# Evaluation from a Public Policy Perspective

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# Defining Evaluation

There are a number of definitions of evaluation, e.g.,

"...the *systematic* examination and assessment of features of an initiative and its outcomes...to produce information ***that can be used*** by those who have an interest in ***improving its effectiveness***."

*World Health Organization*

# Defining Evaluation, cont.

- Program evaluation is a "**social science activity** directed at collecting, analyzing, **interpreting**, and communicating information about the workings and effectiveness of programs." (Rossi, et al.)

- Interpretation
  - Based on solid social science practice.
  - Transparent
  - Integrity & Ethics

# Defining Evaluation, cont'd.

- "Program evaluation is the use of **social science research methods** to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are **adapted to their political and organizational environments** and **designed to inform social action to improve social conditions**." (Rossi, et al.)

# Evaluation as a Public Policy Issue

- Social programs exist to ameliorate social problems.
- What those identified social problems are and what social programs are used to address these problems should all be based on the organization's:

  - Mission
  - Vision
  - Values
  - Strategic Plan (Those plans that are mission-based)

- The purpose of evaluations is to improve the quality of social programs, so as to further the mission, vision, values, and strategic plan of the organization.

# Evaluation should be "Utilization-focused"

- Michael Quinn Patton:  The vast amount of federally-funded research is not utilized & usually not read.
- If we are going to evaluate:
  - Decide **who** is going to use the findings?
  - For **what** purpose?
  - How will this evaluation serve the mission, vision, values and strategic plan?
- If we have to perform an evaluation due to grant or other requirements,
  - Modify or add to the evaluation so that it is of real value to the organization.
  - Example: Add an implementation evaluation even though the grant demands (prematurely sometimes) an outcome evaluation.

# Joseph Wholey: Evaluability

- Background: Research in the 1970's at the Urban Institute
- Difficulty evaluating programs
- Minimum preconditions that should precede evaluation efforts were missing.
  - Clear program model with clear specification of the program's goals, objectives, and activities.
  - Stakeholder interest and likelihood of use.

# Evaluability, cont'd

- What if there is inadequate agreement on goals, objectives, information priorities and intended uses?

  - Evaluations focus on irrelevant policy and management decisions.

- What is there are inadequate resources, poor implementation or lack of knowledge?

  - 1$^{st}$ add resources, activities or objectives before a formal evaluation

  - Case example: Program integration project.

# Evaluability, cont'd

- What if relevant data is not available and cannot be obtained at a reasonable cost for the evaluation?
  - Determination needs to be made if available data can actually answer the evaluation questions.
  - If not, an assessment needs to be made if such data is mission critical.
  - This is a good example of evaluability serving the interest of organizational development.
- What if policy makers are not willing to change the program based on an evaluation?
  - "Information in search of a user" that will not contribute to improved program performance.

# Evaluability Summary

Evaluability is a process of clarifying program designs, exploring program reality, and if necessary, helping redesign programs to insure:

- Well defined goals, objectives, activities, side effects, and prioritized information needs
- Plausibility
- Performance data can be obtained
- Stakeholder agreement on how the evaluation findings will be used.

# Use a Developmental Perspective

- All programs should be examined from a developmental perspective.
    - Proposed programs
    - Programs recently initiated
    - Stable programs
    - Stable programs that have been evaluated to be effective.
- The evaluation should be tailored to the developmental stage.

# Evaluation Hierarchy

Efficiency

Impact

Outcome

Process/Implementation

Program Theory

Need/problem

# Defining the Need/Problem

- The foundation of any problem is the description of the problem:
    - Scope of the problem
    - Nature of the problem
- Special care should be taken to make explicit, implicit assumptions about the nature of the problem
- Example: Domestic violence program proposed for women at York.

# Program Theory

- Without a clear idea of what the program is supposed to do, it is difficult to perform an evaluation.
- There are several critical components of program theory:
  - Theoretical plausibility derived from research.
  - Specific versus general
  - Population and setting
  - Specificity with regard to objectives, activities & outcomes
  - The rationale for all activities are explicit

# Use Logic Models

- There are two types of logic models:
  - **theory of change** model
  - **program logic model**
- Logic models are **iterative**
- Logic models should not be **given** to stakeholders; they should be **developed in collaboration with stakeholders**.
- BPRI DOJ/DOL Grant as a model
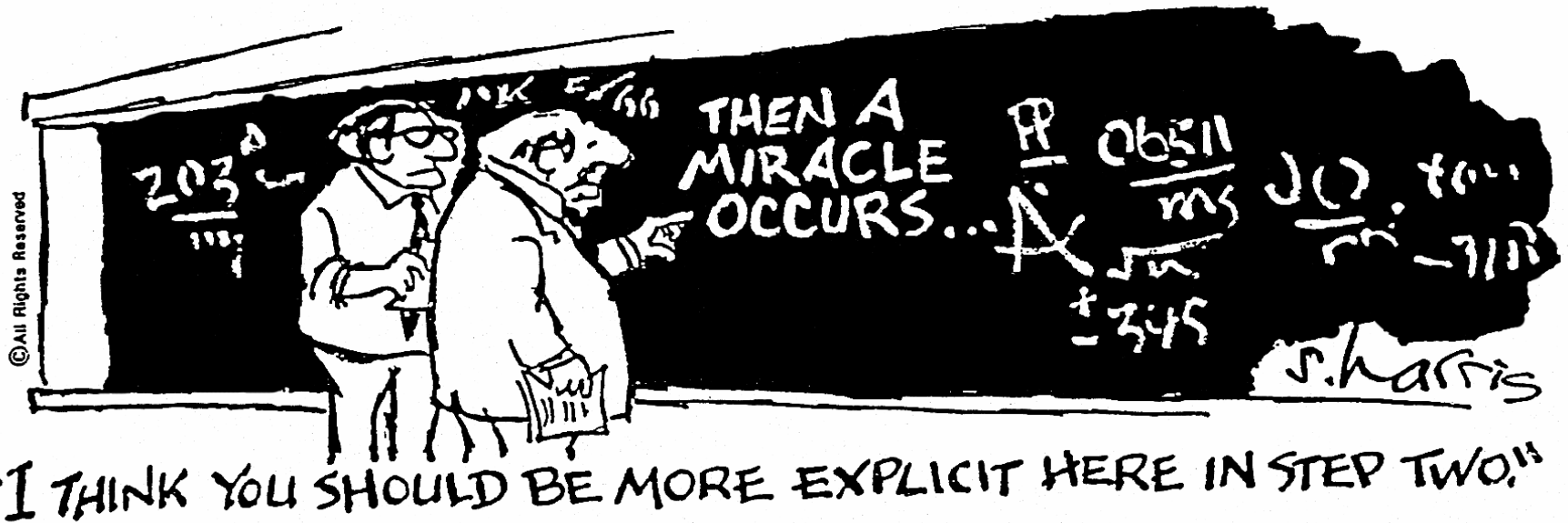
# Implementation/Process Evaluation

- Outcome evaluation without process evaluation is a mistake.
    - If outcomes are good, you don't know why.
    - If outcomes are bad, you don't know why.
- Programs that have been evaluated to be effective, with these type clients in this type of setting need to be monitored and supervised.
    - "Program drift" and "program fidelity"
    - Program foundations, e.g., M.I.

# Outcome Evaluation

- Outcomes should be based on the logic model of the program.
- For newly designed programs the proximal, intermediate, and long-term outcomes should be identified.
- For existing programs, a review of the curriculum should be conducted to identify the sometimes implicit change model.
- Although recidivism is often viewed as the best indicator of program success, in many cases it is not.

# Define Explicit Intermediate Outcomes



"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

# Impact Evaluations

- It is important not to confuse **outcome** evaluations with **impact** evaluations.

- Impact evaluations answer the question "Did this program **cause** the desired change?"

- Basic logic of impact evaluations is that a treatment group is compared to another group such that the groups are equivalent except that the treatment group receives the treatment.

- Challenge: How to insure that in fact the groups are equivalent?

# Impact Analysis, cont'd

- Gold standard: Random assignment.
  - Eliminates the problem of "selection bias" by controlling both observed and unobserved differences.
- Matching: Can be effective but is difficult and can only control for observed variables that were used in the matching.
- Statistical controls using multivariate analysis, including propensity scoring.
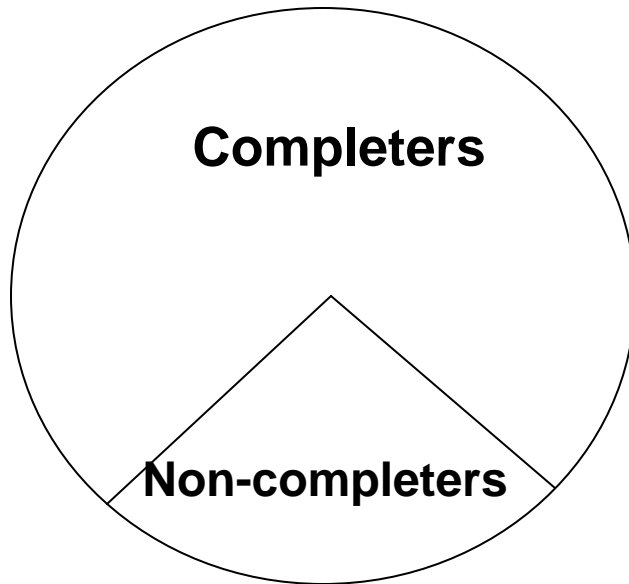  - Reduces bias but does not eliminate bias.

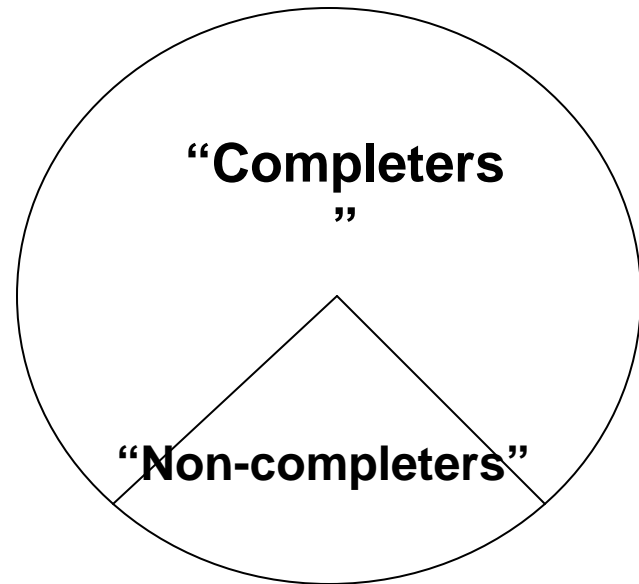# Subject Mortality and Intent to Treat Methodology

- In addition to the need to control for selection bias, we need to control for dropouts.

- Be careful when outcome studies report that "a randomized study showed that **completers** of Dr. Hynes's super-duper program…"

# Intent-to-Treat Analysis

**Treatment Group**

**Comparison Group**

**Completers**

**"Completers"**

**Non-completers**

**"Non-completers"**

# It's More than "p" Values

- "p" values tell us the likelihood that the outcome could have happened by chance.

- Increasingly, for good reason, journals are demanding reports on "effect size."

- Effect size can help us determine if the difference between a treatment group and a comparison group really matters.

# Efficiency

- Remember the scope of the problem, e.g., the number of individuals having significant addiction problems in the DOC.
- It is possible to have an effective program but one that is inefficient relative to other approaches.
- Efficiency studies ask, is there a way to have the same or close to the same effect and serve more individuals.
- Clinical versus public health approach.

# From Lee Cronbach and Associates.

"An evaluation of a social program is justified to the extent that it facilitates the work of the polity.  It is therefore to be judged primarily by its contribution to the public thinking and to the quality of the service **subsequent to the evaluation**....  To speak broadly, an evaluation ought to inform and improve the operations of the social system."

# Summary

As we work together to allocate scarce evaluation resources, we need to work collaboratively to decide what problems and programs we should focus on, and decide how these results will serve to advance our collective interest in improving the quality of our interventions.