

Chapter 8.8

Guerilla Evaluation: Adapting to the Terrain and Situation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides proven strategy and tactics for the corporate evaluator. Topics include: adopting a performance-based operating model (the V-model) to shift focus from training for activity to training for results; using the V-model to plan and structure communication; leveraging modern measurement and statistics to save time and money (e.g., item response theory, sampling procedures, regression); leveraging available data to calculate training ROI (return on investment); determining when to hire or contract skills and knowledge; using technology to save time and money; and making the most of your available applications.

INTRODUCTION

Most corporate evaluators confront an assortment of decisions and trade-offs between the prescribed models of their discipline and the demands of the current business and technological situation. These exigencies demand flexibility in measurement and evaluation approaches. Adapting successfully to the situation and the reality of the corporate terrain often requires creative or “guerilla” tactics. In this chapter we share some of the tactics that have served us well in our endeavors to conduct effective evaluation in the larger corporate system within which we operate. For us, guerilla evaluation means adapting to two primary domains or constraints:

1. **Terrain:** The unique demands of the modern corporate training environment. Successfully navigating the corporate terrain requires tactical planning and communication, and a good map. Our map is a systems development model adopted from our corporate methodology and repurposed for evaluation and performance improvement work. This model guides our work as well as our communication plans. It helps us identify the unique characteristics and requirements of each stakeholder group, and deliver the information that each group needs in a timely manner.
2. **Situation:** Constraints on resources of time, money, people, skills, and technology. We respond to these situational constraints with a second set of guerilla tactics based on lessons learned: leveraging data and statistical skills, using contractors and consultants, and maximizing our use of available technology.

It is important to note that what we describe in this chapter is based on our experiences as a small team with a large agenda. Our group of four is the evaluation team for the central learning organization of Accenture, a leading global management consulting and technology services organization, with more than 75,000 people in 47 countries. Our team's defined mission probably reflects that of other corporate evaluation teams:

To be an integral partner within our organization and provide valued information that enables us to improve the products and programs necessary to build capabilities within our company.

In essence, our mission is to use evaluation to create and drive value.

Our collective background includes graduate training in evaluation, statistics, and measurement, as well as applied measurement and evaluation in the public and private sectors. In recent years our business context has become more challenging (but more interesting) and our strategies have

evolved in response. This chapter will describe and illustrate a few of the important challenges confronting today's corporate evaluator, and what can be done to meet these challenges with resourcefulness, flexibility, and creativity.

NAVIGATING THE TERRAIN

Evaluation within a business context and the discipline of measurement as practiced and taught within academic settings are different enterprises and require different approaches. In our experience, successful corporate evaluators place themselves "in the trenches" and frame their work in the business context, rather than attempt to organize their efforts around lofty theory. As we'll describe later, academic training and acumen in statistics and measurement are critical levers for adding value, but in the corporate arena, the alignment of evaluation strategies with the business needs of the organization is of primary importance. Two strategies we have employed for the purpose of adapting to the business terrain are:

1. Adopting a performance-based operating model
2. Planning and structuring communication effectively in a business context

As is usually the case in adapting to any terrain, it helps to have a map. Ours is a model that guides our evaluation work and relates our work to the goals that the organization values. It is also vital for organizing our communication with stakeholders about our processes and results.

Creating a Map of the Terrain

It is widely purported that the Human Resource Development (HRD) field is evolving of necessity from its traditional training paradigm to a performance-based approach. In this approach, the objective of the training function is no lon-

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