Picking Fine Wine and Program Evaluation: So What’s the Difference?

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STAGES TO WINE TASTING

Appearance
“in the glass”
“in the mouth”
“finish”
Wine tasting as a metaphor for program evaluation
MEMORANDUM FOR THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Peter R. Orszag
Director

SUBJECT: Evaluating Programs for Efficacy and Cost-Efficiency

Rigorous, independent program evaluations can be key resources in determining whether government programs are achieving their intended outcomes as effectively as possible and at the lowest possible cost. Evaluations can help policymakers and agency managers strengthen the design and operation of programs. The President has requested that each non-security agency submit a budget request 5 percent below the agency’s FY 2012 discretionary total in the FY 2011 Budget. In the context of meeting the President’s goal of cutting the deficit in half as a share of the economy by the end of his first term and restoring fiscal sustainability over the medium term, careful evaluation and decision-making based on demonstrated results are even more vital than ever. Ultimately, evaluations can help the Administration and Congress determine how to spend taxpayer dollars effectively and efficiently, by investing taxpayers’ resources in what works.

In the FY 2011 Budget process evaluation initiative, OMB allocated approximately $100 million to support 35 rigorous program evaluations and evaluation capacity-building proposals across the Federal government. As noted in the FY 2011 guidance, many important programs have never been formally evaluated – and the evaluations that have been completed have not sufficiently shaped Federal budget priorities or agency management practices. Many agencies lack an office of evaluation with the stature and staffing to support an ambitious, strategic, objective, and relevant research agenda. As a consequence, some programs have persisted year after year without adequate evidence that they work. In some cases, evaluation dollars have flowed into studies of insufficient rigor or policy significance. Federal programs rarely have evaluated multiple approaches to the same problem with the goal of identifying approaches that are more effective or cost-effective. And findings of completed evaluations do not always reach decision makers to guide program planning.
...in which new or expanded programs have evaluation “baked into their DNA”...

Memo M-10-01 (2009)
“Increased Emphasis on Program Evaluations”
THE EVALUATION DEBATE

Experimental Design
- Causation
- Generalization
- Replication

Quasi-experimental Design
- Methodological and statistical adjustments to compensate

Alternatives
- Needs Assessment
- Implementation
- Monitoring
Evaluation Theory Tree
METHOD

The original model for the social sciences was the quantitative, experimental methodology of the physical sciences.

Campbell and Stanley (1966) *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*
Michael Schriven (1986)

✓ “Bad is bad and good is good and it is the job of evaluators to decide which is which…”

✓ Consumer Reports analogy – identify critical competitors
Michael Quinn Patton

*Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (1978)

“...narrowing the gap between evaluation findings and actually using those findings for program decision making and improvement.” pg. 6
**Connoisseurship model (1976)**

- rejection of technological scientism – things that matter cannot be measured quantitatively
- Connoisseurship
- Criticism
Connoisseurship Methodology

Descriptive Dimension: describing the current state of program, class and school. Language and figures of speech are used to emphasize the aesthetic dimensions of evaluand.

Interpretative Dimension: the expert’s knowledge of multiple theories, viewpoints and models are applied to specify criteria to understand the meaning and significance of activities in the observed environment.

Evaluative Dimension: the educational significance and effect of the interpreted experience/activities are evaluated. During this process, there should be some educational criteria to judge about the experience.
Validating Valuing

1. “Structural Corroboration”—triangulation, support from other types of data
2. “Consensual Validation”—agreement among “competent others”
"If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else."
   -Yogi Berra

“Begin with the end in mind.”
   -Stephen Covey

“Better to be without logic than without feeling.”
   -Charlotte Bronte
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."
Logical chain of connections showing what the program is to accomplish

**INPUTS**
- Program investments

**OUTPUTS**
- Activities
- Participation

**OUTCOMES**
- Short
- Medium
- Long-term

What is invested → What is done → Who is reach → What results
Criteria

- Posavac: selection of criteria as important as selection of methodology
  - Different for different stakeholders
  - Temporal differences within theory
  - Program structure – multiple components
## OUTCOMES

*What results for individuals, families, communities.....*

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<th>MEDIUM (Action)</th>
<th>LONG-TERM (Conditions)</th>
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**CHAIN OF OUTCOMES**
Project Protect is designed to improve permanency outcomes of children in foster care or at risk of being placed in foster care due to parental substance abuse by providing substance abuse treatment and comprehensive recovery-support services for parents, as well as housing assistance, long-term case management and child-focused (related) services.
Project Protect Criteria

PERMANENCY

✓ Children at risk of out-of-home placements due to parental substance abuse will remain with their parents.
✓ Children in out-of-home placements due to parental substance abuse will be returned to their parents.

WELL-BEING

✓ Substance-abusing parents will end or reduce their use of substances
✓ Parents will address their behaviors that affect child wellbeing.
✓ Children will have opportunities for healthy physical, social and emotional development.

SAFETY

✓ Children are protected from abuse and neglect with reduced occurrences of maltreatment.
PROJECT PROTECT INDICATORS

ADULT OUTCOMES
- 100 parents per year will complete substance-abuse treatment
- 100 parents per year will improve their parenting skills as evidenced by tests administered pre- and post- St. Patrick Center Living Skills classes

FAMILY OUTCOMES
- 100 families per year will obtain and retain permanent housing.
- 100 families per year will move toward financial stability through parent participation in employment attainment or achievement of entitlements
  - educational classes
  - employment-training programs
  - job-search activities

CHILD OUTCOMES
- 200 children/youth per year will exhibit indicators of family stability, such as
  - good school attendance
  - employment and participation in GED/ABE classes (for older youth)
  - positive bi-annual health screenings,
  - and enrollment and participation in after-school or daycare programs
- 150 children per year will benefit from increased parental involvement as observed by case managers at opportunities, such as parent-child bonding events and in-home visits.
CONDUCTING PROGRAM EVALUATION IS AND ISN’T LIKE CHOOSING WINE

- the criteria for making an assessment are definable
- choosing wine is individual taste
  - program evaluation is not
- a good glass of wine has balance
  - a program evaluation should as well
Next Speaker

Priscilla Dowden-White
Department of History

“Margaret Bush Wilson and the Promise of America”

Wednesday, April 11
427 SSB