

We have to pass a series of hurdles before we can even start evaluating social programmes. Some of these hurdles may be insurmountable and some may be invisible. In the following I shall point to such difficulties, step by step, as we meet them in a process of conducting an evaluation project. And it is my hope that optimism among potential evaluators will be replaced by realism.

### *1. Identification of the initiating agency*

Before the evaluation process starts it is important to identify the social location of the initiating individual or agency in the evaluation process. This is necessary because the social relationship between the initiating agency and the activities which are to be evaluated, determines not only how the evaluation process will be carried out but also how the results of the evaluation will be implemented.

The initiating agency may be classified according to its being centrally or peripherally located with regard to a number of spheres of interest, such as relationship to political authorities, executive authorities, activity to be evaluated, production of problems to be evaluated, production of relevant expertise, and contact with clients.

Some of these locations might involve commitments to already established practices which no evaluation results are likely to change. Other locations might be so peripheral that neither valid research results nor good will alone will produce any changes. And still other locations might involve commitments to values which apparently have no connection with the actual evaluation programme, yet, such commitments conceivably could introduce premises with a heavy influence on the evaluation process itself.

### *2. Identification of motives for initiating evaluation process*

Identifying the social location of the initiating agency will often give a first cue to the agency's sources of motives for wanting an evaluation process. One cannot take for granted that a sincere interest in the programme is always the basic motive for initiating the evaluation process. Sometimes evaluation is used as a means of procrastinating political problems, sometimes as a means for legitimization in the eyes of the general public or outside groups, and sometimes as a means of furthering specific group interests.

These motives can be so strong that a research process will be hampered and evaluation research will be used or misused in accordance with interests outside and maybe even counter to the actual programme.

To save resources as well as to avoid personal grievances the researcher must seriously consider the above two points, before accepting an invitation to do evaluation research.

### *3. Goal analysis*

Evaluation assumes the existence of a measuring stick against which, at any given time, the degree of goal fulfillment can be gauged. This is the ideal demand. This demand may be approximated only within limited programmes with clearly specified goals.

Most social programmes are characterized by diffuse goals which change as the programme is being implemented. And the goals are likely to be perceived differently by different groups, such as programme administrators, the general public, political authorities, and clients under the programme.

The researcher has to sort out general goals as well as subgoals, and differently perceived goals. This process is likely to be most successful if close cooperation with the groups involved is feasible. The researcher also must

take into consideration what phases of goal setting the programme passes through during the actual period of the evaluation process.

#### *4. Reformulation of evaluation tasks*

Having achieved an assessment of the complexity of goals the researcher may well turn out to be in disagreement with the initiating or responsible agency about the purpose of the evaluation programme. The researcher, having redefined the task on the basis of new information, will find that the future of the evaluation programme depends on the acceptance of the initiating agency and its interest in the reformulation of the research tasks.

#### *5. Analysis of intended consequences*

Inevitably, in accordance with some theoretical scheme, the analysis of goals must progress into an analysis of variables, which serve to mediate effect upon the system under study. Now it becomes important to establish the boundaries of the system within which the programme under evaluation is intended to function. These boundaries will make it possible to limit the number of intended consequences that are to be analyzed, and will help in choosing level of analysis.

The researcher will often feel tempted to delimit the system so as to maintain a clear overview of the processes affected by the programme. However, the more restricted the delimitation of the system, the greater the loss of consequences potentially having a bearing upon the understanding of how the social programme functions.

#### *6. Analysis of unintended consequences*

Hardly any programme has only intended consequences. There are unintended consequences as well, and sometimes these are more decisive than the intended ones. The groups upon which unintended consequences operate often are not part of the social programmes producing these consequences.

They may not be perceived as relevant objects of study under the evaluation programme. A narrow delimitation of the social system surrounding the programme under evaluation might preclude the unintended consequences from being assessed.

#### *7. Choice of methodology: first stage*

At this point the researcher has to make a series of choices for which no methodology exists. It is not possible to make all intended and unintended consequences objects of analysis, and the researcher has to focus on those that seem most important. They may be important to varying degrees depending upon the different points of view. Some may be important for the administrators, some may be important for those whom they concern, or some may be important for other groups or society at large. Ideally, the theoretical scheme which serves to guide the evaluation programme ought to point to the relevant set of consequences. However, the evaluator may not be in a position to divorce himself/herself from the varying viewpoints surrounding the system.

A consequence may also be seen as important because of its feedback effects upon the programme within which it works and because of its potential for social change. Other consequences will be important because they are amenable to direct influence. Some consequences may change importance in time, and some such consequences may have long-range manifestations going beyond the period within which the evaluation is being done. Sometimes the consequences may seem unimportant because the social programme has been designed for no other purpose than that of maintaining the status quo, or that of producing such marginal effects that they hardly seem worthy of an elaborate methodology.

The above choices are not always made explicit. Rather, they are overshadowed by traditional methodological problems which often means that the researcher prefers to work with those consequences that are measurable.

### *8. Choice of methodology: second stage*

Having reached this point the researcher has the choice between a whole range of methodological approaches for evaluating a social programme. These approaches are described in many textbooks. A few key phrases will suffice here: Natural experiments, controlled experiments, approximated experiments, cost benefit and cost effectiveness analysis, social indicators, qualitative descriptions, and action research, are among the most important approaches. The adequacy of the method chosen depends on the theory and how the problem is posed. But it is no exaggeration that every method known so far has its weaknesses and these weaknesses sometimes are of such a magnitude that the evaluation results may be seriously questioned with regard to their validity.

### *9. Organization of research administration*

It is well known that the wider the scope of the evaluation programme, the larger the team of researchers required to do the job. Decisions have to be made concerning what kind of expertise is needed and how the relationships between the different experts should be organized. Interdisciplinary teamwork, for example, may be time-consuming and full of conflicts, but it also carries the potential for new and fruitful approaches to complicated evaluation problems.

The relationship between the researchers and the responsible agency ought to be formalized for the protection of both parties in case of conflict. Terms concerning access to data and clients as well as publication of results should be stipulated by contract as should time schedule and budget.

### *10. A final check with the responsible agency*

Due to practical difficulties, availability of data, methodological shortcomings, involvement in interest groups, and problems of system delimitations, the design for the evaluation programme according to all likelihood will undergo considerable changes

from the time of the initiation of the study. The initiating agency may no longer recognize the purpose of the study. Therefore, it is very important at this point to check all changes with the responsible agency in order to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings at a later stage.

When this final check has been performed the researcher should be free to go ahead with the evaluation programme within the framework of agreement. Research strategies and implementation of the agreement from now on ought to be considered the responsibility of the researcher.

### *11. Implementation of evaluation programme*

The actual implementation of the evaluation programme has also been described in many textbooks. Different research strategies lead to different problems. Among typical problems we have seen assumptions for a controlled or semi-controlled experiment being broken. Or, participation in the evaluation programme has been boycotted by staff in the programme under evaluation. Or, data supposed to be gathered by the administration have been distorted, not out of malice but because of prejudiced opinions or lack of knowledge. Or, we have seen cases where the researcher has intervened in the social programme out of sympathy for the clients.

But above all, since the goals are likely to have changed during the observation period we also find that administrative changes have been introduced, often due to increased awareness which the existence of the evaluation programme has brought along.

### *12. Collocation of results*

The results of the evaluation must be reported so as to serve two major objectives. Firstly, the results must be presented, important findings must be set apart from unimportant ones, and the results must be conveyed in such a way that they are accessible to non-experts without being oversimplified or distorted.

The second objective is far more difficult because it presents a challenge to the social scientists for which many of us have not been trained. In order to do proper evaluation research we also have to be able to discuss the practical implications of our results. It is not sufficient to criticize and to point at shortcomings in the present handling of a social programme.

The researcher must know how to point to those changes which have to be introduced if the social programme in question is to function properly. Alternatively, the researcher must be prepared to design new social programmes and discuss the consequences and required social changes for introducing such a programme.

### 13. *The receiving end*

The results of an evaluation programme usually do not produce social impact through its own weight. A receiving apparatus is required to interpret and convey the results properly, and a political apparatus is necessary to induce social changes deemed appropriate.

If the results are politically sensitive they tend to become distorted and used fragmentarily. In such a case the researcher will have a difficult task trying to transmit a complete picture of the results. If the social programme under evaluation is a dead political issue the researcher may be tempted to arouse political and administrative authorities to take action.

The expectations towards the evaluator have also changed; now the researcher will be ex-

pected to qualify as a social planner. But that is a different story which we shall not go into at this point.

In this paper I have drawn upon many sources, the major ones being:

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