

Ch 12: Rossi

Officially The Social Context of Evaluation

- Wide Variety of preparation
- Many different uses of evaluations
- Political

Warnings

- You become your first evaluation much in the same way you become your first supervisor.
- My first experiences were filled with:
 - Deception, self-dealing behavior
 - Massive amounts of money on the line
 - Need for activist style evaluators

This clouds my judgement to this day. You will likely have a COVID-19 taint of some kind.

More Darkness

The Iron Law of Evaluation: The expected value of any net impact assessment of any large scale social program is zero.

- “Large scale” seems to be key.
- Small often works

The Stainless Steel Law

The better designed the impact assessment of a social program, the more likely is the resulting estimate of net impact to be zero.

- Good experimental design that deals with self-selection usually means no-measured effect.
- Positive result bias exists in evaluation

The Brass Law

The more social programs are designed to change individuals, the more likely the net impact of the program will be zero.

- You can't change a person.
- You can change the incentives that they face.

The Zinc Law

Only those programs that are likely to fail are evaluated.

- Don't buy this one.
- Programs that are evaluated have a constituencies, either supporters or detractors, they drive evaluations.

Feeling doom and depression yet?

Evaluators Come from Many Fields

- Econ
- Engineering
- Sociologist

The best had a masters in stats and and Ph.D. in folklore.

Tend to Be Generalists

- You need to learn a lot of odd things to be a good evaluator.
- Bridging from economics is hard because we don't always value other skills sets.
 - Rare that economists will do an ethnographic interview
 - Intensely statistical

Who Values What

- Academics need peer reviewed journal articles
- Evaluators need their work to be used by someone and have an effect on lives.

The push to get evaluations used often leads to advocacy and the reputation of bias.

Step in one toe

- Wildly political environment
 - Don't know the players
 - Alliances
 - Often, who is in charge
- Someone may be using you as a weapon

Example The Meeting on Friday

- I didn't know why I was in that meeting but saw use.
- Pretty sure I was not being used as a weapon.
- I didn't know who was in charge, but used an old trick.
- 36 Stratagems

Note: I over-emphasize this because of my early experience

Primary Problem

Unless you have a contractually defined contact that wants to see a well conducted evaluation, and who trusts you to do a good job – you serve a hydra.

It is best to think of your evaluation as a collection of bomb parts that you must consider how they will be misused.

Bomb Parts?

- Program supporters will think you are trying to harm them.
- Detractors will use it to attack.
- Sometimes supporters and detractors are about a person and not a program. Learn to ID this.

My Solution

- Rossi describes evaluators as needing to be a 'secondary disseminator'.
- You may have been hired by an organization, but your moral responsibility is to program participant.
- The result is my activist orientation.

Communication

You just spent 6 years of your life earning an MS in Economics and have gotten very good at econometrics.

- If you can't explain what you did well enough to make someone *feel* as if they understand – you have failed.
- This is a skill in itself – translators.

Common Pattern

- Hard tech is in appendix
- Main body is the long version of those with subject matter expertise.
- Executive summaries (plural) for different audience groups.
- Presentations that are targeted at specific groups.

So, you need a team

- Diversity is a strength. I mean in terms of skills sets.
- Explain your discipline's point of view to your team members.
- Trust them in their area of expertise.
- The more you learn from each other, the more you can swap roles.

In the end, The Guiding Principles

<https://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51>