

John M. Owen



Bio

John Owen is interested in the dissemination and use of knowledge created through research and evaluation and other forms of social enquiry. In particular he is concerned with the design and conduct of studies to inform decision making by individuals and groups. He also has a strong conceptual understanding of change theory, particularly how technical and social innovations are adopted and used within organizations and systems.

He was awarded the ET&S prize for outstanding contributions to evaluation by the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES), and was made a Fellow of the Society in 2003. In 2001 he was awarded a Universitas21 Scholarship by Melbourne University for outstanding leadership in teaching, He led a team that developed an innovative post-graduate training program in evaluation and assessment on the internet, with students from across Australasia and overseas. In 2004 he taught this program to 20 public sector managers in Yellowknife, Canada. He is a regular contributor to journals and at international evaluation conferences in Australia and overseas.

His book: Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches provides an integrated framework to evaluation theory and practice that has had favourable reviews worldwide.

Workshop title

Using Pragmatic Principles to Structure Evaluation Practice

Target audience

This workshop is suitable for participants who are responsible for commissioning or undertaking social or educational policy or program evaluation.

Workshop Level

While the workshop is open to anyone, participants with some prior knowledge of evaluation concepts are likely to achieve more benefit from attendance. Thus the workshop is addressed to those at beginner to intermediate level interface.

Workshop content

Managers and other stakeholders with a stake in social/educational interventions often have unrealistic expectations when they commission an evaluation. Evaluators face a host of real-world problems in planning and implementing studies that respond to client knowledge needs. For example, evaluations can have small budgets; can be commissioned late in the life the program under review, or need to be conducted within short timelines. These and other like aspects present challenge to evaluators who are committed to the delivery of valid and plausible findings.

Based on research on evaluation practice it is possible to identify a set of principles (Pragmatic Principles) that assist evaluators who are faced with these dilemmas. These Principles can be presented as a set of issues that evaluators must address from the inception of the evaluation. These include:

- To what extent are the evaluation questions answerable?
- Can we develop an evaluation design that responds to these questions, given restraints due to factors such as; resources, time and timing of the study, available information sources, and evaluator skills?
- Can we implement this design?
- What certainty can we place on the resultant findings?

The Principles constitute a framework that can be sequentially implemented during the planning and implementation of an evaluation study.

Detailed workshop outline

The workshop will be based on adult learning principles such as group problem solving and transfer of training. This will involve working on a case-study introduced by the presenter. In addition to whole group discussion, participants will work in groups of no larger than five; the maximum number of participants will be 20. The discussions are designed to encourage participants to apply strategies to their own contexts.

These include:

- Coming to agreements with stakeholders about key evaluation questions that can be answered
- The creative access and use of a range of methods to address these questions
- Ways in which the issue of uncertainty of findings can be addressed

Those enrolling in the workshop will receive materials and papers designed to extend their knowledge about Pragmatic Evaluation.

Timing

It is expected that the following time schedule will be followed:

- (i) introduction and greeting, outlines of principles and task setting (40 minutes)
- (ii) group work (60 minutes)
- (iii) group reporting (30 minutes)
- (iv) whole group discussion and implications for transfer (45 minutes)
- (v) discussion of key references and concluding comments (15 minutes).