ORGANIZING EVALUATIONS FOR USE

AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

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INTRODUCTION

Evaluation as an educational management tool is a critical and timely issue. Today's administrators face a dual challenge: to demonstrate how well their school systems are performing and to take greater responsibility in that demonstration.

Increased administrative responsibility is, we believe, demanded by the growing concern over the quality of education in our schools (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). If they are to respond to that concern, administrators must have information demonstrating how successfully their schools and districts are pursuing the goal of excellence. And if they plan to use evaluations as part of their demonstration efforts, administrators must play a greater role in designing and conducting these evaluations.

According to the Council of Chief State Officers (1982):

> As the shift continues from the federal to the state levels in the management of education programs, the states become more, not less accountable for them. SEAs and LEAs have become accustomed to the federal government not only requiring the evaluation of programs but also dictating methods of evaluation.

As federal control of evaluation diminishes, along with federal resources for these evaluations, state and local administrators will have to assume greater responsibility for their evaluations (Burry, 1984). They will have to think hard about how best to allocate scarce human and financial resources so as to ensure that these evaluations generate useful information. One index of that usefulness is the extent to which evaluation becomes a tool for the management and improvement of educational programs (Klein, et al., 1984).

The research base informing this article can serve as a guide to administrators in two ways. First, it shows clearly that, the more active an administrator's participation in program evaluation, the more likely it is that the evaluation findings will be put to use. Second, it has led to the development of an organizing framework designed to help administrators take the leadership role necessary if evaluation is to become an effective management tool in educational decisionmaking.

The proposed framework assumes that evaluation is a means of producing information which can be used to make decisions about programs: about how the program can be improved, about how resources should be allocated, about how attitudes toward the program can be changed.

Evaluation information has many potential users. Let's take the example of a school setting in which a number of programs operate: a Chapter I program, a state-funded bilingual education program, a remedial math or language arts program for students in need of specialized instruction. Each of these programs can be evaluated, and each of the evaluations can have a variety of potential users. Thus, the district superintendent may want evaluation information on all the programs, in order to make informed decisions about district operations as a whole. In addition, the people responsible for a particular program--the director, other administrators, curriculum developers, instructional staff, and funding agency personnel--may want evaluation information on that program.

Other potential users include school boards, parents, advisory councils, and community organizations. Each of these groups can have professional and personal interests in the program and its evaluation: They may be involved in the evaluative decisionmaking process; they may be required to implement particular decisions; they may be affected by particular decisions. In each case, they are asked to apply or to accept evaluation information or the decisions based on that information and so are potential evaluation users.

Now, evaluation users differ in their predisposition to apply evaluation information. In fact, predisposition toward evaluation is one of the many elements known to influence use, elements inherent not only in the conduct of the evaluation itself but also in its social, political, organizational, administrative, and programmatic context. If these elements are ignored, they can reduce or negate the evaluation's use potential.

If, on the other hand, an evaluation is considered in light of the range of elements known to affect use--and if it is organized, planned, conducted, and communicated in response to the particular elements operating in a given setting--its use potential increases. This kind of administrative organizing role is the theme of this article, which describes our own research on evaluation use over the past decade, summarizes the entire body of empirical research on use, and draws some propositions for the administrator who is considering how to organize an evaluation for use. The concluding section presents an organizing framework that can be used in various settings and offers specific suggestions on how to increase evaluation's potential as an educational management tool.

CSE RESEARCH ON EVALUATION USE

In the mid-1970s, when the Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) began to conduct research on evaluation use, the term had been cropping up in the literature for a number of years. Most such discussions were theoretical or conceptual in nature, however, and lacked any firm empirical foundation (see, for example, Cohen & Garet, 1975; Mann, 1972; Rossi, 1972).

Our early research on evaluation use (Alkin, 1975; Alkin, Kosecoff, Fitzgibbon, & Seligman, 1974) marked the beginning of systematic, empirically-grounded research on use: what use means, whether or not it occurs, and what kinds of influences promote or impede it.

To a great extent, our research was motivated by the grandiose claims made by some of the early advocates of evaluation. According to them, evaluation would have a significant and highly visible impact on the program being evaluated. All the evaluator had to do was to provide valid data, and educators would see the light and use these data to make more rational and informed decisions, which would immediately be translated into action, which in turn would result in dramatic improvements in educational policy and practice.

We know now that this view was naive. For one thing, evaluation information may not be put to immediate and observable use, but it does not follow that no use is occurring. Rather, the impact of evaluation information is frequently long-range, cumulative, and more modest than originally expected (Alkin et al., 1974). Further, while evaluation information may contribute to a particular decision, other kinds of information may also play a role.

For another thing, early advocates overemphasized the importance of technical matters. However, neither the procedural soundness with which an evaluation is conducted nor the validity of the data it produces is sufficient to ensure use. Other evaluation characteristics, many of them far removed from the technical realm, can influence use, as can a broad range of factors which have little to do with the conduct of the evaluation itself. For instance, one early CSE study (Alkin, 1975) showed that the evaluator's stance toward the program, its staff, and their questions can affect use. Other early research (Patton et al., 1978) also pointed up the importance of the "personal factor."

According to the naive view, the evaluator has sole responsibility for evaluation and its use. But CSE research indicated that the potential user of information, such as an administrator, also carries some responsibility. The evaluator often lacks the power, prestige, understanding, and political sensitivity necessary to promote use. The influence of an administrator--a superintendent, a program director, or a principal--is often required.

Drawing on the early studies mentioned above, CSE launched a series of empirical studies of evaluation use. They included: (1) evaluation case studies, (2) an evaluator field study, and (3) a user survey. The findings from these studies prompted us to prepare (4) a review of the literature on evaluation use, which contributed to our development of (5) a handbook for evaluation decision-makers. While the handbook was being prepared, we undertook a study of (6) evaluation regulations and their interactions with other influences, and an examination of (7) the characteristics of highly utilized evaluations. The major points of each of these studies--their contributions to our knowledge of the evaluation use process--are summarized below.

The evaluation case studies

The case studies (Alkin, Daillak, & White, 1979) focused, over a period of two years, on five Title I or Title IVC programs. Our approach involved in-depth interviews with program staff and the evaluator, as well as the examination of documents such as program proposals and evaluation reports.

The case studies described in detail school-level program implementation and evaluation: how the evaluation process unfolded and who helped shape the process, how evaluation was used, how it fitted in with other school operations, and how it influenced decisions about the program. By identifying the factors that influenced the evaluation process, we developed a conceptual framework to guide our future study of use. This early framework included the following elements:

- the evaluation's preexisting bounds, such as its requirements and fiscal constraints;
- the users' orientation toward the program and its evaluation;
- the evaluator's approach to the program and to his or her craft;
- evaluator credibility;
- organizational considerations, such as relationships between program site and district;

- extraorganizational considerations, such as community influence
- information content and reporting; and
- administrator style, such as organizational skill and initiative.

The importance of all these use-influencing elements was confirmed as we applied and refined the framework in our studies.

The evaluator field study

The case studies had suggested that evaluation information is more likely to be used at the local level when evaluators adapt their approach to the needs of program managers. Thus, the field study was undertaken to examine the work environment as seen by the evaluators themselves. Daillak (1980) spent a year in an urban school system as a participant-observer, working closely with three district staff evaluators, two of them concerned with preschool language programs and the other with Title I schools. By directly observing these three evaluators at work, and by discussing with them the evaluation process as it unfolded, Daillak was able to elaborate some of the elements posited in the original version of the conceptual framework, especially those elements related to evaluator approach, information content and reporting, and organizational considerations.

With respect to approach, for instance, Daillak noted the importance of the evaluator's providing advice and guidance to program staff rather than merely collecting and analyzing data. As regards information content and reporting, he found that the informal sharing of ideas and recommendations tended to increase evaluation use. With respect to organizational considerations, Daillak concluded that, regardless of the stance taken by the evaluator, certain organizational constraints--such as loose management of instruction or negative attitudes toward evaluation--may pose obstacles to program evaluation and information use.

The user survey

The user survey (Stecher, Alkin, & Flesher, 1981), conducted in the same district as the evaluator field study, was intended to illuminate the evaluation process from the users' standpoint: how they view the program and its evaluation, how evaluation information is used and by whom, how much it is used, for what purposes, and under what social/institutional/political conditions. Over the course of a year, the principal, the Title I program coordinator, and another staff administrator at each of 22 Title I schools were interviewed about their perceptions of significant program occurrences over the year and about the extent to which evaluation had contributed to these occurrences.

The interviews suggested that, in addition to evaluation information, other influences such as personal belief and opinion have a bearing on the decisionmaking process. Further, while evaluation may play a modest role in the final decision, its greatest impact is felt in the earlier stages of the decisionmaking process, such as needs assessment and problem recognition. Finally, the level of evaluation use increases to the extent that administrators adopt the tactic of involving others, such as teachers, in the decisionmaking process.

Review of the literature on evaluation use

At this stage in our research, we were able to flesh out our framework of use-influencing characteristics. In addition to having a fairly clear picture of the general conditions of evaluation use, we felt we had identified many of the specific elements--such as evaluator role, user interest, the evaluation requirements, and the substance of the evaluation information--that have a bearing on use in most settings.

Our annotated review of the literature (Burry, 1983) justified our confidence. The review identified and examined some 150 studies dealing specifically with evaluation use, of which about 30 were empirically based. These studies--reflecting use in education, public health, human services, and criminal justice--confirmed the existence and importance of each of the elements identified earlier. They also made it clear that evaluation use is strongly influenced by the actions of administrators: identifying the intended information users, translating their interests into evaluation questions, discussing these and other requirements with the evaluator, making sure that the evaluation addresses both program-focused and other issues, and making sure that the answers are communicated in ways appropriate to the intended users.

The handbook for evaluation decision makers

In view of the importance of administrator-evaluator collaboration in mapping out the evaluation's focus and procedures, we next decided to develop a handbook for administrators who wish to organize their evaluations for maximal usefulness (Alkin et al., in press).

Drawing upon our findings up to this point, the handbook describes and exemplifies the personal, organizational, and procedural characteristics known to affect use. Of major importance to the administrator-organizer are the scenarios, which constitute a bridge between the research findings and their administrative application. These scenarios, a series of evolving vignettes, show an administrator working closely with an evaluator to build local uses into the evaluation.

The organizing framework presented in the handbook demonstrates how the elements affecting use fall into patterns which reflect stages of the use process and how the administrator can influence these elements to promote use. This organizing framework is discussed in a later section.

Evaluation regulations and their interactions with other influences

During our research, it became clear that the various elements in an evaluation's setting interact to affect use. While the handbook was still being developed, we decided to take a closer look at one group of elements to see if we could identify some common interaction patterns. Given the increasing need for state and local education agencies to assume greater responsibility for their evaluations, we focused on those elements related to the various requirements that may be imposed on an evaluation. We wanted to find out whether, as federal control over program evaluation relaxes, SEAs and LEAs can agree on how and to what purposes evaluations may best proceed.

Based on our analyis of current federal evaluation requirements (Burry, 1984), we hypothesized that (1) even though these regulations encourage local control of evaluations, the needs of SEAs and LEAs may be difficult to reconcile; (2) even though school districts are now free to administer evaluation measures appropriate to their own educational concerns, they may be inclined to fall back on historical precedent; and (3) as a consequence of such tension and conservatism, school districts may be unable to build local program relevance into their evaluations.

Interviews with directors and staff members of school district evaluation units (Burry, 1984) confirmed these hypotheses. Respondents reported that state-level information needs tended to dominate over local program needs. Further, in those districts where locally developed measures of student progress (typically criterion-referenced tests) had been introduced, most people still believed that the primary evaluation purpose was to administer and report the results of some previously required measure of a comparative nature (typically a norm-referenced test). Thus, district evaluators found it difficult to allocate time and resources to locally focused evaluations or to gain support for such efforts. Their colleagues (administrators, teachers) felt that they were already giving enough time to the "traditional" evaluation and that any parallel, locally driven evaluation would be a waste of time, because it would not be viewed as "respectable" by those people at the state or district level who required that an evaluation be conducted.

Characteristics of highly utilized evaluations

For the 1984 AERA annual convention, we organized a Division H award to recognize and reward excellence in promoting evaluation use. Evaluators entering the competition discussed those features of their evaluation which had contributed to use. Levels of use were verified through documentation furnished by the evaluation's users. Each of the studies submitted dealt with an educational program: Some were public school programs at the district level; others were university programs, statewide programs, vocational education programs, and programs designed to promote teacher effectiveness.

Our analysis of these highly utilized evaluations (Ruskus & Alkin, 1984) indicated that evaluators and users differed in their views of which elements enhance use. Evaluators tended to cite such elements as the role they chose, the procedures they selected, and the way in which they reported information. Users also cited the importance of evaluation reporting but also mentioned other aspects of the evaluator's role, such as the extent to which the evaluator involved users in the evaluation and the extent to which the evaluator was involved in implementing the recommendations made to program staff. In addition, users emphasized the importance of their own commitment to use.

Generally, the analysis confirmed the validity of our evolving framework, underscoring the importance of the evaluator's and the users' approach to evaluation use.

Summary

Over the last decade, CSE research on evaluation use has evolved from investigation of the general conditions of use to analysis of specific cases. In this evolution, we have moved from an understanding of the broad domain of use, to consideration and verification of the discrete elements that make up that domain, to illumination of how these elements influence the use process, and finally to demonstration of the kinds of administrator action which promote evaluation use.

As Figure 1 shows, the principal characteristics influencing use fall into three categories: the participants in the evaluation, the setting of the evaluation, and the conduct of the evaluation. The first category comprises evaluator characteristics and user characteristics; the second, preexisting evaluation bounds, organizational features, and program characteristics; and the third, evaluation procedures, information dialogue, substance of the evaluation, and reporting of the evaluation. Each of the elements listed in the figure has a demonstrated relevance to evaluation use.

SYNTHESIS OF USE RESEARCH AND SOME PROPOSITIONS

In this section, we summarize the principal findings of research over the past decade on the use process. Although the literature includes both conceptual-theoretical and empirical studies, here we will cite only the empirical studies, with one exception. The conclusions reached in the conceptual-theoretical studies are generally congruent with the empirical findings.

After summarizing the findings on the characteristics of the evaluator that influence use, we will offer some propositions about the optimal form that each of these characteristics should take in order to maximize an evaluation's use potential. This pattern is repeated in the remaining subsections: on user characteristics, on the evaluation setting, and on the conduct of the evaluation. In this way, we will define and explicate each of the elements listed in Figure 1. This discussion will then serve as a background to the final section on how the administrator can organize an evaluation to promote its use as a management tool.

The participants: The evaluator

As Figure 1 shows, the evaluator characteristics pertinent to use are: commitment to use, willingness to involve users, choice of role, rapport

Figure 1: The Domain of Evaluation Use

I. The Participants in the Evaluation

A. Evaluator Characteristics

1. commitment to use
2. willingness to involve users
3. choice of role
4. rapport with users
5. political sensitivity
6. credibility

B. User Characteristics

1. identity
    a. range of potential users
    b. organizational positions
    c. professional experience levels
2. interest in the evaluation
    a. views about the project being evaluated
    b. expectations for the evaluation
    c. predisposition toward the evaluation
    d. perceived need
    e. perceived risks
3. commitment to use
4. professional style
    a. administrative and organizational skills
    b. initiative
    c. openness to new ideas or change
5. information processing
    a. preference for particular forms
    b. how information is processed

II. The Setting of the Evaluation

A. Pre-existing Evaluation Bounds

1. written requirements
2. other contractual obligations
3. fiscal constraints

B. Organizational Features

1. intraorganizational
    a. role of central/district office

b. interrelationship between unit and central/district administration

c. institutional arrangements

d. unit level autonomy

e. sources of information beyond evaluation likely to be in use

f. perceived institutional risk

2. external

a. community climate

b. community influence

c. role of other agencies

C. Project Characteristics

1. age/maturity

2. innovativeness

3. overlap with other projects

III. The Conduct of the Evaluation

A. Evaluation Procedures

1. methods used

a. appropriateness

b. rigor

2. dealing with mandated tasks

3. use of a general model

B. Information Dialogue

1. amount and quality of interaction between evaluator and users

C. Substance of Evaluation Information

1. information relevance

2. information specificity

D. Evaluation Reporting

1. frequency of information provided

2. timing of information

3. format of presentations

a. oral presentations

b. written reports

c. statistical and narrative data

with users, political sensitivity, and credibility. All these characteristics reflect the evaluator's approach to his or her craft, which has a profound influence on use.

For instance, the case studies showed that, when evaluators tangibly demonstrate their commitment to use and encourage others to follow suit, use is more likely to occur (Alkin et al., 1979). Similarly, our studies of use in Title I evaluations found that evaluators frequently stimulate use of findings by involving users in the evaluation itself (Alkin, Stecher, & Geiger, 1982).

In their assessment of the Title I evaluation and reporting system, Reisner and her colleagues concluded that an evaluator who believes "evaluations are a waste of time unless they are used by someone" and who works "to create a positive attitude toward utilization" enhances the likelihood of evaluation use (Reisner, Alkin, Boruch, & Millman, 1982, pp. 59-60). In her summary of the Huron Institute's studies of the role of evaluation information in public schools, Kennedy (1982) noted that evaluators committed to use often successfully involve others in the evaluation by enlisting the support of an administrator, who then goes on to recruit others.

Evaluator commitment to use and willingness to involve others, then, often go hand in hand. But these qualities may have little effect if the evaluator does not adopt a role appropriate to the program being evaluated. In most cases, the most appropriate role seems to be a facilitative one, based on a recognition that the evaluation should serve the program rather than simply meeting the pro forma--frequently external -- requirements (Alkin et al., 1979).

Based on her analysis of evaluation use in medical education projects, Dickey recommended that, to increase the use of their work, evaluators "should adopt a more collaborative role, involving the decision maker and the staff in decisions about the evaluation" (Dickey, n.d., p.24). Patton (1978) reached the same conclusion in his work in health projects and noted that use potential increases when the evaluator takes direct and personal responsibility for getting information to people who can act upon it.

An evaluator's ability to adopt a collaborative role may influence the extent to which he or she can develop rapport with users. Our research clearly demonstrated that rapport contributes to use (Alkin et al., 1979), as did the research of Braskamp and Brown (1980), who also noted in a variety of project settings that both rapport and use increase when the evaluator demonstrates an understanding of the internal and external political environment of the program. In our framework, this characteristic is termed "political sensitivity." Cichon and Dwyer's (1982) conclusions concerning evaluation use in Title I settings led them to warn evaluators that "evaluation is only one part of the ongoing social and political context of _any_ program and, as such, it can either become a part of the system from the ground up or it can be left to chance to fit at the end" (p.23). Obviously, they recommend the former option.

The final evaluator characteristic contributing to use is credibility with the program staff. Credibility may stem from reputation (Alkin et al., 1982), from the trust the evaluator enjoys with program staff and from their perception of how well he or she understands their program (Brown & Braskamp, 1980), or from forcefulness of personality (Reisner et al., 1982).

As is the case with any profession, evaluators differ in how they approach their craft. Some evaluators believe that if they do a technically sound job their work will automatically be put to use. Others understand--or, with proper tutoring, can come to understand--that their personal commitment to use is critical and that they must expend whatever effort is needed to promote use. Efforts to involve potential users in all facets of the evaluation process--planning, execution, and application--are especially likely to pay off. The evaluator who tries to do everything him/herself is missing out on a good opportunity to ensure that the evaluation findings will be used.

These two characteristics--commitment to use and willingnes to unvolve others-- are, in large part, dependent on the role the evaluator chooses, and there are several from which to choose. Some evaluators view themselves as impartial judges of quality; others tend to equate evaluation with research and to run the evaluation as if it were an experiment; others may choose to act as advocates for the program being evaluated. The ideal role, however, is one in which the evaluator views the users as colleagues who, on the one hand, help guide the evaluation and who, on the other hand, have questions which are entitled to their fair share of the evaluator's attention; their questions should not be treated as secondary to those which may emanate from some external governing agency.

The evaluator who adopts the use-promoting stance suggested above takes an important step toward fostering the trust and harmony that underly rapport with users, a rapport that is further strengthened when the evaluator is sensitive to the program's political dynamics and understands that evaluation information is only one of many possible inputs to the decisionmaking process and that people with different attitudes, backgrounds, and power or prestige are likely to contribute to that process.

Finally, the evaluator who is a good craftsman and who displays the characteristics described is establishing the credibility he or she needs if potential users are to believe that the information they receive is worth putting to use.

With respect to the evaluator's contribution to use, then, we offer the following propositions.

An evaluation's use potential is likely to increase to the extent that the evaluator:

- o is personally <u>committed</u> to seeing his or her work put to use, and actively seeks to facilitate the use of information;
- o is willing to <u>involve</u> users in all facets of the evaluation: planning, execution, and application;
- o recognizes that alternative evaluation <u>roles</u> exist, chooses a role that is appropriate in a given setting, and focuses on serving program needs as well as meeting any external requirements;
- o develops <u>rapport</u> with users by earning their trust in an atmosphere of harmony and agreement;

- is politically sensitive to the program, understands the relationship among formal and informal power sources in the decisionmaking process, and recognizes that evaluation is only one of many inputs to this process;
- establishes credibility in terms of technical competence, professional expertise, and personal manner.

Part of the administrator's task in organizing for evaluation use may involve exerting influence to ensure that these propositions are heeded.

The participants: The users

The user characteristics pertinent to use are: identity, interest in the evaluation, commitment to use, professional style, and information preferences and processing routines.

With respect to identity, we found that most evaluations have a range of potential users; evaluation use tends to increase when these users are clearly specified and when their questions and needs are earmarked for the evaluator's attention (Alkin et al., 1979). Kennedy's (1982) analysis of users' questions led her to conclude that the use-conscious evaluator should be aware that users, even those who belong to the same group, may have conflicting definitions of a common issue and that these conflicts must be resolved in the interest of use. Other user characteristics that fall under the rubric of identity are organizational position(s) and professional experience level(s). Our research on Title VII evaluations (Alkin et al., 1974) showed that use tends to increase when evaluation information is provided to someone who occupies a position of power within the organization and who has sufficient experience to put the information to use. Similarly, King and Pechman's (1982) study of evaluation in a school district concluded that use "requires the explicit and continual action-based support of powerful administrators" (p. 32).

User interest has several aspects: users' views about the program being evaluated, their expectations about the evaluation, their predisposition toward evaluation in general, their perceived needs, and their perceptions of the risks entailed in an evaluation. Our research reveals that successful evaluators are careful to determine how the various users view both the program and the evaluation and then to act accordingly (Alkin et al., 1979). Kennedy's (1982) research bears out this point: When users hold inflexible views about a program, when they expect the evaluation to produce information that supports their views, and when the evaluation generates findings that run counter to these views, then use is difficult to promote. Users' general attitudes toward evaluation are also important: the more positive these attitudes, the more likely it is that the evaluation will be used (Alkin et al., 1979; Stecher et al.,, 1981). Other researchers have noted that use increases when the potential users believe that evaluation produces useful information (Anderson, Ciarlo, & Brodie, 1981, in studies of mental health programs), and is appropriate for a particular question (Brown, Newman, & Rivers, 1980, reporting across varied settings). But when users believe that the evaluation entails a risk that outweighs its perceived benefits, use levels may diminish (Alkin et al., 1979; Brown & Prentice, 1983).

Several studies have found that user commitment to use is just as important as evaluator commitment. For instance, our research shows that, when decisionmakers are tangibly and visibly committed to use, then use potential increases (Alkin et al., 1982). Reisner and her colleagues (1982) and Dickey (n.d.) arrived at the same conclusion.

Users' professional styles constitute another important group of influences. Our case studies (Alkin et al., 1979) clearly demonstrated that the administrator's ability to organize, initiate, and follow through on information-based action was related to use. Similarly, Cichon and Dwyer (1982) found that the extent to which "management and evaluation functions [are] integrated in the program leadership role" (p. 23) has a strong bearing on use, while McColskey, Altschuld, and Lawton (1983) reported that school principals who are open to change, and who have the authority and initiative to apply the information at hand, have a positive influence on use.

Finally, we have found that users differ not only in their preferences for particular kinds of information but also in their preferences as to how this information is processed and presented to them (Alkin et al., 1979). Moreover, the extent to which evaluation information matches these preferences is one determinant of use, a finding confirmed by several other studies (see, for example, Braskamp & Brown, 1980; Brown & Rivers, 1982; Riesner et al., 1982).

Given that most evaluations have a range of potential users, it follows that various groups of users are likely to differ on all these characteristics. Evaluators and administrators concerned with use will need to be aware of these differences and to adapt their approach accordingly. Perhaps their greatest efforts should be directed toward those potential users whose positions within the organization give them the greatest influence in the decisionmaking process. Potential users whose professional backgrounds include little direct experience with evaluation may need to be educated about the contribution they can make to evaluation use.

Users' views about the program, its evaluation, and evaluation in general may range from neutral to strongly positive or negative, and both the nature and the strength of these views can affect their tendency to use evaluation information. Generally, to the extent that users' specific needs for evaluation information outweigh any perceived risks involved in the evaluation, they will be inclined to put the information to use. Actual use, however, will depend on how well users can organize information and take responsibility for putting it to use, even if such use leads to changes in the program's content and operation.

Finally, no matter how strongly users are committed to applying evaluation information, use will also depend on the extent to which the information they receive comes to them in a form with which they are comfortable.

With respect to the users' contribution to use, then, we offer the following propositions.

An evaluation's use potential is likely to increase to the extent that the users:

- are clearly identified so that the evaluator understands the range of organizational positions and professional experience levels -- administrative vs. operational, sole or shared decisionmaking authority, familiarity with evaluation -- which are represented;

- view the program in ways that they are willing to modify, if warranted;
- have specific expectations for the evaluation--e.g., that it is intended to assess the program's efficiency, illuminate its processes, weigh its outcomes--that are translated into questions and concerns which the evaluation can address;
- are predisposed to accept the evaluation's findings, perhaps because they
- have a high perceived need for evaluative answers to their questions, and
- perceive the risks of the evaluation to be less than the potential benefits. In addition, they
- are personally committed to using evaluation information as their questions and concerns are answered, and
- have sufficient administrative and organizational skills to act on information, to get things done. They will
- take the initiative in using evaluation information in their own area of responsibility and, if necessary, in stimulating others to follow their example. Further, they
- are open to new ideas and to changes that stem from the findings, even if these findings suggest that they must modify their original views of the program. And, as the evaluation process unfolds, their positive interest in the evaluation remains high, because they

- o ask for and receive the kinds of information they prefer to use (narrative, descriptive, or some combination) through the kinds of processes (oral reports, written reports, detailed or summary treatments) they are most comfortable or familiar with.

Part of the administrator's task in organizing for evaluation use will be to determine how closely the users fit the above descriptions and, where necessary, to reinforce their commitment to use. In addition, the administrator will need to make sure that the evaluator acts on users' information preferences and processing routines.

The Setting

The elements of the setting that are pertinent to use include: preexisting evaluation bounds, organizational features, and program characteristics.

Evaluation bounds have three facets: written evaluation requirements, other contractual obligations, and fiscal constraints. In our case studies (Alkin et al., 1979), we found that any potential conflicts (e.g., between the requirements imposed on an evaluation by an outside agency and the requirements emanating from the program itself) must be resolved if use is to occur; no single set of issues should be allowed to dominate. Other researchers have reported similar findings: that use increases when the parties associated with different requirements agree in advance about the focus of the evaluation and the kinds of information it should produce (Kennedy, 1982); that negotiation between the evaluator and various users contribute to the use process (Braskamp & Brown, 1980); and that use is more likely when at least some of the financial and personal resources earmarked for an evaluation are allocated to program concerns (Cichon & Dwyer, 1982).

The organizational features affecting use are of two kinds: intraorganizational and external. With respect to intraorganizational features, we found in the case studies (Alkin et al., 1979) and in the evaluator field study (Daillak, 1980) that use potential tends to increase when the district office gives the evaluator some freedom in choosing a role and an evaluation focus. Equally important is the district's overall responsiveness to the needs of the local program. In particular, local program personnel must have autonomy to act upon the evaluation's findings. Allowing the evaluator freedom in role selection without offering comparable freedom at the site level to follow the evaluator's recommendations runs counter to the use process. Similarly, Kennedy (1982) noted that a district's overall institutional arrangements are important to the use process and that collaborative problem solving is crucial. King and Pechman (1982) also concluded that collaboration is a key determinant of use, while McColskey and his colleagues (1983) noted that school principals who felt that they had the freedom to make important decisions in the school tended to make greater use of evaluation information.

Just as individual users may perceive that an evaluation entails risks to a program, so the organization as a whole may perceive risk, and this perception can impede use (Alkin et al., 1979). In this regard, Brown and Prentice (1983) reported that "the more respondents believed there was a sense of risk to the institution, the more they wanted [to be involved] in the decision" and in the processes leading up to it (pp. 9-10). Given the importance of this involvement to the use process, it is critical that overall institutional arrangements are such that user involvement is encouraged.

Among the external features that can have a bearing on use are school-community relations (Alkin et al., 1979). Specifically, when the local community has a stake in the program being evaluated, and when it is asked to provide support, then the involvement of community members in the evaluation becomes important. In this regard, Reisner and her associates (1982) found that "utilization . . . increases when the local community expects to be involved" (p.60).

Finally, certain characteristics of the program itself--including its age/maturity, its innovativeness, and its overlap with other programs--have a bearing on evaluation use (Alkin et al., 1979). For instance, newer and more innovative programs benefit more from formative than from summative evaluations. When programs overlap with other projects to form a programmatic whole, and when the whole is subject to evaluation, some attention should be given to the unique questions and information needs of each individual project. At the time we completed the literature review (Burry, 1983), we found no other empirical studies dealing with project characteristics, although several theoretical-conceptual works (e.g., Griffin et al., 1983; Holley, 1979; Weiss, 1981) agreed that these characteristics affect evaluation use.

To summarize the influence of evaluation setting on use, then, we concur with the statement that "the findings highlight the need for information users and information providers to be sensitive to the contextual factors that affect information needs and use" (Brown, Newman, Rivers, & Glock, 1981, p. 14). For example, in any evaluation setting, the degree of tension or conflict between external evaluation requirements and the needs of the program itself can have a profound effect on use. Further, within the particular organization in which the evaluation is being conducted, overall institutional arrangements which minimize program-level autonomy can thwart evaluation use at the program level. Institutional sense of risk, community involvement and expectations, the age and innovativeness of the program, and its relationship with other programs can also affect the extent to which the evaluation is put to use.

With respect to the characteristics of the setting that contribute to use, then, we offer the following propositions.

An evaluation's use potential is likely to increase to the extent that:

<u>The preexisting evaluation bounds</u> --

- o are characterized by guided harmony rather than by conflict and tension. The evaluation's <u>written requirements</u>--legal codes, federal/state requirements--should be flexible enough so that the evaluator can respond to <u>other contractual requirements</u> such as those set by program administrators or operators.

<u>The organizational features</u> --

- o are marked by <u>amicable co-existence</u> in an atmosphere that encourages discussion and the negotiation of problems and needs;
- o allow the <u>central/district office</u>--often the evaluation sponsor--to balance broad system concerns with those of the individual units, such as the schools which are subject to evaluation;

- permit sufficient unit-level autonomy so that unit (e.g., school) questions receive a fair share of the evaluator's attention as he or she addresses a variety of questions of interest;
- promote frank discussion of the perceived institutional risks and, where there is a question of whether the evaluation benefits will outweigh the risks, consider the possible outcomes and resultant actions the organization might take;
- are free from undue or negative influence from the surrounding community or from other agencies.

Program characteristics --

- are clearly defined on such dimensions as age/maturity, innovativeness, and overlap with other programs, because these characteristics have a bearing on the kinds of procedures the evaluator should select and the kinds of information he or she should provide in order to stimulate use.

Part of the administrator's task in organizing for evaluation use will be to determine what effect these characteristics are likely to have in a given evaluation setting.

The conduct of the evaluation

The final group of characteristics affecting evaluation use relate to the conduct of the evaluation itself. They are: the evaluation procedures, the information dialogue between evaluator and users, the substance of evaluation information, and evaluation reporting.

Our own research (Alkin et al., 1979) showed that evaluation procedures--including the methods selected, the way in which mandated tasks are handled, and reliance on a general model--can have a strong bearing on use. In particular, the methods selected should be appropriate to the given setting and should satisfy requirements for rigor. Similarly, Dickey (n.d.) observed that "the project director is most likely to use the evaluation when he or she . . . sees its procedures as appropriate" (p. 17). With respect to rigor and appropriateness, however, Cichon and Dwyer (1982) sounded a note of caution with which we wholeheartedly agree: The evaluator's "unquestioning adherence to [strict research] procedures may well get in the way of usefulness for program improvement" (p. 25). To the extent that procedures are sensitive to the purpose and scope of the programs's evaluation needs, the potential for use is enhanced.

Earlier, we pointed out that tension may exist among an evaluation's various requirements. The case studies (Alkin et al., 1979) showed that if the evaluation emphasizes, or is perceived to emphasize, externally mandated requirements, then its potential usefulness decreases, at least in local eyes. In this regard, Reisner and her associates (1982) noted that "utilization increases when evaluations are specifically designed [or are permitted the flexibility] to meet local needs" (p. 61).

An evaluation need not follow a formal model to enhance use (Alkin et al., 1979). What is more important is that the evaluator select methods which are sensitive to the organizational characteristics described earlier. Similarly, Lawton, McColsky, and Altschuld (1983), from their research in a variety of settings, concluded that "no single or small set of strategies stands out as a predictor of evaluation success. Rather, it seems that evaluators [use] a wide variety of strategies to conduct an evaluation" (p. 3). This point is of particular importance to the use-conscious adminstrator given the tendency of some evaluators to espouse a particular evaluation model regardless of its appropriateness in a given setting (Burry, 1982).

The importance of evaluator-user dialogue loomed large in all of our research. We found, for instance, that use tends to increase when the evaluator involves users in discussions of such specific evaluation concerns as how to read, analyze, and make decisions on the basis of evaluation information (Alkin et al., 1982). Other researchers confirmed the importance of dialogue. For example, Reisner and her colleagues (1982) found that "evaluation use increases when decision makers are assisted in understanding how they might use evaluation data" (p. 65). Similarly, Braskamp and Brown (1980) observed that the earlier the evaluator and program staff meet to discuss possible evaluation uses the greater the liklihood that use will occur.

Several studies have underscored the importance of the substance of evaluation information, especially its relevance and specificity. In our own research, for example, we found that evaluation information which focuses on major program concerns is more likely to be used in decisionmaking (Alkin et al., 1979). Similarly, Dickey (n.d.) noted that "the project director is more likely to use evaluation when . . . its recommendations are helpful" (p. 17). King and Pechman (1982) concluded that "if a user finds . . . information of value to his particular situation, he is likely to use it; . . . if, for whatever reason, it does not seem of immediate value, he will not use it" (pp. 20-21). Braskamp and

Brown (1980) found that important program decisions are typically based on a broad range of information needs and that use tends to increase when users are provided with information that they see as being specific to these needs.

Evaluation reporting encompasses frequency and timing, as well as format. Our own work demonstrated that the frequency and timing of evaluation reporting contribute to use (Alkin et al., 1979; Daillak, 1980). In their work at the district and school levels, Kennedy, Apling, and Neuman (1980) observed that while the effect of a final evaluation report is difficult to gauge, frequent and well-focused formative reports increase the potential for use. Cichon and Dwyer (1982) stated the case even more directly: "If your interest in using the results of an evaluation begins when the results come in, you're probably too late. Use issues must be addressed from the start of the evaluation to maximize the potential" (p. 32).

With resepct to timing, David's (1978) research on local uses of Title I evaluations found that "the timing of an evaluation can by itself restrict the potential utility by not meshing with the timing of program planning" (p. 38). Similarly, Dickey (n.d.) concluded that "the project director is most likely to use the evaluation . . . when its final report is produced on time for the project's needs" (p. 17).

As for the format of reports and presentations, we found that evaluation use increases when the evaluator selects a format which is appropriate to potential users and which gives clear answers to their questions (Alkin et al., 1982). Similarly, Braskamp and Brown (1980) recommended that the evaluator use informal presentations, such as discussions with staff, to increase information use. Fleischer (1983) too found that informal presentations during the course of the evaluation were especially effective: "Because of the extent of informal communication between the evaluator and program personnel, [program] changes and new developments were already accomplished <u>before</u> the written report was turned in." Finally, Reisner and her associates (1982) found that graphic, narrative, and nontechnical modes of presentation--especially when they describe program strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for improvement--increase use, while Brown, Braskamp, and Newman (1978) reported that potentially troublesome technical data can be made more useful if they are accompanied by narrative explanation and interpretation.

With respect to the conduct of an evaluation, then, the research findings agree that the procedures used, the interaction between evaluator and users, the substance of the information, and the manner in which it is reported can have a marked influence on use. We therefore offer the following propositions.

An evaluation's use potential is likely to increase to the extent that:

<u>The evaluation procedures</u> --

- o are <u>appropriate</u> to the particular program. A selected procedure must be appropriate both as a <u>method</u> for addressing a given question and in the <u>context</u> of the program;
- o demonstrate <u>rigor</u> in terms of accepted standards of evaluation practice and of the users' conceptions of rigor;

- deal with mandated tasks -- funding agency requirements, central office needs, unit level questions -- in a balanced manner so that no single point of view is seen to dominate;
- reflect the view that no single evaluation model is inherently superior; rather, evaluation should be seen as a tool for decisionmaking, and the selection of evaluation procedures should be guided by the program's decisionmaking processes.

Information dialogue --

- reflects the purposeful sharing of ideas between evaluator and users;
- is ongoing, in sufficient amounts to stimulate or maintain user interest in the evaluation, with quality growing out of collegiality and reciprocity.

Evaluation substance --

- provides relevant answers to the questions raised by the users;
- is specific in its focus on the needs and interests of the particular user or user group.

Evaluation reporting --

- is marked by frequent and well-focused provision of information;
- is timely in meeting the program's decision needs;
- uses whatever presentation formats (oral or written; statistical or narrative; formal or informal) are appropriate to the range of users and their evaluation interests.

Part of the administrator's task in organizing for evaluation use is to make sure that these propositions are observed in the conduct of the evaluation.

Summary

Several related themes emerge from the preceding discussion. First, the evaluator's ability to address questions relevant to the program, questions of interest to program staff, is a key determinant of program-level use. Now, the evaluator's success in this regard depends, in part, on the various requirements imposed on the evaluation (by a funding agency, for example, or by the program itself) and on whether any particular set of requirements is allowed to dominate. If one set of needs, requirements, attitudes, or expectations takes precedence over other sets, causing the evaluator to adopt a certain role and collect certain kinds of information, and if the resulting evaluation runs counter to expectations at the program level, then potential users are likely to view the evaluator and his or her work with something less than enthusiasm.

Second, evaluation use also depends in large measure on users' interest in the program and its evaluation and on their commitment to applying its findings. This commitment is, in turn, affected by their levels of professional experience, their perceptions of individual and institutional risk, the program's context, and the program's relationship with similar programs or projects undergoing evaluation.

Third, even in those cases where the evaluation addresses the needs and concerns of program-level staff and where potential users are predisposed to apply its findings, certain procedural handicaps can offset these advantages. For example, the evaluator may not have a clear idea of potential users' preferences as to information scheduling, format, and processing. They may be reluctant to express their preferences to the evaluator, viewing such expression as unwarranted "turf encroachment," or they may falsely assume that an organizational superior will communicate their preferences to the evaluator.

Taken together, these three points suggest a fourth: that many use-influencing elements are not amenable to the influence of the evaluator. Rather, they are more properly the responsibility of the administrator, who is in a better position than the evaluator to make sure that the evaluation addresses program-level needs, that potential users are committed to applying the findings, and that their expectations and preferences are clear. In short, many of the elements amenable to influence in a given setting lie within the administrator's domain and thus are more susceptible to his or her influence. This influence is not confined to the setting or organizational context traditionally associated with administrative responsibility. Rather, the administrator's influence cuts across all three categories: participants, setting, and conduct of the evaluation. And such influence is vital to use in cases where the evaluator lacks leadership ability, prestige, or political understanding.

Our final summary point has to do with the use of evaluation as a management tool, an issue not directly dealt with in previous research on use. Now, if educational administration were strictly autocratic, then the extent to which evaluation information is used outside of executive decisionmaking might be of little concern. But many constraints operating within an educational organization--constraints related to participant and organizational goal/need ambiguity and to the loose coupling of educational systems (for a detailed discussion, see March & Olson, 1976, and Weick, 1976)--make autocratic management inappropriate.

Given that decisionmaking in educational organizations is necessarily diffuse, it seems desirable that all parties involved in or affected by decisions share a common information base, such as that provided by an evaluation. It may be that an administrator makes a management decision intended to elicit a systemwide response among other organizational participants. Or it may be that a teacher makes an instructional decision which initially affects only one group of students but which later makes itself felt in other parts of the system as students are promoted, transferred, and so forth. In both cases, a common information base would be advantageous.

We are suggesting that educational decisions flow both from the top down and from the bottom up. This model is ideally suited to our educational decision needs, reflecting as they do a range of issues from broad organizational policy to classroom planning and the provision of instruction (Baker, 1984). The value of such a model is further enhanced if the various participants are guided by a coherent set of decision purposes.

As suggested earlier, all the people involved in or affected by evaluative decisions are being asked to apply or accept evaluation information; thus, all are potential evaluation users. Given the nature of educational decisionmaking and the large number of factors that influence use, however, they may opt to be nonusers. Such nonuse seriously limits the extent to which evaluation, or any other information base, can be used as a management tool to assess, monitor, and improve organizational performance.

Our principal point is that effective management includes the management of evaluation. If evaluation is to be of use as a management tool, then the evaluation and its resultant information base must first be organized around some coherent set of purposes, such as the achievement, demonstration, and maintenance of educational excellence. According to this scheme, each participant may use the information in some unique way and may make some unique contribution to the achievement of the basic purpose.

ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION FOR USE

To have a high potential for use, an evaluation must be carefully planned around some coherent purpose or set of questions and then conducted for and communicated to people who are expected to use the information. This kind of evaluation rarely happens by chance; someone has to take responsibility for making it happen. Part of this responsibility lies with the evaluator; but, as we have demonstrated, the administrator (e.g., superintendent, principal, program director) can also have a marked effect on use potential. In this section, we present a framework which can guide administrators, working in cooperation with their evaluators, as they attempt to exert a positive influence on the evaluation and to increase its potential for use in program management and decisionmaking.

If an evaluation is to address the achievement, demonstration, and maintenance of educational excellence--or of any other desirable goal--it must be prefaced by open discussion of such issues as the definition and indicators of excellence, the current status of the organization with respect to these indicators, and the best means of achieving the goal.

A colleague at CSE (Burstein, 1984) has recently discussed how evaluation can be applied to the question of educational excellence. These applications are important because they attempt to integrate the decision-making process with respect to assessment, planning, and resource allocation and to embed these issues in a common information base. Burstein (1984, pp. 16-19) identifies the following evaluation applications:

- pulse monitoring: treating evaluation information as indicators of the progress that the educational system is making toward the goal of excellence;
- student decisionmaking: using evaluation information to make decisions about student progress;
- program decisionmaking: drawing on evaluation information to monitor programs and to modify them as needed;
- educational policymaking: using evaluation information to guide discussion of the overall status of the system and of mechanisms for improvement; and
- long-range planning: applying evaluation information in decision areas such as physical plant needs, the hiring and assignment of teachers, and resource allocation.

All too often, these decision areas are informed by widely divergent information bases. This need not be. Decisions in all these areas can be grounded in a common information base, such as an evaluation, if the various stakeholders in the evaluation can agree about what purpose the evaluation has, how that purpose can best be achieved, what uses should be made of evaluation information, and by whom. The information produced by the evaluation can then be used by all the stakeholders:

by teachers and principals concerned with monitoring student progress; by curriculum specialists concerned with program development and refinement; by superintendents concerned with establishing policy directions; by superintendents and boards of education concerned with allocating resources to support the established policy; by agencies which provide some or all of the funds supporting the particular program. Each of these groups has a stake in resolving the central issue: Each may contribute to or act upon decisions concerning the issue.

The administrator must consider how to organize the evaluation so that all stakeholders are involved in some central issue. At the same time, he or she must negotiate to ensure that the evaluation meets the needs of all the stakeholders who will be asked to make some use of its findings.

The dynamics of the use process

Research suggests that, in most settings, the elements affecting evaluation use tend to fall into a core pattern reflecting the dynamics of the use process. Figure 2, excerpted from our handbook for evaluation decision makers (Alkin et al., in press), illustrates this pattern.

The administrator who is organizing an evaluation around some central issue should consider the elements listed in Figure 2 from the standpoint of the intended users/uses. The administrator's principal organizing task is to gather information that will help the evaluator focus on user needs. At the same time, the administrator-organizer will need information to ensure that the salient elements in a given setting do not impede that focus. Organizing begins by deciding which users/uses the evaluation should focus on, asking questions in light of core influences on use, and using the answers to these questions to guide both the evaluation process and the administrative tactics devised keep the evaluation on target.

Figure 2

A. SETTING THE STAGE

Pre-existing evaluation bounds
User identity
Program characteristics
Intra-organizational features
External features

B. IDENTIFYING/ORGANIZING THE PARTICIPANTS

User Interest in evaluation
User commitment to use
Evaluator characteristics ° commitment to use ° willingness to involve users in evaluation ° choice of role ° political sensitivity ° credibility
Evaluation procedures
User professional style(s)

C. OPERATIONALIZING THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS

Evaluation procedures
Substance of evaluation information
Evaluator commitment to use
Information dialogue
User information processing preferences

D. ADDING THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Evaluation reporting
Evaluator characteristics (selected)
Information dialogue
User commitment to use

The administrator-organizer can use the pattern in Figure 2 -- with any additions, deletions, or changes of emphasis required by the particular context -- while he or she considers the program, its evaluation, the setting in which it takes place, and its intended uses. One must anticipate the effects that a particular evaluation direction, once taken, is likely to have. One must look at each of the use-influencing elements in turn, asking how it is manifested in the particular program and whether it is likely to have a positive, neutral, or negative effect on use. In light of the answers to these questions, one can then devise strategies to strengthen or maintain positive effects while minimizing negative effects. These strategies can then be implemented by the administator, some other potential user, or the evaluator.

Let's assume that the administator-organizer, using the scheme suggested in Figure 2, asks the following question about the first phase of the pattern, setting the stage: "If the evaluation findings suggest that programmatic changes are necessary to achieve excellence, does the staff perceive any risk that might hinder my using these findings to plan modifications in course content, staff assignments, or resource allocations?" After due deliberation and discussion with staff members, the administrator discovers that some teachers feel that the evaluation poses an unacceptably high risk to them, while others feel either that the evaluation poses little or no risk or that its benefits will far outweigh the risks.

Now, a user group's reluctance to accept and apply evaluation findings may have two consequences, both negative. First, if their acceptance is necessary to achieving consensus on a major program decision, then their reluctance to participate in the decision means that the issue may never be fully resolved. Second, if they move beyond reluctance and attempt to convince other potential users of the perceived dangers, they may thwart the entire evaluation effort.

In such a situation, the administator-organizer must ask a series of questions: Why does one group of users perceive risks? Is the perception justified? Will they try to persuade others to accept their view of the risks entailed? Are their efforts likely to be successful? The answers to these and similar questions will guide the administrator-organizer in devising appropriate strategies to overcome the difficulties.

For instance, suppose that the administrator-organizer decides that the user group's perception of risk is unjustified or overly magnified, perhaps because of some previous experience with evaluation. In this situation, the administrator must convince the hesitant group that the perception is unjustified. To do this, he or she may have to enlist the support and the persuasive powers of other staff members who are receptive to the evaluation and who are trusted and respected by their more reluctant colleagues.

With this example in mind, we will now suggest some of the questions that might be asked at each stage in the use process. The answers to these questions should guide the administrator-organizer in selecting strategies that will build use into the evaluation.

Setting the stage

Setting the stage involves determining, before the planning process begins, what factors are likely to influence use in a given setting. While these influences may to some extent be set, they are not necessarily "givens." As Figure 2 shows, the particular elements that should be considered at this point are: preexisting evaluation bounds, the identifying of potential users, program characteristics, intraorganizational features, and external features.

Some of the questions that the administrator-organizer might raise here include:

- Who are the intended users of the evaluation information?
- Are the preexisting evaluation bounds likely to conflict with program expectations or with other requirements?
- How is the program best characterized with respect to its maturity, innovativeness, and overlap with other programs?

Let us clarify the context before going any farther. Suppose that the administrator wants to use the evaluation findings as a management tool in achieving, demonstrating, and maintaining excellence. Then he or she must be concerned about whether the potential users share a common definition of excellence and whether they agree on its indicators and on how resources might best be spent to promote and maintain it. Any possible areas of disagreement must be carefully negotiated before the evaluation proceeds.

Identifying/organizing the participants

After setting the stage for evaluation planning, the administrator-organizer must next raise a series of questions about user characteristics (interest in the evaluation, commitment to its use, professional syles), evaluator characteristics, and evaluation procedures. The answers to these questions should help the evaluator to choose an appropriate role and to select evaluation procedures that are congruent with users' interests, expectations, and professional styles.

Among the questions that should be considered at this stage are the following:

- Are the intended users committed to use? Is their commitment rhetorical or real?
- What do the intended users expect from the evaluation? Are these expectations likely to affect their desire or ability to apply information?
- What is the most appropriate role for the evaluator, and is the evaluator willing and able to assume this role?
- What evaluation procedures will best match the users' professional styles?

At this point, the administrator-organizer should be concerned with making sure that any conflicts over the definition and measurement of excellence have been consensually resolved before the evaluation procedures are selected and put into operation.

Operationalizing the interactive process

Up to this point, the administrator-organizer has been anticipating future evaluation actions and effects; in the third stage, the carefully planned evaluation procedures are put into operation. The elements that should be considered at this stage include, in addition to evaluation procedures: the substance of evaluation information, evaluator commitment to use, the information dialogue between evaluator and potential users, and the users' information-processing preference.

Some of the questions that should be raised at this point are as follows:

- What is the most effective data-collection schedule, and are there any possible impediments to this schedule?
- Do any of the proposed procedures require special arrangements; and, if so, with whom?
- What kinds of information, in what format, are most relevant to each intended user or groups of users?
- What kinds of dialogue, carried out by what techniques, are most appropriate to users' information-processing styles?

While the evaluation process is under way, the administrator-organizer in our scenario should constantly monitor the process to make sure that previously raised questions have been ansered, to determine whether any unanticipated influences are emerging or whether an expected influence is smaller than anticipated, and to decide whether energy may safely be shifted to another area of concern.

Adding the finishing touches

The final stage in maximizing the potential for evaluation use involves consideration of the following elements: evaluation reporting, evaluator characteristics, information dialogue, and user commitment to use. At this point in the evaluation process, most or all of the evaluation information has been collected and must now be communicated in such a way that the intended users will actually apply the information.

Among the questions the administrator-organizer should raise here are the following:

- What combination of written and oral reporting will most enhance use of information?
- When should these reports be provided?
- After the reports are provided, will any final arguments be needed to convince users to act on the information?

It should be noted that the answers arrived at earlier will influence questions and organizing stategies at subsequent stages. The process is cyclical, and decisions made at an earlier stage can be modified (for instance, a given evaluation question can be given more or less emphasis) in light of subsequent events.

CONCLUSION

We have suggested here that evaluation can serve a variety of educational management needs if these needs are (1) organized around some central concern and (2) identified stakeholders use evaluation information so that each discrete decision point contributes to resolution of the central concern.

Research has revealed a variety of influences on an evaluation's potential for such use: participant characteristics (e.g., potential users' attitudes toward and expectations for the evaluation); setting characteristics (e.g., externally imposed requirements, institutional operating patterns); and procedural characteristics (e.g., means used to collect and communicate information). The research demonstrates that an evaluation's potential for use, whether in educational management or in some other area, is greatly enhanced if someone assumes responsibility for organizing the evaluation to meet the specified needs of particular users.

Often, an administrator is in the best position to assume this responsibility.

It seems evident that adminstrators and evaluators must come to know more about each other's operational needs and viewpoints. To the extent that they share responsibility for defining an evaluation's purpose, establishing its direction, and ensuring that it addresses these purposes, the evaluation's decisionmaking power and relevance are increased.

Therefore, in considering a program evaluation, the administrator must decide on the central concern of the evaluation, identify the users who will help resolve that concern, and specify their questions, their information needs, and their probable uses of the information. At the same time, the administrator must consider the characteristics of a given setting which are likely to influence these uses. The framework described here can guide the administrator in organizing the evaluation so that it will have a high potential for use.

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