Politics and Evaluation

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Definitions: Politics

a. the interrelationships between the people, groups, or organizations in a particular area of life especially insofar as they involve power and influence or conflict

b. the use of tactics and strategy to gain power in a group or organization
Vernacular Definition: Politics

The use of raw power and/or devious means to get one’s way.

This slide not used at May 12 presentation
Definition: Evaluation

Evaluation is the act of making a value judgement about an evaluand.
Information Age Publishing
Charlotte, North Carolina

www.infoagepub.com

(pbk.)
(hardcover)
Terms of Reference

TOR accepted by Prof. Reeder are:

- The evaluation report will be a public document.
- His oversight report will be a document confidential to the Chancellor of the New York City school system and to the Mayor of New York.

Reeder advises that it is very unlikely that the oversight report will stay confidential. In his experience the report will be leaked even though not by him.
Evaluation Design

The evaluation design, briefly described, is to collect reading test scores for the students in April. Those who do not achieve a high enough score must go to summer school for eight weeks (nicely known as the Second Chance program). They then take the same test a second time. The pre-test and the post-test scores are compared for the students who attended summer school.
O – X – O design

The design flaw is very clear. This is the pre-test post-test design so frequently used by non-evaluators; there is no data other than two sets of scores. This non-experimental design yields results that are ambiguous as best. There is no way to separate improvement in test score due to any of the following three:

- score increase due to regression.
- score increase due to test taking skills.
- score increase due to actual learning
- score increase due to teaching to the test.
Regression Effect

April Scores
- Top 20%
- Middle 60%
- Bottom 20%

July Scores
- Mean Decreased
- Mean Increased

summer school teaching a.k.a Second Chance Prog.
Cast of players

- Paul Reeder - university professor, evaluator
- Richard Pellegrini - Chancellor of the NYC schools
- Mayor Kuhnsmiller - Mayor of NYC, insists that the Second Chance program be evaluated
- Velma Williams - executive assistant to Mayor
- United Parents Federation – association of 350,000 parents
- Sam Kepner, Assist. Chancellor of NYC schools
- George Clough, Deputy Chancellor, NYC schools
- Rick Cole, head of the NYC schools evaluation department
- plus others
Story Line

1. From the beginning, Reeder knows of the design deficiency.
2. Reeder knows that actual gain to be expected from the regression effect are about the same as the improvement reported.
3. Reeder visits the program
   - to understand the program process
   - to determine the statistical sophistication of the research director and
   - to suggest that additional data would be a useful enhancement of the design being used.
4. Reeder concludes that the research director:
   (a) has no idea of statistical regression and
   (b) is convinced that only test scores are necessary.
5. Reeder examines an interim report.
6. Reeder drafts his audit report with the key message that the observed score changes are due to a statistical artefact – not to the program. He adds positive comments on the attitudes of some of the teachers he observed. He makes suggestions for improving the evaluation design.
Story Line

7. Reeder’s draft report goes to his internal review team.
   • The statistician on the team wants the explanation of regression to be made less ambiguous
   • the reading specialist wants much more attention to his preferred method of teaching reading and
   • a third person wants the test results to be analyzed separately for each of the ethnic groups.

8. The internal politics among Reeder’s advisors has to be stick handled by Reeder to maintain them on his team.
9. Reeder’s revised audit report is sent to New York. Days later, the telephone call arrives.

10. The Chancellor is furious at the negative report and wants to see Reeder as soon as possible – alone – just the two of them.

11. Reeder goes to New York City finds that he is forced to wait two full days before the meeting takes place. And then it is the Deputy Chancellor who attends the meeting.
Story Line

12. Reeder is asked to redo his judgment of the inadequacy of the analysis in the NYC evaluation.
13. Reeder refuses to change his conclusion.
14. Much more discussion; then the Deputy Chancellor suggests a strategy to end the impasse. The school board will issue its report with the analyses that shows the gains. And then they will add a final page that shows Reeder’s analysis which concludes no evidence of gain from the program. Reeder agrees.
15. A few weeks later, a copy of the next evaluation report arrives at Reeder’s desk.

16. The report is as agreed upon. Reeder’s page is last. Reeder is somewhat dissatisfied with the lack of any explanation in the report regarding the two different conclusions on the test scores but says nothing since the Report is as he had agreed.
17. Some days later, Reeder receives a telephone call from someone in the Mayors’ office.

The caller is seeking clarification regarding the report issued by the Chancellor’s office.

Based on discussion of the report with interested parties, the evaluation report seems to be missing some detail.
So what shall we do?

• Be very competent
  (but know your professional limits)
• Manage the politics
• Adhere to professional standards
• Stay ethical in the face of temptation
Professional designations as a tool for the evaluator

Certification as an enabling power. Protection via the professional body.

This slide not used at May 12 presentation
Norms for Evaluators
(taken from the United Nations)

Evaluators must:
- have personal and professional integrity
- respect the right of institutions & individuals
- be sensitive to beliefs, manners, & customs
- be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality
- report discreetly, to the appropriate body, evidence of wrongdoing
Political Ploys

• the evaluation will take too much time
• certain of your questions are “off limits”
• In response to a data request, evaluator given huge amounts of information (snow job)
• legitimate stakeholders omitted from planning process
• pressure to alter findings
• findings suppressed or ignored
• claim evaluation results now irrelevant
  - things have changed
• some information provided is omitted or distorted
• findings are deliberately modified prior to release
Your Views

1. Evaluators and evaluates each have power in the relationship. **Who has more power?**

2. Is **training** on the political dimension of evaluation (often referred to as interpersonal relations) necessary for evaluators? If “Yes”, where and how to provide the training.

3. Will a **professional designation** for evaluators be sufficient for evaluators who must cope with the political pressures? Must it be certification or could a lower level designation work?
References


