American Development Bank, 2012). A requisite component of most funding and donor

agencies is an ex-post evaluation. The call for consultancy services for these evaluations is generally made by the agency itself, and a team of independent evaluation consultants is selected to conduct the evaluation (Bamberger, 2000). Consequently, the primary users of public sector evaluations in the ESCC region tend to be funders and donors themselves. The evaluation report is however shared with the public sector entity executing the program, so that these reports can be used by decision-makers and other program staff. From time to time, government agencies may also request an evaluation of a specific public-sector initiative. These evaluation reports tend to be used by the decision-makers and program staff who work with the program.

Evaluation Initiatives in the English-Speaking Commonwealth Caribbean

In response to the demand for evaluation consultancy services by international and regional funding agencies working in the region, Caribbean Evaluators International was established in 2014. This VOPE serves the entire Caribbean region including all countries in the ESCC grouping. Its mission is "to increase individual and regional evaluation capacity, advocating for the use of appropriate evaluation practices and methods, and the use of regional evaluators" (Caribbean Evaluators International, 2018, ¶ 2). In addition to this body, evaluation in the region is also being promoted through various training initiatives and conferences. For example, in 2000, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados established a graduate degree in project management and evaluation. The Caribbean Development Bank has also periodically offered M&E workshops targeted at public sector employees in the region. Two evaluation forums were also held in Barbados during the last five years that helped to promote program evaluation. In 2013, the International Development Evaluation Association held its global assembly in Barbados under the theme Evaluation and Inequity: Moving Beyond the Discussion of Poverty (International Development Evaluation Association, 2013), and in 2016 The Office of Independent Evaluation at the Caribbean Development Bank, Carleton University in Canada, and The University of the West Indies in Barbados partnered and hosted a joint conference in Barbados on the theme Strengthening the Role of Evaluation in the Caribbean.

Research Questions

In light of the increased focus that evaluation has been receiving in recent times in the ESCC region, four research questions are posed to learn about public sector program evaluation practices and culture in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines:

- RQ1: What is the status of program evaluation culture in public sector organizations?
- RQ2: What are the main problems associated with program evaluations in public sector organizations?
- RQ3: Which areas of public sector program evaluation require improvement?
- RQ4: How can public sector organizations improve their program evaluation practices?

Methods

The research was confined to the four countries aforementioned due to financial constraints. Within the study, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had the smallest population (102,089) (Central Intelligence Agency (US), 2018d), while Guyana had the largest population (737,718) (Central Intelligence Agency (US), 2018a). A purposive sample was used to select the public sector officials who participated in the study. This technique was used since the criterion for participation was that respondents had to be familiar with program evaluation practices within their organizations during the past ten years. Eighty-eight public sector officials participated in the research. The participants represented a wide cross-section of government sectors in each country including agriculture, education, health, housing, national security, tourism, transport, and water.

The survey comprised sixteen close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions sought to glean insight into evaluation practices and use within the public sector such as the frequency of program evaluations, types of evaluation capacity used for program evaluations, reasons for program evaluation, importance of program evaluation to the organization, and organizational policies on program evaluations (see Table I). The open-ended questions asked about the main problems associated with program evaluations in the public sector, aspects of program evaluation that require improvement, and ways for the public sector to improve program evaluation practices. All surveys

were administered in person and collected at the site upon completion.

The data for the closed-ended questions were analyzed using SPSS and descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The data for the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Standard international research best practices were followed in conducting this research. Participants were informed that they did not have to participate in the study. They were also informed that only aggregate data would be reported, and anonymity and confidentiality would be preserved.

The major limitation of this study is that a probability sample was not used for neither country selection nor participant selection. Consequently, no generalizations can be made to the ESCC region. Financial constraints also prevented the inclusion of both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the two countries with the largest populations in the ESCC.

Findings and Discussion

RQ1: What is the status of program evaluation culture in public sector organizations?

Public sector organizations in all four countries in the study practiced program evaluation. However, the extent of practice varied between the countries (see Question 1: Table I) with Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines indicating a higher incidence of program evaluation practice (81% and 69%, respectively) compared to Belize and Guyana (50% and 14%, respectively). All four countries in the study used a combination of internal and external capacity for program evaluation (Question 2). Question 3, which asked whether the organization had trained personnel to evaluate programs, indicated that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had the highest percentage of trained personnel (69%) and Guyana had the lowest percentage (36%). On the question of a formal program evaluation policy (Question 4), less than a quarter of the participants indicated that their organizations had an official policy to govern program evaluation practice (Barbados = 19%, Belize = 13%, Guyana = 9%, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines = 24%).

Notwithstanding the lack of a formal program evaluation policy in most organizations, most participants from Barbados, Guyana, and Saint

Vincent and the Grenadines reported that their programs are formally evaluated (Question 6). The practice of formal program evaluations may, however, in some cases be influenced by an evaluation component in the contractual terms in funding agreements (see Questions 7 and 11). This was clearly the case in Guyana where most participants reported that program evaluations were done only to satisfy funding requirements. This finding is not by any means unique to Guyana. According to Bamberger (2000), this is a global phenomenon, particularly in developing countries.

The data further highlighted that approximately half of the participants acknowledged that program evaluation is a useful exercise. Fifty-five percent of participants felt that their organizations had benefited from program evaluation practices (Question 9), 59% said that lessons learned from program evaluations are utilized (Question 10), 64% indicated that their organizations perceived that program evaluation is a tool capable of adding value (Question 14), and 52% indicated their organizations felt program evaluation was either important or very important (Question 16). However, the reason for the underutilization of program evaluation in Guyana is clearly linked to financial cost considerations (Question 13). Again, this finding is not by any means exclusive to Guyana. The literature indicates that the financial costs associated with program evaluations is an issue of concern in both developed and developing countries (Bamberger et al., 2006).

RQ2: What are the main problems associated with program evaluations in public sector organizations?

Results suggest several problems affect program evaluations in the public sector in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Topping the list were lack of an organizational evaluation culture, financial costs associated with program evaluations, inadequate organizational M&E staff capacity, and public-sector employees exhibiting excessive evaluation anxiety during program evaluations. Some participants also indicated that external evaluators are frequently frustrated because they cannot get access to documents and information in a timely manner, baseline data is often not available, and political interference sometimes presents a concern.

Table I. Public Sector Evaluation Practices*

| | <i>n</i> | Barbados 21 | Belize 16 | Guyana 22 | St. Vincent 29 |
|---|----------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Does your organization routinely conduct program evaluations? | | 17 | 8 | 3 | 20 |
| 2. If yes, what type of capacity is used? | | | | | |
| <i>Internal</i> | | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| <i>External</i> | | 6 | | 6 | 2 |
| <i>Both</i> | | 8 | 5 | 1 | 19 |
| 3. Does your organization have formally trained personnel to evaluate programs? | | 9 | 8 | 8 | 20 |
| 4. Does your organization have a program evaluation policy? | | 4 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| 5. If yes, how often is policy reviewed? | | | | | |
| <i>Never</i> | | | | | 1 |
| <i>1-5 years</i> | | 2 | 3 | | 4 |
| <i>6-10 years</i> | | 2 | | | |
| 6. Are programs in your organization formally evaluated? | | 16 | 4 | 19 | 24 |
| 7. If yes, when are the programs formally evaluated? | | | | | |
| <i>While programs are underway</i> | | 8 | 5 | 6 | 10 |
| <i>After programs are completed</i> | | 13 | 10 | 9 | 21 |
| <i>When requested by stakeholders</i> | | 10 | 3 | 15 | 17 |
| 8. Is program evaluation a part of program design? | | 13 | 6 | 1 | 20 |
| 9. Do you think your organization has been benefitting from program evaluation? | | 6 | 7 | 15 | 20 |
| 10. Are lessons learnt from program evaluations utilized? | | 8 | 6 | 18 | 20 |
| 11. Does your organization conduct program evaluations only to satisfy funding requirements? | | 11 | 2 | 19 | 11 |
| 12. Does your organization conduct program evaluations to increase program success? | | 5 | 5 | 1 | 17 |
| 13. Does your organization consider program evaluations too costly, so it is rarely if ever undertaken. | | 2 | | 21 | 2 |
| 14. Does your organization believe that program evaluation is a tool capable of adding value? | | 15 | 6 | 16 | 19 |
| 15. How often are program evaluations undertaken? | | | | | |
| <i>Never</i> | | | | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Seldom</i> | | 1 | | 15 | 3 |
| <i>Sometimes</i> | | 12 | 3 | 5 | 7 |
| <i>Often</i> | | 4 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| <i>Very Often</i> | | 1 | 3 | | 1 |
| 16. How important is program evaluation to your organization? | | | | | |
| <i>Not Important</i> | | | | 3 | 2 |
| <i>Slightly Important</i> | | 2 | | 5 | 2 |
| <i>Moderately Important</i> | | 2 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| <i>Important</i> | | 15 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Very Important</i> | | 3 | 3 | | 13 |

*Data reflect "yes" responses on each question

The problems highlighted by this research are not unique to the countries in this study. For instance, Bamberger et al. (2006) explain that priority will not be given to evaluations when financial resources are scarce. Further, financial constraints will always directly impact organizational M&E evaluation capacity development, which in turn will affect data collection efforts. With respect to the issue of evaluation anxiety, Donaldson, Gooler, and Scriven (2002) note that this is a global concern that is manifested by participants in both developed and developing countries. Political attempts to influence evaluations is also a well-documented concern in the evaluation literature (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2001; Weiss, 1993).

RQ3: Which areas of public-sector program evaluation require improvement?

According to the data, the area most in need of improvement is formative evaluation. As shown in Table I (Question 7), limited evaluation is conducted during program implementation. Many participants felt that learning from ex-post evaluations, albeit useful, is a little too late in the program life cycle. The need for formative evaluation is consistent with the literature which indicates that evaluation should be a regular activity (Scriven, 1991) throughout the program life cycle (Khan, 2003). The research also highlighted that public-sector organizations need to place more focus on organizational M&E capacity development and training. Increasing M&E capacity would of course help to remedy the problem with inadequate formative evaluations. However, building M&E capacity may be challenging since governments "often lack the resources to implement and monitor the required initiatives over the long term" (Inter-American Development Bank, 2017, p. 39).

RQ4: How can public sector organizations improve their program evaluation practices?

Several suggestions were provided that can improve program evaluation practices in the public sector. These suggestions are similar to those used in other parts of the world to build evaluation culture. The three top suggestions were: (1) making program evaluation culture a part of organization culture, (2) developing organizational M&E capacity, and (3) making program evaluation a regular mandatory activity. These three activities are all interrelated. In fact, the latter two activities

cannot be realized unless activity one is in place, which according to the literature, is not easily accomplished (Kim, 2002; Mayne, 2008, 2009). Other suggestions for improving program evaluation practices included maintaining proper documentation, following good evaluation best practices, using technology to collect data, ensuring that indicators are clearly defined, ensuring that baseline data is collected, and considering stakeholder concerns.

Conclusion: Suggestions for Developing and Strengthening Public Sector Program Evaluation Culture

The changing dynamics of the global arena dictate that organizations be responsive to new ways of doing things. In this respect, program evaluation is starting to gain tremendous respect as a critical activity that can help organizations to learn and improve (Khan, 2003). However, the move towards making program evaluation culture a part of organizational culture has been rather slow in both developed and developing countries, with many policy-makers still showing a reluctance towards formal program evaluation (Blomquist, 2003). The fact that program evaluation is being practiced by public sector entities in four countries in the ESCC region is therefore quite encouraging, even though the extent of the program evaluation practice is quite different among the four countries.

As highlighted under RQ4, participants felt that the best solution to improve public sector program evaluation practices is to make program evaluation culture a part of organizational culture. This is critical for facilitating all the other recommendations made by the study participants under RQ4, especially M&E capacity development. The most effective way to develop an institutional program evaluation culture is undoubtedly to create an official institutional program evaluation policy. This would suggest that the organization places importance on program evaluation and is willing to commit financial resources to support the initiative. Fiscal support is of course the key for developing and sustaining evaluation capacity infrastructure (Gugiu & Persaud, 2005), which in turn helps with building program evaluation culture at the country-level (Blomquist, 2003).

To build a more vibrant public sector program evaluation culture, it will also be necessary for senior public sector decision-makers to make M&E a regular topic of conversation. Currently, conversations about project success and failure in

the region tend to focus on how projects were managed, with little or no conversation on the critical role that M&E plays in management and its role in helping to ensure project success. The limited focus on M&E is by no means unique to this region. For example, Damoah, Mouzugh, and Akewi (2015) explain that lack of monitoring was the number one reason for government project failure in Ghana. Sadly, the comments expressed by Rondinelli (1976) decades ago about poor and inadequate monitoring and control by governments during project implementation are still very much a reality of public sector M&E practices in this part of the world. As expressed by a senior public sector official, maintaining adequate M&E staff to monitor government projects is a challenging endeavor:

“Government is constantly training persons. However, persons are asked to leave when fiscal problems are experienced. Constant staff turnover affects data collection efforts and the manner in which data is maintained. In short, data quality tends to be quite poor since priority is not given to supporting and sustaining public sector M&E units.”

One solution may be to build organizational M&E capacity development into multilateral and bilateral funding agreements. As Blomquist (2003) points out, donors and funding agencies can play a fundamental role in helping countries develop institutional capacity. However, Governments will still need to figure out how they will sustain M&E capacity over the long-term. The public sector may also find it advantageous to enter into a partnership agreement with The University of the West Indies and provide graduate program evaluation internships for students in the M.Sc. Project Management and Evaluation program. Again, this will not solve the current problem with inadequate public sector M&E capacity but can be beneficial in the short-term.

Local and regional evaluators may also need to play a more active role in demystifying program evaluation since many persons do not truly understand program evaluation and its role. Using a simple example (e.g., purchase of tomatoes—looking at firmness, color) can help many to relate to the fact they too are involved in numerous informal evaluations every day, and that these evaluations are very helpful. Gaining the trust of stakeholders will normally generate greater buy-in.

Gaining trust is also important for addressing another problem highlighted by the research, that is, evaluation anxiety on the part of public-sector

employees. As mentioned before, this problem is also experienced in other parts of the world (Donaldson et al., 2002), and is in fact often associated with fears that the evaluation will reveal incompetent management and leadership (Royse et al., 2001). Such fears need to be addressed because when evaluation anxiety is exhibited, candid dialogue cannot take place between the evaluator and critical stakeholders. In this respect, independent local and regional evaluators can play a major role in helping critical stakeholders to feel more comfortable by promoting evaluation in a positive light. For example, evaluators must constantly reassert the link between evaluation and learning for success. They must also make it clear during conversations that they are not looking for a right or wrong answer. If those involved with program implementation can see the link to accountability, institutional learning, and performance improvement (Horton & Mackay, 2003), and to the overall big picture of government priorities and policies (Shepherd, 2016), they are more likely to be receptive to program evaluations, and less likely to be on the defensive.

Additionally, formal institutional policies on program evaluation may also assist in reducing excessive evaluation anxiety, as well as negative perceptions and fears that are frequently associated with program evaluations. For instance, many program managers generally view M&E staff as surveillance agents waiting to pass judgment on their performance. However, if program evaluation practice becomes mandatory in organizations, this perception will likely dissipate over time.

In conclusion, the data from this study suggest that the evaluation culture in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines is still in an embryonic stage and needs to be strengthened and nurtured. However, building a more vibrant program evaluation culture will require public sector political will and top management support. As pointed out in the literature, many organizations commit to building an evaluation culture; however, little is done to actively foster the process (Kim, 2000; Mayne, 2008, 2009). Additionally, a conducive evaluation culture can only develop if the public sector environment is sufficiently nurturing. This means that there must be tolerance for honest mistakes and a willingness to learn from those mistakes. The institutional environment must also be conducive to ensuring that internal evaluators are not apprehensive of the old saying, “don't shoot the messenger because you don't like the message”. If the institutional environment is not sufficiently conducive to an evaluation culture, internal evaluators will not be able to effectively conduct

their work, and any expenditure on organizational M&E capacity development will be wasted.

Future Research

This study has provided useful insight into public sector program evaluation practices and culture in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. However, as outlined under limitations, no generalizations can be made to the ESCC region since a probability sampling methodology was not used. To gain a comprehensive picture of evaluation practices and culture in the region, future research will need to examine evaluation practices in all twelve countries. Alternatively, the study will need to be extended to at least Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, since these two countries have the largest populations in the ESCC.

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