

## CHAPTER 2

# EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

## 2.1 EVALUATION AND PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Organizations, whatever their character and purposes, consist of people. As a first step in looking at the way in which evaluation must be related to organizational structures, it is firstly important to consider the purely personal element. People working within an organization become identified with the goals of the organization, with its clientele, or with specific aspects of its programme. Those concerned with evaluation must recognise this personal and emotional investment as a potent force in organizational dynamics.

At the same time, people concerned with evaluation have their own personal investment in their evaluational activities. The evaluator doubtless has some commitment to objectivity, to a critical and searching analysis of a programme and, very likely, a commitment to a particular kind of theoretical or conceptual background.

Wildavsky has produced an extremely valuable discussion of some of the organizational aspects of evaluation and we will be referring to this paper at several points in the current chapter.<sup>1</sup> At this point it is useful to look at some of his comments on personal factors in the evaluation process:—

“The ideal organization would be self-evaluating. It would continuously monitor its own activities so as to determine whether it was meeting its goals or even whether these goals should continue to prevail. When analysis suggested that a change in goals or programs to achieve them was desirable, these proposals would be taken seriously by top decision-makers. They would institute the necessary changes; they would have no vested interest in continuation of current activities. Instead they would steadily pursue new alternatives to better serve the latest desired outcomes.

The ideal member of the self-evaluating organization is best conceived as a person committed to certain models of problem solving. He believes in clarifying goals, relating them to different mechanisms of achievement, creating models (sometimes quantitative) of the relationships between inputs and outputs, seeking the best available combination. His concern is not that the organization should survive or that any specific objective be enthroned or that any particular clientele be served.

Evaluative man cares that interesting problems are selected and that maximum intelligence be applied toward their solution. While he often does have strong social preferences, his central commitment is to solving problems in the right way .....

"Evaluation should not only lead to the discovery of better policy programs to accomplish existing objectives but to alteration of the objectives themselves. Analysis of the effectiveness of existing policies leads to consideration of alternatives that juxtapose means and ends embodied in alternative policies. The objectives as well as the means for attaining them may be deemed inappropriate. But men who have become socialized to accept certain objectives may be reluctant to change. Resistance to innovation then takes the form of preserving social objectives. The difficulties are magnified once we realize that objectives may be attached to the clientele — the poor, outdoormen, lumbermen — with whom organizational members identify. The objectives of the organization may have attracted them precisely because they see it as a means of service to people they value. They may view changes in objectives, therefore, as proposals for 'selling out' the clients they wish to serve. In their eyes evaluation becomes an enemy of the people .....

"The result of having evaluative studies that are carried on during the life cycle of a program is that evaluators and program personnel must live (uneasily, as we shall see) side by side. The result of periodic evaluation after the program has been established is that one group of men are making statements about the worth of activities to which another group of men are devoting their lives .....

"The assumption that objectives are known, clear, and consistent is at variance with all experience. Evaluation cannot ordinarily proceed, then, by determining the degree to which the unknown objectives of a particular program are being achieved at whatever cost. The first element of evaluation, therefore, which often proceeds simultaneously with program operations, must be a search for objectives against which to evaluate the program. Program personnel cannot be expected to take kindly to the suggestion that they do not know what they are doing (because if they did know they would presumably be able to specify precisely their current objectives) .....

It is easy to see that personal factors may act as a barrier to effective evaluation. There may be resistance to the very institution of critical evaluation within a programme; alternatively people may accept the institution of evaluation as a process but reject its findings and the implementation of change which might be suggested by this. People are naturally unwilling to accept any evaluation which demonstrates or suggests failure on their part.

It is also easy to see that personal factors on the part of either the evaluator or the evaluated may distort the process of evaluation and present false results. An evaluation which is not adequately reality-based may well be worse than no evaluation in that it can be used as a tool to perpetuate ineffective programmes or to destroy sound ones.

Having emphasized the inherent difficulties and dangers facing any programme seeking to establish evaluative processes it is now important to turn to practical questions about organizational arrangements.

## 2.2 EXTERNAL OR INTERNAL EVALUATION?

One solution to this problem has been to place evaluation in the hands of persons, or of an organization, which is completely external to the programme being evaluated. University Departments, individual researchers or consultants, or technical experts made available under international auspices, may be asked to carry out full evaluation of a programme. There are doubtless situations where this is a valuable strategy but many examples demonstrate that there are inherent difficulties in such an approach. The advantages and disadvantages of external evaluation can usefully be summed up as follows:

### **ADVANTAGES**

1. A specialised organization or an individual expert can bring to bear upon the problem of evaluation, resources and knowledge which are not available to the agency whose programme is being evaluated.
2. An external evaluator can introduce a level of objectivity unlikely to be possessed by personnel engaged in the programme being evaluated.
3. The external evaluator will be much better able to bring to bear upon his evaluation a comparative experience of similar programmes in other organizations or other countries.

### **DISADVANTAGES**

1. Those working within the programme and closely involved with it will find it easy to resist change to their programme — they will be able to claim, often accurately, that the external evaluator did not fully understand all factors involved. Even though this is sometimes a rationalization, it is nevertheless an effective one.
2. The reality is that the external evaluator will rarely be able to fully grasp all factors involved in the programme and may very easily overlook important elements.
3. The external evaluator will possess his own personal commitments to various viewpoints leading him to make certain basic assumptions and judgements upon which he then bases his evaluation. This will rarely be made adequately explicit and the evaluation will therefore often be considered in isolation from its basic assumption.

On the other hand, an organization may endeavour to structure itself so as to provide for continuing internal evaluation without reference to external assistance. This is implied in the first paragraphs quoted above from Wildavsky.

Unfortunately the processes of organizations and of bureaucratization work against the realization of the genuinely self-evaluated organization. To quote again from Wildavsky:

“Evaluation and organization may be contradictory terms. Organizational structure implies stability while the process of evaluation suggests change. Organization generates commitment while evaluation inculcates skepticism. Evaluation speaks to the relationship between action and objectives while organization relates its activities to program and clientele. No one can say for certain that self-evaluating organizations can exist, let alone become the prevailing form of administration”.

Thus internal evaluation tends to fall victim to the inevitable institutionalization of programme which occurs within an organization. Even where a separate section within an organization is specifically established at a high level of power to provide evaluative input to the administration of that body, the evaluation unit inevitably becomes part of and identified with overall goals and programmes of the organization.

On the other hand, there are obvious strengths in internal processes of evaluation. It is often much easier to gain acceptance of the results of such evaluation and to ensure implementation of appropriate action based upon these results. Furthermore, the evaluators are much more likely to have a full knowledge of the nature of the programme and the various factors which influence its direction and character. It would virtually be true to say that the advantages and disadvantages of external evaluation are a mirror image of the corresponding disadvantages and advantages of internal evaluation.

Within this framework it is now possible to look further at potential strategies for combining the strengths of these two approaches into an appropriate organizational process for evaluation. In this chapter we will look at what might be called the preconditions for evaluation and elaborate upon procedures in later chapters.

## 2.3 MORE ABOUT PRECONDITIONS FOR EVALUATION

We have already made some comments in the introductory chapter on the importance of establishing some common agreement about the carrying out of evaluation, its purposes, its uses and possible consequences. This chapter has served to elaborate the organizational problems involved and it is now possible to look a little further at the establishment of an appropriate organizational environment.

Although idealised, the philosophy and concept underlying Wildavsky's picture of a self-evaluative organization (see above) are important. Political decision-makers and permanent administrators should do their best to ensure

that these concepts are firmly integrated into the philosophy underlying their policies and programmes. From this we can set down a first precondition:

### **PRECONDITION 1**

**Those responsible for the policy and administration of programmes must be fully convinced of the need for evaluation; must agree on the purpose of evaluation; must agree upon the uses and possible consequences of evaluation; and they must be fully involved in making the decision that evaluation will be a part of their programme.**

However, as we have noted already, it is extremely doubtful whether the purely and genuinely 'self-evaluating organization' does or can exist. Evaluation also demands an element of objectivity which can best be provided from outside of the organization. It may also require resources and knowledge which are not readily available within the organization seeking evaluation. It may therefore be essential to involve external personnel in the evaluative process and so we suggest:

### **PRECONDITION 2**

**Organizational arrangements must be made to ensure objectivity together with appropriate resources and knowledge; this will normally mean the involvement of external persons in the evaluation process.**

Merely on these two strategic statements it would be easy, once having decided upon evaluation, to hand the entire responsibility over to the external evaluator. Again, we have already outlined above that there are some clear disadvantages in doing this. The external evaluator may find it difficult to fully understand the complex factors underlying programme development, will doubtless have his own deficiencies in objectivity, and by producing a completely external view of the organization, is all too likely to find his evaluation rejected.

Close team work between the evaluator and the evaluated is called for. This means joint planning of the actual evaluation process, during which not only would the overall design be determined, but the responsibility for the various aspects of data collection and analysis would be defined. Those being evaluated should continue to participate fully in the evaluative process throughout its execution. Hence:

### **PRECONDITION 3**

**Where external personnel are involved in the evaluative process, all steps of evaluation including design, data collection and data analysis, should be shared between external and internal personnel so that any artificial distinction between evaluator and evaluated is diminished.**

There is a particular difficulty inherent in evaluation of youth programmes. Young people are generally seen in terms of the old adage that 'children

should be seen and not heard'. The result is that many programmes for youth are paternalistic and the viewpoint of the service consumer, that is the young person himself or herself, is rarely considered. If evaluation is to be adequate then it must take into account the perspective of the service consumer and balance this against other viewpoints. We will discuss this in more detail in a later section of this handbook but for the time being:

#### **PRECONDITION 4**

**In evaluating any service programme, the recipients of the service should be involved in the evaluative process as far as possible.**

The extent of involvement is difficult to define in any general principles and will vary from one programme to another and from one culture to another. The question should be considered however of the extent to which the young people in receipt of a service might not only be asked for information but might actually share in the design of evaluation and in the development of recommendations for later action.

Finally, it is important to look briefly at the question of objectivity. It is generally agreed that the social scientist can never achieve perfect objectivity.<sup>2</sup>

Human perception is always conditioned by the beliefs, cultural values and opinions which are held. The external evaluator is just as prone to distortions in perception as the individual working within the programme being evaluated. His distortions will doubtless be different ones, many of them relating to his personal viewpoint and his academic experience.

One important safeguard against hidden assumptions underlying evaluation and distorting its results lies in teamwork between the evaluator and the evaluated. In the course of reaching joint agreement on the design and operation of evaluation, each party should become aware of the assumptions and 'hidden agendas' of the other. Naturally this will only occur if an atmosphere of frankness prevails in planning. In some situations it may be assisted by ensuring that all parties to the evaluation endeavour to write down their basic assumptions and philosophy so making these explicit and visible to all concerned. We come, therefore, to a last proposal:

#### **PRECONDITION 5**

**Those who are involved in an evaluation process should share with each other their basic assumptions and values underlying their thinking so that the influence of these upon perceptions of data and upon action recommendations, arising out of the data, will be known.**

#### **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Wildavsky, Aaron, *Evaluation as an Organizational Problem*, (Centre for Environmental Studies, London: University Working Paper No. 13, 1972.)
2. Myrdal, Gunnar, *Objectivity in Social Research* (London: Duckworth, 1970).