

## Evaluation Activities in Australasia

John S. Risley

### General Summary of Activities

The Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) produces, and posts on their website ([www.aes.asn.au](http://www.aes.asn.au)), an e-newsletter approximately twice per year. The AES also holds an annual conference, usually in September or October. The 2004 conference is in October near Adelaide, Australia and will focus on “Diverse Voices in Evaluation.” Last year’s conference emphasized evaluation and indigenous peoples. Many pre-conference workshops are offered. AES has regional representatives from throughout Australia and New Zealand. There is a New Zealand Listserv—Evaluation Aotearoa—that discusses “evaluation research.” It only has a few posts per month, mostly dealing with Auckland Evaluation Group activities.

From reading the editorials and other non-refereed articles in the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia (EJA)* it appears that the evaluation profession in Australasia differs from the profession in the United States in two main ways. First, evaluators come from more diverse academic and professional backgrounds in Australasia than in the United States. Second, Australasian evaluators are much less likely to be associated with a university and much more likely to be employed by a government agency than are American evaluators.

### ***Evaluation Journal of Australasia***

A recent editorial in *Evaluation Journal of Australasia (EJA)* noted the history of AES publications. The society launched the *EJA* in 1989. Then from 1993 through 2000 AES published both *EJA* and *Evaluation News & Comment*. In 2001 these publications merged to form the new series of *EJA*. The journal is published by the AES bi-annually (though recently there have been delays in publishing new editions). AES posts the two copies preceding their most recent issue on their web site. The journal includes refereed and non-refereed articles, editorials, interviews with evaluators from both within and without the region, book reviews, research reports, and information about the annual AES conference.

Issues addressed in *EJA* included much information concerning cultural appropriateness, indigenous peoples, and diversity in evaluation. This may be a reflection of the recent AES conference themes. There is some material drawing distinctions about evaluation aspects specific to Australasia, but many articles are written by authors outside the region about subjects not specific to the region.

Subjects of refereed articles in recent issues of *EJA* include: evaluation of options for changing port ownership in Belfast, an evaluation of a respite care program in Christchurch, evaluating the cultural appropriateness of human service delivery programs in Australasia, and the TRIAGE (Technique for Research of Information by Animation of a Group of Experts) technique. A few refereed articles were short (3 pages and 5 pages) compared to articles in the *American Journal of Evaluation*, for example.

Some of the refereed articles had very little to say about evaluation. For example, one of these articles (Burton & Rajan, 2002) concerned a case study evaluation of 15 people seriously injured in workplace accidents. The authors described the

project's goal as exploring the social and economic consequences to society from these workplace injuries. The article discussed the methodology of the study, the experiences of the researchers, and the lessons learned from their research experiences. The methodology was basically a semi-structured interview of injured workers, their family members, employers, etc. The lessons learned by the researchers were: 1) interviewing can be exhausting, 2) diversity of the project team was essential, and 3) it was difficult to remain objective after seeing the suffering of the injured workers.

One interesting article (Sigsgaard, 2002) addressed an unusual methodology (in evaluation research), the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology. The author, Peter Sigsgaard, works at a Danish NGO called "MS" on measurement and evaluation issues. He gave examples of his experience using MSC in evaluating partnership-based economic development programs in Africa, Asia and Central America. Using MSC you ask people to identify positive or negative changes they have observed within a given "domain of interest." People are then asked which change, positive or negative, they think is most significant and why. More important or very large changes that are reported are verified by further investigation.

Sigsgaard (2002) contrasts this approach with one previously used by MS in evaluating these programs, in which they would conceive of indicators to measure and then cast about looking for these indicators. This led to lots of time spent looking for, and not finding, specific data.

It makes intuitive sense to ask program consumers what changes are occurring due to the program. It does highlight the need to be careful how one measures program changes.

## References

- Burton, J., & Rajan, R. (2002). Revealing the hidden costs: research experiences from a case study evaluation project. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia (new series)*, 2(2), 69-73.
- Sigsgaard, P. (2002). Monitoring without indicators: an ongoing testing of the MSC approach. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia (new series)*, 2(1), 8-15.