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Michael Baizerman  
*University of Minnesota*

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EVALUATION RESEARCH AND EVALUATION:  
SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT AND IDEOLOGY

Michael Baizerman

Center for Youth Development and Research

University of Minnesota

INTRODUCTION

The idea that human services programs should be evaluated is accepted by most practitioners and researchers. Discussion is about the technical aspects of this research and about how practitioners can be encouraged to utilize evaluative findings in their everyday practice. Emphasis is placed also on the organizational barriers to this utilization. These ideas and issues are found in a growing literature in the social sciences and, increasingly, in the even faster growing literatures in the professions and in the human services, including the social services, medical and health services, criminal justice and the like.

Here, evaluation research is discussed from a different perspective: as a scientific social reform movement and as an ideology. Attempt is made to offer a beginning analysis of some elements in the evaluation ideology and to focus attention on some of the consequences of this ideology and social movement for staff in human service agencies.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF EVALUATION RESEARCH

Evaluation (or evaluative research) is now accepted as necessary by many in the human services.<sup>1</sup> Until recently this acceptance was often rhetorical; now services are being studied, often at the request of service administrators who are responding to laws, rules and regulations which demand program evaluation. These requests and these rules have resulted from a successful social reform movement which sought to make evaluation central to practice in the human services.

Evaluation can be thought of as a "scientific social reform movement" (Eaton, 1962). A scientific social reform movement is a type of social movement distinguished from other types by the participants and by the social legitimation sought and given to the reformist ideas. Sources of this movement are found in early sociology, social philosophy, and social reform (Caro, 1971). At base and simply put was the notion that "science" could contribute to "making society better." In the recent past, particularly since the War on Poverty programs, evaluation has become a basic idea, one found in several forms.

<sup>1</sup>For the difference between these notions, see Suchman, 1967.

Evaluation research was a goal of those who sought to learn if programs "worked" - legislators and social scientists among others. These people sought to make research, in general, and this approach, specifically, a central process in the funding and administering of human services. To practitioners in the human services, evaluation was a means of learning about their services so as to make these effective. This idea included two notions: the true desire to learn about one's program, and, it seems, the preventive notion that unwillingness to accept this outside monitoring could lead to more severe forms of outside control and accountability.

The word evaluation came to be used by different groups of people to mean different things. The word diffused into many professional vocabularies - but in each vocabulary the meaning of evaluation was different. In common was the idea that evaluation was a "good thing," something which "should be done." Evaluation became part of a social movement which sought to counter critics of the human services at a time when the Great Society was no longer great, when funds for such services became scarce, when the social philosophy and political style of the government became more corporate and efficiency oriented:

No matter which political party dominates the legislative process, or which academic viewpoint is held at any given time, or whether the mood of the country is for increased spending or cutbacks, constant modifications and innovation in human service programs is bound to continue. There is every reason for dissatisfaction with the current state of intervention on problems of health, economic security, education, housing -- indeed on the entire range of social disorders that confront our urban communities. . . .

Numerous limitations surround current efforts at social action: inadequate techniques, scientific knowledge, and manpower are commonly cited examples. . . . But knowing what to do and when to do it requires another tactic as well. Neither the rhetoric of politicians nor the pleas of do-gooders of various persuasions are sufficient to guide program development. Similarly, neither the theories of academicians nor the exaggerated statements of efficacy by practitioners are an adequate basis for the support and expansion of various human service activities.

Evaluation research, not a new but nevertheless an increasingly robust enterprise, can have a major impact on social problems. While it would be foolish to argue that all the deficiencies of current programs or all the political and conceptual problems can be swept away by evaluation studies, the adequate assessment of existing and innovative programs can be a vital force in directing social change and improving the lives and the environments of community members. (Caro, 1971)

#### EVALUATION AS AN IDEOLOGY

The ideology of evaluation in the scientific reform movement included several notions: That "the evaluation findings can and should be utilized in practice;" that "the findings are appropriate and necessary for management and program development;" that social scientists have the techniques to do evaluative research.

And that policy and administrative decision-making about social policy, program funding and the like can be rationalized, (outside of or within a notion of politics) and become more effective: i.e., social policy and planning using evaluative research as the technology for getting appropriate data would be an a priori "better" way to decide.

Evaluation is a particularly powerful ideology of change because (by its nature) it blurs the distinction between the culture systems of science and ideology (Geertz, 1964). Ideology has the social function of making "an autonomous politics . . . possible by providing authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the evasive images by means of which it can be grasped." (Ibid.):

And it is, in turn, the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them, that accounts both for the ideologies' highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held. . . .

The differentiae of science and ideology as cultural systems are to be sought in the sorts of symbolic strategy for encompassing situations that they respectively represent. Science names the structure of situation in such a way that the attitude contained toward them is disinterestedness. Its style is restrained, spare, resolutely analytic: By shunning the semantic devices that most effectively formulate moral sentiment, it seeks to maximize intellectual clarity. But ideology names that structure of situations in such a way that the attitude contained toward them is one of commitment. Its style is ornate, vivid, deliberately suggestive: By objectivizing moral sentiment through the same devices that science shuns, it seeks to motivate action. Both are concerned with the definition of a problematic situation . . . Where science is the diagnostic, the critical, dimension of culture, ideology is the justificatory, the apologetic one - it refers to that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defense of patterns of belief and value.

Evaluation is an ideology which blurs the distinction between science and ideology:

Interest in evaluation research has been greatly stimulated in the past decade by widespread concern for domestic social reform. Searching questions have been raised about the adequacy of organized programs in such institutional sectors as health, justice, education, employment, housing, transportation, and welfare. In an atmosphere charged with demands for rapid and significant change, a great many innovative action programs have been introduced. Some reformers have urged that the quest for more effective institutions be orderly and cumulative. They have argued that careful program evaluation is needed as a basis for continued planning and have recommended that the methods of social research be utilized in the evaluation of reform programs. (Caro, 1971)

Evaluation would be used also for policy and administrative decision making in the domain of human services.

Evaluation as an ideology is part of the scientism ideology. Both of these ideologies fit into the model of a scientific social reform movement.

#### EVALUATION AS A SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL REFORM IDEOLOGY

Evaluation was the ideology of the evaluation research scientific social reform movement. This ideology sought to give legitimacy to the social change efforts of those who wanted to implement evaluation research in human services programs by arguing that evaluation research on a grand scale was a new and rational way to decide about these services. In this sense, evaluation was a particularly potent example of the scientific social reform ideology of "newism" (Eaton, 1962).

The newism ideology is "the presumption that new developments or practices are superior to those 'not quite so new' or old." (Ibid.) In this ideology,

. . . the attribute of novelty is presumed to be indicative of validity . . . . Plausible rather than well-documented facts are used to support the theory that stylistic changes also represent a gain in operating efficiency and durability. (Ibid.)

Evaluation research on a grand scale was the novelty in that it is presumed to be a more effective tool for rational decision-making about human services. An examination of the symbolism of the evaluation ideology suggests, however, that the scientific social reformers sought more than the widespread implementation of evaluation research of the human services. Using the ideology of evaluation, they sought to rationalize the human services system. This is seen in the notion of "accountability" which is integral in the symbolism of the evaluation ideology.

#### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE EVALUATION IDEOLOGY

Evaluation as an ideology is understood in part by an analysis of the "figurative nature" of its words, notions, ideas, metaphors and symbols; and by the consequences of these symbolic forms on and for particular groups of people who comprise the socio-political human services institution.

An essential character of religious symbolism is its multivalence, its capacity to express simultaneously several meanings the unity between which is not evident on the plane of immediate experience . . . . This capacity of religious symbolism to reveal a multitude of structurally united meanings has an important consequence: the symbol is capable of revealing a perspective in which diverse realities can be fitted together or even integrated into a "system." One cannot sufficiently insist on this point: that the examination of symbolic structures is a work not of reduction but of integration. One compares and contrasts two expressions of a symbol not in order to reduce them to a single, pre-existent expression but in order to discover the

process by which a structure is capable of enriching its meanings.  
(Eliade in Edelman, 1971).

"Evaluation" can be thought of as a symbol in which are combined several ideas, notions, words, meanings and social processes. Among these are "knowing," "monitoring," "research," "scientific," "applied research," "field study", and, most important, "accountability." It is our notion that there is in the symbol "evaluation" a meaning of "accountability," and that this meaning is, in turn, a language of rationalizing, organizing and controlling. That is to say, the notion of "evaluation" can be viewed as an "administrative language" (Edelman, 1967) by which political control is exercised or attempted in the social domains of human services as a means of bringing "order and reason" and socio-political legitimacy to public and private expenditures for human services. Evaluation is a "managerial ideology" (Krause, 1973).

The word evaluation has come to include several notions, ideas, meanings, and social processes. Among these are a type of empirical socio-behavioral research and a technology of learning about something (Robinson, 1971). To human service practitioners, evaluation means a requirement that their program be examined by "outsiders." It is a research process in which data will be collected, analyzed, etc., "to help us learn about what we are doing so that we can change and correct it," or "really show how good we're doing." It is something "hard," "scientific," "objective" and "scary;" it is something "scary" because evaluation is understood by practitioners to mean "accountability" in a new and different sense.

#### The Notion of Accountability

The notion of accountability includes ideas from sources such as moral, political and legal philosophy, and it has the formal meanings of "answerable to, capable of being explained, and responsible to (for)." In this last meaning, accountability is found in the political idea that an organization has many constituencies which hold expectation of it, that some of these expectations and requirements are about funds, "treatment" of people, "quality service" and the like. Since the expectations and requirements cannot be learned about a priori, it is necessary that facts be collected so as to learn about whether or not and to what degree these expectations are "met." That is, "research" is a method of learning about the agency. Evaluation (and evaluative research) is one type of research (technology) which can be so used. Evaluation and accountability have come to be joined in the mind of the practitioner.

Accountability also refers to the social process of administrative/political/management decision-making and control. In particular, to practitioners it refers to fiscal decision-making - to funding and refunding. Hence, accountability means agency survival.

The symbol evaluation, then, includes in its penumbra the notion of agency existence. This is one psychological and social reality for human service workers and is likely part of the reason why evaluation is "scary."

## EVALUATION AS A LANGUAGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

"Accountability" like evaluation are themes in the larger "human service ideology" (Baker, 1974). "Control" is one notion found in the ideas of accountability and decision-making in the evaluation ideology. Control over agency survival is one example of this. Another example is in the idea that evaluation means to some a language of rationalizing and organizing, i.e., of controlling the human services "system." These notions and ideas are found in the language used to discuss accountability and evaluation.

Four sets of language are heard in discussions about evaluation and accountability: The language of the human services and politics long used by participants in the traditional bargaining systems; that of the new bargainers - new professionals, new client groups and the like; the language of corporate business - efficiency, markets, PR, products, cost-benefit ratios - as this has become the language of the federal executive branch; and the language of socio-behavioral research - as evaluation has become a means of achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

The language of corporate business is a managerial language of "hardness," coldness, clear-headedness, and data.\* It is a language of ends, of goals and objectives, and it is a language of numerality. Like legal language, it is a language of specificity, of things which can be measured. It is a language of objectivity. It contains words, symbols and metaphors which present images of rationality, organization and order;\*\* of facts and "science." (Boulding, 1969).

This language brings semantic and cognitive order to the human service system: inputs and outputs are clear(er). It is a language of control as order and regulation facilitate management. It is a language which makes things "researchable" - discrete, clean, time-limited. It is a language of accountability. It is a language of evaluation; of science; of scientificism - the ideology.

This language is not traditional in the human services, particularly in small, private agencies; it is certainly not the language of the alternative agencies. There are well-documented differences between the languages of research and human services (with clear exceptions in some branches of clinical medicine and psychology, among others). This was of major import to researchers who hoped early on to do evaluative research which would have utilizable findings incorporated by service workers. Most practitioners gave symbolic, not substantive support to their efforts (Eaton, 1969). Now the import is more severe, for, as suggested, there is increasing congruence between the languages of research and management. There is actual power to use the symbols. Language has become one medium of administrative control over human services accountability.

\*See Adams, (1974) for the relations between and among the notions and words such as "hard - soft," "male - female," "right-handed - left-handed," etc.

\*\*Contrast this to the notion of "muddling through."

## THE EVALUATION RESEARCH SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT

Participants in the evaluation research movement sought the widespread use of this research approach in the human services. They were successful in that the idea that human services should be evaluated is now socially legitimate. It is found in laws, regulations and rules for the funding of human services in both the public and private domains. The stated purpose of this movement was to implement this type of research in order to make decision-making about human services a more rational and effective process. The argument for this position was found in the evaluation ideology - a culture system with a symbolism and a language. In these latter was embedded the notion of accountability. The social movement sought control of decision-making by offering a rational and seemingly objective way to insure agency and worker accountability. To achieve these ends, those advocating evaluation research had to be accepted by, or to become, an elite group in the human services system.

In the recent past, researchers and evaluators were marginal to the centers of decision-making in human service agencies and in the human service system. The opportunity to change this status occurred after the Nixon Administration reduced the War on Poverty and spending for other social programs. Funds for social programs became scarce at a time when many programs were new so that there was a high relative scarcity of funds. At the same time, the ideologies of business, of management, of efficiency and of accountability were introduced by the Administration.

The War on Poverty brought more than new human service programs and large public funding for these. The ideologies of "citizen participation" and "community (control)" were legitimated. Attempts were made to include clients of the service on decision-making boards. "New careers" were conceived and implemented. The poor, the minority and the "new professionals" were active participants on the local levels of publicly funded programs. These groups were an emerging new elite in the human service system.

Regardless of intent, one consequence of the evaluation research social movement was a challenge by researchers and their allies to the citizen participation movement: The rationality of research against the experience of being poor. Evaluation was the ideology which gave legitimation to this new elite of researchers (Krause, 1973).

The evaluation research movement challenged the older human service elite, too. Here the issue was the "sloppiness" of human service systems. The parts of the systems were disjointed when examined from the perspectives of client service, interagency relations or the like. The old elite could be held responsible for these inefficiencies and for the lack of service effectiveness.

Evaluation in its symbolism and language offers cognitive and social means to rationalize the human services systems (Rich, 1973). It is a way to think about and to achieve "order." The problems of actually doing and utilizing evaluation research of the human services are very real. Researchers, now successful, may soon face a severe problem: "How to deliver." It may be at

that point that the demands for evaluation research become modified. For the moment, evaluation research "is in." Examined next are some consequences of this successful scientific social reform movement.

#### SOME CONSEQUENCES OF EVALUATIVE RESEARCH FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES

##### On the Level of the Worker

The language of evaluation is spoken increasingly by human service workers. However, very often only the words are learned and the meanings are changed or lost. When the meanings are kept, social control is gained for "language can be thought of as a system of social control with vocabularies socially canalizing thought" (Pitkin, 1972).

Practitioners want and need evaluation research, hold unusual expectations of it and are disappointed by its outcome. In response, they have created a vocabulary of "reasons why not" i.e., why statistically significant findings were not found:

- "The therapeutic relationships examined or the impact of the program is 'too subtle to measure with statistics'."
- "The presence of outsiders disturbs the normal conduct of the program or the group or the session."
- "Even though they may come back to prison, they are better or happier or more emotionally stable people for having participated in the program."
- "The effects of the program can only be measured in the long run, not just during the first six months or year after release ."
- "The program or the technique is OK but it is not designed for this particular individual."
- "The reason that the program failed is that it wasn't extensive enough or long enough or applied by the right people."
- "The program is worth it if it saved one man." (Ward and Kassenbaun in Weiss, 1972).

Silly comments, defensive statements, these? To some ears, these can be read also as a solid critique of evaluation research as now practiced. The conflict in orientation between the researcher and the practitioner is clear. This conflict is emerging into public discourse as another consequence of the social movement for evaluation. Related directly is the issue of measurement: What do the evaluation researchers measure in their studies? Often "objectives."

Practitioners have begun to "manage by objectives\*," to quantify expected outcomes to/in their clients and to measure these (most often with the help of researchers). Too often, only the easily measurable is examined regardless of its centrality to the program, its management, or to its service ethos (Rich, 1973). "Management by objectives" (MBO) is both a technology and an ideology. So too is "research utilization." Measurement as a technique used in MBO to collect data to utilize in programs is also used in political and ideological ways. It is these uses which contribute to the emerging widespread clash between practitioners and researchers (Rich, 1973).

For the worker, evaluation research means records, forms and instruments. To him, his success and failures become numbers, not people. Often, he tries to get around these papers. He fudges. He gets cynical, often angry. He begins to avoid certain tasks. There emerges a deviant social role for the human service worker.

Another consequence of evaluation often is that the instruments of the process - the forms and records and the like - become incorporated and institutionalized. Information sought for one end is used for no end. More red tape and bureaucracy follow, with the attendant difficulties in changing these ways.

Yet another consequence is that the data are moved from the practitioners and the managers to the researcher who designs, collects, analyzes, interprets, etc. - all in his own corner. In turn this seems to make the goal of management utilization of findings more difficult to achieve. Further, this contributes to a sense by workers that the researcher is an "outsider" - one who is hard to reach, who doesn't understand practice, etc. And, maybe most important, the practice of organizationally separating research from practice and researchers from practitioners is to disengage the worker's act of giving treatment from (a) feedback about the act and the particular worker - client dyad; and (b) the worker's professional responsibility for that act. Responsibility and moral accountability becomes effectiveness - "did it work? The researcher will tell me." The idea of and the social values basic to professional practice and professionalism are changing.

#### On the Systemic Level

Along with emerging notions of professional behavior and responsibility are other consequences of the institutionalization of the evaluation ideology in practice. Among these are the following.

A new form of social legitimacy and social control of the human services has emerged. With this has come a new elite: social scientists, and systems and operations-management people. These people, styles and ideologies are

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\*See Rhineland, (1973) for suggestive comments about the "optical model" of the mind and the relation of this to notions of "objectivity" and, by extension "objectives."

important participants in the socio-political bargaining systems of the human services. This is a gain for the technocrat and the methodologist.

A third consequence is panic on the part of practitioners and managers as they begin to see that the question of "does it work?" could lead to their program being closed. A finding of "no proof of effectiveness" can be a death certificate.

Another consequence can be thought of as the "achievement crisis" (Eaton, 1974); researchers will have to produce too. They will have to devise technologies of evaluation which will meet the needs and wants of the socio-political decision-making process or else they will lose the legitimacy which governs their elite status in these decision systems.

Last, here, is the consequence of feeling hopeless because the human services have been "captured by outsiders." Where does this leave the practitioners?

#### BEHIND THE 'RHETORIC OF RECONCILIATION'

The practice of the rhetorical reconciliation helps to explain how American society escapes many of the strains that might be expected when its professed ideals conflict with many of its accepted practices. There is a tendency to describe accepted practices in ideologically acceptable terms, whether or not the terms are truly descriptive of practices . . . What is significant is the metamorphosis of the normal language shifts in American society into a rhetorical reconciliation between opposing practices and beliefs; a reconciliation that serves to perpetuate the conflict by rationalizing practices and delaying changes in ideology. (Skidmore, 1970).

There is always hope of a reconciliation between differing views - here, between practitioners, researchers, decision-makers of policy and funding, the "public" in general and organized constituencies in particular. This is a basic tenet of our political ideology and a basic perspective in the socio-political analysis of individual and group wants and needs.

There is a possibility, though, that the very success of the evaluation social movement has institutionalized words, notions, ideas, symbols and social processes which are at root inherently different, as different as art and science; and that at best there are but tangential ways in which these culture systems overlap and can be brought into mutual support on the level of workers and clients. It is our task to find these points, for without them, we will clothe our art in robes of scientific rhetoric and be no better for it. Our responsibility is to search for a fit between research and practice in the service of our ideals.

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