

EVALUATION AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

3.1 CHANGING CONCEPTS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Organizations almost inevitably engage in planning of their activities. This process of planning may consist only of making a series of ad hoc decisions bearing little relationship to each other or to any explicit overall goals. At this extreme position, probably most people would consider that there is, in fact, a complete absence of planning and this kind of decision-making process might therefore be seen as non-planning.

To many people planning essentially involves some overall framework within which decisions are made in such a way that they have a rational relationship to each other and to the overall frame of the organization. A number of ideas about the nature of the planning process have developed and, before proceeding further, we need to briefly outline the changing nature of these concepts. Perhaps the simplest and most traditional view of planning is what might be called the straight-line process. This essentially consists of a series of sequential steps. Two simple examples of ways in which this process might be conceptualized are given in *Figure 1*.

Even a quick inspection of *Figure 1* compared with realistic experience indicates that planning is very rarely quite as simple as this. There is constant feedback from one step to another in the planning process, with adjustments taking place to each step in the process and with the various steps of the process proceeding concurrently rather than sequentially. A graphic illustration of this is shown in *Figure 2* indicating something of the complexity of what really happens in most well considered planning. *Figure 3* gives a hypothetical illustration of the way in which evaluation might be conceived within such a framework. An actual example taken from the Town Planning Report for the new city of Milton Keynes (U.K.) is given in *Figure 4*. It will be seen that in this example a variety of techniques for monitoring and evaluation are separately defined and built-in to the process.

Even this kind of formulation is seen by some planners as being unduly static. They emphasize that different things are desirable to different people; that planning must therefore accept that there is not common agreement upon individual and social goals; and that therefore planning must try to specify a diversity of goals held at the same time by different groups and individuals. This concept sees planning as a dynamic process which must evolve and adapt and within which constant modification takes place at every step of the process. *Figure 5* is one example of the way in which this concept can be perceived. It emphasizes even more than the feedback models shown in *Figures 2 and 4*, the extremely complex inter-relationship between various aspects of planning. Because of this complexity it may be a more difficult notion to understand and implement in practice. Furthermore, it becomes much more difficult to see evaluation as a definable function within this process. It postulates, in fact, the kind of planning process which might occur in Wildavsky's self-evaluating organization. As we have already discussed above (Chapter 2) this kind of organization probably does not exist in practice.

It is likely that most administrators will therefore find it much more useful to think in terms of the feedback models for planning which can be much more readily related to organizational structure and function. Within this very brief framework we have distinguished three different types of formulation — the "straight-line" process, the "feed back" process, and the "inter-active" process. It is now possible to look in a little more detail at the part which evaluation might play in each of these formulations.

3.2 EVALUATION IN AD HOC OR STRAIGHT-LINE PLANNING

Many organizations are in the position where planning has been on an ad hoc basis (non-planning) or where the general concept of planning has been according to the straight-line model. However, they are now faced with awareness of the need for evaluation or, alternatively, external pressures for evaluation as part of increasing accountability.

In this situation, it is, in fact, desirable that an overall evaluation of the agency programme as it stands should be carried out before endeavouring to move to a new kind of planning process. Even at the very simplest an organization in this position should undertake what might be called a descriptive stocktaking of its situation prior to any shift towards new arrangements for planning or development.

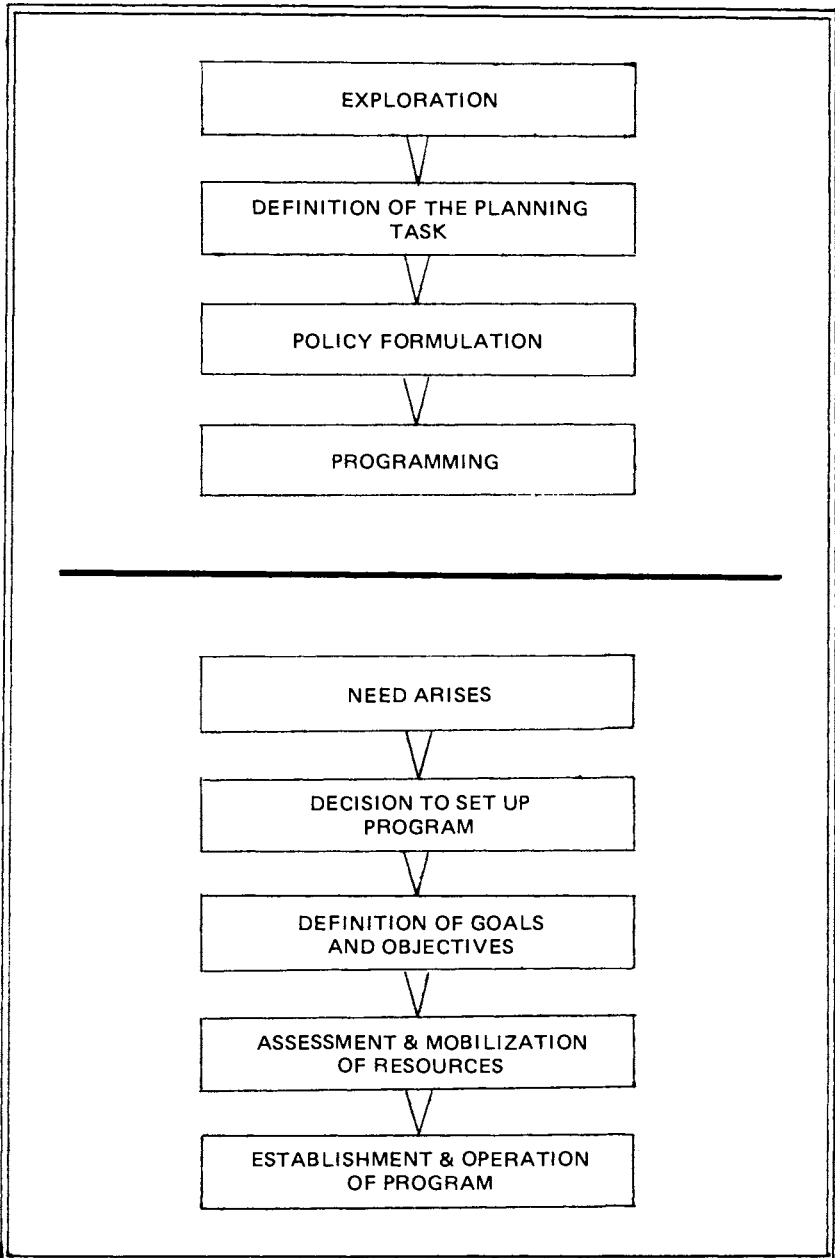


Fig. 1. Examples of straight-line formulations of the planning process.

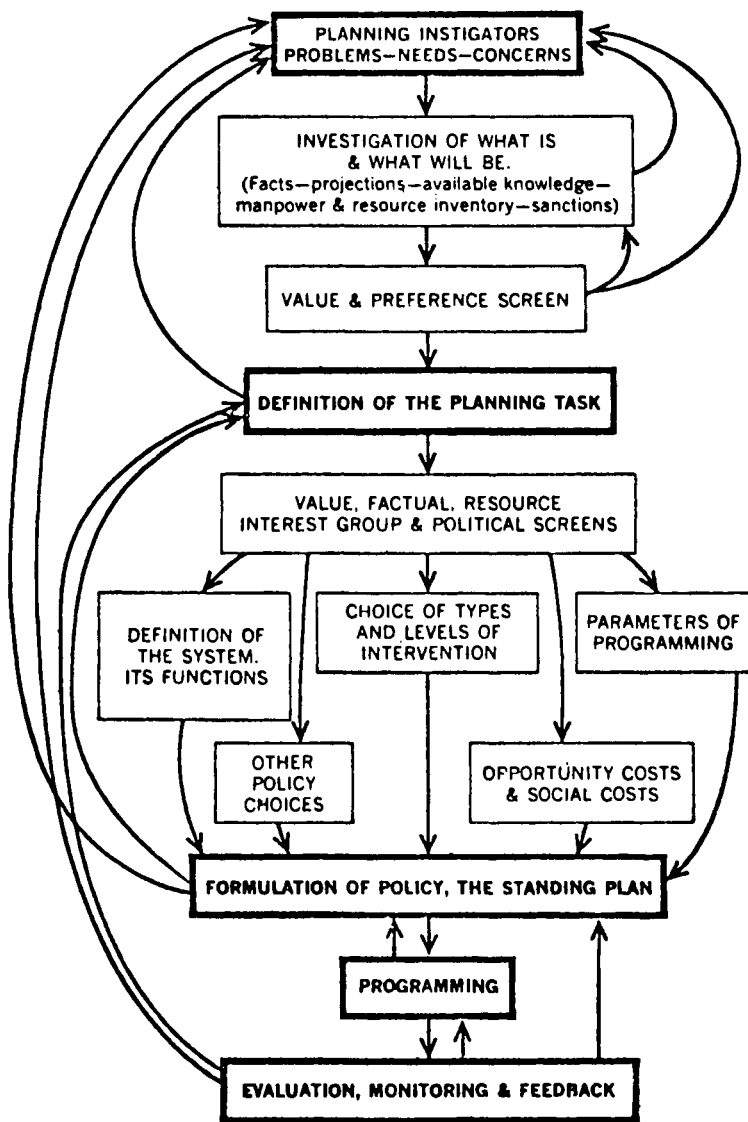


Fig. 2. The feedback conception of the planning process. (From Kahn¹, 1969).

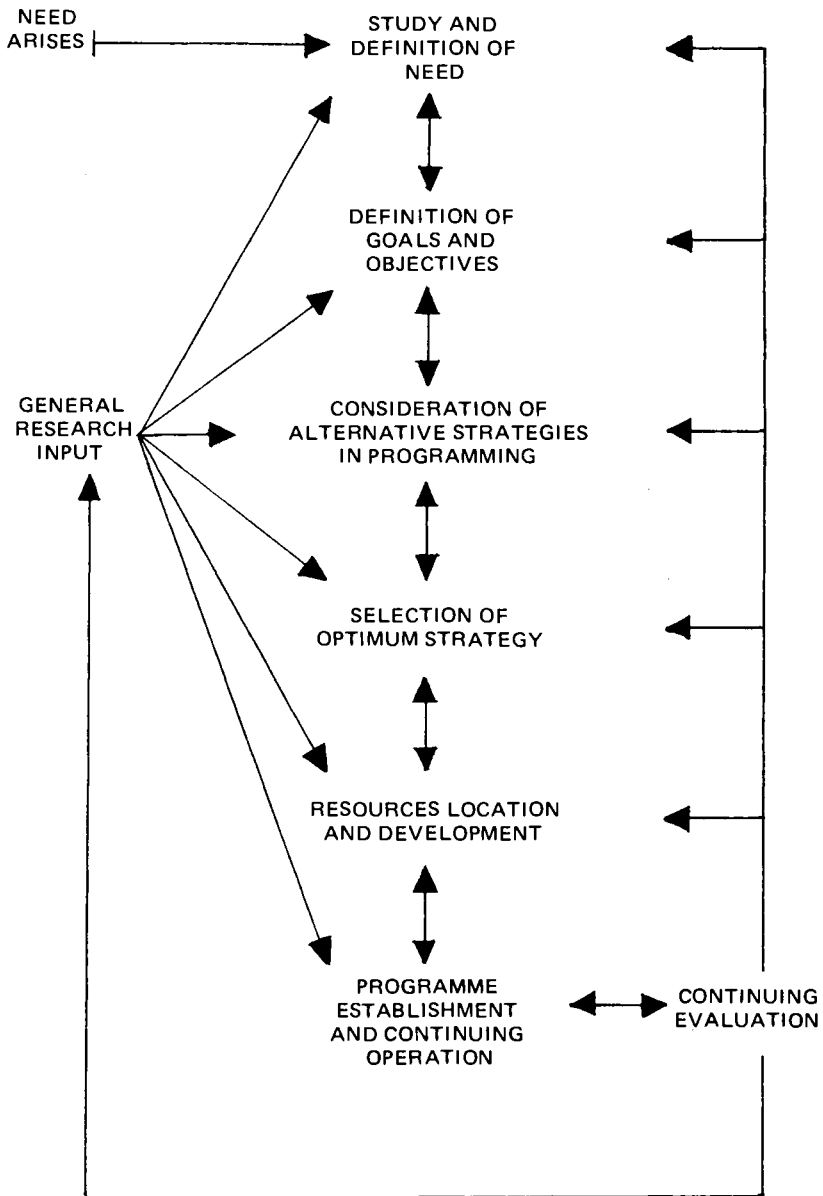


Fig. 3. Evaluation as part of the "feedback" formulation of planning.

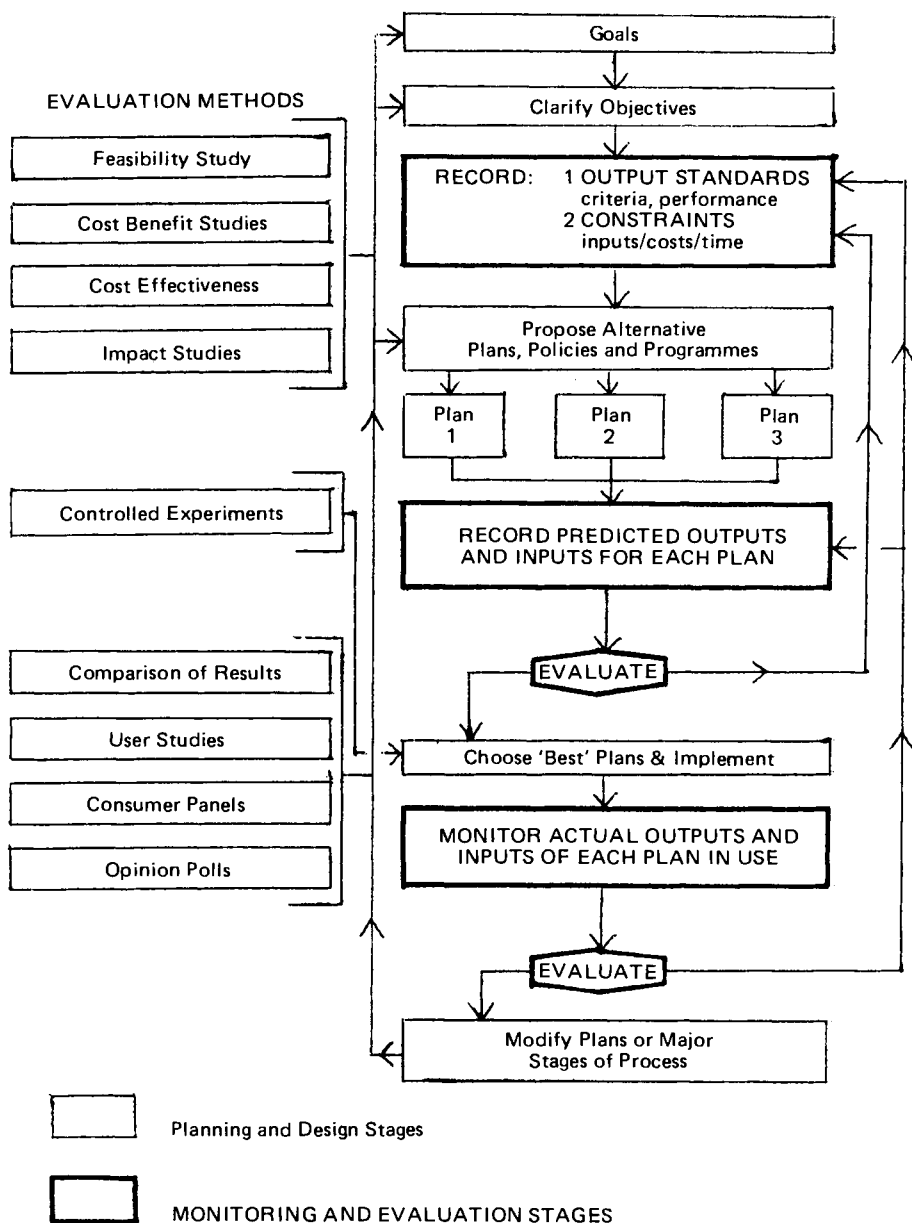


Fig. 4. The practical example of the feedback approach to planning. (Milton Keynes²).

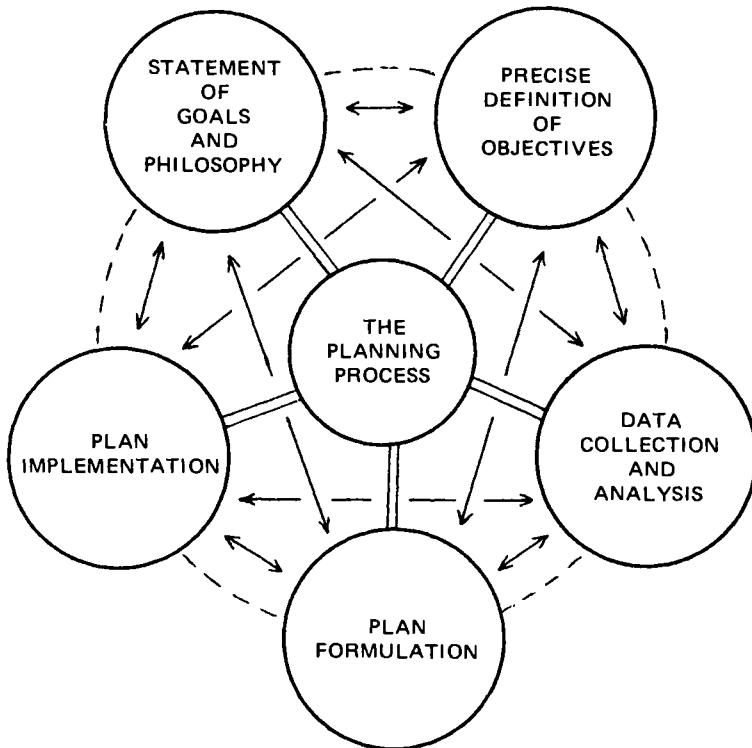


Fig. 5. Planning as an inter-active process. (As formulated by Burton³).

This brings us to the concept of what might be called cross-sectional evaluation. In this situation one is concerned with taking a look at the effectiveness of an organization at one specific point in its history. Ideally one would anticipate that having carried out an evaluation of this kind the organization will then be in a position to not only re-assess its goals, priorities and methods, but to re-formulate its approach to planning in such a way as to provide for future operation of a “feedback” basis.

3.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

It is useful to make a distinction between monitoring as a technique, or group of techniques, used within the overall process of evaluation, and the overall process in itself. Monitoring consists of collecting information in a systematic way which is relevant to the functioning of the organization. Evaluation involves using that information in order to make soundly based judgements about the effectiveness of the programme, the appropriateness of its goals or similar issues.

Monitoring is an essential part of evaluation within a “feedback” approach to planning. It demands careful determination of which data should be collected, the way in which it should be collected, and the way in which it can best be stored and analysed to provide usable information. The example illustrated above in *Figure 4* shows a preliminary definition of areas within which data should be collected, but in practice one would have to proceed much further than this.

The establishment of monitoring alone is, of course, not enough. The information which develops from monitoring must be communicated to those concerned with decision-making and with programme implementation. They must then assess it and use it to make better decisions or develop better programmes. This is the essential feature of evaluation within this concept of planning. Obviously this planning model can break down when there are interruptions in the communication process or barriers to utilization of the information which is being communicated.

3.4 EVALUATION IN INTER-ACTIVE PLANNING

We return now to the inter-active formulation illustrated in *Figure 5*. That component of the process shown with being concerned with data collection and analysis corresponds to the monitoring which we have discussed in the previous section. It will, at the same time, be collecting other

data as implied in the Milton Keynes model (*Figure 4*). More importantly, this component of the process will be in constant communication and interaction with all other components. Thus not only will the definition of objectives, the statement of goals and philosophy, the formulation of planning, and the implementation of planning be influenced by the information made available, but the very data being collected and the way in which it is analysed will, in turn, be constantly subject to changing demands from the other components of the process. This brings us face-to-face with one of the real dilemmas facing us in many practical situations.

Data collection analysis and evaluation is often a time-consuming process which must be pursued over a reasonably lengthy time to gain real confidence in its judgements. Perversely, the organization operating on the inter-active model is likely to be constantly shifting its emphasis creating considerable practical difficulty for those concerned with evaluation. To quote again from Wildavsky:

“Evaluation requires a certain minimum amount of stability; changing the program month by month makes it impossible to get a fix on it of sufficient duration to perform any study. Yet social problems, which are supposed to adapt to rapid shifts in the environment, change frequently in time and in the substance of their orientation. So the evaluators become an interest group within the organization pleading for sufficient stability so that they can learn what is going on. If evaluators want to begin soon after a program has been established, the officials in charge may plead that insufficient time has elapsed for the program to take hold and its effects to be sufficiently distinctive to show up in measurements. By this time, however, the evaluators have learned that if they don’t get in at the start, the program will have changed and they will again be told that not enough time has elapsed to study the new orientation.”

We will return at a later stage to discuss this dilemma in more detail.

3.5 PLANNING AND EXPERIMENT

One often hears the term “experimental” programme used. A cynical commentator looking at a number of such programmes might very well conclude that “experimental” really means that the programme concerned is a little risky in that it might provoke negative reactions from political decision-makers, members of the public or others. Alternatively, he might decide that “experimental” was a potent bit of magic which facilitated the flow of funds.

On the other hand, the scientist, from whose realm the term “experimental” has been borrowed would insist that an experiment requires careful definition and control of the conditions within which it is carried out, accurate measurement of its results and full reporting of its outcomes.

The cynical viewpoint may well be justifiable as a realistic strategy in programme development — it is not for this manual to make judgements upon whether it is right or wrong to use the term “experimental” in order to protect or to gain support for a particular programme. However, it can be argued here that experiment only contributes effectively to evaluation and to an overall process of rational planning if it meets the scientist’s criteria.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Kahn, Alfred J. *Theory and Practice of Social Planning* (Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1969).
2. *Planning for Milton Keynes*, Volume 2 (Milton Keynes Development Corporation, Wavendon, 1970).
3. Burton, Thomas L., *The Challenge of the Leisure Environment* (Paper to National Seminar on Leisure, Canberra, Australia, 1974).