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The Evaluation Capacity of Czech Nonprofit Social Services Organizations

Salvatore P. Alaimo – Grand Valley State University

Jakub Pejcal – Masaryk University

Simona Smrčková – Charles University

This study explores the capacity of Czech nonprofit social services organizations to have their services evaluated. These organizations are often required to evaluate their services by their national, regional governments, and/or the EU Social Investment Fund, however they are challenged with evaluation capacity building (ECB). This study organizes the ECB literature around six dimensions and draws on ECB studies, frameworks, and checklists. It examines the exploratory question of evaluation capacity through a national survey of, and semi-structured interviews with, directors of these organizations. Results demonstrate that the challenges for evaluation capacity are similar to previous ECB studies in other countries. However, in this study they are somewhat driven by directors' social constructions of evaluation which are influenced by government guidelines and standards and their limited understanding of ECB and perception for their role in it. Conclusions are accompanied by recommended practice.

Keywords: Evaluation capacity building; Evaluation; Czech Republic; Nonprofit management; Social services

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations are challenged with demonstrating program effectiveness from government, philanthropic foundations, accreditation organizations, and other stakeholders. Many lack capacity, “the human capital (skills, knowledge, experience, etc.) and financial/material resources” necessary for evaluation (Boyle, Lemaire, & Rist, 1999, p. 5), thus requiring evaluation capacity building (ECB), “the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002, p. 1). Czech nonprofit management and evaluation continue in their professionalization, largely driven by the evolution of Czech civil society, sector growth since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, and an evolving relationship with government. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) establishes, regulates, and evaluates social services against their fifteen standards (MoLSA, 2016).

The approach to this study is deductive by drawing from existing evaluation and ECB literature, and frameworks used for ECB research, to develop survey and interview instruments used to

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assess ECB in participating organizations within the six dimensions. There has not been such a study that examines ECB in Czech nonprofit organizations, nor many, in other former Soviet Bloc nations. This study seeks to answer the exploratory research question, within the Czech context: What influences the state of evaluation and ECB in nonprofit social services organizations?. Supporting questions include, What challenges do these organizations face for the evaluation of their services? and How does the relationship with government impact their understanding of evaluation as a concept and process, and ultimately impact ECB? For consistency in participant understanding of evaluation, we defined it in the survey and interview as any assessment of the impacts and overall benefits or gains provided by services to their recipients. In this study we did not consider mere monitoring (indicator tracking), employee appraisals, feedback monitoring, audits, compliance with standards, etc., as evaluations in and of themselves. While these activities can be important components of an overall evaluation, they themselves do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the impact of services provided on individual clients/consumers (service outcomes), which is primarily how we generically frame evaluation in this study, with the understanding that there exist many specific types of evaluation i.e. outcome, participatory, empowerment, etc. The phrase “program evaluation” is typically used in the U.S., Canada, Australia and other nations, however, in the Czech language and context, the term “program” typically refers to an employee training program, hence they instead use the term “services.” This study refers to “program evaluation,” because that’s what the literature refers to but it is used interchangeably here because it examines the evaluation of Czech social services.

This article organizes the literature on ECB around six dimensions, then presents the Czech context including background on the nonprofit sector, social services, and the extent to which evaluation has progressed. This is followed by the methods section which describes the study population, survey development and distribution, semi-structured interviews, along with data collection and analysis. The results are presented within the guide of the six dimensions. The discussion section follows, and the authors provide limitations of this study, directions for future research, and conclusions accompanied by corresponding recommended practice.

Evaluation Capacity Building

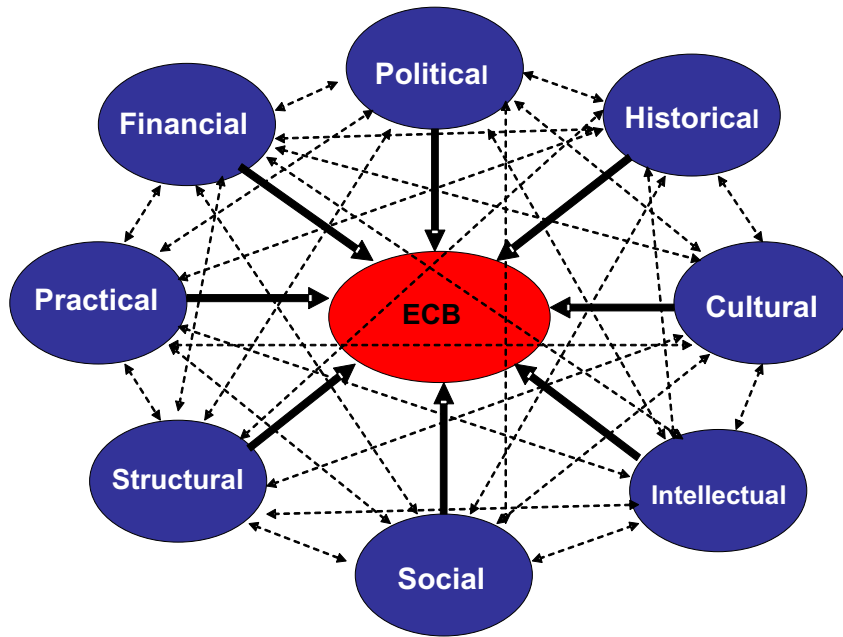
Organizational Context

ECB remains a relatively new concept, as its body of knowledge, mostly from the United States and Canada, is about twenty-five years old, but it has substantially evolved and expanded in that time. It is context dependent and stakeholder driven, and therefore is multi-dimensional; dynamic; has economic, sociological, and psychological implications; and is different in size, scope, factors, and components from one organization to another. Figure 1 shows contextual factors for ECB:

While Figure 1 may not be exhaustive in displaying such factors, it is important to note that all impact each other as well as ECB. For example, if an organization has *historically* prioritized program evaluation, then it is likely to have worked towards embedding it *culturally* over time and therefore ensured it has had the *financial* resources and proper *structures* necessary to *practically* engage in it. An understanding of these factors is necessary for managing the internal and external organizational contexts for evaluation, and being aware of “power hierarchies, administrative culture, and decision-making processes” (Volkov & King, 2007, p. 1); acquiring stakeholder understanding and agreement on the demand for evaluation (Festen & Philbin, 2007; Volkov & King, 2007); balancing the demand and supply for evaluation (Boyle, LeMaire, & Rist, 1999); and determining how receptive the organization is to change (Grudens-Schuck, 2003;

Volkov & King, 2007). This thorough and comprehensive understanding is necessary for meaningful stakeholder participation in ECB, planning the evaluation, and ensuring that results and process are used for learning and improvement (Bryson & Patton, 2015; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Patton, 2022).

Figure 1. Contextual Factors for ECB



Dimensions for ECB

The existing literature on ECB including ECB research studies, ECB frameworks, ECB checklists and evaluability assessments all used to guide this study, and serve as the basis for the survey and interview instrument development, are shown with their sources below in Table 1:

Table 1. ECB Dimensions

Dimension	Recommended Practice	Sources
Leadership	- Understanding program evaluation - Taking responsibility for program evaluation - Managing political frame for program evaluation - Influencing organizational culture	Alaimo, 2008; Bamberger & Mabry, 2020; Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith, & Eden Avery, 2002; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014; Duigan, 2003; Festen & Philbin, 2007; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Grudens-Schuck, 2003; Imas & Rist, 2009; Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Sonnichsen, 1999; Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002; Stufflebeam, 2002; Volkov & King, 2007; Wade & Kallemeyn, 2019;

Williams & Hawkes, 2003		
Organizational Culture	- Developing and maintaining an organization culture conducive to program evaluation - Developing and maintaining an organization culture conducive to learning	Baizerman, Compton, & Stockdill, 2002; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014; Grudens-Schuck, 2003; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Sanders, 2003; Sonnichsen, 1999; Williams & Hawkes, 2003
Organizational Learning	- Ensuring program evaluation is a learning process where results are used for change and improvement - Ensuring ECB is a learning process where results are used for building capacity towards sustainable evaluation practice - Integrating the program evaluation and ECB processes so they inform each other - Learning takes place from both results and the evaluation and ECB processes	Bamberger & Mabry, 2020; Bastoe, 1999; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith, & Eden Avery, 2002; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014; Duigan, 2003; Festen & Philbin, 2007; King, 2007; Mattesich, 2003; Monroe, M.C. et al., 2005; Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015; Patton, 2008; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Sonnichsen, 1999; Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002; Taut, 2007; Torres & Preskill, 2001
Resources	Providing the necessary human, financial, physical, informational resources and time dedicated to program evaluation	Bamberger & Mabry, 2020; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith & Eden Avery, 2002; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014; Festen & Philbin, 2007; Stockdill, Baizerman, & and Compton, 2002; Stufflebeam, 2002; Volkov & King, 2007; Wade & Kallemeyn, 2019
Systems and Structures	Establishing systems and structures to effectively and efficiently evaluate programs	Bamberger & Mabry, 2020; Bastoe, 1999; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith, & Eden Avery, 2002; Duigan, 2003; Festen & Philbin, 2007; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Volkov & King, 2007
Program Evaluability	- Assessing program readiness - Establishing a program theory of change - Developing a program logic model	Bamberger & Mabry, 2020; Chen, 2015; Imas & Rist, 2009; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2015; Patton, 2008; Trevisan, 2007; Wholey, 2015
Existing ECB frameworks, studies, surveys, checklists, and evaluability assessments	Collective recommended practice for what comprises ECB Note: Combined with above literature to develop survey	Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Carman & Fredericks, 2008; Fierro & Christie, 2017; Hudib & Cousins, 2022; Stufflebeam, 2002; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2013; Trevisan, 2007;

These dimensions are not mutually exclusive, with some relationships being co- dependent and others being symbiotic, but they all collectively drive ECB. For each of them identified in column one, the authors identified the recommended practice in column two conveyed by the sources in column three. Each of these dimensions for ECB are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Leadership

Leadership in the context of this study refers to the actions and decisions of top nonprofit executives, typically in the Czech Republic referred to as directors. It plays an important role in managing both the internal and external organizational context by initiating, catalyzing, and ensuring ECB takes hold in their organization (Alaimo, 2008; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Volkov & King, 2007; Wade & Kallemeyn, 2019). One of the most important aspects is managing evaluation's existence within a political environment. Program evaluation involves making a value judgment for a program and decisions on changing it, improving it, etc. and involves multiple stakeholders each with their own assumptions and values, so it is therefore inherently a political process (Bamberger & Mabry, 2020a; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Taylor & Balloch, 2022). Bamberger and Mabry sum it up well, "Evaluation is the most politically challenging of all approaches to inquiry because it often confirms or confronts values, personal preferences, and political agendas" (2020a, p. 95). Leadership also decides whether an organization will attempt to satisfy external demands solely for compliance, accreditation, reporting, or funding, or they will balance such responses of those external pulls by integrating them with an internal push (Alaimo, 2008) for evaluation. If such demands are not integrated into ECB, then organizations run the risk of not learning, not improving their programs, and rendering the evaluation results not worth the cost (Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015).

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as, "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems" (Schein, 1992, p. 12). If an organization has the proper resources, skills and other capacity issues covered to engage in program evaluation, but their culture is not conducive to change, does not embrace evaluation and does not prioritize learning, then program evaluation and ECB are not likely to occur. Some scholars have focused on the importance of mainstreaming program evaluation in the organization to where its priority, resourcing, attention, and engagement are on par with the other routine management functions (Duigan, 2003; Runnels, Andrew, & Rae, 2017; Sanders, 2003; Williams & Hawkes, 2003) and it becomes institutionalized (Stufflebeam, 2002). One indicator of when this happens is when program evaluation becomes an uncontested activity within the organization, stakeholders view it as a part of sound management, and it is reflected through the governance of the organization (Toulemonde, 1999).

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning occurs when "...individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf" (Argyris & Schon, 1996, p. 16). Scholars agree that program evaluation and ECB must be learning processes for them to be

effective (Monroe, et al., 2005; Parsons, Lovato, Hutchinson, & Wilson, 2016; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Torres & Preskill, 2001). That effectiveness is driven by learning what works and what does not work in their programs and using information for improvement. Organizational learning is the catalyst for the inherent, potential, symbiotic relationship between ECB and program evaluation. This is where program evaluation results and learning from the process of evaluation are used to inform the work in ECB. In this relationship the learning from the program evaluation process is called process use (Patton, 2022, p. 214). Process use can contribute to evaluation capacity building through stakeholder participation resulting from increased knowledge and changed attitudes. ECB in turn improves and enhances program evaluations to be more efficient, relevant, robust, holistic, and comprehensive. Ongoing learning of this kind helps drive a culture of continuous improvement. The use of results also influences organizational and program thinking and decision making through revisions, improvements, and judgement of program worth (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014).

Resources

Program evaluation like any other management function within an organization requires human, financial, physical, and informational resources. The typical question when it comes to staffing to conduct the evaluation is whether to build capacity from within and dedicate a full-time person or persons to evaluation or hire an external evaluator. Often this decision is driven by the size of the organization, its ability to afford outside help and whether funds have been dedicated to the evaluation function. In some cases, a hybrid form of staffing is employed where the internal and external evaluators work together on the evaluation. ECB's concerns also include building evaluation expertise within the organization through staff training and professional development (Sonnichsen, 1999). Bamberger and Mabry (2020b) recommend strengthening evaluation knowledge and skills in several groups including organizations that fund evaluations; evaluators; government; and other organizations that use the results of evaluations.

Insufficient funds and the need for dedicated funding for program evaluation are often lamented (Bamberger & Mabry, 2020a; Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Volkov & King, 2007). One reason may be that program evaluation simply is not a priority in the organization. Organizations tend to budget for things they deem important. Another reason is the organization's belief that allocating funds from their budget for program evaluation takes money away from their core service and their ability to serve their clients/consumers (Carman & Fredericks, 2008). Lastly, sometimes the very external stakeholders that demand evaluation inadequately fund it, if at all.

Systems and Structures

Systems and structures within the organization that support evaluation practice are necessary for ECB to be successful. One example is to develop and implement a purposeful long-term, ECB strategy and plan for the organization (Bamberger & Mabry, 2020b; Duigan, 2003; Volkov & King, 2007). Accompanying that plan should be an evaluation plan developed in consultation with senior managers including a needs assessment (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013). These plans should be incorporated into the organization's strategic plan to ensure priority, implementation, learning and improvement, and such inclusion utilizes program evaluation results as a feedback loop to inform planning (Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith & Eden Avery, 2002; Festen & Philbin, 2007). Communication systems and peer learning structures for socialization around evaluation are also recommended (Volkov & King, 2007).

Program Evaluability

ECB also exists at the program level, as not all programs are ready to be effectively evaluated. Important factors include clarification of the program design and possible need to redesign it; understanding of the demand for and feasibility of program evaluation; consensus on program goals and desired outcomes (Wholey, 2015); increased stakeholder understanding of the program; the specification of the program's theory (Patton, 2022); and the development of a program logic model (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013; Trevisan, 2007). Conceptualizing the program's theory of change impacts how it is implemented, understood, talked about, and improved and typically is a positive contributor to the use of evaluation results (Patton, 2022). While a theory of change model is conceptual, it is an important foundation for the program logic model which has practical application (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Program logic models are visual portrayals, often using columns with shapes and directional arrows, like a flow chart, of how programs operate and how they are intended to result in desired outcomes for participants.

These dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and their significance is realized in how they all influence each other. Organizations are recommended to address all dimensions for a comprehensive approach to ECB.

The Czech Context

Nonprofit Sector

The Czech Republic's nonprofit sector has grown substantially since the Velvet Revolution in 1989 that ended Communist one-party rule in the country and preceded the self-determined split of Czechoslovakia into the independent countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia on January 1, 1993. There were approximately 2,000 registered nonprofits in 1989 serving households (the core of the nongovernmental nonprofit sector), rapidly growing to more than 150,000 in 2021 (Czech Statistical Office, 2022a). This growth is seen by some as part of the evolution of Czech civil society (Green, 1999; Pospisil, Navratil, & Pejcal, 2015; Potucek, 2000). It is also driven in part by significant laws governing the nonprofit sector since the early to mid 1990's. The legal forms of Czech nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations are primarily regulated by the Civil Code, and they include registered association, branch of association, foundation, philanthropic fund, public benefit company, church organization, and registered institution (Ministry of the Interior, 2012). According to the Satellite Account of Non-profit institutions, the revenue sources for Czech nonprofit organizations constitute public resources (36.4%); revenues from the non-market production (21.8%); revenues from the market production (10%); the work of volunteers (9.1%); corporate donations (8%); foreign (including EU) funding (7%); membership fees (4.7%); and personal donations (4%) (Czech Statistical Office, 2022b). Czech nonprofits were presented with new project and funding opportunities when the country joined the European Union in 2004, and their significance is seen in their share of the sector's revenue. The importance of the sector is noted in official Czech government documents including *Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030* (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017) focused on sustainable development, and the Czech Government's Strategy for Cooperation Between Public Administration and Nongovernmental Non-profit Organizations 2021-2030 who's vision is one where nonprofit organizations are "a stable and strong partner of public administration in meeting the needs of the Czech society" (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2021, p. 37).

Social Services

The Act on Social Services number 108 in 2006 regulates “conditions governing assistance and support to physical persons (individuals) in adverse social situations provided through social services, conditions governing the issue of the authorization for the social services provision, execution of public administration in the field of social services, inspection of the social services provision and prerequisites for performance of social services activities” (MoLSA, 2022a). Furthermore, the Act regulates “prerequisites for execution of the profession of a social worker performing activities in social services (a social services worker)” (MoLSA, 2022a). More than 8,750 registered social services are currently provided in the Czech Republic (MoLSA, 2022b), and most (more than 5,400) are provided by 1,055 non-governmental, nonprofit organizations. A smaller part of social services is provided by organizations established by the public sector (more than 2,880), while only a fraction is provided by for profit organizations (approximately 410) (MoLSA, 2022b).

In spite of growth, advancements and improvements by government and the social services providers over the past ten years, the MoLSA states, “Further development of social services, however, is hindered by outdated legislation, division of competencies, methods of distribution of funds, and professional abilities of social workers in the public administration” and that “It is necessary to go ahead with fundamental transformation of the system” (MoLSA, 2022c). They cite the most pressing challenges as a lack of consistency in implementing social policies across regions and municipalities; inadequate skills of social workers in the public administration and lack of continuous, current training; and inequities in access to funding (MoLSA, 2022c). Other challenges include high inflation, increasing upward pressure on wages, and inadequate and late public sector payments (Stejná odměna, 2023). The 300,000 Ukrainian refugees remaining in the Czech Republic as of February 2023, one year after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, has added demand for social services (Skacel, 2023). The MoLSA however, states “Probably the most important role in the field of social services is played by the strong non-profit, non-governmental organization sector striving to provide modern social services” (MoLSA, 2022c).

These challenges impact the evaluation capacity of Czech social services nonprofit organizations evidenced by the ministry stating that “the quality of the provided services is not adequately checked,” and “there do not exist comprehensive data on social services and quality analyses are not performed” (MoLSA, 2022c). While the MoLSA’s strategy supports quality improvement of the services driven by their 15 standards, it appears they don’t collect or sufficiently use information on the performance and outcomes of those services (MoLSA, 2022d). Their *Standards for Quality in Social Services* in Decree on Implementing Certain Provisions of the Act on Social services 2006, state, “The most important indicator for the evaluation of services, however, is how the provided service projects into the life of the people who receive it” (MoLSA, 2006). The criteria for Standards 5 and 15 are the only ones that explicitly reference “evaluation.” Standard 5, Individual Planning of the Course of Social Service, states “The provider has written internal rules according to the type and mission of the social service, which govern the planning and method of re-evaluating the service provision process” and “Together with the person, the provider continuously assesses whether their personal goals are being met.” Standard 15, Improving the Quality of Social Services, states “The provider continuously checks and evaluates whether the method of providing social services is in accordance with the defined mission, goals and principles of the social service and the personal goals of individual persons” and “The provider also involves employees and other interested natural and legal persons in the evaluation of the provided social service” (MoLSA, 2006). While all social services organizations are regulated by these standards, how organizations satisfy them and engage in evaluation typically varies across types of organizations. For example, how an organization that serves senior citizens evaluates its

services would likely differ than one who serves people rehabbing from substance abuse because each is answering different evaluative questions, measuring different outcomes and indicators, and inquiring into different criteria about their services, which in turn require different data collection methods. What is measured significantly drives how to best measure it.

Evaluation in the Czech Republic

According to the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), there are approximately 165 national and regional evaluation associations around the world (IOCE, 2024). The Czech Evaluation Society (CES), founded in 2007, “is a voluntary, self-governed, non-profit, apolitical, and independent association of professional evaluators” whose “members evaluate public and private-sector development projects and programs” (Czech Evaluation Society, 2022). CES adopted *The Evaluator’s Code of Ethics* in 2011 and *Formal Standards of Conducting Evaluations* in 2013. While CES does not engage in all evaluations of social services, they serve as a pipeline of external evaluators that can be hired for evaluations required by the MoLSA or EU Social Investment Fund. CES also provides professional development with occasional workshops and an annual conference, therefore building evaluation capacity among its member evaluators. The Czech journal *Evaluation Theory and Practice* began publishing in 2013, and its mission is “to create a space for professional discourse about evaluation issues in the Czech and Slovak Republics and thus help to expand the evaluation capabilities between commissioners, evaluators, and other stakeholders” (Evaluation Theory and Practice, 2022).

These developments over the past sixteen years indicate that the evaluation profession is still rather new, and that evaluation is still evolving in the Czech Republic. Remr and Potluka (2020) remind us that the Czech culture and use of terminology around evaluation today is still influenced by the centrally planned economy of the Soviet era evidenced by the dominance of monitoring; the narrow purpose of evaluation for reporting; and lack of trust in evaluation data. They also reference the universally common ECB challenges of funding, time, knowledge and skills, training, and methodological guidance. The supply of experienced external evaluators and university courses in evaluation lag behind growing demand. Despite these challenges, the evaluation requirements from EU financed projects and assistance from the Czech Developmental Agency have been significant catalysts in the professionalization and evolution of evaluation (Remr & Potluka, 2020). If the promise of moving evaluation as a means for organizational learning and improvement is to be realized, Remr and Potluka remind us “Cooperation of all stakeholders is an essential issue for evaluation capacity building, especially in the Civil Society sector” (2020, p. 372).

Materials and Methods

The above description illustrates that the Czech Republic represents an interesting environment suitable for a closer examination of evaluation and ECB. As was mentioned, this study seeks to answer the exploratory research question, within the Czech context: What influences the state of evaluation and ECB in nonprofit social services organizations?. Supporting questions include, What challenges do these organizations face for the evaluation of their services? and How does the relationship with government impact their understanding of evaluation as a concept and process, and ultimately impact ECB? The exploratory question of evaluation capacity was answered by means of a national survey, and semi-structured interviews with directors of these organizations.

Survey

Table 1 serves as the basis for the development of a national, online survey sent to the directors of 1,032 (out of 1,055) registered social services provided by Czech nonprofit organizations, using Qualtrics software. The survey was developed from the literature on evaluation, ECB, frameworks and checklists, evaluability assessments, and existing ECB surveys used in various studies. The authors attempted to balance comprehensiveness with the feasibility to complete it given the time limitations of busy nonprofit directors. The initial draft of the survey based on contemporary literature was adapted to the Czech context, followed by a translation by the two Czech authors into Czech (the lead author only knew English, and this research fulfilled his Fulbright-Masaryk Award in NGO Management), pre-tested by three Czech social services nonprofit directors, and then revised again based on their feedback.

The Tailored Design Method (TDM) (Dillman, 2014) was used to promote and distribute the survey to maximize the response rate. Participants could enter a drawing of five random winners of a gift card worth 1,200CZK (\$50 USD and 48 euros as of July 4, 2024). The following organizations endorsed the research: The Association of the Providers of Social Services in the Czech Republic, Czech Evaluation Society, Centre for Nonprofit Sector Research at Masaryk

Annual Budget (CZK)	Number	%	University, Faculty of Social Studies at Charles University, and the University of Ostrava.
0 - 2,499,999	38	9%	The survey response was 41.3%, and the sample profile data is shown below in Tables 2 and 3:
2,500,000 - 4,999,999	67	16%	
5,000,000 - 9,999,999	103	24%	
10,000,000 - 14,999,999	54	13%	
15,000,000 - 24,999,999	60	14%	
25,000,000 - 49,999,999	60	14%	
50,000,000+	44	10%	
Total	426	100%	

Table 2. Annual Budget in 2022 (n=426)

Table 3. Sources of Revenue (n=426)

Sources of Revenue	%
Public sector through state	65%
Revenues of the organization (payments)	14%
EU Social Investment Fund	8%
Funders - legal entities	7%
Donors - individuals	4%
Other	3%
Total	100%

One important point to note is the fact that 49% of the organizations are small with annual budgets ranging from 0 to 9,999,999 CZK (\$0-\$430,130 USD and 0-398,055 euros as of July 4, 2024). Another is that most of their revenue comes from government, common to social services, with 73% from the Czech government and the EU combined. Of the 426 organizations, 77.6% provided one to three different social services while the remaining 23.4% provided four or more different social services.

The sample represents the population as shown below in Figures 2-4:

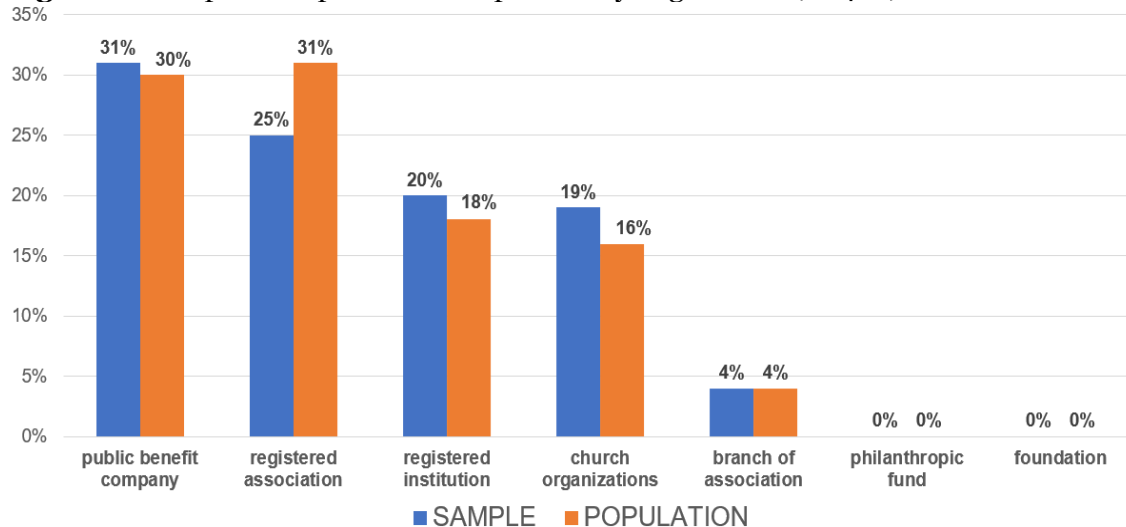
Figure 2. Sample to Population Comparison by Legal Form (n=426)

Figure 3. Sample to Population Comparison by Organization Age (n=391)

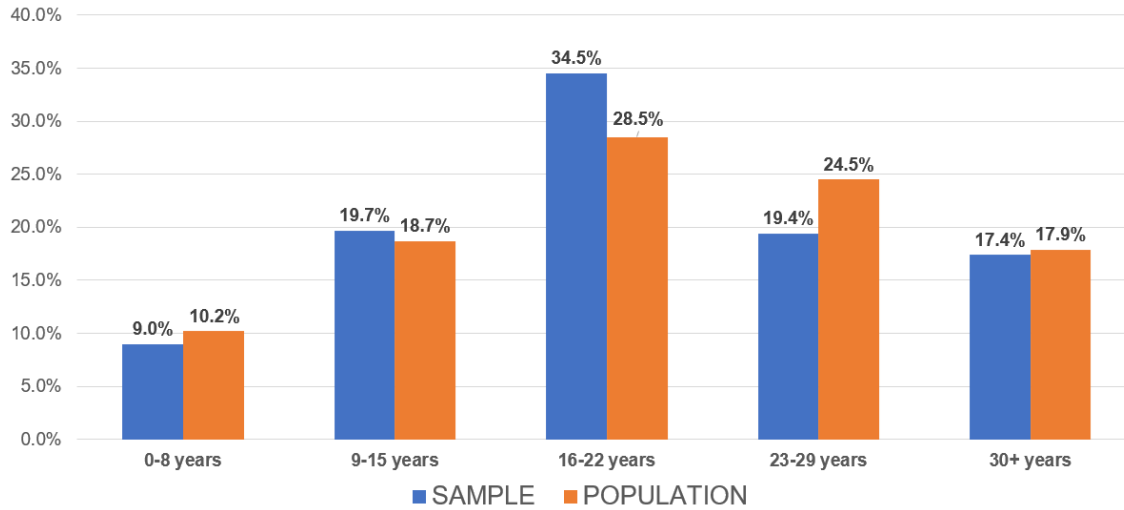
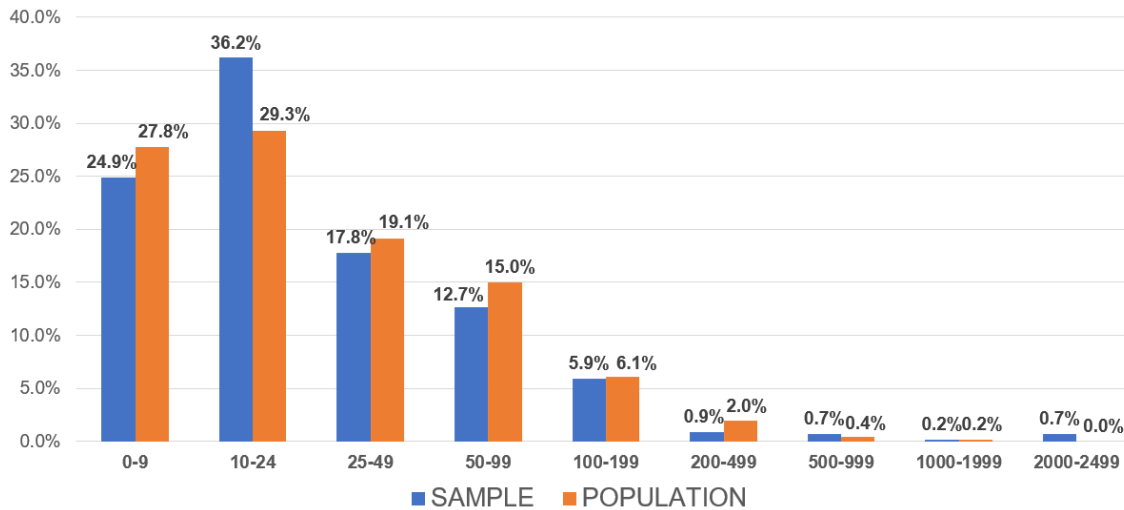


Figure 4. Sample to Population Comparison by # Full-time Employees (n=426)



Interviews

Table 1 also informed the development of a complementary, semi-structured interview conducted with twelve directors of nonprofit social services organizations. Organizations were randomly chosen and contacted. Those directors who agreed to participate represented a variety of organizations regarding region, size, and age. Table 4 shows the profile information of the twelve organizations, represented by their directors who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 4. Interview Organization's Profile Information (n=12)

Region	Legal form	Annual budget (CZK)	Age (years)
Ústecký Region	Registered association	0 - 2,499,999	9
Prague	Registered association	5,000,000 - 9,999,999	28
Pilsen Region	Registered association	10,000,000 - 14,999,999	27
South Bohemian	Public benefit company	2,500,000 - 4,999,999	12
Zlín Region	Public benefit company	5,000,000 - 9,999,999	12
Hradec Králové Region	Public benefit company	5,000,000 - 9,999,999	9
Pardubice Region	Public benefit company	5,000,000 - 9,999,999	27
Moravian-Silesian	Registered institution	5,000,000 - 9,999,999	25
Vysočina Region	Registered institution	15,000,000 - 24,999,999	23
Hradec Králové Region	Registered institution	25,000,000 - 49,999,999	19
Liberec Region	Church organization	15,000.000 - 24,999,999	17
Central Bohemian	Church organization	50,000,000+	31

The purpose of the interviews was to complement the survey by gleaning insights into the dynamics of evaluation within their organizations, including how they saw their role as leaders and decision-makers for evaluation, and the challenges they faced for it. The two Czech authors who conducted the interviews used clarifying, confirmatory, descriptive and explanatory probes, when necessary, based on participant responses to extract more thorough and clear responses from the participants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed using Transkriptor software, corrected by the two Czech authors, and translated for the English-speaking lead author for his participation in the data analysis. The analysis of the interviews was conducted in two stages. In the first stage two of the authors, one who conducted the interview and one who did not, both coded all interviews and then met to discuss discrepancies and come to consensus for inter-rater reliability, and then all authors grouped codes into common themes.

Given that ECB is a relatively new phenomenon in the Czech context of social services, a hermeneutic analysis with an inductive approach using open inquiry for coding was applied. The authors did not have a set of codes representing things they looked for and instead interpreted the data. Both coding authors instead just let the data do the talking and compared codes with each other for the same interviews. There may have been some bias from the ECB framework which might have subconsciously emphasized what they were looking for; however, both authors did their best to wipe the slate clean and coded based on what the data presented. The author who conducted the interview would be more familiar with the data than the second coding author who did not. However, that can be an advantage in coding as researchers through the process get closer to the data, and in having the other author who did not interview that participant serve to complement the author who did in the comparison and discussion of codes from both. The second stage involved the authors taking the coded results and cross-referencing them with Table 1 for analysis against the ECB dimensions.

Lastly, both the survey and interview analyses were combined for a more robust understanding of what took place in these organizations regarding ECB from their directors' perspectives. While the information obtained through the survey offers a more general view of the whole population, the information from the interviews attempts to explain the individual phenomena observed.

Results

ECB Dimensions

While 426 participants completed the survey, not all answered all the questions which explains why some of the numbers of participants (the “n’s”) for each of the results are slightly different. Also, for those participants whose social services were not evaluated, they did not answer all the same questions as those whose were evaluated, as skip patterns were used. Of the 426 survey participants, 51% indicate all their social services were evaluated while 20% said most, 14% said some and 15% said none. Of those that had at least some of their services evaluated, their challenges for evaluating them are shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Challenges for Evaluation of Social Services (n=362)

Challenge	#	% responses	% cases
Not enough time planned and dedicated for evaluation	174	18.8%	48.6%
Not enough money to pay for the evaluation	161	17.4%	44.7%
Lacking internal knowledge and skills in evaluation	128	13.9%	35.8%
Lack staff to conduct the evaluation	90	9.7%	25.0%
No evaluation plan	90	9.7%	25.0%
Difficulties in collecting services data	75	8.5%	21.9%
Lack of help/support in evaluating our services	57	6.1%	15.8%
Information technology (IT) problems	44	4.7%	12.2%
Missing structures and systems for adequate communication	31	3.3%	8.6%
Difficulties in managing services data	28	3.0%	7.8%
Don't know	26	2.8%	7.2%
Other	20	1.3%	3.3%
Organizational culture not supportive of change	3	0.3%	0.8%
Organizational culture not supportive of evaluation	1	0.2%	0.6%
Total	928	100%	

The 64 directors indicating in the survey none of their organizations' services were evaluated provided their reasons shown below in Table 6:

Table 6. Reasons why Social Services were not Evaluated (n=64)

Reason	#	% responses	% cases
We are not required to evaluate our services	34	24.3%	53.1%
We lack the funds necessary to pay for the evaluation	29	20.7%	45.3%
We lack the skills necessary to conduct the evaluation	29	20.7%	45.3%
We don't have time to conduct the evaluation	21	15.0%	32.8%
We don't know where to find an evaluator	12	8.6%	18.8%
We don't believe the evaluation of our services is necessary	11	7.9%	17.2%
Other	4	2.9%	6.3%
Total	140	100%	

The top three cited challenges for those organizations who had their services evaluated were two through four most frequently chosen for those who did not. For them, the top reason was they were not required to have their services evaluated. This presents an interesting incongruence with the interview results where almost all 12 interview participants said they would still have their services evaluated even if they were not required. There was a variance in what they would do within the scope of evaluation due to size, capacity, knowledge, and other factors. Some examples of what they said include:

“So, I think we would do it, but we would probably do it more and more on our knees. I think if nobody wanted us to do it, I don't think I'm going to make any graphic charts to prove the mission of the organization.”

“I would think so. It's just that it would never take that kind of form... like formal. It's kind of like, you're always doing it on the fly and you're not making deliverables out of it.”

The importance of evaluation within the organization was consistent across all legal forms of organizations, as church organizations, public benefit companies, branch of associations, registered associations and registered institutions each deemed evaluation very important ranging from 55 to 67%, while a similar range covered those indicating evaluation was somewhat important from 31 to 39%.

The survey and interview results are now presented by each ECB dimension. This information provides insights into what is behind these challenges and an overall picture of ECB within these organizations. It is important to note that some redundancy is expected as they are not mutually exclusive, they impact each other, and some results can be relevant to multiple dimensions.

Leadership

Directors play a key role in the presence of evaluation, and it is a matter of accountability for them in their interest to keep their organizations in the provider network and on the register of social service providers. For who makes decisions to pay for evaluation in their organization they were the majority at 57%. The degrees to which they integrated external demands for evaluation into their organization's evaluation systems and processes were 67% somewhat and 19% completely. One director acknowledged the political frame for evaluation:

“So, my role is, I would say, partly controlling and partly motivating... So, also linking and networking within the services and possibly also by being involved in politics somehow in that external environment as well, so some comparison of what's happening in the region where we operate and therefore some sharing of trends, as it is in the community planning of the cities where we operate, because I'm there in some way as well.”

The role directors see themselves play in, and the extent to which they are, supporting and driving the evaluation process is important for successful ECB. One director describes their role as a driver of the process:

“Then in terms of the effectiveness of services, for example, and coordination and so on. So that's what we're trying to do, who's evaluating that is me as the director and now we have a direct support team leader, so we're actually working with him to do that. I think that's our job - just to get it done in some way.”

Organizational Culture

Results produced numerous indicators concerning whether the organization's culture was conducive to evaluation and ECB. For the importance of the evaluation of their social services, 60% said very important and 35% said somewhat important. Approximately 71% indicated their organization seeks ways to improve processes within their social services while about 74% indicated their organization views problems or issues as opportunities to learn. For indicating their organization's tolerance, openness, and receptivity to negative information, 79% used negative feedback from employees to implement changes; 76% encouraged employees to provide both negative and positive feedback; and 69% discussed negative feedback with employees in meetings.

About 62% of directors indicated their organization allows enough time to reflect on and discuss its successes, challenges, and failures while 70% of the directors indicated their organization discusses evaluation regularly. How organizations financially account for their evaluation expenses is a significant cultural indicator for how they view them and prioritize them in their budget. In this study 57% of the participants indicated they recorded evaluation expenses as expenses related to their services while 29% recorded them as administrative or “overhead” expenses. This also is important because nonprofits are pressured to keep administrative or “overhead” costs low.

In cross tabbing the data, the percentage difference between the 70% of the sample participants indicated that the evaluation of their social services was discussed regularly at meetings and approximately 14% who said it was not, were consistent across who typically evaluates the social services. As expected, the extent that evaluation was deemed important within the organization matched up well with how often evaluation was discussed at meetings. Of the approximately 60% of the sample said evaluation was very important to their organization, 74.4% indicated it was discussed regularly at meetings, while of the approximately 35% who indicated evaluation was somewhat important, only 25% of them said it was discussed regularly at meetings.

Organizational Learning

All 362 organizations that had their services evaluated indicated they used their results. Examples are shown below in Table 7:

Table 7. How Evaluation Results of Social Services are Used (n=362)

How evaluation results are used	#	% responses	% cases
Make changes in existing services	283	18.7%	78.6%
Establish service goals or targets	257	16.9%	71.4%
In strategic planning	197	13.0%	54.7%
Outreach and public relations	142	9.4%	39.4%
Make staffing decisions	129	8.5%	35.8%
Reporting compliance with external stakeholders	111	7.3%	30.8%
Develop new services	107	7.1%	29.7%
Budgeting decisions	101	6.7%	28.1%
Report to management of organization	94	6.3%	26.4%
Secure funding	84	5.6%	23.6%
Other	11	0.5%	2.2%
Don't know	2	0.1%	0.6%
Total	1,518	100%	

Directors were asked if their organizations learned from their evaluation results, and 52% indicated they learned a lot while 46% learned a little. Table 8 below shows examples of what was learned:

Table 8. What Organizations Learned from their Social Service Evaluations (n=357)

What was learned	#	% responses	% cases
How to improve our services	308	39.2%	86.3%
More about how our services work	184	23.4%	51.5%
What is necessary to evaluate services	133	16.9%	37.3%
About the evaluation process	92	11.7%	25.8%
Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders	57	7.3%	16.0%
Don't know	6	0.8%	1.7%
Other	7	0.6%	1.4%

Total	785	100%
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Discussing evaluation regularly at meetings, while important, is not enough. Meaningful reflection, discussion, review, and use of results and closing feedback loops are all necessary for continuous learning and improvement. Of the approximately 70% of participants that indicated that the evaluation of their social services was discussed regularly at meetings, approximately 65% said there was enough time allowed for the organization to reflect on and discuss its successes, challenges, and failures while approximately 32% said there was not. Also, within that 70%, 76% indicated they often sought ways to improve processes within their social services while 24% said they sometimes sought them.

Resources

Table 5 shows that the four most frequent responses for challenges faced with evaluation are resources – time, funds, knowledge and skills and personnel. Time remains a challenge for the evaluation of social services due to most of the organizations being small, struggling to meet the demand for their services, staff turnover, and the opportunity costs involved when evaluations are conducted by internal staff. This is reflected in some of the directors' comments:

“I think a smart evaluator also tries not to burden the team more than necessary.”

“How do we reduce the administrative burden and have the evaluation set up so that it's sort of like automatic, that we can just click somewhere or open something up and see how we're doing? So, I think that's kind of been a goal of ours for a number of years that we haven't quite succeeded in.”

The interviews revealed that the costs for evaluation were typically paid for with the funds received from the external entity requesting the evaluation, such as the MoLSA, the EU Social Investment Fund, or regional government while internal evaluations were paid out of general operating budgets, or the funds received for the services provided. The mix of external and internal evaluations was reflected in top three percentages of sources of funds to pay for evaluations in the survey respondents' organizations, with 43% from the public sector (Czech government), 33% from their own internal funds, and 9% from the EU Social Investment Fund. Organizations with larger budgets typically had higher percentages of use of external evaluators whether they be independent, from the government or other external entities.

In cross tabbing the data, 57% of the directors or head/service managers were most likely to be the one evaluating the services across all budget categories, ranging from 61% in organizations with a budget of 25,000,000 - 49,999,999 CZK to 49% for the largest organizations with a budget of more than 50,000,000 CZK. Only 16% of the sample indicated they had an employee dedicated to evaluations, otherwise known as an internal evaluator, with not much difference across budget sizes ranging from 14.7% for organizations with a budget of 5,000,000 - 9,999,999 CZK to 18.5% for the largest organizations with a budget of more than 50,000,000 CZK. Organizations utilizing an external, independent evaluator comprised 11.3% of the sample with not much difference across budget categories except for the lowest category of 0 - 2,499,999 CZK for whom only 3 organizations utilized one. When cross tabbed against the number of full-time employees and the age of the organization, differences were not significant as the director or service manager garnered the highest percentages for who evaluated the services in every category.

The challenge for affording external evaluators was reflected in most of the interviews:

“Well, we don't have an external evaluator, and we don't get a penny for that at all, so it's just that we're a learning organization and we have to be able to do it ourselves and set the dynamics of the service.”

“We would reach for an external (evaluator), or at least maybe even calmly more multiple people, who could give us again some even picture of how they do it, what good practice they have, so we would stand for maybe sharing as well. Now that the money is not open...we're kind of doing it here on our own.”

The financial support of the MoLSA, EU Social Investment Fund, and regional governments factored into their ability to utilize an external evaluator:

“We actually brought in like an external worker, Mrs. Soňa K., that was a condition of the European Social Fund... we accepted the challenge of Mrs. Markéta P. of the Social Innovation Department of the MoLSA where there was a mandatory evaluation by an external evaluator. So, without those projects we would not have, we might never have got to that point at all.”

“So, actually the only evaluation that we're involved in now - quite spiritedly I think - and it's being done for us by somebody else is actually in a project that we're doing now with support. Or actually it's the second project that we have, where we are implementing a social housing project from a call - before it was OPZ (European Social Fund - Operational Programme for Employment), now it's under the OPZ+ (European Social Fund - Operational Programme for Employment plus).”

The internal knowledge and skills to conduct evaluations was also an issue, as expertise in evaluation is not part of the training for social workers nor is it typically part of the background of directors of these organizations. Here is what a few directors had to say:

“I think the other thing that's missing is that... in that area of social work, it's not quite clear how to evaluate those social services. There's not some sort of, I think, widespread knowledge base. And people don't even have that information, they don't know how to do it.”

“We don't quite know how to go about it. We like to have it written down some, the area of housing, like maybe gained employment, how many like can we have, how many women... what helped them the most. So, from that perspective, we would benefit from her (external evaluator's) professional perspective.”

Systems and Structures

Approximately 25% of the surveyed directors (n=360) indicated their organizations did not have an evaluation plan, and none of the directors interviewed referenced anything resembling an ECB plan. However, some indicated their desires to expand their evaluation efforts to be more comprehensive, robust, and meaningful including those who specifically referenced the desire to measure the specific impact on individual clients. Some of the directors interviewed indicated their organizations did not have a strategic plan, while some had strategic plans, but evaluation was not included in them. Those indicating evaluation was in their strategic plans offered few specific examples except to inform the plan for making changes to services, but not necessarily for planning on how to expand or improve their evaluation process. Some directors also expressed

the desire to make evaluation more meaningful but felt limited by the parameters of the external stakeholders requiring it, as in these examples:

“Then there's the system maybe at the level of the municipality or at the level of those foundations, which tend to be like more substantive...If it's just some reporting according to some terribly complicated and completely arbitrary template, then in that case maybe it's not really evaluation in the sense of the word evaluation, it's more about fulfilling some bureaucratic requirements and discipline mainly.”

“We are either paid from the budget of the Zlín Region - we didn't have an evaluation there, but when it's the projects from the OPZ (European Social Fund - Operational Programme for Employment), where there are more funds and more possibilities, they basically involve other entities. So, it is not a rule, it depends on how the Zlín Region writes the project, but in this last project it was the case that there was actually an evaluation, because they are of course interested in the how the funds are spent.”

Approximately 70% of the directors indicated their organizations discussed evaluation regularly at meetings, and approximately 74% of the directors indicated their organizations had evaluation included in their policies and procedures. Other challenges related to systems and structures include difficulties in data collection (22%); information technology issues (12%); missing structures and systems for adequate communication of information and results (9%); and problems managing their data (8%). Of the approximately 60% of participants indicated evaluation was very important to their organization, 54% said it was included in their organization's policies and procedures while approximately 9% said it was not. Of the approximate 34% that said evaluation was somewhat important, approximately 19% included it in their policies and procedures while about 10% did not.

Program Evaluability

Approximately 89% of directors indicated their social services had clear goals and approximately 82% indicated their services have clear and well-defined outcomes. Approximately 88% of directors indicated there is agreement among the users of evaluation results for how those results will be used. However, concerns stem from the fact that approximately 65% of directors said none of their services had a theory of change and about 74% said none had a logic model. This raises the question of what the basis was for, and how they developed, clear and well-defined outcomes without a theory of change or logic model, or how they're framing “outcomes.”

Discussion

The organizations' hard work, concern and care for clients shone through all interviews with their directors. A recurring theme, except from a few of the larger, more sophisticated organizations, is the lack of understanding and/or narrow framing and perspective for evaluation. Often the concept was used interchangeably with “inspections,” “quality assurance,” “meeting standards,” “monitoring,” and “audits.” While they may be components of an overall evaluation effort, they alone do not comprise a holistic or comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the services on individual clients. This also presents the possibility that they have a limited understanding of client impact to be mostly client satisfaction. This dilemma seems largely driven by the fact that most formal, structured evaluations are externally driven by the MoLSA whose goal is to assess the organization's ability to meet their 15 standards. The standards are rigorous and seemingly a good way to assess quality and ensure the safety of clients, however they do not specifically extend

to measuring the desired outcomes for each client. That seems to be left to the organizations, most of whom do not know how to do it and/or don't have the capacity to do it. While most survey participants said their services have clear and well-defined outcomes, the measuring of service outcomes was not referenced in any of the interviews. Based on these results, it is possible that what they mean by "outcomes" is the ability to meet the MoLSA's standards. Deeper investigation into this would be necessary to fully understand this incongruence in results.

Resource dependency heavily influences the behavior and decisions of nonprofit organizations because they are not self-sustaining organizations and instead are open systems relying heavily on external financial support to deliver their services. It's no surprise that money was a recurring theme throughout this study within the context of funds to provide and/or expand services, conduct evaluations, and pay staff. The inability to adequately pay their social workers who interact directly with their clients was discussed in all twelve interviews, and the dilemma is common in other countries including the U.S. This should not be framed solely as a staffing issue, as turnover is a program issue in terms of quality of service delivery; consistency with clients in terms of knowledge of their case, relationships with them, etc., and the constant need for training of new staff. If there is instability with delivery of services it is likely to also impact their evaluation, especially in smaller organizations who cannot afford to hire an external evaluator. How can an organization build capacity to evaluate their services when they struggle simply to deliver them?

The tying of the evaluation to funding seemed embedded in how stakeholders understood evaluation and why it was conducted. Interview participants expressed the desire to have an external evaluator, but most cannot afford one. The confusion of evaluation with monitoring might contribute to a narrow perspective for the role of the evaluator as important only to securing funding which contributes to a culture of compliance in lieu of organizational learning. This misaligned prioritization of evaluation driven by resource dependency often runs counter to learning and instead develops more so a culture of compliance.

The top three challenges for evaluation are consistent with some of the more frequently cited challenges for evaluation in other ECB studies including Wade and Kallemeyn's qualitative study of 12 Chicago area nonprofits (2020); Bourgeois and Cousins' qualitative study of Canadian federal government organizations (2013); Fierro and Christie's study of 162 evaluators and program managers from U.S. federal public health programs (2017); Taylor-Ritzler et al.'s study of 169 Chicago area nonprofits (2013); Hudib and Cousins' global study of 52 bilateral and multilateral aid organizations (2022); and Carman and Fredericks's study of 189 Indiana nonprofits (2008). In the Indiana study, the challenges closely matched their most frequently cited "barriers" for evaluation that were "not enough time," "not enough trained staff," and "not enough evaluation expertise" (Carman & Fredericks, 2008). These other studies in other countries and contexts, including those in places where evaluation is arguably more advanced than in the Czech Republic, show that these challenges remain consistent across all because they are inherent to the dynamics of program evaluation and ECB and where they are in their evolution within nonprofit organizations, including social services.

For professional development and training of staff on evaluation, time is the biggest constraint. Most organizations are small and therefore do not have a dedicated person to conduct the evaluation, so the responsibility falls to the social worker or to the director. Most of the interview participants stated this responsibility was in the social workers' job descriptions. However, the lack of knowledge and skills on top of the lack of time result in opportunity costs for their core work. Survey participants indicated they provide professional development for evaluation including courses but given that very few university courses in evaluation exist in the Czech

Republic, it is not clear what they are referencing. The receptivity and support for evaluation internally from staff had mixed results from the interviews ranging from them understanding its importance and that it's part of their job to not believing it is helpful in the organization meeting its goals. This also may relate to their level of understanding for the concept and process, as understanding must come first before valuing something.

The role of the director in the evaluation process varied greatly across the interview participants, and only a few conveyed that they “drove” the process to make sure it happened. All understandably seemed unaware of the concept of ECB or what their role should be in it. A few in the larger, more advanced organizations desired the ability to expand their evaluation process to be more meaningful by measuring the impact of their services on individual clients. However, 1) they were unclear on how to build capacity to move in that direction, 2) they cited capacity issues as a reason for their inability, and/or 3) that the MoLSA or regional governments were not interested enough in individual client impact.

These organizations use evaluation results for important things such as planning, making changes, establishing goals and targets, however it is unclear whether they transform such use into continuous learning towards sustainable evaluation practice or if these examples of use are limited in scope and depth due to their incomplete understanding for evaluation.

Limitations and Further Research

This research discovered Czech nonprofit social services organizations' understanding and activity around evaluation. However, the results are through the lens and perspective of their directors who, while the likely choice for such inquiry, may also reflect some social desirability bias in their responses. Every attempt has been made to ensure accurate, two-way translation however, contextual nuances and the impact of the English-speaking evaluation lexicon may have impacted the participants' understanding of questions. For example, there are several terms in the Czech language that refer to evaluation - "evaluace" and "hodnocení" or "vyhodnocení." This inconsistency may result in different perceptions of the purpose, methodology, and overall process of evaluation.

The confusion between monitoring and evaluation and the variance in social constructions, understanding and perceptions around the concept and process of evaluation warrants a qualitative study to delve deeper into what these organizations specifically think evaluation is. Such a study should inquire with other key stakeholders such as social workers. Some of the interview participants reference “individual client plans” and “outcomes” as a part of meeting quality standards, but it was unclear what was meant by “outcomes” and what they did with either, warranting further investigation. In-depth case studies are recommended where the researcher would closely observe their work with evaluation, how their services are evaluated against the MoLSA's standards, and the dynamics between stakeholders around evaluation and the dimensions for ECB.

Conclusions and Recommended Practice

This study, while conducted in the Czech Republic, reflects some conclusions and implications for practice applicable for the rest of the world. The top three most cited challenges for the evaluation of their services in time, funds, and internal knowledge and skills are consistent with other ECB studies from around the world, including countries in which evaluation is advanced as a

profession. This seems to indicate that these challenges are universal and global regardless of the level of professionalization of evaluation in that country, and the type, size, and maturity of the organization. With the understanding, appreciation, concern and factoring in of differences in context and culture, this consistency still provides opportunities for organizations to learn from each other's challenges and successes in ECB.

The interview results point out two important factors for ECB not often discussed – stakeholders' social construction of the concept and process of evaluation and the organizations' directors lacking knowledge of ECB and what their role can and arguably should be for it. Organizations may respond affirmatively in studies they are engaging in "evaluation," but what do they mean by it, and what exactly are they doing for it. Confusion between monitoring and evaluation along with narrowly framing evaluation as quality assurance or client satisfaction shows the variance in understanding of evaluation. Education or training in ECB should be seriously considered in nonprofit management degree programs as well as non-academic training programs conducted by nonprofit centers around the world.

The state of evaluation within Czech nonprofit social services organizations indicates a solid foundation to build from. However, the dominant influence from MoLSA, regional governments, and EU Social Investment Fund seems to significantly form the organization directors' social constructions, understandings and perceptions of the concept and process of evaluation. This in turn impacts their lacking knowledge of ECB and what role they could play in it, reflected in the interviews when they deferred the addressing of ECB challenges to the external stakeholders requiring the evaluation. Client satisfaction, monitoring, and quality standards are important components of a robust and comprehensive evaluation process, but in this study they often were confused individually or collectively as "evaluation." The missing component appears to be the measuring of the impact of services on each individual client as outcomes, in terms of how their lives were changed or improved. Some directors expressed interest in expanding their evaluation efforts to include outcome measurement but cited lacking capacity as a deterrent. Organizations should conduct an evaluability assessment using the six dimensions for ECB to build long-term sustainable evaluation practice. With such an effort they can begin transforming their organizational culture into one driven by continuous learning and improvement.

We offer below in Table 9 conclusions with corresponding recommended practice by each key stakeholder group within the world of Czech nonprofit social services, conveying that ECB "takes a village" and should not solely be the responsibility of the social services organizations.

Table 9. Conclusions with Corresponding Recommended Practice for ECB

Conclusions	Recommended practice	Stakeholder group
Predominant focus on client satisfaction, MoLSA standards, monitoring and outputs	Build upon this foundation to move towards also measuring outcomes for individual clients • Develop theory of change model for services • Develop logic model for services • Develop outcome measurement framework	Social services organizations
Lacking funds to expand evaluation effort	• Budget for evaluation with dedicated line item • Negotiate with external funders for more funds for evaluation	Social services organizations
	Increase funding for expanded evaluation	MoLSA and regional governments

Demonstrated desire to expand and improve evaluation	Develop ECB plan and link to strategic plan	Social services organizations
Social worker staffing concerns and challenges	• Advocate to MoLSA to set higher rate of pay for social workers • Budget and seek professional development opportunities • Increase pay of social workers • Increase funding for professional development for evaluation and ECB • Advocate with Ministry of Education to universities to offer courses in evaluation • Promote <i>Formal Standards for Conducting Evaluations</i> and <i>Evaluator's Code of Ethics</i> • Collaborate with universities to offer professional development and consulting to organizations in evaluation and ECB ○ Internships ○ Practicums	Social services organizations
• Insufficient compensation • Extreme workload – burnout/turnover • Professionalization • Lack of knowledge, skills and training in evaluation		MoLSA and regional governments
	Provide professional development opportunities in evaluation and ECB	Czech Evaluation Society
		The Association of the Providers of Social Services in the Czech Republic (APSS CR)

While these conclusions and recommended practice are specific to this Czech study, all can serve for learning and adaptation of human and social services organizations from around the world who are challenged with evaluation and/or seek to develop sustainable evaluation practice.

The dimensions for ECB can be applied to these organizations regardless of region, legal form, or size. Such application can provide a guide for building sustainable evaluation practice through training, workshops, hands-on learning, coaching and mentoring. In some ECB workshops, as those delivered by one of the authors, the dimensions have served as workshop components and collectively as an overall guide for recommended practice. Evaluation is nothing new to social services and the field of social work. For example, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has in its Ethical Standards, 3.03 a standard for Performance Evaluation that states, “Social workers who have responsibility for evaluating the performance of others should fulfill such responsibility in a fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria.” Standard 5.02, for Evaluation and Research has 17 sub standards stating social workers should “monitor and evaluate policies, the implementation of programs, and practice interventions”; “promote and facilitate evaluation and research to contribute to the development of knowledge”; “critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice”; and fulfill other sub standards for how they evaluate programs, policies and interventions as well as report findings (NASW, 2021). The second example, worth mentioning because it represents the Czech context, is The Institute of Education of the Association of Social Service Providers of the Czech Republic which offers two evaluation-related courses, “Evaluation and motivation of social service workers” and “Social service quality assessment and change implementation” (Institute of Education APSS CR, 2025). Standards and how-to workshops are important; however, the authors feel the key

missing piece is the organizations' development of evaluation capacity, and therefore training and professional development in this area would be helpful for nonprofit managers.

Clients or consumers ultimately will benefit from more robust, meaningful, comprehensive and impactful evaluations driving the improvement of services they receive which ultimately enhances Czech civil society. The Czech context in this study can assist other former Soviet Bloc nations who are challenged with evaluation and ECB on similar trajectories, as they their civil societies evolve, and they advance relationships between their governments and nonprofit sectors. This study reminds us that the challenges for evaluation and ECB are global and universal, existing across nations; types, sizes, and ages of organizations; and contexts. Leaders of nonprofit organizations can benefit from learning about evaluation and ECB so they can go beyond the contextual grounding and compliance culture set by their external stakeholders and be catalysts for advancing and progressing the evaluation of their organizations' programs or services.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Ethics Approval

The Grand Valley State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Protocol #23-018-H) reviewed this research and issued a Certificate of Exemption. This study was also approved by the Ethical Commission for Research at University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic.

Informed Consent

All participants in the study were informed regarding the purpose of the study and their role and rights associated with participation. All participants gave their informed consent.

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Author Biographies

Salvatore P. Alaimo is Professor at Grand Valley State University, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA where he has taught courses in philanthropy and nonprofit administration for fifteen years. He received the Fulbright-Masaryk Scholarship in NGO Management and taught and conducted research in the Czech Republic 2022-2023. Some of his publications include book chapters in *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Nonprofit and Public Leadership*, *Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: A Reference Handbook*, and the *Handbook of Research on Nonprofit Economics and Management* as well as journal articles in *International Journal of Community Well Being*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, and *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*. He has produced two documentaries, a feature length film *What is Philanthropy?* and a short film entitled *Sew What?*. Professor Alaimo earned his Ph.D. in Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University.

Jakub Pejcal serves as a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Administration at Masaryk University, in Brno, Czech Republic where he also plays an active role in the Centre for Nonprofit Sector Research. His teaching and research span a variety of topics, with a focus on the economics, accounting, and management of non-governmental nonprofit organizations. Currently, his research delves into key issues facing nonprofit sector, including financial health, transparency and accountability, evaluation, and capacity building.

Simona Smrčková is a Phd student in the Department of Public and Social Policy, within the Faculty of Social Sciences, at Charles University, in Prague, Czech Republic. Her research interests are in evaluation and evaluation capacity building.