Title	**Creating a participatory, strategic and sustainability-driven evaluation system at the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education**
Key words	Participatory evaluation, impact and program assessment, *Rating*, *Activity Dynamics* and *Validation*, community-based education, Trent University, Canada
Reference	Barr, T. and K. Hall, J.M. Chevalier 2007. Creating a participatory, strategic and sustainability-driven evaluation system at the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education. Social Analysis Systems² 1.0 (http://www.sas-pm.com), 7 pp.
Context	For the past ten years, the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education (TCCBE) has provided a community-based brokering service between faculty and students and community organizations to support the completion of local community-inspired projects. As it implements its three-year strategic plan (May 2007- May 2010), subject to approval by the Board of Directors, the TCCBE needs a useful system to continually evaluate the achievement of strategic priorities and their relevance to the Centre and its partners. The system should address important questions, such as: Is the Centre meeting the needs of today's communities? How effectively is the Centre working with community organizations, students, faculty, and other stakeholders? What processes and outcomes should projects demonstrate and how well is the Centre doing in delivering these outcomes? What is the cumulative effect of the many projects that are successfully completed? How can these questions be answered using a participatory, strategic and sustainable evaluation system? By having this evaluation system in place, the Centre will be able to track the effectiveness of the strategic plan and also respond more quickly to community need, funding opportunities, and policy developments.

Purpose

To explore the use of SAS^2 as a continuous evaluation system based on the active involvement of the community and the TCCBE Board, Committees and staff. The Centre views SAS^2 as a collaborative approach that enhances creativity, imagination and purposeful inquiry into the complex and often time-limited realities of the day. The tools and techniques integrate data collection, data analysis and training into a collaborative experience that combines rigor and understanding with efficiency (taking hours instead of weeks).

Process summary

On March 6, 2007, senior staff from the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education (TCCBE) and U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research (U-Links) along with some TCCBE Board members participated in a day-long workshop with Jacques Chevalier, Co-author of the *Social Analysis Systems (SAS²)*. The workshop was designed on the previous day by Chevalier, Barr and Hall based on TCCBE needs. It involved three main activities. The first activity was designed to investigate the main impact areas of TCCBE activities. The second activity looked at main program components of the TCCBE and the way they interact. The last activity was a validation exercise completed at the end of the day. Each activity resulted in a table or diagram with accompanying key notes, rationale and recommendations.

For the first two activities, the group split up and worked simultaneously, with relatively equal numbers of staff and Board members in each group. Each group did the third activity. There were five (5) staff and three (3) Board members in total.

The workshop was designed to introduce some key concepts and tools of SAS^2 while also producing immediate results to be used in the environmental scan (and ultimately the strategy development phase) of the TCCBE strategic planning process.

**Analysis and recommendations**

The first activity involved a participatory rating of the Centre's main impact areas using five evaluation criteria: the overall level of success (perceived by workshop participants), the importance of each impact area, the degree of innovation involved in each area,

Impact assessment

the level of difficulty involved, and the degree of control over the outcomes. The group created and agreed upon all of the main impact areas and the evaluation criteria before doing the rating. The rating scale was from 1 (the lowest score) to 7 (the highest score).

Activity 1: Main Impacts Areas of TCCBE Activities

Evaluation Criteria	PD Staff	Student Benefits	Experiential Learning Model	Community Outcomes	Positive C/U Relationships	Knowledge Building / Sharing
Levels of success 1 low - 7 very high	7	6	6	5	5	**2**
Importance 1 less - 7 very high	4	7	6	7	4	6
How innovative are we? 1 less - 7 very innovative	5	**3**	6	**2**	5	6
How easy is it to accomplish? 1 less - 7 very easy	6	4	7	**2**	**3**	**2**
Control of outcome 1 low - 7 very high	7	4	6	**2**	**3**	5
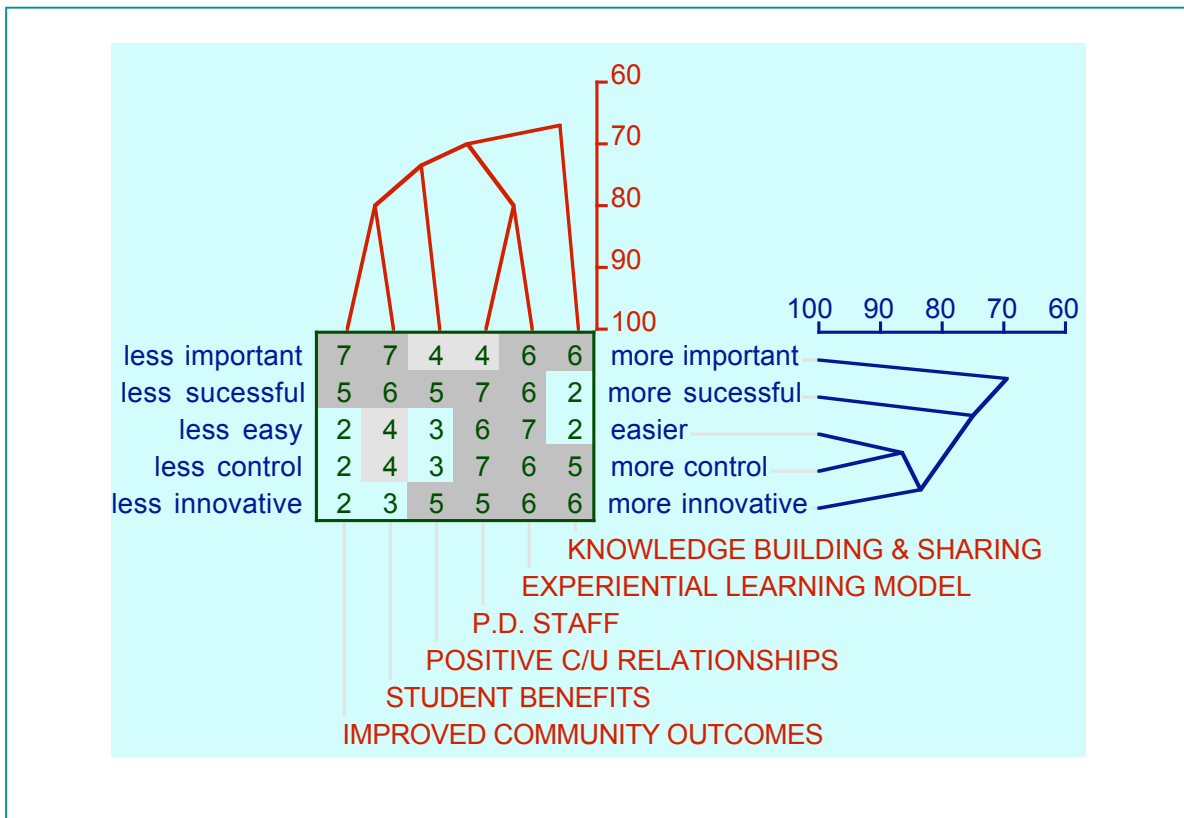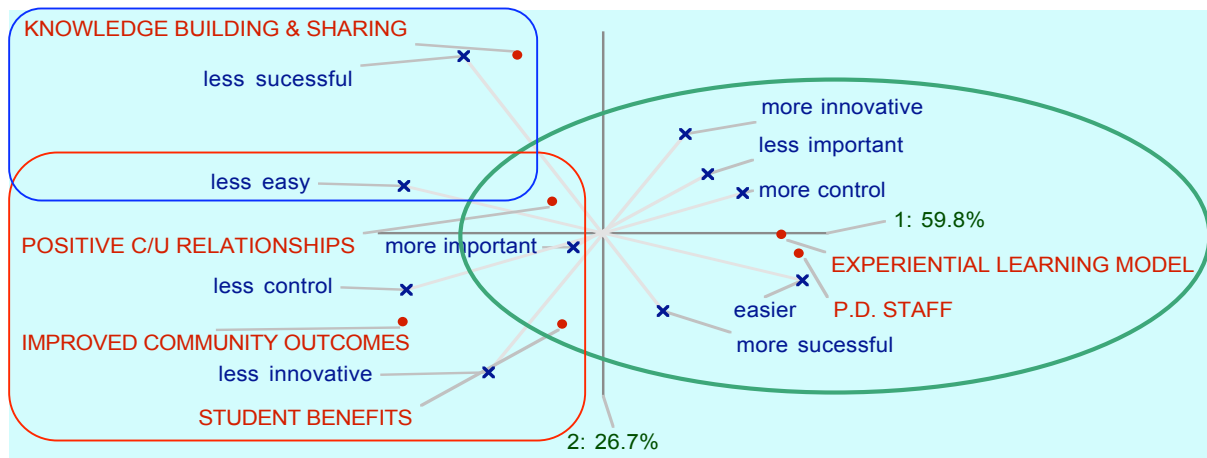
The level of success is highest in two areas: **Professional Development** for Staff (PD Staff), and **Student Benefits**. While less important compared to other objectives, professional development for staff is a high impact area. This is partly the result of regular meetings and a lot of information sharing, strategic evaluation, and planning among team members. Students also benefit greatly from the Centre's work as they take up most of the Centre's time and effort.

The Centre's **Experience Learning Model** constitutes a third high impact area. However, more time should go into preparing and refining this model and getting Faculty to incorporate it in the university curriculum.

Professional Development activities and the Experiential Learning Model tend to be under the Centre's control, present fewer difficulties, and have been the object of innovative work on the part of the Centre. The same cannot be said of Student Benefits: the Centre has not been able to innovate as much as it would like to, mostly because of its limited control over students' hard skills and the preparation and grading of students, which is under Faculty control and varies a great deal.

The Centre is doing relatively well in two other areas: **Community Outcomes**, and **Positive Community/University Relationships** (where the Centre enhances university visibility). The Centre has less control over these impact areas and faces real challenges. Still,
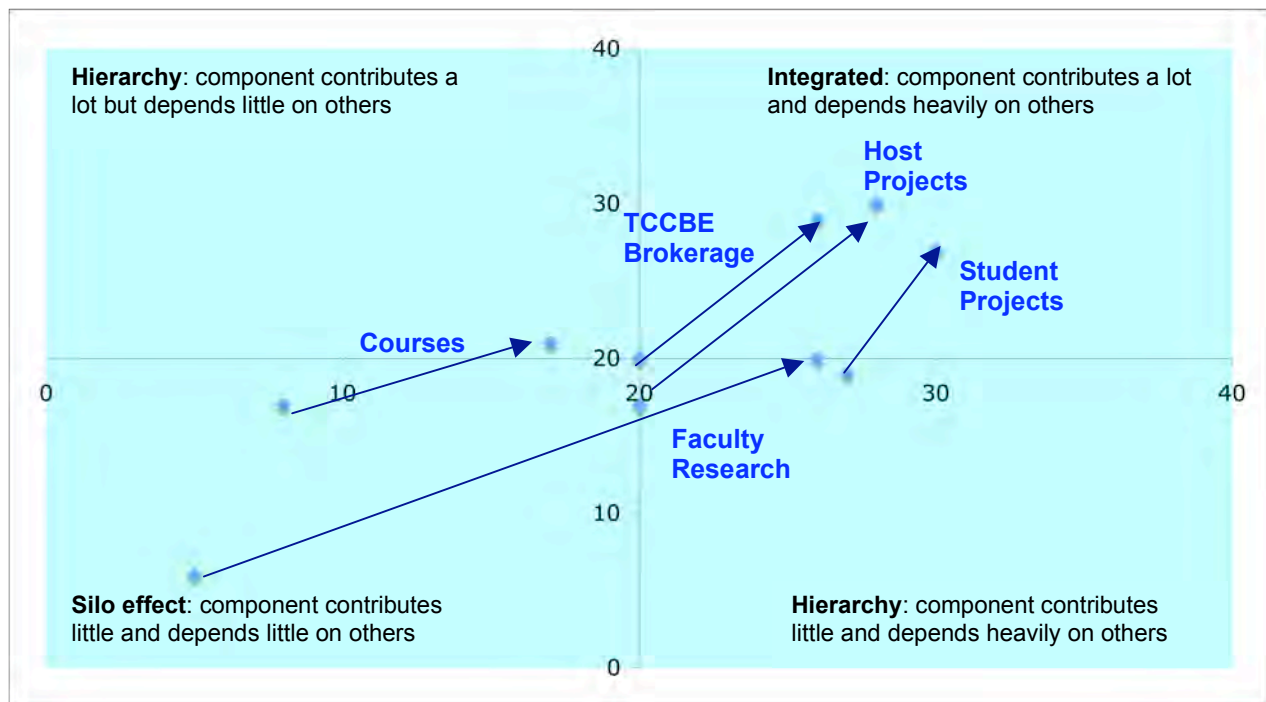
there is room for considerable improvement, including a better outreach strategy, projecting a professional image in the community, and introducing innovative training and action-research tools to achieve sustainable community outcomes that are useful and will satisfy host needs.

Although very important, **Knowledge Building and Sharing** is the Centre's weakest impact area, mostly because of lack of time. However, the Centre has decided over the last few months to remedy this by being proactive, launching a series of information sharing, promotional, and library development activities involving Faculty and community members.

Program assessment

The second activity focused on program activities. Participants assessed the actual and the desired interaction between the main program components (listed below). The assessment addressed two main questions: to what extent does each program component contribute to other program components, and what would be the optimal contribution in each case, keeping in mind what is feasible within a time frame of three years? The scale used is from 0 to 10. Scores for the current contribution are inserted in the upper half of each cell of the double-entry table appearing below. Scores for the desired contribution are inserted in the lower half.

Program Components	Courses	TCCBE Brokerage	Faculty Research	Student Projects	Host Projects	**Total Contribution**
Courses		4	1	8	4	17
		4	4	8	5	21
TCCBE Brokerage	3		**2**	8	7	20
	5		**8**	7	9	29
Faculty Research	**0**	2		**1**	3	6
	4	5		**5**	6	20
Student Projects	4	9	**0**		6	19
	4	9	**6**		8	27
Host Projects	1	5	**1**	10		17
	4	8	**8**	10		30
Total Dependence	8	20	4	27	20	79 / 200
	17	26	26	30	28	127 / 200

Hierarchy: component contributes a lot but depends little on others

Integrated: component contributes a lot and depends heavily on others

Host Projects

TCCBE Brokerage

Student Projects

Courses

Faculty Research

Silo effect: component contributes little and depends little on others

Hierarchy: component contributes little and depends heavily on others

The current **level of integration** between all program components is about 40% (79 / 200). Workshop participants hope to increase the integration level by 24% (127 / 200) within the next three years. The component that requires the greatest adjustment is **Faculty Research**. Although the Centre knows little about university research interests and needs to clarify its own mission with respect to the concept of community-driven research, faculty research should contribute a lot more to all other program components and also build on student and community learning (course work and projects) and the Centre's work. Incentives, including small grants to support these integrative linkages, should be explored.

Course work could slightly improve its contribution to community-based education by providing better guidelines on suitable student projects and evaluation procedures and better support to host projects. There is also room for improvement in the quality and usefulness of **student projects**, especially those that involve multiple stakeholders.

While reducing its own involvement in student projects or being more efficient in this process, the **TCCBE** should find ways to contribute to the further development of curriculum in community-based education. It should also support community projects through

a better mobilization of knowledge and the evaluation and dissemination of the lessons learned.

Further validation

The last activity of the day was used to validate the results of the two previous assessments using two criteria: the extent to which each assessment was based on **evidence** (sound and sufficient information and analysis), and the extent to which it achieved **consensus** through collaborative thinking.

Each group plotted the assessment they had done on the following diagram to validate and think about next steps in relation to the outcomes from the day. For the most part, both groups felt that they had 50% evidence but very little consensus. Both groups expressed an interest in further validating their assessment before acting on it.

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                    Consensus 10


      0 Evidence              5              Evidence 10



              Impact
              Assessment
                                  Program
                                  Assessment

                    Consensus 0
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