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"CHANGE AND PROGRAM EVALUATION IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS"

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There is an assumption of an inherent rationality in linking information on program effectiveness to program change. This article briefly discusses three typical evaluation studies and demonstration projects that fail to link information generated on the effectiveness of what people do, to program changes. Perceived inaccuracy of the information and the perceived threat of the information are emphasized as two reasons for this failure of program information to affect change in social organizations. A pre-planning functional information base is proposed as an important prerequisite in the sequence of creating a more receptive environment for organizational change.

It is often assumed that information on the effectiveness of what an organization does will be utilized to improve those programs. In social organizations[1] these program changes are expected to provide more effective service to clients. This assumption of an inherent rationality linking information on program effectiveness to program change has led to a multitude of evaluation studies and demonstration projects[2] to provide information on program effectiveness.

A review of actual cases of evaluative research and demonstration projects often does not substantiate the assumption of an inherent rationality in linking information to policy formation.

This paper will briefly review three typical case studies that fail to link newly generated program information to policy change. It will suggest two major reasons for this failure and then outline a pre-planning functional information base as an important prerequisite in creating a more receptive environment for program information to affect policy changes in social organizations.

<u>Three typical cases where program information resulting from evaluation research and demonstration projects failed to affect program changes</u>:

1. The original purpose of the St. Paul Minnesota

"Family Centred Project" was to develop a master plan for reorganizing health, welfare and recreation services in American Communities. (Rutman, 1974:2) National and international attention to the 1948 and 1954 phases of this project was so extensive that a 1962 survey found 143 communities in Canada and the United States had multi-problem families projects using at least some aspects of the St. Paul model at some stage of thought, planning or operation.[3] Despite this apparent success in elaborating and diseminating new conceptualizations and case work techniques for multi-problem families, the Family Centred Project eventually abandoned its treatment focus. For many reasons, some of which are elaborated upon in Leonard Rutman's (1974) paper, the widely publicized information on potential improvement in service had very limited long range impact on relevant program change.

2. A second typical case where relevant program information failed to affect program changes is a four school study in New York referred to by Kruse (1968). This project was undertaken in the 1960's to ascertain the effect of extensive agency involvement in the schools. All four schools were in roughly similar circumstances in disadvantaged areas of New York City. Two of the four schools were subjected to extensive group and case work involving both students and their families. The other two schools were used as control groups. After two years, the findings indicated there were NO significant differences in the social problem characteristics of these two groups. Despite these findings, the usual agency services continued to operate uninterrupted.

3. A final example where pertinent information failed to affect change is a 1970-71 evaluation study on the relative effects of parole supervision as provided to a group of juvenile boys and girls (Hudson, 1974). The major aim of the study was to determine whether juveniles released from two major state level correctional institutions in Minnesota would adjust as well on parole without formal supervision from parole officers, as a corresponding group receiving conventional parole supervision. The research techniques are elaborated upon in considerable detail in Hudson's

paper. This study found that exposure to parole supervision does NOT have a significant positive effect upon the parole adjustment of juvenile-aged boys and girls. Hudson (1974:15-16) states "the major conclusions were included in a summary of the project which was distributed to all parole officers, supervisors, and administrators as well as to the members of the Parole Board. (All these groups had extensive involvement and commitment to the research). In conjunction with this summary of the project findings, the investigator communicated his willingness to meet with and discuss the programmatic implications of the research. No response to this offer was ever made by either the practitioners, supervisors or administrators of the parole division or by the members of the Parole Board. Almost totally ignored, the project became, for the purpose of the state, a "non-study -- left to gather dust on a shelf".

There is a considerable danger in generalizing on a subject as extensive as social change. However, two of the major reasons why program information, such as generated in the three cases referred to above, is not more extensively utilized in policy making can be outlined.

TWO REASONS WHY LINKING PROGRAM INFORMATION TO DECISION-MAKING FAILS TO YIELD PROGRAM CHANGE

The first reason why program information often fails to lead to change is the perceived INACCURACY of the information.

Evaluation of social programs is often beyond the capabilities of existing methodology. The number of studies that measure up to minimum standards of scientific adequacy is generally accepted to be exceedingly small.[4] The following nine factors account for much of the perceived inaccuracy of the information generated by evaluation research and demonstration projects in social organizations.

Nine factors that affect the accuracy of the information generated by evaluation research and demonstration projects are:

1. The difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of

the programs. For example:

(a) what constitutes the appropriate criteria of outcome.

(b) output definition and measurement problems, especially where programs are multi-purpose.

(c) some outputs are easier to measure than others.

(d) problems of attributing the effect of the process on the outcome. In other words, the research design, selection and administration affect the outcome. An important question is how extensive is this effect?

(e) difficulties in directly observing states of "well being". For example: Is a person who is mobile with considerable pain healthier than someone who is bedridden? etc.

2. The need to include client opinion, as well as professional judgement, in considering treatment outcome. This creates many methodological problems including:

(a) how should the client's judgement be weighed in the evaluation of services? For example, the client may express gratitude or frustration for service rendered, rather than an actual change in condition.

(b) some researchers have noted that treatment outcome is closely related to client motivation. Given our understanding that equality of opportunity cannot be equated with the equality of condition, we can predict that different clients may perceive identical treatment in entirely different terms.

3. The inability to check the validity of the research. Is the project evaluating what it claims to evaluate? Problems here include:

(a) outside criteria as an external source to compare the measuring instrument are usually not available.

(b) There is often a lack of uniformity in recording case records between agencies.

4. The difficulty of obtaining a scientifically valid sample of clients. For example, even the "mix" of the population to be served, e.g., self-referral, private agency referral or government agency referral, may affect the results.

5. The lack of a clearly conceptualized treatment method in many research programs. For instance, what treatment variables should be included. e.g., Length of involvement, sex, insights, etc.

6. The difficulty of fitting research into the normal routines of the agency and the resultant bias on outcomes.

7. The complexity of both the internal organizational structure and the many levels of interaction with the external environment.

8. The inability to replicate most evaluative studies because of continued changes in both the internal and external environments.

9. The difficulty in assessing how the values and attitudes of the professionals affect the service outcome. Evaluation rests upon a set of values but technical procedures of evaluation rarely challenge these values. (Fried, 1968:43)

A second reason why linking program information to policy fails to yield program change is that the information is often perceived as a THREAT.

This perception of program information as a threat is shared by both the professional workers and administrators. For example, if a counselling program is found to be relatively ineffective it may appear to imply the workers are not performing properly. It may also appear to question the validity of the professional approach, and, it may even appear to threaten the very raison d'etre of the organization. Dedication to organization survival and maintenance often leads to a "success cult". (Carter, 1973:17) When the success of programs are thought to rely on results of evaluation to "pass", the threat of not passing often leads to obscuring evaluative results.

Another threat can develop from the potential for drawing unwarranted conclusions from those who "don't understand" the limitations as outlined above, on the accuracy of program information.

The lack of credibility of the information generated by evaluation research and demonstration projects, plus the perceived threat of program information, have both contributed to the failure of this information to affect program changes. The author has elsewhere (Cohen, 1974) discussed other characteristics and imperatives that affect change in social organizations. While acknowledging the broad complexity of the subject of change in social organizations,[5] it is proposed that a pre-planning functional information base can assist in overcoming the failure to link information on program effectiveness to program change.

THE FUNCTIONAL INFORMATION BASE

The creation of a more receptive environment for program information to affect policy changes is a primary goal of a functional information base. A key question to ask in most organizations at the present time is "How can you plan when you do not know what you are planning for"? Detailed budget records, statistics on staff employed and number of clients serviced, provide the basis for most of an organization's present knowledge of its operations. A serious shortcoming with this traditional approach to classifying organizational data by "objects" of income and expenditures is that it does not directly identify how all input resources including rent, administration, travel costs, etc. are distributed to the various service programs which in total constitute what the organization does. A number of recent studies have found large discrepancies between what the staff and the board of an organization <u>think</u> or say they are doing, and what they are actually doing in terms of a total deployment of resources to all actual service programs and functions.

The information base envisaged here considers that all data is only data unless it can be used for decision making, and only then does it become information. The types of decisions to be made must be anticipated. In social welfare organizations for instance, this usually implies the need for common caseload reporting with data related to categories of people. (e.g., emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped, one parent families, etc.) These categories of people have needs. Measuring the extent of organizational success in meeting the needs of these categories of people provides output information for making decisions on any changes to be made in existing programs. The decisions relate to resource allocation to services to meet the needs of the people.

To provide an appropriate information base for decision making a functional information base is considered a pre-planning necessity. Following the implementation of this functional accounting system[6] an organization should move towards the processes of P.P.B.S. (Planning, programming, budgeting system.) (See Goodman (1969) for a discussion on the dangers in making functional budgeting an end unto itself.) The spirit of P.P.B.S. is a marriage between program planning and budgeting. However, the program information utilized in P.P.B.S. must be mature if the marriage is to last. This maturing comes through the processes of acceptance that the functional information base is reasonably accurate. A major deficiency in many information systems such as P.P.B.S. is they ignore the need for a sequential maturing stage before attempting to link program information to the decision-making processes of organizational change.

ADVANTAGES OF A FUNCTIONAL INFORMATION BASE

There are a number of reasons for assuming that the information base described above will create a more receptive environment for organizational change than existing evaluation research and demonstration project techniques.

A functional information data base reflects with reasonable accuracy what resources are actually providing the various programs the organization is undertaking. This data collection on existing programs is not a one shot project but an ongoing process that allows ample opportunity for correctional feedback from all levels of the organization.

This paper has discussed implications of perceived inaccuracy of information as an important variable inhibiting organizational change. The involvement of all levels of the organization in determining how resources are allocated to the various organizational programs should result in an acceptance that this functional information base is at least a reasonable representation of what resources are allocated to what programs. All three cases referred to earlier in this paper lacked this commitment to basic program information.

Beside an increased consensus on the accuracy of organizational program information, another advantage of the functional information base is that the provision of information by programs and services encourages all levels of the organization to focus on ends rather than means. For example, travel expenditures are not categorized separately, but are grouped to programs by considering travel for what ... to do ... for what services? This need to collect unit cost information by at least crude benefits to the people served logically leads to questions regarding effectiveness in meeting the needs of the people being served. For example a counselling service with costs over $200 per unit of service will probably lead to questions about possible less costly alternatives ... without a forced review through a formal evaluation with its many limitations already referred to.

A further advantage of a functional information base is a reduction in the perceived threat to the workers and administrators. Criticisms can be countered with information that reasonably reflects what services <u>are</u> being provided and what it <u>costs</u> to provide them. It is also possible to relate these costs to at least crude output indicators that reflect the impact these services appear to have on the client population.

Obviously the information generated by this functional information base will not always reflect what everyone in the organization would expect or readily accept. This data is called a pre-planning information base because it is specifically emphasized that policy making should follow the data collection. It is true that the information engineering is always possible. However, by strictly limiting this information base to what programs are actually being undertaken and how all organizational resources are utilized to provide these programs, the political reality of change is placed in sequential order.

In other words difficult political decisions can be reviewed from the perspective of a more accurate organizational information base that is accepted by those responsible for the provision of the services.

EXAMPLES OF FUNCTIONAL INFORMATION

The scope of this paper does not permit detailed examination of the processes of the program information generation and its subsequent linkage to organizational change. However, a few specific examples should illustrate the potential effect on program change.

Table 1 is the actual functional budget of a small family agency in a fairly typical North American community of approximately 300,000. The left hand column lists the proportion of total resources including administration required to provide these services, while the final three columns show actual and proposed dollars. In this case the funders of the organization were under the impression their dollars were providing family and individual counselling. When the newly generated functional accounting results of Table 1 indicated only little over 50% of the agencies' resources were being devoted to this service, the major funders threatened to withdraw part of the next year's funding. This led to significant changes in the organization.

Tables 2 and 3 provide information on the major functions of a Y.W.C.A. in a North American community along with functional accounting information on dollar income, expenses and deficits. The fact that 42.6% of the projected deficit resulted from the Health and Physical Education program and in particular from the operation of the swimming pool, led to considerable discussion of possible changes in this program area. The functional information on the proportion of resources devoted to the various program areas, and the projected deficit attributable to these various programs have already led to organizational change.

Functional information on two adoption agencies operating in the same city revealed that the rate per adoption between the two agencies was as follows:

Agency A - Rate per adoption - $338.00
Agency B - Rate per adoption $1,368.00

TABLE 1

FUNCTIONAL BUDGET (WITH PROJECTED COSTS) OF A FAMILY AGENCY

Service	Percent	1973 BUDGET ($101,000)	1974 BUDGET ($110,000)	1975 BUDGET ($116,000)
Community Planning, Coordination	7.86	$ 7,938.	$ 8,646.	$ 9,118.
Community Development	1.19	1,202.	1,309.	1,380.
Information & Referral	7.69	7,766.	8,459.	8,920.
Job Placement Services	.16	161.	176.	186.
Consultation & Training	20.85	21,059.	22,935.	24,186.
Sub Total		38,126.	41,525.	43,790.
Family & Individual Counselling	53.92	54,460.	59,312.	62,547.
Family Life Education	8.33	8,414.	9,163.	9,663.
Sub Total		62,874.	68,475.	72.210.
TOTAL	100.00%	$101,000.	$110,000.	$116,000.

TABLE 2

FUNCTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY A Y.W.C.A. BRANCH WITH PROPORTION OF TOTAL RESOURCES ALLOCATED TO EACH FUNCTION

	Function	Proportion of Total Resources used for function
1.	Hostel and Transient Program (The provision of shelter)	39.9%
2.	Health and Physical Fitness (Pool and Gym)	30.2%
3.	Personal and Social Development (Courses other than vocational)	9.4%
4.	Vocational Training (typing courses)	6.0%
5.	Big Sisters (Volunteer parental substitutes)	2.6%
6.	Head Start (Including a nursery service for paying customers)	7.6%
7.	Other (including the restaurant service and a number of others)	4.3%

TABLE 3

FUNCTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY A Y.W.C.A. BRANCH

PROJECTED FUNCTIONAL ACCOUNT FOR ONE YEAR
BASED ON INCOME & EXPENDITURES
FOR OCTOBER & SEPTEMBER 1973

Function	Annual Income	Direct Expense		Share of non-direct expenses[1]		Total Expenses	Projected Deficit	
	$	$	%	$	%	$	$	%
Hostel	78,558.	65,802.	41.5	16,530.	30.6	82,332.	3,774.	6.8
Health & Physical Education: Recreation	38,718.	44,865.	28.4	17,400.	32.2	62,265.	23,547.	42.6
Personal & Social Development	10,137.	12,276.	7.8	7,242.	13.4	19,518.	9,381.	17.0
Vocational Training	8,764.	8,780.	5.6	3,618.	6.7	12,398.	3,634	6.6
Big Sisters	-	3,684	2.4	1,782.	3.3	5,466.	5,466.	10.0
Head Start, etc.	13,150.	15,564.	9.8	5,676.	10.5	21,240.	8,090.	14.6
Other	7,542.	7,104.	4.5	1,782.	3.3	8,886.	1,344.	2.4
Totals	$156,869.	$158,075.	100.0%	$54,030.	100.0%	$212,105.	$55,236	100.0%

[1]Including central services and administration.

This huge discrepancy in costs had existed for many years but major funders were not aware of it. In fact Agency A was considered by many, to be an "inefficient operation". Substantial differences in the philosophical approach to adoption between the two agencies exist, with the more expensive service utilizing a foster care program prior to adoption. However, it was only after this functional information was available that serious consideration was given to determining the possible advantages of one approach over the other. This type of questioning, arising out of actual differences in programs purporting to accomplish the same goals, has considerable potential for productive evaluation research.

Vancouver Canada has a uniform functional information system operating across many non governmental social service agencies. (Vancouver, 1973) Twenty-four agencies reported they were providing a service defined as "Family and Individual Counselling" at a unit cost ranging from $3.11 to $29.11. The Girl Guides of Vancouver had a unit cost of $1.41 for a service defined as "Group Work", while the Y.W.C.A. unit costs for the same "Group Work" service category were approximately $17.00. Obviously these two agencies were not "doing" the same thing in their provision of "group work".

The relevant point in both these Vancouver examples is that simply knowing the wide cost variances within supposedly similar services, permits the asking of questions about effectiveness of these services that would not be possible without this unit cost functional information.

SUMMARY

This paper is not proposing that the provision of a functional information base will eliminate the problems related to change in social organizations. What is suggested is that existing information in most social organizations is not adequate to cope with the consequences of evaluation research and demonstration projects. The result is that many important implications for social change are ignored. The creation of a more receptive environment for organization change will not just happen. A functional information base for social organizations is one way to increase the potential for more effective change in meeting the needs of people.

FOOTNOTES

1. Social organizations for the purposes of this paper refer to the broad range of organizations providing services rather than producing products as their primary function. Health, education and welfare organizations are obvious examples of social organizations.

2. See appendix for a brief discussion on the definitions of evaluation studies and demonstration projects.

3. For instance, London, Ontario spent over $50,000 on a multi-problem family project in the 1960's. This demonstration project attempted to replicate many of the St. Paul concepts and operations. After three years and the publishing of an extensive report the entire London project was terminated with no long term effects on program change.

4. Geismar (1973:14) has noted that "research relating service characteristics to treatment results are extremely rare".

5. This information base should not be equated with the total needs for information in an organization. For instance it initially does not emphasize objectives, program evaluation and many areas of internal and external communication. This information base is concerned with detailing where <u>all</u> input into the organization is deployed in terms of what the organization is doing (its programs) and accounted for in units that allow for eventual evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs.

6. See Cohen (1974) and Frank (1973) for relevant discussions on P.P.B.S.

Appendix

Evaluation studies and demonstration projects have been defined and redefined, organized and reorganized in so many ways that it is impractical to overview the subject in this paper. For example, Carter and Wharf (1973) list fifteen pages of bibliography related to evaluating social development programs. This list of eighty books and one hundred fourteen articles, periodicals and papers is far from a comprehensive list related to this subject alone.

Within the context of this paper "a demonstration project is defined as a field experiment designed to test the value and feasibility as well as the practical implications of

(a) a new program or new social structure
(b) an inventive approach to providing services or dealing with new and unresolved social problems
(c) adopting an operational program to a new setting
(d) modifying existing programs to make them more responsive to current social problems and needs with the objective of improving the character and/or quality of the social environment and of services rendered by the organizations involved". (Canada, Demonstration Projects, 1970.)

For the purposes of this paper evaluation studies, evaluation research and similar designations assume the Webster's dictionary definition of evaulate: "determine the worth of; appraise".

Although the implications of the extent of scientific sophistication in evaluations is referred to in this paper, a more detailed analysis is not practical here. For instance, some attempts have been made to differentiate evaluation studies from evaluative research. Evaluation studies often refer to the broad spectrum of attempts to determine how effective programs are in meeting their objectives. Even informal interviews and observations are included in this classification. On the other hand, evaluative research is often limited to a more rigid scientifically disciplined approach. This more rigid evaluation would usually include criteria such as Coplans" (1968) three fold classification of process evaluation, achievement evaluation and administrative evaluation, using scientifically accepted procedures to measure effectiveness. There is, however, little consensus on these definitional differentiations.

Within the context of this paper it is considered appropriate to include a wide spectrum of definitions by assuming the broad generic dictionary definition of evaluation.

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