

Workshop Summary: Success Reimagined - Holistic Assessment in Optional Co-op Programs

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The workshop aimed to:

- Address challenges in evaluating co-op/experiential learning programs
- Move beyond narrow metrics (e.g., placement numbers)
- Introduce a more holistic evaluation framework (CIPP: Context, Input, Process, Product, by [Stufflebeam, D. 2007](#))
- Help practitioners better articulate the full value of their work, including “invisible” yet indirect contributions that lead to measurable impact through engaging in a community of practice

Program evaluation through a baking analogy:

Participants explored the importance of program evaluation through a “baking a cake” analogy:

- Success in baking depends on the purpose of the cake, ingredients acquired, executing the right process, and then seeing the outcome
- Similarly, educational programs require:
 - Clear goals
 - Adequate resources
 - Effective processes
 - Meaningful outcomes

Therefore, success isn’t just the final product, it’s the entire system behind it.

The CIPP model explained (as a holistic evaluation model) [Stufflebeam, D.:](#)

Component	Key Question	Program Application
Context	Why are we doing this?	Goals, needs, purpose
Input	What do we need?	Resources, capacity, planning
Process	How are we doing it?	Implementation quality
Product	Did it work?	Outcomes and impact

This model captures the nuance and work it takes for us to be able document the impact of the program, which can also support decision making.

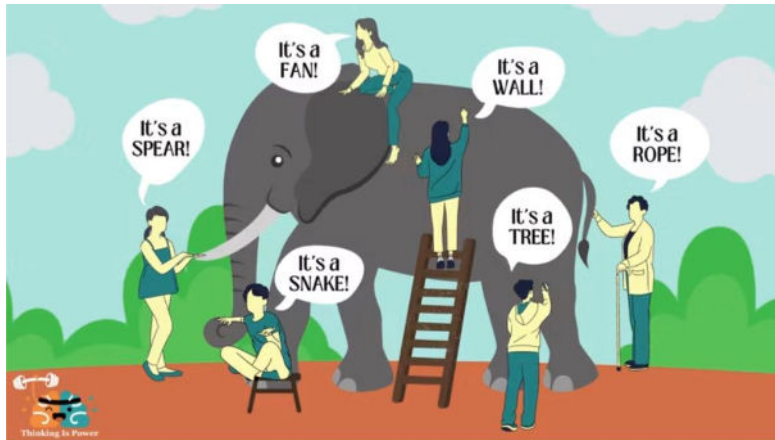
Challenges in our work:

Most institutions rely heavily on single metrics, especially:

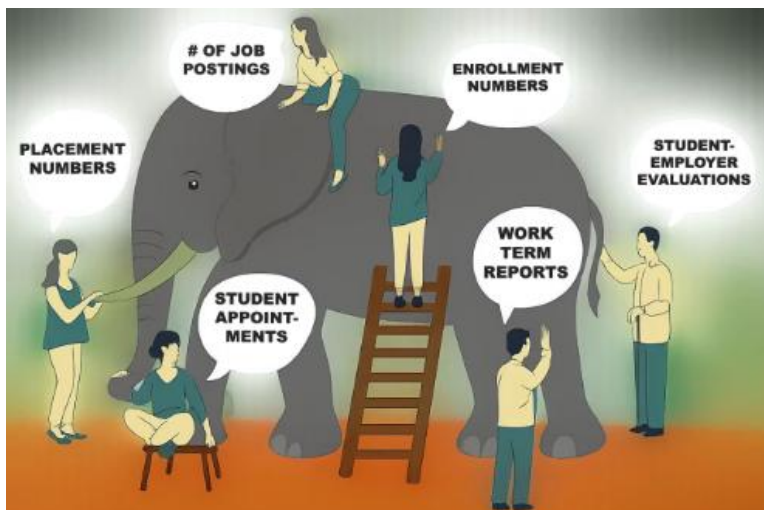
- Number of placements

- Enrollment numbers

This creates the “blind people and the elephant” problem:



Source: <https://thinkingispower.com/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant-is-perception>



- Only one part of the program is measured, and can be misinterpreted as the only valuable impact
- The full value of the program remains invisible

Workshop activities for participants in the session:

Participants:

1. Applied CIPP to program-level goals (macro)
2. Applied CIPP to daily tasks (micro)
 - e.g., worksite visits, coaching, recruitment

Key takeaways from the session:

1. **Over reliance on certain metrics hides true value of the educational program**

Placement numbers dominate because of funding/reporting requirements. However, they do not capture:

- Relationship-building
- Student development
- Employer engagement
- Long-term impact

Therefore, what gets measured ≠ what actually matters

2. Much of our work as coordinators is invisible

Examples of our work that can be under-recognized:

- Employer relationship-building (even without immediate job postings)
- Career coaching conversations
- Student confidence and clarity
- Network development (e.g. city, government, institutional associations)

Therefore, programs produce indirect and delayed value that typical placement only metrics miss

3. Evaluation requires both quantitative + qualitative data

- Surveys alone are insufficient (does not provide context)
- Rich insights come from:
 - Student stories/testimonials
 - Focus groups
 - Employer feedback

Therefore, narrative evidence is critical to demonstrating impact

4. Timing of impact matters

- Students often realize value after graduation, not during the program
 - Student feedback during the program can be shortsighted and may underestimate the program impact

Therefore, programs need long-term (post-program) evaluation strategies

5. Lack of clarity and purpose of program can undermine perceived value

Practitioners and students sometimes don't understand:

- Why certain tasks are done (e.g., networking interviews)
- What the program can do beyond securing a placement/work term

Therefore, clear communication of the purpose (“the why”) is essential

6. Resource constraints are a major barrier

- Staff are asked to “do more with less”
- Proper evaluation requires:
 - Time
 - Tools
 - Coordination

Therefore, evaluation is valuable but resource-intensive

7. The CIPP evaluation model is helpful but complex

Feedback from participants: the CIPP model is useful for reflection and structure, but can be:

- Time-consuming
- Can feel overwhelming (“a can of worms”)
- Requires iteration and team collaboration

Therefore, to reduce overwhelm, the CIPP model can be used for one or two aspects of our program we have control over (e.g. Work site visits, Appointments with students)

8. Existing data is underused

Institutions already collect:

- CRM data (e.g. Orbis, or the institution’s WIL and career portal)
- Appointment trends
- Engagement metrics

Therefore, leveraging and seeking out existing data is more efficient than starting from scratch

9. Alignment with institutional goals is key

- Evaluation should connect to:
 - Student well-being
 - Employability
 - Institutional strategy

Therefore, linking program work to broader institutional priorities strengthens its impact and value

10. Some stakeholders want more than numbers

- Students want:
 - Support, career clarity, and skill development

- Employers want:
 - Feedback loops and collaboration
- Leadership want:
 - Evidence for decisions

Therefore, a holistic model serves multiple stakeholders simultaneously

Implications for decision makers (practitioners, program managers, executives):

Adopting a holistic evaluation approach enables:

- Stronger justification for funding and resources
- Better alignment with institutional priorities (e.g., student success, employability)
- Improved program design and efficiency
- More compelling stakeholder communication (for students, employers, leadership, board of governors, ministry)

How to apply the CIPP model:

At the individual level start asking:

- “What is the purpose of this task?” (Context)
- “Do we have the resources?” (Input)
- “Is this effective?” (Process)
- “What outcomes actually matter?” (Product)

At the team level:

- Review one program goal
- Evaluate one task (pilot approach)

At the strategy level:

- Track numbers (quantitative insights)
- Capture stories (qualitative insights)
- Evaluate long-term outcomes (e.g. post-graduate survey data)

Overall, the workshop reframed evaluation from:

How many placements did we achieve?

to:

What value are we creating, and how can we prove it holistically?