

# The CIPP approach to evaluation

## **COLLIT project: A background note from Bernadette Robinson**

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The COLLIT project evaluation is based on the CIPP model, adapted for the project by Judith Calder. This note is intended to provide some background information on the approach.

### **What is CIPP?**

The CIPP model of evaluation was developed by Daniel Stufflebeam and colleagues in the 1960s, out of their experience of evaluating education projects for the Ohio Public Schools District. Stufflebeam, formerly at Ohio State University, is now Director of the Evaluation Centre, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. CIPP is an acronym for **C**ontext, **I**ntput, **P**rocess and **P**roduct. This evaluation model requires the evaluation of context, input, process and product in judging a programme's value.

CIPP is a decision-focused approach to evaluation and emphasises the systematic provision of information for programme management and operation. In this approach, information is seen as most valuable when it helps programme managers to make better decisions, so evaluation activities should be planned to coordinate with the decision needs of programme staff. Data collection and reporting are then undertaken in order to promote more effective programme management. Since programmes change as they are implemented, decision-makers needs will change so the evaluation activities have to adapt to meet these changing needs as well as ensuring continuity of focus where appropriate in order to trace development and performance over time.

The CIPP framework was developed as a means of linking evaluation with programme decision-making. It aims to provide an analytic and rational basis for programme decision-making, based on a cycle of planning, structuring, implementing and reviewing and revising *decisions*, each examined through a different aspect of evaluation – context, input, process and product evaluation. Stufflebeam viewed evaluation in terms of the types of decisions it served and categorised it according to its functional role within a system of planned social change. The CIPP model is an attempt to make evaluation directly relevant to the needs of decision-makers during the different phases and activities of a programme.

In the CIPP approach, in order for an evaluation to be useful, it must address those questions which key decision-makers are asking, and must address the questions in ways and language that decision-makers will easily understand. The approach aims to involve the decision-makers in the evaluation planning process as a way of increasing the likelihood of the evaluation findings having relevance and being used. Stufflebeam thought that evaluation should be a process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information to decision-makers, with the overall goal of programme or project improvement.

There are many different definitions of evaluation, but one which reflects the CIPP approach is the following:

'Programme evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcome of programmes for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programmes are doing and affecting' (Patton, 1986:14).

Stufflebeam sees evaluation's purpose as

- establishing and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives;
- assisting an audience to judge and improve the worth of some educational programme or object;
- assisting the improvement of policies and programmes.

The four aspects of CIPP evaluation (context, input, process and outputs) assist a decision-maker to answer four basic questions:

1. What should we do?

This involves collecting and analysing needs assessment data to determine goals, priorities and objectives. For example, a context evaluation of a literacy program might involve an analysis of the existing objectives of the literacy programme, literacy achievement test scores, staff concerns (general and particular), literacy policies and plans and community concerns, perceptions or attitudes and needs.

2. How should we do it?

This involves the steps and resources needed to meet the new goals and objectives and might include identifying successful external programs and materials as well as gathering information

3. Are we doing it as planned?

This provides decision-makers with information about how well the programme is being implemented. By continuously monitoring the program, decision-makers learn such things as how well it is following the plans and guidelines, conflicts arising, staff support and morale, strengths and weaknesses of materials, delivery and budgeting problems.

4. Did the programme work?

By measuring the actual outcomes and comparing them to the anticipated outcomes, decision-makers are better able to decide if the program should be continued, modified, or dropped altogether. This is the essence of product evaluation.

The four aspects of evaluation in the CIPP model support different types of decisions and questions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The CIPP model of evaluation

<i>Aspect of evaluation</i>	<i>Type of decision</i>	<i>Kind of question answered</i>
Context evaluation	Planning decisions	What should we do?
Input evaluation	Structuring decisions	How should we do it?
Process evaluation	Implementing decisions	Are we doing it as planned? And if not, why not?
Product evaluation	Recycling decisions	Did it work?

### **Where does CIPP fit in relation to other approaches to evaluation?**

The field of evaluation is large and there are a number of different approaches to evaluation and theories of it. Figure 1 lists the main approaches developed by different evaluation theorists and shows where CIPP's position is. While the different approaches are all attempting to answer similar questions (about the worth of programmes and elements of them), the emphasis on various aspects (purpose, focus and evaluator's role) varies, as does the underpinning theory. However, all share at least one feature: a concern for rigor in the conduct of the evaluation and a concern for reliable and systematic evidence to support any conclusions.

Many of the approaches combine quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry from the social sciences (questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, content analysis of documents and learning materials, analysis of records and databases, observation of sites and processes, literature search and analysis).

Figure 1. Five approaches to evaluation

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Emphasis</i>	<i>Focusing issues</i>	<i>Evaluator's role</i>	<i>Specific information needs</i>
1. Experimental	Research design	What effects result from programme activities and can they be generalized?	Expert/ scientist	Outcome measures. Learner characteristics. Variation in treatment. Other influences on learners. Availability of a control group.
2. Goal oriented	Goals and objectives	What are the programme's goals and objectives, and how can they be measured?	Measurement specialist	Specific programme objectives. Criterion-referenced outcome measures.
3. Decision-focused <b>[CIPP]</b>	Decision making	Which decisions need to be made and what information will be relevant?	Decision support person, provider of information.	Stage of programme development. Cycle of decision-making. Data gathering and reporting.
4. User-oriented	Information users or clients	Who are the intended information users and what information will be most useful?	Collaborator	Personal and organizational dynamics. Group information needs. Programme history. Intended uses of information.
5. Responsive	Personal understanding	Which people have a stake in the programme and what are their points of view?	Counsellor/ facilitator/ collaborator	Variation in individual and group perspectives. Stakeholder concerns and participation in determining and framing the data. Programme history. Variation in measures and sites.

### Strengths and limitations of CIPP

One of the problems with evaluation in general is getting its findings used. Through its focus on decision-making, CIPP aims to ensure that its findings are used by the decision-makers in a project. CIPP also takes a holistic approach to evaluation, aiming to paint a broad picture of understanding of a project and its context and the processes at work. It has the potential to act in a formative, as well as summative way, helping to shape improvements while the project is in process, as well as providing a summative or final evaluation overall. The formative aspect of it should also, in theory, be able to provide a well-established archive of data for a final or summative evaluation. The framework is flexible enough to allow us to examine different cases or situations within the whole project.

Critics of CIPP have said that it holds an idealised notion of what the process should be rather than its actuality and is too top-down or managerial in approach, depending on an ideal of rational management rather than recognising its messy reality. In practice, the informative relationship between evaluation and decision-making has proved difficult to achieve and perhaps does not take into account sufficiently the politics of decision-making within and between organisations.

As a way of overcoming the top-down approaches to evaluation, those of stakeholder and participative approaches have developed (for example, the approaches of Richard Stake and

Lincoln and Guba). These argue that all stakeholders have a right to be consulted about concerns and issues and to receive reports which respond to their information needs, however in practice, it can be difficult to serve or prioritise the needs of a wide range of stakeholders. This is part of a trend toward the democratisation of evaluation and is seen in the participative approaches of Marie-Therese Feuerstein or David Fetterman. In stakeholder and participative approaches, evaluation is seen as a service to all involved in contrast to the administrative approach (such as CIPP), where the focus is on rational management and the linkage is between researchers and managers or decision-makers. In the stakeholder approach, decisions emerge through a process of accommodation (or democracy based on pluralism and the diffusion of power). So the shift in this type of approach is from decision-maker to audience. Cronbach (1982) argues that the evaluator's mission is to 'facilitate a democratic, pluralist process by enlightening all the participants'. However, some of the commissioning agencies who receive the reports from participative evaluations say they do not always find them helpful in decision-making, because of the nature of the reports produced and lack of clear indications for decision-making or conflicting conclusions.

One challenge for us in the COLLIT project is to try to include a stakeholder dimension and some participative approaches within the CIPP framework and in carrying out the evaluation activities. Another is to ensure that evaluation findings do indeed inform decision-makers at the different levels in an ongoing way.

## References

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