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EVALUATING EXPLORATIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS
FOR PLANNING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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In the past several years there has been an accelerating demand for the formal evaluation of human service programs. This interest is most dramatically reflected in the amount of funds, especially from the Federal Government which have been allocated for the evaluation of sponsored programs. For example, Buchanan and Wholey have recently noted that in the three Federal Departments of Health, Education and Welfare, Housing and Urban Development, and Labor there was a thirty percent increase in the amount of evaluation research funds that were allocated between fiscal years 1971 and 1973 (1972:17). Much of the impetus for evaluative research came from the program managers concern to enhance program efficiency. Also, because of the relative scarcity of funds available for human service programs, funding bodies have increasingly demanded that objective data pertaining to program effectiveness be collected. This is a significant departure from the traditional reliance on testimonials provided by program personnel or selected clients. Additionally, the increased demand for the evaluation of human services has been spurred by the appearance of numerous research reports, across a variety of programs, which fail to demonstrate marked positive effects for the clients being served (Bailey, 1966; Eysenck, 1961; Fischer, 1973).

The increased emphasis on evaluation research is not totally a response to such external pressures. Human service professionals have become more interested and involved in conducting evaluative research for the purpose of testing theory and, ultimately, improving practice. Similarly, evaluation research is becoming increasingly accepted as an integral part of program development, program management and policy-making. It is in this context that the demonstration project has emerged as a popular planning strategy. In the field of corrections the Ford Foundation and the President's Committee sponsored juvenile delinquency projects during the 1960's. More recently, the Law Enforcement Assistance Act provides for the funding of "innovative" projects.

For planning purposes, it is generally expected that the lessons learned from demonstrations, through the rigors of scientific research, will result in large-scale adoption and major shifts in aims, styles, resources, and effectiveness of human service programs. Although the expressed purpose is to use demonstrations for social planning, there are other covert purposes for undertaking such projects - e.g., postponing needed action, placating particular constituencies or challenging existing programs without a major concern for supporting data. Under the rubric of demonstration projects are activities primarily aimed at the conceptualization and development of programs as well as activities which are designed to test their effectiveness. A project aimed at program conceptualization and development should be referred to as an "exploration" and the term "demonstration" more appropriately reserved for those programs in which the independent variable (i.e. the program) is clearly defined and amenable to manipulation. Such a distinction has not generally been drawn. Thus, in reference to the delinquency and poverty projects of the 1960's, Marris and Rein state:

"though they claimed to be experiments, their whole manner of operation seems more consistent with an exploration (Marris and Rein, 1969: 207)." Failure to make this distinction can result in poorly conceived and inappropriately conducted evaluative research and, consequently a limitation on the use of explorations and demonstrations as instruments for social planning. The distinction between explorations and demonstrations will be emphasized in this paper in order to show the differences in the purposes and evaluative research strategies for both types of projects. Since the strategies of explorations and demonstrations represent stages of program development, the contribution that investigations of these projects make to the planning process constitutes the overall context for examining evaluative research. Illustrative material will be drawn from two research designs prepared by the author; an exploratory project, "The Training Center for Community Corrections" and a demonstration, "The Group Probation Project."

Evaluating Explorations - The Training Center

Alice Rivlin has aptly described the strategy for program development in the 1960's as "random innovation" in which new ideas, methods and models were not systematized through experimental methods (Rivlin, 1971). Her observation is not made disparagingly as she recognized that such a climate permits creative people to develop innovative programs. Examples of random innovations in the field of corrections are plentiful: the trend toward a variety of residential "community-based" programs; diversionary projects which aim at keeping persons out of the courts and correctional institutions; the use of ex-offenders in treatment programs; and the reliance on different therapeutic methods, including restitution as a rehabilitative approach. Although random innovation results in the implementation of new ideas and methods, at some point, however, systematic experimentation is needed to determine the effectiveness of these programs. This involves the use of scientific experiments, to the extent possible, to test programs in different places and under varying conditions.

Although information about the effectiveness of innovative projects may be desired, a host of factors besides the usually articulated ones of political, legal and ethical constraints impede the use of experimental methods to study these programs. Among numerous other circumstances, the use of rigorous experimental designs in testing the effects of innovative programs are greatly restricted by the characteristics of the program itself: 1) vaguely conceptualized and operationalized programs without a clear orientation and/or 2) vague, unarticulated and conflicting goals. Trow suggests that in such situations it is important that the research be in the service of the innovative enterprise and not sitting in judgment of it (1971). Research can contribute to innovative projects and their ultimate use for program planning by assisting program personnel in developing an impact model - including the identification and operationalization of goals, the description of the input or program variables, and an elaboration of a rationale that specifies the relationship between the input variables and the stated goals (Freeman and Sherwood, 1971). Explorations can be a useful strategy for developing such an impact model which could then be tested experimentally during a subsequent demonstration stage.

The research design used for the Training Center for Community Corrections in Minnesota, an LEAA funded project, will be used to illustrate the use of an exploration for developing a testable demonstration. The Training Center was funded on the premise that since there was a dramatic increase in the number of community based programs in Minnesota, they felt there must be a need for training personnel who worked in this field:

The rapid emergence of new ideas and new priorities in the field of corrections has created a serious need for new training methods to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to translate the new correctional thinking and rhetoric into action and to stimulate substantive reform in the correctional process.

Nevertheless, because of the newness of the field, there was no well-documented body of data that would clearly describe all the specific skills and knowledge necessary to implement community based programs for which training was needed. The task facing the Training Center was the development of an appropriate training program and identifying the goals which such training would presumably accomplish. The completion of this task would make possible the measurement of the effectiveness of the training provided in the subsequent stages of the Training Center's development (i.e., during the demonstration stage).

The initial task of the planning process was the determination of training needs. Staff representatives from sixteen operating residential programs in the "pilot training group" were invited to a "needs/resource analysis seminar". The seminar was designed to help the participants identify areas of concern, translate those concerns into performance objectives, determine the kind of training that could best accomplish the stated objectives and identify the available training resources among the representatives and their programs. This seminar, however, was only a beginning step toward the identification of training needs. Two additional strategies were developed - a program follow-up and personal training inventory. Two staff members from the Training Center met with the entire staff of each of the pilot programs to discuss the outcome of the needs/resource analysis seminar which had been attended by representatives of these programs. This meeting also focused on the particular concerns and training requirements of each individual program. To gather information on the perceived training needs of the personnel, each director and staff person was asked to complete a personal training inventory form. In addition, information was also collected to identify resource persons whose knowledge and skills could be shared with others, either in formal sessions or on a consulting basis.

On the basis of the data collected from the needs/resource analysis seminar, the program follow-up and the personal training inventory, the Training Center Staff identified topics for pilot training sessions. Several one-day training sessions were planned and conducted. For research purposes, these sessions would provide opportunities for learning about preferred content, teaching approaches, instructors, and other concerns related to the provision of training for workers in the field of community corrections. It was hoped that from the lessons learned in conducting these exploratory sessions it would be possible to develop a testable training package. These sessions would also assist the

Training Center in identifying goals which become apparent only through involvement in the training endeavor.

The research strategies for examining these pilot training sessions included: 1) monitoring the actual training sessions; 2) immediate follow-up interviews with participants and 3) a subsequent three month follow-up. Training Center staff who monitored each of the training sessions kept notes on the content covered, the teaching approaches used and the perceived reactions of the participants to the sessions. The aim was to learn, through observation, the participants' training needs and the preferred methods of instruction. To supplement the impressions of the staff who monitored the training sessions, telephone interviews were conducted with the participants within days of the actual training. These interviews yielded data on the participants' reaction to the training sessions as well as solicited their preferences for future training. This data was useful in the ongoing process of planning a demonstration project for training personnel in community corrections. In regard to specifying goals, the staff could have themselves determined the goals for the Training Center's program. However, to broaden the range of possible goals for consideration, information was solicited from the participants of the pilot training sessions regarding how they felt the training session affected their work, ways in which they continued to pursue content covered at the training sessions and how they viewed themselves using the Training Center on the basis of their involvement in its activities. As a result of this inquiry, unanticipated goals emerged. Finally, a rationale could be developed for linking a planned training program to specified objectives (e.g., persons participating in training sessions are more likely to use evaluative research procedures in their work and more highly rated as effective practitioners).

Evaluating Demonstrations - The Group Probation Project

Whereas the major purpose for doing research of explorations was to collect information for use in developing an impact model, the evaluation of a demonstration project aims to "test", through rigorous scientific methods, the effectiveness of a program in achieving its stated goals. There are two types of demonstration projects. Model demonstrations involve the evaluation of programs under ideal circumstances, with a controlled experiment being preferred. What are usually considered as demonstrations, however, are prototypes in which programs are tested in natural settings that presumably resemble the conditions in which such programs might be later introduced if proven successful. The model demonstration serves the purpose of testing the validity of a particular approach as a means toward the achievement of some desired objective while the prototype demonstration tests the ability to institute a workable program in the "real world" based on that approach (Suchman, 1971).

The Group Probation Project is a prototype demonstration which aimed to test and compare the effectiveness of group work and casework services with juveniles on probation. An impact model was an inherent feature of the grant application. The experimental input or independent variable was group work service. More specifically, initially two different group work approaches would be tested - positive peer culture and the mediating approach. The experimental variable could be clearly

conceptualized and operationalized. For example, the use of positive peer culture could be recognized by the following traits: frequent meetings (at least 3 or 4 per week); focus of the meetings mainly on one individual; small number of group members (5 to 7); rigid seating arrangements; extensive use of confrontation; and so on. This method was clearly different from the mediating approach which focuses on the group as a whole and where mutual support and aid are the characteristic interaction patterns. Moreover, both group work approaches constituted a distinctly different treatment than the regular casework supervision. The outcome goals were also clearly stated: improving self-concept; improved school grades and attendance; reduction in delinquent behavior; etc. The rationale linking the experimental input to the stated goals was that the peer group is more likely to have a positive influence on the youth's behavior than the intervention by the professional probation officer. The preconditions did exist for developing an experimental design and compromises in this ideal design would be necessitated by professional, administrative and legal constraints, but not primarily because of the limitations imposed by the characteristics of the program. The fact that juveniles are assigned to workers according to their geographical location, posed limitations on the extent to which random assignment to experimental (i.e., group work) and control groups (casework supervision) could be made. Where random assignment was not possible, a comparative caseload was selected. "Before" measures on self-concept, school performance, family closeness, prior involvement with the court and other relevant data could be obtained prior to placement on probation. Information could be collected on the treatment process (e.g. the use of contact sheets completed by the workers to measure the quantity and type of contacts made with the juvenile or on behalf of him; group summary forms completed by the worker after each group meeting to note the focus of the meeting and the nature of participation by the members; video tape to rate the workers' performance in the groups; and a questionnaire which solicits information from the juveniles about their views of the group). Finally, follow-up information could be collected on the juveniles in both the experimental and control groups after six months on probation.

This experimental design could address itself the following purposes for an evaluative study: (a) effort - who received the services; who provided the service; how was the program implemented; what was the nature of the clients' participation; what was their view of the service received; needed resources to carry out such a program; (b) effect-infering the extent to which the program produced changes in school performance, delinquencies committed and self concept; and (c) efficiency-comparative cost of providing group work and casework service relative to the success of these two approaches. In other words, such an evaluative study pursued two major goals (a) identifying the manner in which the program was carried out, particularly to determine whether it was actually implemented in the intended manner; (b) assessing and accounting for the impact of the program on the consumers of the service, including the economy of the program vis a vis accomplished results.

Comparative Analysis

Explorations and demonstrations have been presented as both strategies and stages of a rational planning process. To maximize their "payoff" for the planning enterprise, emphasis has been placed on the use of evaluative research designs and procedures which are appropriate to the purpose and stage of the program's development. The danger of emphasizing the differences in the purposes and research strategies for explorations and demonstrations is the possibility of creating artificial distinctions while negating important similarities. Although a comparative analysis focuses on differences, the activities of describing process, measuring outcomes and inferring causal explanations are aims of all projects. Nevertheless, there is a difference in the relative importance and nature of these activities according to the type of project.

The research conducted on explorations is clearly aimed at discovery and relies largely on an inductive approach. In undertaking an exploration, the pilot project affords a learning opportunity with research used as a tool for collecting data to assist in the conceptualization and operationalization of a program and the specification of its goals. This necessitates an emphasis on studying the program' unfolding process:

The whole process - the false starts, frustrations, adaptations, the successive recasting of intentions, the detours and conflicts - need to be comprehended. Only then can we understand what has been achieved and learn from experience (Marris and Rein, 1969: 207).

The Training Center's research was aimed primarily toward the development of a concrete and appropriate training program for people employed in the field of community corrections. Its initial investigation of needs for training assisted in the development of pilot training sessions which in turn were examined in order to learn more about the type and methods of training which should be included in a training package for the succeeding year.

Whereas the exploration primarily aims at discovery through an inductive approach, demonstrations more clearly attempt to verify through measurement of the relationship between the experimental variable (i.e., the program) and the dependent variables (i.e., specified outcomes or effects) through a deductive approach. Testing hypotheses is an appropriate approach to studying demonstrations. The focus on process is not restricted to learning how the program was carried out. In addition, efforts are made to determine whether the program was implemented in the intended or prescribed manner and to use program components or variables as possible causal explanations for the outcomes produced. For the Group Probation Project it was possible to test hypotheses related to the extent and nature of participation in groups with outcome on probation. The program was monitored to determine the manner in which it was implemented and to relate various aspects of the program to the success of the probation service in meeting its stated goals.

The extent to which there are strict controls on the program's operation and continual feedback of research findings occurs is largely dependent on the nature and purpose of the evaluative study. For explorations, feeding back information from the evaluation to the program in order to affect both its objectives and procedures is of paramount importance. The

Training Center relied on a constant feedback of information to plan the pilot project and then to use the lessons learned from the pilot project to develop a testable demonstration project for subsequent evaluation. Research and program development was a dynamic and reciprocal process. On the other hand, if information is needed on the ultimate worth of program ideas, then a controlled situation is more likely to be insisted upon. And there would only be deliberate manipulation on program variables which have been predetermined for their contribution to the overall experiment. Additional demonstrations could be undertaken, prior to the formulation of a permanent program, to pursue insights and test changes which emerged from the initial research. The Group Probation Project which sought information on the effectiveness of a particular approach relied upon a controlled situation. Subsequent alterations in the program (e.g., working with the juveniles' families) were only made after the initial phase of the research was completed.

There has been considerable controversy about whether it is preferable to use in-house or outside evaluators. Inevitably, the answer is that there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to both. Since the research in the exploratory phase is an integral part of the program development, the project's own staff can take major responsibility for planning and conducting the research without having to fear accusations about bias. If needed, an external researcher would merely serve as a consultant and his role would involve providing technical advice where needed.

Although initially hired as an outside evaluator for the Training Center, the researcher undertook regular staff responsibilities and except for his more specific involvement in developing the research instruments, determining data collection procedures and analyzing the data, his role was not distinctly different from other staff. On the other hand, in his involvement with the Group Probation Project, the researcher was clearly identified as an outside evaluator and he acted like a watchdog ready to oppose major alterations in program and procedures for fear that it might render the evaluation useless.

Since there are somewhat different purposes for undertaking explorations and demonstrations, the acceptability of "soft" versus "hard" data varies somewhat according to the type of project. In the attempt to discover the nature of the program and its goals, explorations must rely to a greater extent on soft data - e.g., attitudes, felt needs, subjective estimates and personal opinions. Much of the data collected by the Training Center was of this type. In testing demonstrations, however, where the outcome criteria are critically questioned, it is necessary to collect relatively objective data which can be assumed to have a known degree of reliability and validity. Although the Group Probation Project did include soft measures (e.g., attitudes toward the group), greater emphasis was placed on the collection of more objective data - demographic information, school grades and attendance, recidivism rates and standardized self-concept scales.

There are not only differences in the research design used and the type of data collected for explorations and demonstrations, but the procedures and instruments for the collection of data are also somewhat different. Although both included administered questionnaires, the exploration relied more heavily on observation, unstructured interviews and detailed notes.

Conclusion

This paper has emphasized the importance of evaluative research as an integral component for both explorations and demonstrations, particularly for its contribution to planning in criminal justice. In so doing, an attempt has been made to differentiate the purposes and, consequently, the appropriate research strategies for evaluating these projects. The research of explorations aimed to facilitate the process of conceptualizing and operationalizing "innovative" services into testable demonstrations. To increase the validity and generalizability of individual demonstration projects, replications in different places under varying conditions are needed. According to Wholey, however, many small studies have been carried out around the country which lack uniformity of design and objectives. Thus, results have been rarely comparable or responsive to the questions facing policy makers (Wholey, 1971: 15). To remedy this situation there would be some merit in following Rivlin's suggestion that funding organizations take the leadership in organizing, funding and evaluating systematic experiments with various ways of implementing programs (Rivlin, 1971: 15). Demonstration projects could then be planned in response to established priorities in the overall process of program development and/or policy-making while allowing for some random innovation.

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