

## 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 and 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>