

# **Resonance, Stickiness, and the Value Propositions of Evaluation Capacity Building: Key Takeaways and Future Directions**

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## **Abstract**

This chapter presents the results of a study of program participants' responses to an innovative project called the Partnerships for Advancing Character Program Evaluation (PACE), which operationalized a Relational Systems Evaluation (RSE) approach to evaluation capacity building (ECB). We examine which tools and concepts from PACE resonated with participants and were sustained, and why. Analysis of participant interviews yielded 16 distinct value propositions that they associated with the PACE training. Importantly, a number of them extend beyond evaluation to include contributions to other aspects of program professionals' work responsibilities and work life. We explore the relationships between the most widely valued PACE tools and concepts and the value propositions they were associated with. These discoveries about the potential value propositions for the RSE approach to ECB hold promise for efforts to increase investment in evaluation capacity, and to strengthen the transfer of learning that is needed for evaluation to be embedded and sustained in organizations.

Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) has received a great deal of attention in the two decades since Laura Leviton made it the Presidential Theme for the 2000 meeting of the American Evaluation Association. Fourteen years later, Hallie Preskill, contributing to the Forum on Evaluation Capacity Building in the *American Journal of Evaluation*, acknowledged considerable progress in the evaluation field:

... we have developed a fairly robust knowledge base and common set of understandings about what constitutes effective ECB. And, perhaps not surprisingly, there is a good deal of agreement about the construct, goals, objectives, contextual variables, challenges, and opportunities for building evaluation capacity within organizations. (Preskill, 2014, p. 116)

Nevertheless, that positive acknowledgment is the background for a call to do the work—the “hard stuff”—of using insights to truly strengthen ECB practice. Challenges to ECB and its goal of sustained evaluation practice in organizations were and continue to be significant and have been described in numerous studies. They include lack of time and resources (either for professional development or for evaluation); absence of or inconsistent leadership emphasis on evaluation and ECB; insufficient or ineffective use of evaluation results; staff turnover; evaluation being an afterthought; and, attitudes, including the perceived tradeoff between doing evaluation or ECB and doing the “real work” of program delivery (Chaudhary et al., 2020; Labin, Duffy, Meyers, Wandersman, & Lesesne, 2012; Norton et al., 2016; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002). The challenges to ECB are related to the challenges to evaluation itself. Leviton (2014) makes a compelling case for addressing the obstacles and called on the field to identify the “value proposition” of evaluation in order to ensure that it—and by extension, ECB—are integrated into the work of organizations (Leviton, 2014).

Over the past fifteen years of facilitating a Relational Systems Evaluation-based approach to ECB using the Systems Evaluation Protocol (SEP), we have observed firsthand the challenges originating at the individual, organizational, and system levels. Beginning with our early development and testing of the SEP, our refinements of the Protocol and our facilitation strategies have largely been designed to strengthen the evaluation capacity outcomes, address logistical, contextual, and systems-related obstacles to promote sustained uptake of capacity and practice, and expand participants' evaluative thinking—an important and more recently recognized component of evaluation capacity (Chapters 3 and 5 of this volume; Buckley et al., 2015; Trochim et al., 2016). In the course of this work we have observed that the tools, concepts, and skills people often respond to most positively—such as pathway modeling, program boundary analysis, evaluative thinking, program lifecycle analysis—have benefits beyond participants' evaluation responsibilities because they contribute to other, non-evaluation aspects of their work lives.

The current study investigates these observations systematically in the context of an ECB initiative called the PACE Project (Partnerships for Advancing Character Program Evaluation). PACE was a 3-year research project that centered Relational Systems Evaluation (RSE) and the SEP in a unique ECB initiative in which evaluators and program professionals were trained together over 15 months. This chapter reports on our discoveries regarding which tools and concepts resonate the most with participants at the end of the training (“resonance”), which ones are still in use a year later (“stickiness”), and why. The findings offer actionable insights into the value propositions of ECB and the particular strengths of the RSE approach.

### **Evaluation Capacity Building**

During the past twenty years, there has been a proliferation of ECB definitions, models, and approaches presented in the literature. Although no single widely agreed-upon definition of ECB exists, the most commonly cited definition of ECB is offered by Stockdill, Baizerman, and

Compton (2002): “ECB is the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (p. 14). A more recent definition, based on a research synthesis of the ECB literature, describes ECB as “an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation” (Labin et al., 2012, p. 308). That literature review also noted commonalities and differences among the many definitions of ECB. For instance, all ECB definitions identify it as an activity that is separate from actually conducting evaluation. Yet differences arise regarding the extent to which ECB is described as focusing on the organizational level, the individual level, or both. It is also noteworthy that ECB is commonly associated with another important domain within program evaluation: collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005; O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005). The linkage between ECB and these collaborative approaches to evaluation derives from their shared interest in democratizing and decentralizing evaluation practice—whereas, in its original form, program evaluation was solely the purview of expert researchers, today we see many ways in which evaluation skills, attitudes, and practices can be spread throughout a program or organization.

A comprehensive multidisciplinary model of ECB was developed by Preskill and Boyle (2008a) to guide both practical facilitation of ECB and empirical inquiry into ECB. Their definition of ECB summarizes most of the elements contained in their model; it also manifests the overlap between ECB and the democratizing mainstreaming of evaluation:

ECB involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. For evaluation

practice to be sustained, participants must be provided with leadership support, incentives, resources, and opportunities to transfer their learning about evaluation to their everyday work. Sustainable evaluation practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that help embed evaluation work into the way the organization accomplishes its mission and strategic goals. (Preskill & Boyle, 2008a, p. 444)

Taken together, these definitions and models point to why ECB matters and its benefits. The outcomes of ECB are summarized in the expanded Integrated Evaluation Capacity Building Model presented in Labin (2014), based on a systematic review of the ECB literature. They include:

- Increased individual stakeholder interest in and understanding of evaluation, manifest through positive attitudes towards evaluation, a perception of its benefits, and more widespread evaluation expertise (knowledge, skills, and behavior);
- Organizational cultures that favor evaluation, with leadership receptive to negative feedback, with an emphasis on collaborative learning and problem solving, and with “evaluation champions” embedded at all levels of the organizational hierarchy; and
- Organizational structures, including processes, policies, and practices for doing, using, planning, funding, and integrating and mainstreaming evaluation throughout an organization (Labin, 2014).

All are related to evaluation and are recognized as contributing to the ultimate purpose of improving program outcomes (Clinton, 2014; Labin, 2014; Suarez-Balcazar & Taylor-Ritzler, 2014; Wandersman, 2014).

Challenges to ECB have been enumerated in many ECB studies (Chaudhary, Diaz, Jayaratne, & Assan, 2020; Danseco, 2013; Kegeles, Rebhook, & Tebbetts, 2005; Labin et al., 2012; Norton et al., 2016; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Stockdill et al., 2002). Moreover, Leviton

(2014) points out that ECB faces an additional hurdle compared to simply devoting resources to a time-limited but specific evaluation project: investment in, for example, a data collection system is vulnerable to changes in a funder's outcomes of interest, or inability to use the results for program improvement. This recognition of the risks extends to all sorts of potential changes in the ability to benefit from ECB, including changes in funders, staff turnover, shifts in programming, and more. ECB is an investment with considerable costs in terms of resources and time, for both the organization and the staff members engaging in ECB. It stands to reason that the returns on this investment need to be substantial, meaningful, durable, and—ideally—diverse and flexible enough to hold their value in the face of the inevitable variability of individual, programmatic, and organizational situations.

### **Adult Learning and Professional Development**

Research on adult education underscores the importance of meaningful connections between instructional outcomes and participants' work. Authors in the field of adult education have established a clear challenge for practitioners—including those engaged in ECB: build on learners' existing motivations and experience while also breaking through existing patterns of thought and behavior to establish new ways of thinking and doing (Brookfield, 1986; Cranton, 1996; Daley, 2000; Dirkx, 1998; Knowles, 2014; Mezirow, 1997). Getting to adoption—when an adult learner takes on a new tool or framework in a sustained way—is especially difficult. Those who have studied professional development (PD) have found that new knowledge taught in PD programs is seldom transferred to practice and that materials distributed as part of PD training are seldom looked at again (Daley, 2000; Nowlen, 1988; Ottoson, 1995). Even when an adult learner can connect a new idea to their experience or current practice, environmental factors play an important role in the learner's decision to adopt or not adopt a new way of thinking or doing. According to Daley (2000):

Recent research indicates that professionals construct a knowledge base for themselves in

the context of their practice by linking concepts from new knowledge with their practice experience. At this point, they actively make decisions on how to incorporate new knowledge into the context of practice based on their interpretations of the environment. (p. 34)

A key component of effective facilitation is offering the opportunity for the learner to connect to their own experiences in real-time, either through conversation, practice, role play, case studies or simulations (Brookfield, 1986; Daley, 2000; Mezirow, 1997).

### **Relational Systems Evaluation and the Systems Evaluation Protocol in the PACE Project**

The PACE Project strategy for building evaluation capacity involved training program professionals from youth character programs and professional evaluators together, over 15-18 months, in a mix of in-person and webinar training (see Chapters 3 and 6 of this volume for more detailed descriptions of the PACE design). An important component of evaluation capacity building involved putting the RSE tools and concepts into practice in the context of evaluation partnerships—which paired an evaluator (referred to as an Evaluation Capacity Builder, or ‘ECBer’) with a one or usually two-person team of program professionals (PPs) from each program. The evaluation partnership teams completed the main steps of the Systems Evaluation Protocol planning stage to produce a “Program and Evaluation Profile” (PEP) that included a program description, summaries of program context and key assumptions, stakeholder map, program pathway model, evaluation purpose statement, and formal evaluation questions. Most evaluation partnership teams went on to develop a full evaluation plan. Distinctive elements of RSE that were built into PACE and are focused on in this study included evaluative thinking (ET), Evolutionary Evaluation (EE), and specific elements of the Systems Evaluation Protocol, described briefly below.

#### **Evaluative Thinking**

Evaluative thinking (ET) has been mentioned with increasing frequency in the ECB

literature over the past five years, and we consider it to be necessary for high-quality evaluation, a learnable skill, and one that is fostered by using the SEP. Drawing on prior research on the SEP, several PACE research team members have articulated a definition of ET that draws on critical thinking and education research as follows:

Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action. (Buckley et al., 2015, p. 378)

This definition anchored the approach to evaluation capacity building that shaped the design of the PACE Project.

### **Evolutionary Evaluation**

Evolutionary Evaluation (EE) draws on theories of evolution, developmental systems, and epistemology to articulate a view of program development and evaluation as evolutionary processes with inherent lifecycle qualities (Urban, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2014). The insights that follow from this foundation have powerful implications for evaluation planning, because alignment between program and evaluation lifecycle phases is essential for ensuring that a program obtains the kind of information that is most needed at that point in its development, and that program and evaluation resources are used efficiently. When program practitioners, program managers, and evaluators conceptualize program evaluation from an evolutionary perspective, better decisions can be made about whether to keep, change, or retire a program and about what kinds of evaluations to conduct and fund (Urban et al., 2014). The SEP operationalizes EE in the lifecycle analysis step and integrates the results into evaluation planning (Trochim et al., 2016).

### **The Systems Evaluation Protocol**



The Systems Evaluation Protocol (SEP) offers a structured but flexible stepwise protocol that both simplifies evaluation planning and implementation, and promotes quality, rigor, contextual appropriateness, and usefulness of the resulting evaluation (Chapter 3 of this volume; Trochim et al., 2016). Distinctive features of the SEP that constitute our list of key tools and concepts in the PACE Project include stakeholder analysis, pathway modeling, lifecycle analysis, and evidence mapping.

### ***Stakeholder Analysis***

Stakeholder analysis in the SEP involves developing a detailed stakeholder “map” with a comprehensive list of stakeholders, both close to the program and distant. Broadening one’s view of who the stakeholders in a program are helps ensure a full array of perspectives on the program, and contributes to the identification of strategic evaluation priorities.

### ***Pathway Modeling***

Pathway modeling is a critical step in the SEP and is the focus of much effort and time. A pathway model is a visual form of a program logic model that presents the detailed theory of change linking activities to the specific short-term outcome(s) they contribute to, and linking those outcomes to the short- and mid-term outcomes they contribute to, and so on out to the ultimate long-term outcomes envisioned and targeted in the program’s design. In our experience, the process of building a pathway model and the resulting model itself invariably bring to light insights about how a program works, how the different parts of a program interact to bring about change, and the intermediate outcomes that emerge along the way.

### ***Lifecycle Analysis***

Lifecycle analysis integrates the insights and implications of Evolutionary Evaluation into the evaluation planning process. In our experience, program practitioners often find EE and lifecycle analysis to be helpful in promoting an evaluation methodology that feels reasonable and useful for a program and offers a research-based counterargument to the sometimes excessive

push coming from a perception that “more sophisticated” evaluations are necessarily better and more “rigorous” (Urban et al., 2014).

### ***Evidence Mapping***

The SEP step of evidence mapping originated in work by Urban and Trochim (2009) where they demonstrated how pathway models can be used to identify where locally-derived evidence about a program can meet up with research-derived evidence to support a through-line connecting program practice to a larger evidence base (see Chapter 3 of this volume for further description). Their paper used the metaphor of the “golden spike,” harking back to the storied moment in U.S. history when the railroad lines coming from the east and west were joined to establish the first transcontinental rail line. The ability to integrate research and practice in this way empowers program staff and evaluators seeking to strengthen the evidence base for their program and situate their work in a larger research context. Part of one PACE training session was devoted to the Golden Spike, and ECBers provided evidence mapping for their partner programs.

### **The Current Study**

The program teams that participated in PACE were all working in the arena of youth character development but varied in terms of organization and program size, longevity, work culture, evaluation experience, and organizational evaluation mandates (or lack thereof). Moreover, since the PACE design involved partnering program professionals with evaluators in the role of ECBer, there was variety also in the facilitation styles and ECB backgrounds of the evaluators in the partnerships. Three rounds of phone interviews were conducted in the PACE Project—Waves 1 and 2 were pre- and post-training, respectively, and Wave 3 was conducted one year after the conclusion of the PACE Project. Among other objectives, the interviews captured participants’ understanding and uptake of RSE tools and concepts. Our analysis was designed to address the following questions:

1. Among the tools and concepts presented and practiced in the PACE Project, which one(s) resonated with or were retained or adopted by participants, at the end of PACE and one year later?
2. What value propositions did participants attribute to the PACE Project overall or to PACE tool(s) or concept(s) at the end of PACE, and one year later?
3. What was the relationship between individual PACE tools and concepts and the value propositions identified by participants?

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

Although a centerpiece of the PACE Project was the joint training of both professional evaluators and program professionals (PPs), all of whom participated in trainings on Relational Systems Evaluation and engaged in applied evaluation partnerships, we focused on just the program professionals for this study of uptake and retention of ECB outcomes. These PPs have diverse roles in their organizations—some are frontline staff delivering the program being evaluated in PACE, others are in managerial or organizational leadership positions—but overall their roles and generally limited experience in evaluation are more relevant to the broad evaluation capacity building literature than those of the evaluators in PACE. The sample for this study includes 26 PPs who participated in PACE. Budget cuts and personnel changes led to some staff turnover and the withdrawal of one program over the course of the PACE Project; these 26 individuals from 15 organizations represent the set of PPs who completed the full PACE training and partnership.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this study include 26 pairs of transcripts from interviews conducted as a pre-test (Wave 1) and post-training (Wave 2), as well as transcripts from 20 phone interviews conducted one year after the conclusion of their PACE work (Wave 3). The Wave 1 and Wave 2

interviews were designed to address PACE research questions regarding change in knowledge of central PACE concepts (Evolutionary Evaluation [EE], evaluative thinking [ET], character development [CD], and the Systems Evaluation Protocol [SEP]); definitions of high-quality evaluation; attitudes toward evaluation and evaluation capacity building; perceptions of the roles of program staff and evaluators in evaluation; and (post-only) feedback on the PACE experience and the evaluation partnerships. The scope of the Wave 3 interviews was narrower, focusing on the retention and use of PACE tools and concepts (if any); progress on their planned evaluation; the impact of PACE (if any) on advocacy for evaluation, ET, or their program; and updates on their evaluation partnerships if they had continued.

### **Analysis**

We used a three-stage process of thematic coding and synthesis to analyze the matched pairs of Waves 1 and 2 interview transcripts, which had an average length of 32 pages per interviewee. The first stage (described in more detail in Appendix A of Chapter 4 in this volume) distilled the pre-post transcript pairs into a “summary statement set” for each interviewee that summarized the evidence from each interviewee on key themes (e.g., knowledge of PACE concepts, attitudes toward evaluation, partnership observations, PACE impacts). These summary statement sets included direct interviewee quotes where possible. In the second stage, these summary statement sets were entered into NVivo and coded for 79 a priori and emergent themes. In the third stage, driven specifically by the research questions for this paper, we used the coding of the statement sets to extract two subsets of statements related to uptake: (1) those that had been coded for specific PACE tools and concepts (we excluded statements solely relating to knowledge of the concepts, as our focus was on use and adoption) and (2) statements relating to the use of the tools or concepts, adoption of PACE practices, or behavior changes associated with PACE. These two subsets of uptake-related statements were then transferred to an Excel file organized by participant ID, with a separate tab for each respondent.

The Wave 3 interviews were coded differently. Given our focus in this study on uptake and retention of PACE tools and concepts, we conducted an initial review of the Wave 3 transcripts to highlight passages relating to uptake—references to PACE tools or concepts, their continued use (or lack of use), and any references to benefits or purposes associated with that use. This broad highlighting yielded excerpts that we then included in the Excel file described above, adding these selected Wave 3 transcript excerpts to each respondent’s worksheet.

Each worksheet contained, for each respondent, the subset of uptake-related Wave 1-Wave 2 statements and (in bold, so the source was easily distinguished) the Wave 3 excerpts that had been coded as being uptake-related. This set of items for each participant was then coded in two ways: (1) to identify which specific PACE tools or concepts had been retained from the PACE Project and (2) to identify what we called the “value proposition(s)” behind any adoption or retention, that is, the reason(s) why they used or valued tools or concepts from their PACE training.

The coding scheme for PACE tools and concepts included nine a priori and emergent codes. The a priori codes, based on the PACE training curriculum, were: Evaluative Thinking, Evolutionary Evaluation, Pathway Modeling, the “Golden Spike,” Stakeholder Analysis, the SEP, and Evaluation Questions. We added two codes for PACE outcomes that emerged in the initial round of coding of the first two waves of data: “Way of Thinking” and “Evaluation Worldview.”

To answer the first research question, we developed a quantitative summary for each respondent by assigning a “1” to indicate that the tool was coded at least once in that respondent’s uptake-related statements; or a “0” to indicate that the tool was not coded as such. The individual respondent summaries were added up to obtain the total numbers of respondents for whom each tool or concept had resonated.

The coding scheme for Value Propositions emerged as the two first authors reviewed the qualitative data and noted themes in what respondents valued about the aspects of their PACE experience that had stuck or resonated with them. We were interested in why the PACE element had mattered, or how it had been useful. The coders conducted their reviews independently, compared results, and settled on a consensus set of codes that captured 16 distinct benefits attributed to PACE (see Appendix A for the Value Proposition Codebook).

Working independently, the two coders coded each item in a respondent's set of statements for the value proposition elements. Their coding decisions were compared, differences were discussed and reconciled, resulting in consensus coding of the Value Propositions. The combined coding of tools and concepts and Value Proposition elements for each respondent statement in the data was utilized to answer Research Question 3 regarding the pattern linking particular tools to particular Value Propositions.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1: Among the Tools and Concepts Presented and Practiced in the PACE Project, Which One(s) Resonated With or Were Retained or Adopted by Participants, at the End of PACE and One Year Later?**

Table 7.1 reports the pattern of uptake for the nine PACE tools and concepts, as of the end of the PACE Project, and as of one year after the conclusion of the PACE Project.

<<Insert Table 7.1 here>>

As seen in Table 7.1, Pathway Modeling was the tool retained (planned for future use) or used by the most participants at the conclusion of their PACE work. One year later, Pathway Modeling continued to resonate with and be used by 18 of the 20 program professionals interviewed. Evaluative thinking came in a very close second in the post-PACE interviews, and although it was mentioned explicitly by fewer participants a year later, it was still a noted takeaway for 8 (out of 20) individuals. More than half the respondents (15 out of 26) were using their

stakeholder analysis at the conclusion of the PACE Project, and a higher proportion (16 out of 20) were using stakeholder analysis a year later. The “Way of Thinking” code, which ranked fourth in the post-PACE data, referred to overall shifts in how people approached their work, such as the following excerpt from a participant in the Wave 2 interviews: “I can't imagine now, ... especially after the PACE Project, doing programming without the same kind of thinking as evaluation planning” (Participant 20, Wave 2). Unlike evaluative thinking, this was not a specific element in the PACE curriculum or something we named at any point in the training, but it emerged in participant’s interviews frequently enough that we developed a code for it. The concept and implications of Evolutionary Evaluation resonated with 11 of the 26 respondents at the end of the PACE Project and were still important a year later for seven respondents. The five tools and concepts above are distinguished from the remaining PACE training elements because they ranked higher on resonance, and continued to be valued by a substantial number of PACE participants a year later.

**Research Question 2: What Value Propositions Did Participants Attribute to the PACE Project Overall or to PACE Tool(s) or Concept(s) at the End of PACE, and One Year Later?**

Table 7.2 presents the 16 distinct ways that the PACE tools and concepts were valued by the participants and reports the number of participants who described these benefits in their Wave 2 and Wave 3 interviews.

<<Insert Table 7.2 here>>

Improved program planning was the benefit cited by the most participants at the conclusion of PACE, and a year later. Evaluation Advocacy—the ability to make a case for better evaluation—was described by 10 out of 26 participants in the post-PACE interviews. The following is representative of this view:

... having that language around life cycles of the program and life cycles of evaluation and being able to talk through what was actually appropriate, what would we be more likely to see in this time frame, helped me at least think through with my boss who was sort of creating the pressure to measure it at this high level, but it helped me talk through with her. I think ... I felt more prepared, and I felt like I had the right language and tools to be able to have that conversation more effectively.... (Participant 29, Wave 3)

Shared Work Practices and Values stood out as a benefit for a number of respondents, in this case stemming from the overall Systems Evaluation Protocol:

...the more we got used to it and learning about it, it really sort of became this process of like, 'Oh we're really struggling in this moment. Let's go back to the Protocol and see if we're missing something or if there's one of those steps that would sort of clarify where we're spinning out here right now.' So it's also been a great tool for our staff to be more present inside of program development. Because there were these certain things that we could go back to and all work through together. (Participant 19, Wave 2)

The following illustrates how the pathway model contributed to wider program understanding and helped with staff management:

... as a manager, it has been a challenge for me to get my staff to understand where they fit and why they need to think about the bigger picture. You know, like I said, we get so inundated with what it is, the task in front of us, that we forget that there's a bigger picture. And what the pathway model allows us to show and demonstrate to the staff is where we start, how we end, and what needs to happen in-between and what their role is in making that happen. (Participant 15, Wave 2)

The Personal Resonance code applied to cases where a tool or concept filled a need for the participant, or particularly suited the way they thought or worked, for example:



... but we had always believed in what's called a nonprofit life cycle, and ... the program or evaluation life cycle was a fascinating application to something we were already using as an organization to then say, 'Oh, that makes sense that if an organization has a life cycle, then so would the program have a life cycle and then so would the evaluation have a life cycle,' and how do you make sure that all of those life cycles are as close together as they can possibly be, or else no wonder why we're feeling slightly off-kilter or slightly overworking in an area that just doesn't seem like it's fitting. (Participant 2, Wave 3)

### **Research Question 3: What Was the Relationship Between Individual PACE Tools and Concepts and the Value Propositions Identified by Participants?**

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 present the pattern of attributions respondents made from the top five PACE tools and concepts to specific value propositions in the Wave 2 and Wave 3 interviews. Only 15 of the total 16 value propositions are included in these figures as the remaining value proposition was not attributed to any of the top five tools or concepts, although it had been attributed by a few respondents to some of the less frequently adopted tools. In interviews, respondents sometimes cited multiple tools as having contributed to a particular value proposition, so the height of each stacked column is the number of distinct associations that were made for that value proposition, not how many individuals made them.

<<Insert Figures 7.1 and 7.2 here>>

Pathway Modeling rises to the top again, with associations to all of the fifteen value propositions, and the highest overall number of value proposition associations. The most cited association to Pathway Modeling in the Wave 2 interviews was Program Understanding, followed by Communication about the Program; a year later, the value proposition it was most associated with was Program Planning. Evaluative thinking is particularly valued for contributing to overall Organizational Evaluation Culture in the Wave 2 interviews, but contributed to all the other value propositions for one or more respondents in either the Wave 2

or Wave 3 interviews. The standout contribution from Evolutionary Evaluation is to Evaluation Advocacy post-PACE, followed by Better/More Useful Evaluation. Stakeholder Analysis has a modest set of associations in the Wave 2 interviews but is credited more strongly in the Wave 3 interviews and associated with multiple value propositions including Shared Work Practices, Program Planning, Grant Writing, and Staff Management.

### **Discussion**

The primacy of pathway modeling, both in terms of initial and sustained adoption and its association with diverse value propositions, is not surprising, based on our observations over the years of facilitating the SEP and RSE. This is consistent also with the results of a smaller study conducted in 2012 of participants' post-SEP use of the Netway software program that complements and supports the SEP evaluation planning process (Hargraves, Fang, & Hebbard, 2012). That earlier study found that pathway modeling was the most common tool that led evaluation partners to continue using the Netway and that they used their models to serve a variety of non-evaluation purposes.

A somewhat surprising result was the relatively widespread and sustained enthusiasm for stakeholder analysis. Stakeholder Analysis has often felt like a narrowly-purposed step in the SEP, and one whose benefits are specific to evaluation planning. However, as we see in the value proposition results, Stakeholder Analysis turned out to be useful for several participants because it expanded their understanding of their program, and helped staff gain perspectives on why their program mattered and how to promote it.

Stakeholder Analysis and Pathway Modeling are both anchored in visual representations, in contrast to the conceptual nature of the remaining top five PACE elements (Evaluative Thinking, Evolutionary Evaluation, and Way of Thinking). We speculate that that may have something to do with the greater sustained use of Pathway Modeling and Stakeholder Analysis. Although this may be overly optimistic, it may also be that Evaluative Thinking and PACE's

Way of Thinking simply blended over time into participants' work and were less likely to be mentioned in interviews that did not directly inquire about these practices. All of this needs further exploration.

The most striking findings from Table 7.2 are that the list of distinct value propositions is long and that it goes beyond evaluation to include many benefits related to other aspects of participants' work responsibilities. The spillover benefits from ECB to program planning, grant-writing and fundraising are perhaps not surprising to evaluators, but the satisfaction participants gained from being able to advocate for more appropriate evaluation of their program, from having a more aligned work culture, from having new ways of managing staff, and increasing shared understanding of their program seem less obvious. Some of these spillover benefits of the RSE approach to ECB represent important and time-consuming responsibilities for many program professionals, and others are part of general work satisfaction. Greater attention to these, and more deliberate efforts to cultivate these benefits, may help make a case for investments in ECB and may help embed the capacity in an organization and help sustain capacity over time.

The results in Figures 7.1 and 7.2 highlight the multi-benefit nature of individual PACE tools and concepts: one or more of these tools and concepts contributed to 15 distinct value propositions. In addition, there is variation across the tools and concepts in terms of which value proposition each one was credited with contributing to most frequently. For example, Pathway Modeling is the most frequently valued tool in general overall value propositions, but Evaluative Thinking is cited relatively more often for its contribution to building an organizational evaluation culture; Evolutionary Evaluation is relatively more useful for Evaluation Advocacy; at the one-year mark, Stakeholder Analysis is credited for grant-writing and fundraising, and so on.

## **Limitations**

An important constraint on this study is that the interviews we draw on—particularly the Wave 1-Wave 2 interviews—were designed to address research questions established at the design stage of the PACE Project, and do not directly address the research questions in this paper which emerged over the course of the trainings and our interactions with PACE participants. Even the Wave 3 interview questions (which were developed after the PACE trainings concluded) did not directly explore the connections between the PACE tools and concepts they were using and the ways in which they contributed to participant’s other work responsibilities. The interviews provided a great deal of information, but there is more to be learned. Overall sample sizes are small, so the patterns of associations found here are suggestive rather than definitive. In addition, despite efforts to reach past participants, the sample for the Wave 3 interviews included only 20 of the 26 original program professionals. More generally, although the programs in the PACE Project were diverse in terms of geography, program, and organizational size and longevity, all were working in the arena of youth character development. It would be useful in future work to broaden the programmatic context for studying the value propositions, and connections to ECB found here, and to explore them in greater detail.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study provide encouraging insights about ways to make a case for investments in evaluation capacity and to strengthen the “transfer of learning” needed to embed and sustain good evaluation practices in organizations (Preskill & Boyle, 2008a). Naming and increasing the value propositions of ECB can make the time costs of a careful evaluation planning process more manageable, reduce the sense that evaluation tends to crowd out the “real work” of program management and delivery, and make evaluation less of an afterthought. Rather than struggle with the perceived tradeoff between time spent on evaluation capacity building or evaluation, versus time spent on the “real work” of program design and delivery, the array of value propositions recognized by PACE participants in our study suggest that we should leverage

the synergies between program work and evaluation. We should highlight the potential spillover benefits that pathway modeling, evaluative thinking, Evolutionary Evaluation, stakeholder analysis, and other tools and concepts have for work culture, program understanding, volunteer and staff management, stakeholder communication, program promotion, and more.

Many of the connections documented here between evaluation tools and diverse value propositions are specific to the key tools and concepts in Relational Systems Evaluation (RSE). As we integrate these findings into our future RSE work, we will be expanding our early discussions with evaluation partners to proactively identify ways in which the side benefits of RSE—the value propositions outside of evaluation—may be needed or may have particular value to the evaluation partner. This will allow us to adjust the application and facilitation of RSE to capture more of these value propositions. The usual needs assessments done when an ECB initiative is being proposed or planned tend to focus on evaluation needs, but the results here suggest that, for the RSE approach and perhaps others, there can be important additional benefits to evaluation capacity building that can make the investment more valuable, more sustained, and more resilient in the face of change to the program environment. This expanded understanding of value propositions increases the potential for responsive evaluation capacity building to contribute to the democratization of meaningful and productive evaluation and, ultimately, stronger programs and communities.

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**Table 7.1: Retention and Use of PACE Tools and Concepts**

*Numbers of respondents indicating retention or utilization of each tool or concept*

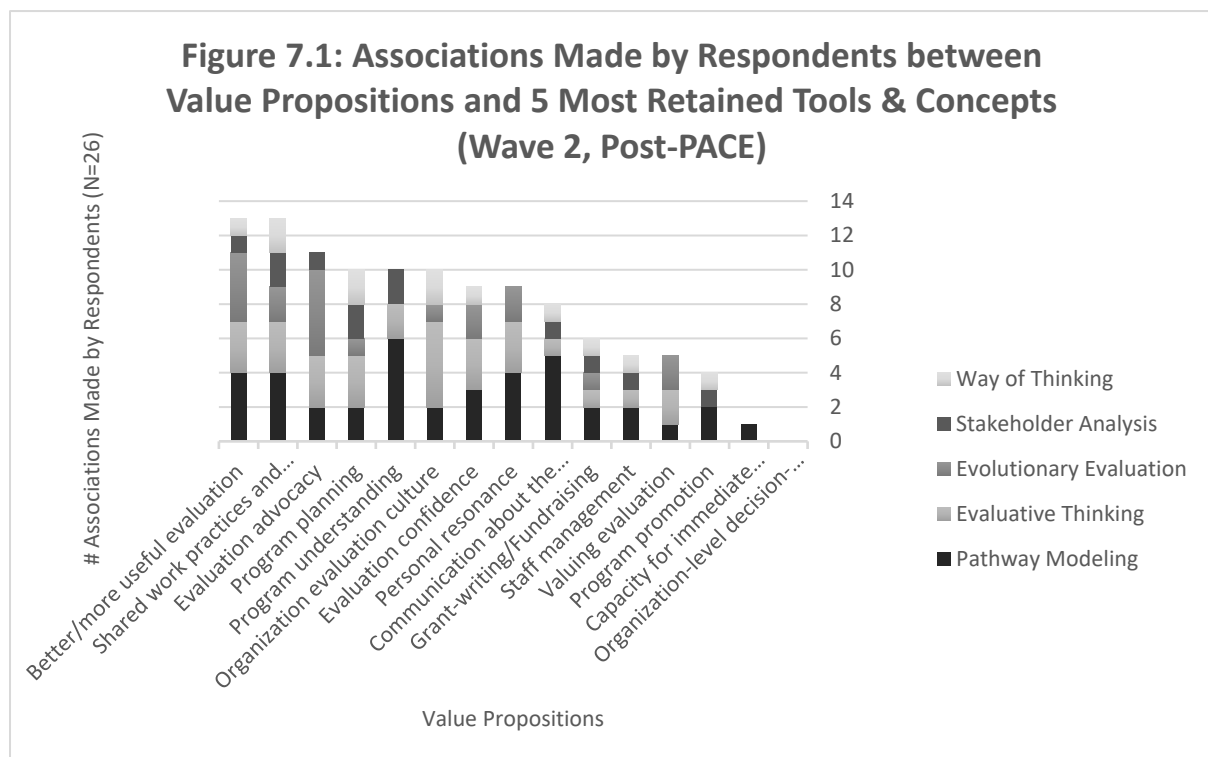
PACE Tool or Concept	Wave 2 (Post-PACE) (N=26)		Wave 3 (1-Year Follow-up) (N=20)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Pathway Modeling	22	85%	18	90%
Evaluative Thinking	20	77%	8	40%
Stakeholder Analysis	15	58%	16	80%
Way of Thinking	12	46%	9	45%
Evolutionary Evaluation	11	42%	7	35%
Systems Evaluation Protocol (SEP)	9	35%	0	0%
Evaluation Questions	8	31%	0	0%
“Golden Spike”	7	27%	2	10%
Evaluation Worldview	4	15%	0	0%
Average # tools retained per person	4.2		2.3	
Max	8		6	
Min	1		0	

**Table 7.2: Value Propositions Associated with PACE Tools and Concepts**

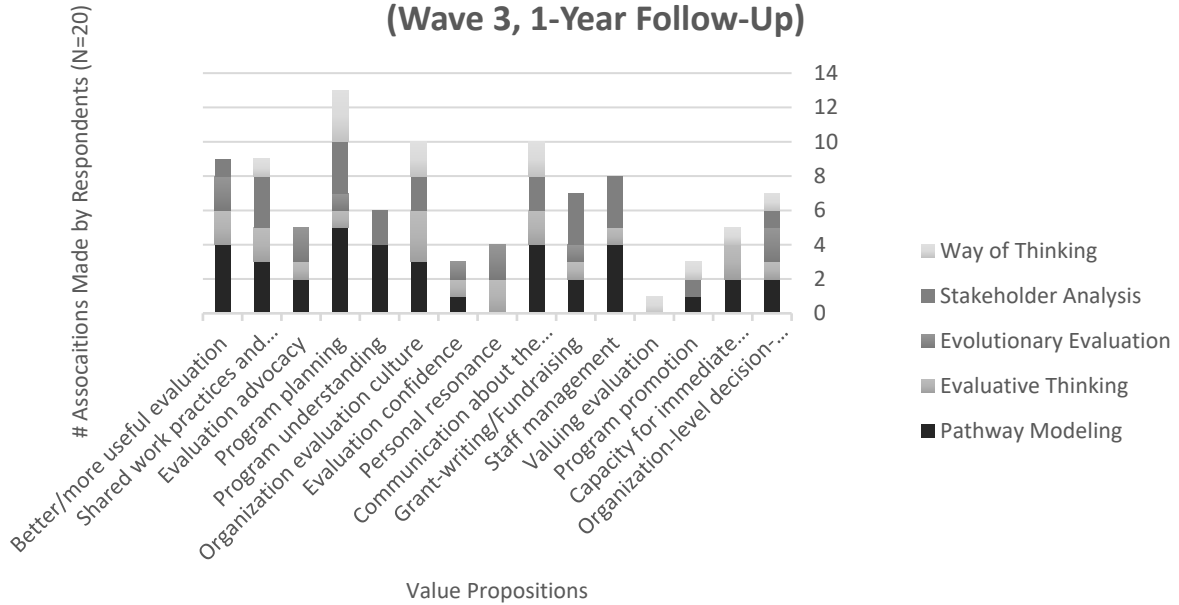
*Numbers of respondents whose interviews contained these Value Propositions*

Value Proposition	Wave 2 (Post-PACE) (N=26)		Wave 3 (1-Year Follow-up) (N=20)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Program planning	10	38%	9	45%
Evaluation advocacy	10	38%	5	25%
Shared work practices and values	9	35%	5	25%
Program understanding	9	35%	4	20%
Personal resonance	9	35%	3	15%
Better/more useful evaluation	7	27%	9	45%
Communication about the program	6	23%	6	30%
Organization evaluation culture	6	23%	6	30%

Grant-writing/Fundraising	5	19%	7	35%
Staff management	5	19%	4	20%
Valuing evaluation	5	19%	1	5%
Evaluation confidence	4	15%	3	15%
Program promotion	4	15%	2	10%
Capacity for immediate program impact	1	4%	2	10%
Personal satisfaction	1	4%	1	5%
Organization-level decision-making	0	0%	4	20%
Average # Value Propositions per person	3.5		2.7	
Max	7		10	
Min	0		0	



**Figure 7.2: Associations Made by Respondents between Value Propositions and 5 Most Retained Tools & Concepts (Wave 3, 1-Year Follow-Up)**



## Appendix A

Coding Dictionary for the “Value Propositions”—the benefits or side-effects that made certain PACE tools or concepts “stick”

Code	Definition	Examples
Better/more useful evaluation	Higher quality evaluation, more useful, more credible, more efficient.	Cites Evolutionary Evaluation as leading to a big improvement in their approach to evaluation, that before PACE they were just “doing what we thought we should be doing” and that they “didn’t have any concept of what life stage are we in”. “Once we started looking at it, it was completely wrong ...”
Capacity for immediate program impact	The PACE tools or concepts contributed to being able to do a better job of achieving program goals, immediately increasing program impact. (This is not about the shortness of time, but rather about being able to simply act and do things differently, outside of the systematic sequential process of evaluation.)	"We're always thinking now about why we're doing this. And I don't think we were doing that before. Before it was just like, we want to place clients [...], so these are the things we need to do. Now, it's like, all right, how do we look at these clients individually, and say this person has these challenges, how are we going to help them get through these challenges? What do we need to put in place to make sure that we do the best to help them to meet these challenges? The way we think about how we work is totally different."
Communication about the program	More clear or effective communication about the program with people who are not directly involved with the program.	"Because, she was better able to articulate what her program is and who it represents, and what it's for. She's able to find matches in the community, of other programs that could benefit the youth in the programs."
Evaluation advocacy	Increased desire and/or ability to push for more or better evaluation, including with external evaluators	Since PACE she reports greater ability to advocate for their program and push back against system-level demands for additional data gathering (asking what it’s for, how it will be useful.) ... She valued the Golden Spike insight so much. It was a big part of what she has been sharing with collaborators in the field and her program’s board of trustees. She views it as a really useful tool in advocating for her approach to her

		evaluation/program work, including with funders.
Evaluation confidence	Confidence in one's own ability to plan, conduct, or oversee an evaluation.	"I definitely feel a lot more confident being able to [develop an evaluation plan] more on our own in the future" ... After PACE, she still cares about bias, but she trusts herself and has other solutions, because she knows about ET and how to do evaluation and trusts herself to do it. ... "Evaluation feels a lot less daunting."
Grant-writing/ Fundraising	Improved ability to develop or strengthen grant proposals, engage in fundraising.	Through pathway modeling, they came to understand their program's contribution to some unexpected outcomes – youth outcomes and skills that are relevant for jobs and job performance. This enhanced view of their program will affect their evaluation and is expected to strengthen their case with funders.
Organization evaluation culture	Improved organizational commitment to or utilization of evaluation, general attitudes toward evaluation, recognition of its importance, and the potential of all staff to play a part.	"I think also, just the evaluation mindset, thinking about data, about tools, about how- just how we're thinking about our impact of our programs. I think that's definitely a lasting effect." ... "And then, we have definitely greatly improved our overall evaluation thinking within our organization because of PACE. We definitely think about it with all the programs that we're doing now, and there was, for example, a couple of our colleagues came up with a concept of a program that they wanted to do and the first thing that we wanted them, we told them that we thought they should do is use the Netway and create a logic model for it, and they did, they did that. That's the kind of thing that never would have happened before."
Organization-level decision-making	Improved allocation of resources among programs, or decisions about overall programming.	"...we've been looking at how do we actually start, even when we know there is a demand for curriculum, and our partners are asking for it, stopping and saying, "who are the other stakeholders that might have interest in that". Which has helped us look at additional funders, actually, that we might not have thought of before. Then, we've been taking it through, like looking at each of our program's lifecycles and we did a lot inside of what's in bounds and out of bounds has actually been really helpful for us.... It's been really helpful to set aside what is actually, that's

		not our intention, here. It may be a byproduct, but it's not our intention.”
Personal resonance	The PACE tools or concepts aligned with the person's own way of thinking or desired way of working, or giving them tools to undertake the kind of work and thinking that they already wanted to be able to do. Filling a need.	“...pathway modeling, for me, has been one of the, perhaps, biggest sort of ‘ahas’ through this whole process, and I've appreciated that more so than really anything else. ... I had never heard of pathway models, never until I came through the PACE program and I'm just disappointed that I haven't heard of them frankly, until now.”
Personal satisfaction	Improved personal well-being, satisfaction, or attitude that goes beyond work.	In the post she talks about how important ET is to her (“evaluative, deep thinking is – is my thing now – and that’s not even just – just that’s just in my life. That’s with my relationships, that’s with my family, that’s in work, personal and professional.”)
Program planning	Improved ability to think through program design and how it connects to community needs, or to impact. Includes improved decisions about program content, program design, allocation of program effort, etc.; describes a SPECIFIC ACTION that has been taken or will be taken in terms of changing the program.	"I think helped us to solidify what are the components that we need to have a successful ... program, and ...what are the components that we need to have a successful ... program at that school? Because each school site is a little different and I think we were able to have a different level of conversation around what those needs were and then how are we going to get it ..." ... EE has made them realize that they need to think differently about their program (describes trying to disseminate a brand new program – too soon). ... It has helped shape opportunities for how her program has grown, and has been able to bring in components of a program, partnerships to that program. Because, she was better able to articulate what her program is and who it represents, and what it's for. She's able to find matches in the community, of other programs that could benefit the youth in the programs.
Program promotion	Improved program marketing, branding, or outreach, program advocacy, increased	"...we have done some stakeholder mapping and that was part of what lead to some of our branding work as well. Trying to make sure that we're reaching beyond the standard group of

	ability to make the case for the program to stakeholders.	stakeholders and trying to expand our reach."
Program understanding	Gaining a better understanding of how the program works, the ways that it makes a difference, how different roles and activities contribute to the overall impact.	" I use [the stakeholder map] for the communication plan in our transition, but also as a way for, again, our staff to understand who the different people are and why it's important that we don't do, or do do x, y, or z. How it kind of ripples out. " ...Through pathway modeling, they came to understand their program's contribution to some unexpected outcomes – youth outcomes and skills that are relevant for jobs and job performance. This enhanced view of their program will affect their evaluation and is expected to strengthen their case with funders.
Shared work practices and values	Better internal communication, atmosphere, work habits, way of thinking, shared values.	"I think also, just the evaluation mindset, thinking about data, about tools, about how- just how we're thinking about our impact of our programs. I think that's definitely a lasting effect."
Staff management	Improved ability to motivate, lead, direct, or engage staff.	"I think that, for me, the pathway model was the most important thing that I did in PACE. And the reason why is because, as a manager, it has been a challenge for me to get my staff to understand where they fit and why they need to think about the bigger picture. You know, like I said, we get so inundated with what it is, the task in front of us that we forget that there's a bigger picture. And what the pathway model allows us to show and demonstrate to the staff is where we start, how we end, and what needs to happen in-between and what their role is in making that happen."
Valuing evaluation	Greater recognition of the ways that evaluation can be useful or beneficial - in improving program performance, outcomes, resource allocation, etc. (This is at the level of the respondent; increased valuing at the	In the post, she reflects on herself pre-PACE and explicitly describes her previous skepticism about evaluation. She then goes on to describe how this has completely changed. She is no longer skeptical of evaluation and "evaluation people" and seems to have truly internalized the importance of evaluation and evaluation capacity. ... Overall, in the post, there is a sense of liberation- a total world view shift when it comes to evaluation. She is no longer oppressed by the impossible (to her) task of measuring long-term impacts, and now believes in



	organization level should be coded as "Organization evaluation culture".)	the value of ET, evaluation, and internal evaluation capacity.
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