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Fostering Intended Use by Intended Users

The Personal Factor

There are five key variables that are absolutely critical in evaluation use. They are, in order of importance: people, people, people, people, and people.

—Halcolm

A Setting

On a damp summer morning at Snow Mountain Ranch near Rocky Mountain National Park, some 40 human service and education professionals have gathered from all over the country in a small, dome-shaped chapel to participate in an evaluation workshop. The session begins like this:

Instead of beginning by my haranguing you about what you should do in program evaluation, we're going to begin with an evaluation exercise to immerse us immediately in the process. I'm going to ask you to play the dual roles of participants and evaluators since that's the situation most of you find yourself in anyway in your own agencies and programs, where you have both program and evaluation responsibilities. We're going to share an experience to loosen things up a bit . . . perhaps warm you up, wake you up, and allow you to get more comfortable. The exercise will also allow us to test your participant observer skills and provide us with a common experience as evaluators. We'll also generate some personal data about the process of evaluation that we can use for discussion later.

So, what I want you to do for the next five minutes is move around this space in any way you want to. Explore this environment. Touch and move things. Experience different parts of this lovely setting. And while you're observing the physical environment, watch what others do. Then, find a place where you feel comfortable to write down what you observe, and also to evaluate the exercise. Experience, explore, observe, and evaluate. That's the exercise.

At the end of the writing time, participants shared, on a voluntary basis, what they had written.

First Observer: People slowly got up. Everybody looked kind of nervous 'cause they weren't sure what to do. People moved out toward the walls, which are made of rough wood. The lighting is kind of dim. People sort of moved counterclockwise. Every so often there would be a nervous smile exchanged between people. The chairs are fastened down in rows so it's hard for people to move in the center of the room. A few people went to the stage area, but most stayed toward the back and outer part. The chairs aren't too comfortable, but it's a quiet, mellow room. The exercise showed that people are nervous when they don't know what to do.

Second Observer: The room is hexagon-shaped with a dome-shaped ceiling. Fastened-down chairs are arranged in a semicircle with a stage in front that is about a foot high. A podium is at the left of the small stage. Green drapes hang at the side. Windows are small and triangular. The floor is wood. There's a coffee table in back. Most people went to get coffee. A couple people broke the talking rule for a minute. Everyone returned to about the same place they had been before after walking around. It's not a great room for a workshop, but it's OK.

Third Observer: People were really nervous about what to do because the goals of the exercise weren't clear. You can't evaluate without clear goals so people just wandered around. The exercise shows you can't evaluate without clear goals.

Fourth Observer: I said to myself at the start, this is a human relations thing to get us started. I was kind of mad about doing this because we've been here a half hour already, and we haven't done anything that has to do with evaluation. I came to learn about evaluation, not to do touchy-feely group stuff. So I just went to get coffee. I didn't like wasting so much time on this.

Fifth Observer: I felt uneasy, but I told myself that it's natural to feel uneasy when you aren't sure what to do. But I liked walking around, looking at the chapel, and feeling the space. I think some people got into it, but we

were stiff and uneasy. People avoided looking at each other. Sometimes there was a nervous smile when people passed each other, but by kind of moving in a circle, most people went the same direction and avoided looking at each other. I think I learned something about myself and how I react to a strange, nervous situation.

These observations were followed by a discussion of the different perspectives reported on the same experience and speculation on what it would take to produce a more focused set of observations and evaluations. Suggestions included establishing clear goals, specifying evaluation criteria, figuring out what was supposed to be observed in advance so everyone could observe it, giving clearer directions of what to do, stating the purpose of evaluation, and training the evaluation observers so that they all recorded the same thing.

Further discussion revealed that before any of these evaluation tasks could be completed, a prior step would be necessary: *determining who the primary intended users of the evaluation are*. This task constitutes the first priority in utilization-focused evaluation.

Identifying Primary Intended Users: The First Priority in Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Many decisions must be made in any evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation must be determined. Concrete evaluative criteria for judging program success will usually have to be established. Methods will have to be selected and timelines agreed on. All these are important issues in any evaluation. The question is, "Who will decide these issues?" The utilization-focused answer is *primary intended users of the evaluation.*

Clearly and explicitly identifying people who can benefit from an evaluation is so important that evaluators have adopted a special term for potential evaluation users: *stakeholders*. This term has been borrowed from management consulting where it was coined in 1963 at the Stanford Research Institute as a way of describing people who were not directly stockholders in a company but "without whose support the firm would cease to exist" (Mendelow 1987:177).

> Stakeholder management is aimed at proactive action—action aimed, on the one hand, at forestalling stakeholder activities that could adversely affect the organization and on the other hand, at enabling the organization to take advantage of stakeholder opportunities. . . . This can be achieved only through a conscious decision to adopt the stakeholder perspective as part of a strategy formulation process. (Mendelow 1987:177–78)

Evaluation stakeholders are people who have a stake—a vested interest—in evaluation findings. For any evaluation there are multiple possible stakeholders: program funders, staff, administrators, and clients or program participants. Greene (2006) clusters stakeholders into four groups:

> (a) people who have decision authority over the program, including other policy makers, funders, and advisory boards; (b) people who have direct responsibility for the program, including program developers, administrators in the organization implementing the program, program managers, and direct service staff; (c) people who are the intended beneficiaries of the program, their families, and their communities; and (d) people disadvantaged by the program, as in lost funding opportunities. (Pp. 397–98)

BEHOLD the "STAKE-HOLDER"!

Others with a direct, or even indirect, interest in program effectiveness may be considered stakeholders, including journalists and members of the general public, or, more specifically, taxpayers, in the case of public programs, participants in "civil society" (Weiss 1998b:28–29). Ordinary people of all kinds who are affected by programs and policies can be thought of as stakeholders, what Leeuw (2002) has called the challenge of "bringing evaluation to the people" (pp. 5–6). Stakeholders include any one who makes decisions or desires information about a program. However, stakeholders typically have diverse and often competing interests. No evaluation can answer all potential questions equally well. This means that some process is necessary for narrowing the range of possible questions to focus the evaluation. In utilization-focused evaluation, this process begins by narrowing the list of potential stakeholders to a much shorter, more specific group of primary intended users. Their information needs, that is, their intended uses, focus the evaluation.

The Stakeholder Idea

The word *stakeholder* originated in gambling in sixteenth-century England, where wagers were posted on wooden stakes. Later the term was broadened to refer to a neutral or trustworthy person who held a wager until the winner was decided. The term was brought into management and given visibility by R. Edward Freeman (1984) in his influential text *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach.* He defined a stakeholder as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. Following this formulation:

Evaluation stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that can affect or are affected by an evaluation process and/or its findings.

Stakeholder analyses are now arguably more important than ever because of the increasingly interconnected nature of the world. Choose any public problem—economic development, poor educational performance, natural resources management, crime, AIDS, global warming, terrorism—and it is clear that "the problem" encompasses or affects numerous people, groups, and organizations. In this shared-power world, no one is fully in charge; no organization "contains" the problem. Instead many individuals, groups, and organizations are involved or affected or have some partial responsibility to act. Figuring out what the problem is and what solutions might work are actually part of the problem, and taking stakeholders into account is a crucial aspect of problem solving.

Failure to attend to the information and concerns of stakeholders clearly is a kind of flaw in thinking or action that too often and too predictably leads to poor performance, outright failure or even disaster (Bryson 2004b:23–24). Paul Nutt in *Why Decisions Fail* (2002) conducted a careful analysis of 400 strategic decisions. He found that half of the decisions "failed"—that is, they were not implemented, only partially implemented, or otherwise produced poor results—in large part because decision makers failed to attend to interests and information held by key stakeholders.

The workshop exercise that opened this chapter illustrates the importance of clearly identifying primary intended users. The participants in that exercise observed different things in part because they were interested in different things. They "evaluated" the exercise in different ways, and many had trouble "evaluating" the exercise at all, in part because they didn't know for whom they were evaluating. There were several potential users of an evaluation of the "explore the environment" exercise:

1. As a workshop leader, I might want to evaluate the extent to which the exercise accomplished my objectives.

2. Each individual participant might conduct a personal evaluation according to his or her own criteria.

3. The group could establish consensus goals for the exercise, which would then serve as focus for the evaluation.

4. The bosses, agency directors, and/or funding boards who paid for participants to attend might want an assessment of the return on the resources they have invested for training.

5. The Snow Mountain Ranch director might want an evaluation of the appropriateness of the chapel for such a workshop.

6. The building architects might want an evaluation of how participants responded to the space they designed.

7. Professional workshop facilitators might want to evaluate the exercise's effectiveness for opening a workshop.

8. Psychologists or human relation trainers might want to assess the effects of the exercise on participants.

9. Experiential learning educators might want an assessment of the exercise as an experiential learning tool.

10. The janitors of the chapel might want an evaluation of the work engendered for them by an exercise that permits moving things around (which sometimes occurs when I've used the exercise in settings with moveable furniture).

This list of people potentially interested in the evaluation (stakeholders) could be expanded. The evaluation question in each case would likely be different. I would have different evaluation information needs as workshop leader than would the camp director; the architects' information needs would differ from the janitors' "evaluation" questions; the evaluation criteria of individual participants would differ from those reached by the total group through a consensus-formation process.

Beyond Audience

The preceding discourse is not aimed at simply making the point that different people see things differently and have varying interests and needs. I take that to be on the order of a truism. The point is that this truism is regularly and consistently ignored in the design of evaluation studies. To target an evaluation at the information needs of a specific person or a group of identifiable and interacting persons is quite different

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Stakeholder Analysis Goes Global

The *Wall Street Journal* headline read

UNTRANSLATABLE WORD IN U.S. AIDE'S SPEECH LEAVES BEIJING BAFFLED: ZOELLICK CHALLENGES CHINA TO BECOME 'STAKEHOLDER'; WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? (December 7, 2005)

In September, 2005, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick delivered a major policy speech to a large meeting of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations in New York. His theme was, "We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder" in the international system.

The *Wall Street Journal* report emphasized that in the written version of the speech, the words were in italics and Mr. Zoellick gave them added emphasis while speaking. He used the word "stakeholder" seven times in all. But, it turned out that the Chinese language has no comparable word for "stakeholder."

In response to Chinese requests for a translation, the U.S. State Department offered the following on a Chinese-language U.S. government Web site: "liyi xiangguang de canyuzhe" or "participants with related interests."

The *Journal* went on to report that U.S. scholars traveling in China were inundated with requests for translation. Jeffrey Bader, a former U.S. trade official, was in Beijing soon after and said, "I ran into people all over the place who kept pulling out tattered copies of the speech. I must have spent eight hours in total helping people understand its meaning," much of the time devoted to the "s" word.

Chinese government academies sent scholarly delegations to Washington to decipher the new term. The *Journal* quoted Minxin Pei, a China scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a Washington think tank: "We hosted several in one week. They arrived and said, 'What does this word mean?' "

The *Journal* reported that some in China preferred a translation that brought out the downside to being a stakeholder, translating it as "participants with related benefits and drawbacks." That implied China's interests might suffer if it attempted to meet Mr. Zoellick's "responsible stakeholder" challenge. Other interpretations came out as "joint operator" or "partner," which connoted an important role for China in world affairs. The *Journal* reported that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had not yet decided on an official Chinese translation of "stakeholder" (King, Jr. 2005:A1).

Evaluators Chime In

The *Journal* article, posted on EvalTalk, the listserv of the American Evaluation Association, prompted several responses throughout December 2005. Here are some summary highlights.

- Not only Chinese evaluators and policymakers have difficulties translating "stakeholder" into their language. The same is definitely true for German-speaking evaluators. There are a number of translations in use but they do not really capture the meaning the term *stakeholder* carries in English. In German, "*Beteiligte* & *Betroffene*" is an often used translation (meaning in English: people participating in or affected by something), although others are used as well, like "*Anspruchsgruppen*" (groups with claims or demands) or "*Interessengruppen*" (interest groups). Interestingly, the use of a specific terminology is highly indicative for the field people are working in. For example, in (quality or public) management, usually there are *Anspruchsgruppen*, in business *Interessengruppen*, in evaluation *Beteiligte* & *Betroffene*.
- In French, there are as well various translations: "*parties prenantes et concernees*" (parties involved or affected), "*protagonistes*" (protagonists).
- In Italian, the term *stakeholder* used to be translated either with "*parti interessate*" (interested parties), or with "*parti coinvolte*" (involved parties); very often it is kept in English, but I am not sure how precisely Italian non-English speakers can understand its meaning. After the discussion in social sciences on how to best involve stakeholders in policy decisions, the term "*parti coinvolte*" was somewhat abandoned (there are stakeholders that are not necessarily yet involved), and the preferred translation seems now "*parti interessate.*"
- In the development of the United States and the movement West people "staked" a claim to land or mines or whatever. Literally, there were stakes in the ground indicating your "40 acres" or land identified as yours. I have always thought a stakeholder had much more than just interest or involvement—it implied ownership. This is important because we not only want to involve those people who have a stake, but also avoid NOT involving critical individuals or groups who have legitimate ownership in whatever we are doing. As we all know, failing to involve an important stakeholder is very likely to result in considerable difficulties down the road.
- Bob Williams of Aotearoa/New Zealand added, "I've just returned from the Australian and New Zealand Systems Conference (working with complexity was the theme). One of the speakers, involved in an extremely complex situation ("World Heritage" park, major fruit-growing industry, rich Sydneyites buying land at huge prices for weekend homes, major tourist attraction) stated that in his work he used the concept of "community of practice" rather than "stakeholder." His point was that "stakeholder" implies representing an "interest," whereas "community of practice" focuses primarily on what people "do."
- Which prompted Jane Davidson, also of Aotearoa/New Zealand, to recall, "It reminds me of my first class in evaluation at graduate school. I had just moved to the States and still wasn't quite used to how much North Americans drop h's in the middle of words. I spent an entire class listening to this mysterious word "stake'olders" wondering "Who ARE these people and just WHY do they have to stay cold?"
- Which prompted this posting: And, of course, there's the definition contained in the 2003 edition of the *Phonetic Dictionary for Carnivores*: "Stakeholder: One who routinely consumes charred slabs of meat without using utensils" (p. 535).

And that gives you a flavor of EvalTalk postings.

These contributions were posted under the subject heading The term *stakeholder*.

For the EvalTalk archives, go to this site: http://bama.ua.edu/archives/evaltalk.html

from *identifying the audience* for an evaluation. For example, Stufflebeam (2001) defines evaluation as "a study designed and conducted to assist some audience assess an object's merit and worth" (p. 11). But audiences are amorphous, largely anonymous entities. Audience connotes passive reception rather than the active engagement of specific users.

Nor is it sufficient to identify an agency or organization as a recipient of evaluation findings. Organizations are an impersonal collection of hierarchical positions. People, not organizations, use evaluation information. I shall elaborate these points later in this chapter. First, I want to present findings from a classic study of how federal health evaluations were used. Those results provide a research foundation for this first step in utilization-focused evaluation. In the course of presenting these data, it will also become clearer how one identifies primary intended users and why they are the key to specifying and achieving intended uses.

Studying Use

In the mid-1970s, as evaluation was emerging as a distinct field of professional practice, I undertook a study with colleagues and students of 20 federal health evaluations to assess how their findings had been used and to identify the factors that affected varying degrees of use. We interviewed the evaluators and those for whom the evaluations were conducted.[1] That study marked the beginning of the formulation of utilization-focused evaluation presented in this book. We asked respondents to comment on how, if at all, each of 11 factors extracted from the literature on utilization had affected use of their evaluation. These factors were methodological quality, methodological appropriateness, timeliness, lateness of report, positive or negative

findings, surprise of findings, central or peripheral program objectives evaluated, presence or absence of related studies, political factors, decision maker/evaluator interactions, and resources available for the study. Finally, we asked respondents to "pick out the single factor you feel had the greatest effect on how this study was used." From this long list of questions only two factors emerged as consistently important in explaining utilization: (1) political considerations, to be discussed in Chapter 14 and (2) a factor we called the *personal factor*. This latter factor was unexpected, and its clear importance to our respondents had, we believed, substantial implications for the use of program evaluation. None of the other specific literature factors about which we asked questions emerged as important with any consistency. Moreover, when these specific factors were important in explaining the use or nonuse of a particular study, it was virtually always in the context of a larger set of circumstances and conditions related to either political considerations or the personal factor.

The Personal Factor

The personal factor is the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates. Where such a person or group was present, evaluations were used; where the personal factor was absent, there was a correspondingly marked absence of evaluation impact.

The personal factor represents the leadership, interest, enthusiasm, determination, commitment, assertiveness, and caring of specific, individual people. These are people who actively seek information to learn, make judgments, get better at what they do, and reduce decision uncertainties.

They want to increase their ability to predict the outcomes of programmatic activity and thereby enhance their own discretion as decision makers, policymakers, consumers, program participants, funders, or whatever roles they play. These are the primary users of evaluation.

Data on the Importance of the Personal Factor

The personal factor emerged most dramatically in our interviews when, having asked respondents to comment on the importance of each of our 11 utilization factors, we asked them to identify the single factor that was most important in explaining the impact or lack of impact of that particular study. Time after time, the factor they identified was not on our list. Rather, they responded in terms of the importance of individual people:

> *Item:* I would rank as the most important factor this division director's interest, [his] interest in evaluation. Not all managers are that motivated toward evaluation. [DM353:17][2]

> *Item:* [The single most important factor that had the greatest effect on how the study got used was] the principal investigator. . . . If I have to pick a single factor, I'll pick people any time. [DM328:20]

> *Item:* That it came from the Office of the Director—that's the most important factor. . . . The proposal came from the Office of the Director. It had his attention and he was interested in it, and he implemented many of the things. [DM312:21]

> *Item:* [The single most important factor was that] the people at the same level of decision making in [the new office] were not interested in making decisions of the kind that the people [in the old office] were, I think that probably had the greatest impact. The

fact that there was no one at [the new office] after the transfer who was making programmatic decisions. [EV361:27]

> *Item:* Well, I think the answer there is in the qualities of the people for whom it was made. That's sort of a trite answer, but it's true. That's the single most important factor in any study now that's utilized. [EV232:22]

> *Item:* Probably the single factor that had the greatest effect on how it was used was the insistence of the person responsible for initiating the study that the Director of _____ become familiar with its findings and arrive at judgment on it. [DM369:25]

> *Item:* [The most important factor was] the real involvement of the top decision makers in the conceptualization and design of the study, and their commitment to the study. [DM268:9]

While these comments concern the importance of interested and committed individuals in studies that were actually used, studies that were not used stand out in that there was often a clear absence of the personal factor. One evaluator, who was not sure how his study was used, but suspected it had not been, remarked,

> I think that since the client wasn't terribly interested and the whole issue had shifted to other topics, and since we weren't interested in doing it from a research point of view, nobody was interested. [EV264:14]

Another highly experienced evaluator was particularly adamant and articulate about the one factor that is most important in whether an evaluation gets used:

> The most important factor is desire on the part of the managers, both the central federal managers and the site managers. I don't think there's [any doubt], you know, that evaluation

should be responsive to their needs, and if they have a real desire to get on with whatever it is they're supposed to do, they'll apply it. And if the evaluations don't meet their needs, they won't. About as simple as you can get. I think the whole process is far more dependent on the skills of the people who use it than it is on the sort of peripheral issues of politics, resources. . . . Institutions are tough as hell to change. You can't change an institution by coming and doing an evaluation with a halo. Institutions are changed by people, in time, with a constant plugging away at the purpose you want to accomplish. And if you don't watch out, it slides back. [EV346:15–16]

His view had emerged early in the interview when he described how evaluations were used in the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity:

In OEO it depended on who the program officer was, on the program review officials, on program monitors for each of these grant programs. Where there were aggressive program people, they used these evaluations whether they understood them or not. They used them to affect improvements, direct allocations of funds within the program, explain why the records were kept this way, why the reports weren't complete or whatever. Where the program officials were unaggressive, passive—nothing!

Same thing's true at the project level. Where you had a director who was aggressive and understood what the hell the structure was internally, he used evaluation as leverage to change what went on within his program. Those who weren't—nothing! [EV346:5]

The same theme emerged in his comments about each possible factor. Asked about the effects on use of methodological quality, positive or negative findings, the degree to which the findings were expected, he always returned eventually to the importance of managerial interest, competence,

and confidence. The person makes the difference, he insisted. All else follows.

Our sample included another rather adamant articulation of this premise. An evaluation of a pilot program involving four major projects was undertaken at the instigation of the program administrator. He made a special effort to make sure that his question (i.e., Were the pilot projects capable of being extended and generalized?) was answered. He guaranteed this by personally taking an active interest in all parts of the study. The administrator had been favorable to the program in principle, was uncertain what the results would be, but was hoping that the program would prove effective. The evaluation findings were, in fact, negative. The program was subsequently ended, with the evaluation carrying "considerable weight" in that decision [DM367:8]. Why was this study used in such a dramatic way? His answer was emphatic:

Look, we designed the project with an evaluation component in it, so we were committed to use it and we did. It's not just the fact that [evaluation] was built in, but the fact that we built it in on purpose. That is, the agency head and myself had broad responsibilities for this, wanted the evaluation study results and we expected to use them. Therefore, they were used. That's my point. If someone else had built it in because they thought it was needed, and we didn't care, I'm sure the use of the study results would have been different. [DM367:12]

The evaluator (an external agent selected through an open request for proposal process) independently corroborated the decision maker's explanation:

The principal reason [for use] was that the decision maker was the guy who requested the evaluation and used its results. That is, the organizational distance between the policymaker and the evaluator was almost zero in this instance. That's the most important

reason it had an impact. It was the fact that the guy who was asking the question was the guy who was going to make use of the answer. [EV367:12]

Here, then, is a case in which a decision maker commissioned an evaluation knowing what information he needed; the evaluator was committed to answering the decision maker's questions; and the decision maker was committed to using the findings. The result was a high level of use in making a decision contrary to the director's initial personal hopes. In the words of the evaluator, the major factor explaining use was that "the guy who was going to be making the decision was aware of and interested in the findings of the study and had some hand in framing the questions to be answered; that's very important." [EV367:20]

The program director's overall conclusion gets to the heart of the personal factor:

Factors that made a positive contribution to use? One would be that the decision makers themselves want the evaluation study results. I've said that several times. If that's not present, it's not surprising that the results aren't used. [DM367:17]

One highly placed and widely experienced administrator offered the following advice at the end of a 4-hour interview:

Win over the program people. Make sure you're hooked into the people who're going to make the decision in six months from the time you're doing the study, and make sure that they feel it's their study, that these are their ideas, and that it's focused on their values. [DM283:40]

Presence of the personal factor increases the likelihood of long-term follow-through, that is, persistence in getting evaluation findings used. One study in particular stood out in this regard. It was initiated by a new

office director with no support internally and considerable opposition from other affected agencies. The director found an interested and committed evaluator. The two worked closely together. The findings were initially ignored because it wasn't a hot political issue at the time, but over the ensuing 4 years the director and evaluator personally worked to get the attention of key members of Congress. The evaluation eventually contributed to passing significant legislation in a new area of federal programming. From beginning to end, the story was one of personal human commitment to getting evaluation results used.

Although the specifics vary from case to case, the pattern is markedly clear: Where the personal factor emerges, where some individuals take direct, personal responsibility for getting findings to the right people, evaluations have an impact. Where the personal factor is absent, there is a marked absence of impact. Use is not simply determined by some configuration of abstract factors; it is determined in large part by real, live, caring human beings.

The Personal Factor

The personal factor is the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates. Where such a person or group is present, evaluations are more likely to be used; where the personal factor is absent, there is a correspondingly lower probability of evaluation impact.

Supporting Research on the Personal Factor

Hofstetter and Alkin (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of research on evaluation use for the *International Handbook of Educational Evaluation*. They concluded,

"In sum, numerous factors influence use. The 'personal factor' appears to be the most important determinant of what impact as well as the type of impact of a given evaluation" (p. 216). And what does this mean in practice? They found that

> the evaluator could enhance use by engaging and involving intended users early in the evaluation, ensuring strong communications between the producers and users of evaluations, reporting evaluation findings effectively so users can understand and use them for their purposes, and maintaining credibility with the potential users. (P. 216)

Sridharan, Campbell, and Zinzow (2006) add to this list of recommendations the importance of developing with intended users a specific anticipated timeline of impact for the evaluation. Ghere et al. (2006) emphasize that such interactions with intended users require interpersonal skills to communicate effectively and engage in design and use negotiations.

Findings about the importance of the personal factor have been accumulating over a quarter century. Burry (1984) and Alkin (1985) of the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation synthesized research on factors that affect evaluation use, work that built on their own important empirical research (Alkin, Daillak, and White 1979). They organized factors affecting use into three major categories: human, contextual, and evaluation factors.

Human factors reflect evaluator and user characteristics with a strong influence on use. Included here are such factors as people's attitudes toward and interest in the program and its evaluation, their backgrounds and organizational positions, and their professional experience levels.

Context factors consist of the requirements and fiscal constraints facing the evaluation, and relationships between the program being evaluated and other segments of its broader organization and the surrounding community.

Evaluation factors refer to the actual conduct of the evaluation, the procedures used in the conduct of the evaluation, and the quality of the information it provides (Burry 1984:1).

The primary weakness of this framework is that the factors are not prioritized. At a conference where this synthesis was presented, I asked Jim Burry if his extensive review of the literature suggested any factors as particularly important in explaining use. He answered without hesitation:

> There's no question about it. The personal factor is far and away the most important explanatory variable in evaluation use. The research of the last five years confirms the primacy of the personal factor (personal conversation 1985).

R. Burke Johnson (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of empirical literature and major models of evaluation utilization. He examined and compared 17 different models of utilization and synthesized these into a "meta-model." He summarized what he found as follows:

> Evaluation utilization is a continual and diffuse process that is interdependent with local contextual, organizational and political dimensions. Participation by program stakeholders is essential and continual (multi-way) dissemination, communication and feedback of information and results to evaluators and users (during and after a program) help increase use by increasing evaluation relevance, program modification and stakeholder ownership of results. Evaluators, managers and other key stakeholders should collaboratively employ organizational design and development principles to help increase the amount and quality of participation, dissemination, utilization and organizational learning. (P. 104)

In a field parallel to program evaluation, Lester and Wilds (1990) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on use of public policy analysis. Based on that review, they developed a conceptual framework to predict use. Among the hypotheses they found supported were these:

The greater the interest in the subject by the decision maker, the greater the likelihood of utilization.

The greater the decision maker's participation in the subject and scope of the policy analysis, the greater the likelihood of utilization (Lester and Wilds 1990:317).

Hypotheses linking stakeholder participation and utilization have found support in a quarter century of evaluation literature (e.g., Huberman 1995; Greene 1988a, 1988b; King 1982), especially in the American Evaluation Association (AEA) journal *New Directions for Evaluation.* Special issues of the journal have focused on *Promoting the Use of Government Evaluations in Policymaking* (Mohan and Sullivan 2007; Mohan, Tikoo, Capela, and Bernstein 2007); *Responding to Sponsors and Stakeholders in Complex Evaluation Environments* (Mohan, Bernstein, and Whitsett 2002); *The Expanding Scope of Evaluation Use* (Caracelli and Preskill 2000); *Legislative Program Evaluation: Utilization Driven Research for Decision Makers* (Jonas 1999); *Understanding and Practicing Participatory Evaluation* (Whitmore 1998); *Using Performance Measurement to Improve Public and Nonprofit Programs* (Newcomer 1997); *Evaluation Utilization* (McLaughlin et al. 1988); *The Client Perspective in Evaluation* (Nowakowski 1987), and *Stakeholder-Based Evaluation* (Bryk 1983).

Marvin Alkin, founder and former director of the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California, Los Angeles, made the personal factor the basis for his *Guide for Evaluation Decision-Makers* (1985). Jean King concluded from her research review (1988) and case studies (1995) that involving the right people is critical to evaluation use. In a major analysis of "the Feasibility and Likely Usefulness of Evaluation," Joseph Wholey (1994:16) has shown that involving intended users early is critical so that "the intended users of the evaluation results have agreed on how they will use the information" before the evaluation is conducted. Carol Weiss, one of the leading scholars of knowledge use, concluded in her keynote address to the AEA:

> First of all, it seems that there are certain participants in policymaking who tend to be "users" of evaluation. The personal factor—a person's interest, commitment, enthusiasm—plays a part in determining how much influence a piece of research will have. (Weiss 1990:177)

More recently, Cousins and Shulha (2006) reviewed a great volume of research on utilization of evaluation and knowledge found that "both social scientists and evaluators are learning that attention to the characteristics of knowledge users is a potent way to stimulate the utilization of findings" (p. 273).

You get the point. From the 1970s (Patton et al. 1977; Weiss 1977) to the most updated comprehensive reviews of research on evaluation use (Cousins 2007; Mark 2006; Cousins and Shulha 2006; Alkin 2005), the evaluation profession has been deepening its understanding of how interactions with primary intended users affects actual use. Over that time the evaluation literature has generated substantial evidence that attention to the personal factor—involving key stakeholders and working with intended users—can increase use.[3]

Primary Intended Users of an Evaluation

Primary intended users of an evaluation are those *specific* stakeholders selected to work with the evaluator throughout the evaluation to focus the evaluation, participate in making design and methods decisions, and interpret results to assure that the evaluation is useful, meaningful, relevant, and credible. Primary intended users represent key and diverse stakeholder constituencies and have responsibility for transmitting evaluation findings to those constituencies for use.

and associates in the Consortium identified major reforms needed in evaluation by publishing a provocative set of 95 theses, following the precedent of Martin Luther. Among them was this gem:

> Nothing makes a larger difference in the use of evaluations than *the personal factor* [italics added]—the interest of officials in learning from the evaluation and the desire of the evaluator to get attention for what he knows. (Cronbach et al. 1980:6)

What we've learned harkens back to the influential insights of the Stanford Evaluation Consortium, one of the leading places of ferment and reform in evaluation during the late 1970s. Cronbach

Issues of Scale and Scope: Connectors at All Levels

In local program settings, it's fairly easy to imagine the personal factor at work. Chapter 1 opened with a scene on a November
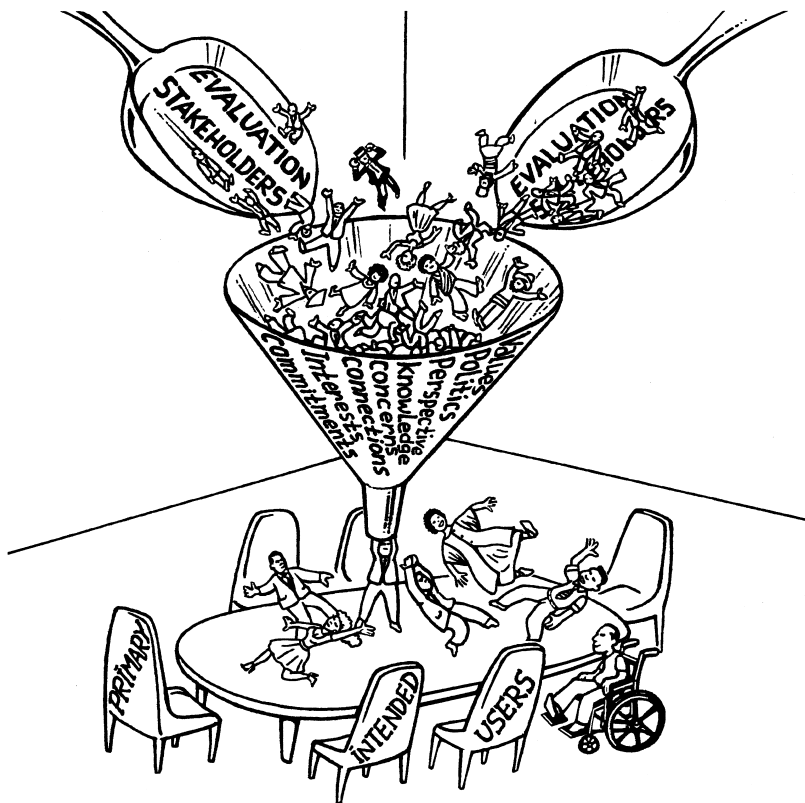
morning in Minnesota where 15 people gathered to discuss evaluation of a county welfare-to-work program. The primary intended users included the county commissioner who chaired the human services committee and another commissioner; state legislators from the county who served on the House and Senate welfare committees; the county administrator for human services and his deputy; an associate director from the state welfare office; two citizen advisory board representatives, one of whom had once been on welfare; the director of a welfare rights advocacy organization; the director of a local employment training program; a university public policy scholar; and the internal county evaluator. These people knew each other and, although they came with varying political perspectives and values, they could be counted on to behave in a congenial manner that has come to be called "Minnesota nice." The network and influence of these 15 people extended to a broad range of stakeholder constituencies. These are the people who Malcolm Gladwell (2002) in *The Tipping Point* called "connectors." In Gladwell's "Law of the Few," he identified connectors as people who know a lot of people and know the right people. *When connectors are the primary intended users, they get the evaluation findings out to a broad range of people.* They are hubs connected to spokes, and they make the wheels of change turn.

But does the personal factor work in larger, more complex settings like the federal government, international agencies, and national organizations? This has been a matter of some significant debate (Alkin 1990; Patton 1988b; Weiss 1988). The debate clarified that different political and decision contexts affect the answer to this question. Policy decisions are different from program decisions and involve different political contexts. Policy change is subject to a broad range of influences that cumulate over time and can be subject to the vagaries and uncertainties of precipitous events. Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans and suddenly there's all kinds of new legislation about natural disasters. The political party controlling Congress or the presidency changes, and a flurry of new policy possibilities are brought to the fore. The cast of characters is large, diverse, and subject to sudden change. Research and evaluation findings enter into this fray in diffuse and unpredictable ways. Thus, in a national policy context, evaluation findings may influence thinking and understanding but are unlikely to lead directly to specific decisions by specific decision makers (Weiss 1988, 1998b).

In short, *context matters*. The national policy context is different from the local program context, with different stakeholder configurations, and different utilization patterns and challenges. But what of a national *program* context? The question remains: Does the personal factor work in larger, more complex settings like the federal government, international agencies, and national organizations? Can targeting and working with key stakeholders enhance use in these broader contexts? Let's look at the evidence.

Wargo (1989) analyzed three unusually successful federal evaluations in a search for "characteristics of successful program evaluations"; he found that active involvement of key stakeholders was critical at every stage: during planning, while conducting the evaluation, and in dissemination of findings (p. 77). In 1995, the U.S. General Accounting Office (since renamed the Government Accountability Office [GAO]) studied the flow of evaluative information to Congress (GAO 1995) by following up three major federal programs:

the Comprehensive Child Development Program, the Community Health Centers Program, and the Chapter 1 Elementary and Secondary Education Act aimed at providing compensatory education services to low-income students. Analysts concluded that underutilization of evaluative information was a direct function of poor communications between intended users (members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources) and responsible staff in the three programs:

> Finally, we observed that communication between the Committee and agency staff knowledgeable about program information was limited and comprised a series of one-way communications (from the Committee to the agency or the reverse) rather than joint discussion. This pattern of communication, which was reinforced by departmental arrangements for congressional liaison, affords little opportunity to build a shared understanding about the Committee's needs and how to meet them. (GAO 1995:40)

The GAO report recommended that Senate Committee members have "increased communication with agency program and evaluation staff to help ensure that information needs are understood and that requests and reports are suitably framed and are adapted as needs evolve" (GAO 1995:41). This recommendation affirms the importance of personal interactions as a basis for mutual understanding to increase the relevance and, thereby, the utility of evaluation reports. In a similar vein, in its report on performance budgeting and program performance, the GAO (2006c) report headline summarized its overall conclusion: "*More Can be Done to Engage Congress.*"

Patrick Grasso is a federal-level and international agency evaluator with extensive experience dealing with large-scale program contexts at the GAO and The World Bank. He has written about the importance of moving from vague and general audiences to "priority" and "key" evaluation users. He has observed that, even in broad evaluations with multiple potential audiences, evaluation

> efforts can be made more successful through up-front consultations with prospective users of the evaluation. Where possible, it is helpful to solicit from the identified potential users indications of what information they need and when they need to have it to meet any pending decision points.

He goes on to advocate that "the extent that all the potential audience groups can reach consensus on the 'what and when' issues, the likelihood of the evaluation actually being used is likely to expand significantly." But how is this done? He tells of the evaluation of a World Bank forestry policy that began with a "kick-off workshop" for interested parties to define the appropriate evaluation questions for the study, and frequent communications with this group throughout the evaluation helped ensure that it would meet the needs of these often-competing interests. He concluded, "An important side benefit is that the final report was accepted by virtually all the parties involved in this contentious area of Bank development work" (all quotes from Grasso 2003:510).

This epitomizes utilization-focused evaluation in a complex, dynamic, and conflict-laden international setting. My only quarrel with how my good friend and colleague Patrick Grasso has characterized this evaluation is that he describes the report's acceptance as a "side benefit." But the key stakeholder-involving process he describes is aimed explicitly and intentionally at such acceptance and use. It is not a side effect. It is the direct, intended outcome of a utilization-focused evaluation.

George Grob, another highly experienced evaluator at the national federal level, has laid out how to get evaluations used at that level by actively engaging "gatekeepers" and "thought leaders" on the program or policy of interest. *Thought leaders* form a "community of experts" on a topic. They are akin to what Gladwell called connectors, with their expertise the basis of their connections. Grob (2003) advises,

> Once you start engaging the thought leaders in a field of interest to you, listen to them. They know what they are talking about. Answer their questions. Make practical recommendations. Tell them something they don't already know. Treat them with respect. (P. 503)

These are wise and effective utilization-focused strategies regardless of the context—local, national, or international.

Exhibit 3.1 summarizes important Canadian research on "drivers of effective evaluations" based on case studies of 15 national evaluations. These drivers emphasize the importance of targeting relevant information to specific intended users and involving those users in the evaluation process.

Evaluation Use Exemplars

Another place to learn what works in large, complex contexts is to examine evaluation exemplars. Each year the Awards Committee of the AEA gives an Outstanding Evaluation Award. In 1998, the outstanding evaluation was the Council for School Performance's "School and System Performance Reports" for the state of Georgia. The reports and reporting process garnered high accolades for their utility. Obviously, schools have a multitude of stakeholders and a statewide education system magnifies the number and

diversity of vested interests and competing perspectives. There are lots of potential "audiences." Were there any primary intended users actually involved in the evaluation's design and use? In an interview for the *American Journal of Evaluation*, Gary Henry described how the evaluation unfolded.

> We knew that it would be important to engage superintendents, school board members, teachers, and principals. Our work was overseen by six Council members who were appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the Georgia House of representatives and an ex-officio member, the State Superintendent of Schools. Members of the Council were emphatic about extending stakeholder status to members of the community in a highly inclusive way—including parents and others in the community. It took almost a year working with these groups to create the architecture of the accountability system. . . . Once we all got on the same page, there was a great deal of creativity and excitement. The process focused on identifying what indicators we would use. We met in four separate groups—principals, superintendents, teachers, and community members—to reduce the influence of pre-existing power relationships on the deliberations. At three points during the process and twice after the system was being implemented we brought all four groups together. Turnout at the meetings was very high. (Henry quoted in Fitzpatrick 2000:109)

Another exemplar and the 2002 Outstanding Evaluation Award recipient was the evaluation of the Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative. This was an 8-year study that involved community-based health promotion projects 29 communities across the state. Ross Connor (2005), former president of the AEA and overall program evaluator, used what he called a "collaborative, community-based approach" that

EXHIBIT 3.1

Research on Use: Drivers of Effective Evaluations

"Best practices" for useful evaluations were reported by the Treasury Board of Canada (2002) based on review of 15 major Canadian evaluations. The report identified "drivers of effective evaluations" that "were felt, by both the evaluation staff and the program staff, to have contributed significantly to making the evaluations useful and worthwhile."

Senior Management Support

Senior management support of the process and the evaluation results is extremely important. This can help in areas where processes are being stalled; relationships with clients and stakeholders are tenuous and require senior management involvement; disagreements exist on evaluation objectives, results or recommendations; or support is required to approve contentious recommendations.

Participatory Relationship between Evaluation Staff and Program Staff

Evaluations where programs staff were actively involved in the evaluation process contributed not only to a process that was focused, smooth, and problem-free but also to producing results that were relevant, timely, and defensible. The buy-in from programs is critical to increasing the likelihood that results and recommendations will be accepted and ultimately implemented.

Specific Best Practices Include

- Program participation: Involvement of the Program management in the planning of evaluation, including providing input to the evaluation Terms of Reference, interview lists, and data collection instruments. Involvement could be through membership on the evaluation governance body (e.g., Steering Committee), or frequent interaction and communication with the evaluation unit.
- Mutually agreed-on terms of reference and evaluation objectives: Mutual agreement on the objectives of the evaluation, including the measures of success, between the evaluation unit and the program staff will lessen the risk of the evaluation going off track and ensure that there are no last-minute surprises. For example, using very specific evaluation terms of reference and meeting to discuss and document evaluation objectives and expectations have helped ensure that all parties are working toward the same goal.
- Open and rapid communication throughout process: Examples of methods that have been used include making regular presentations to programs areas, steering committees, and client groups; maintaining an open process throughout the evaluation; and engaging in internal consultations to ensure that the evaluation was addressing managers' concerns.
- Engagement of program managers in the presentation of management response: Effective evaluation processes have included the program managers in developing and presenting the management response and action plan to the departmental senior management committee approving the evaluation. This provides an opportunity for program managers to be part of the process and promotes ownership of the action plan. It also ensures the development of a timely response to the evaluation by program management.

SOURCE: From Treasury Board of Canada (2002), *Case Studies on the Uses and Drivers of Effective Evaluations in the Government of Canada,* sect. 5.

"involved a lot of different stakeholders" to design the evaluation and interpret findings. The evaluation brought together key stakeholders from different communities at various times to prioritize evaluation questions—people called the "primary question askers." Key stakeholders also participated in designing instruments (the evaluation used a variety of methods), overseeing implementation, and interpreting findings. Connor spent a lot of time in communities and community people spent a lot of time working collaboratively on the evaluation. With so many people involved over a number of years, managing the stakeholder involvement process was a major activity of the evaluation—and that included managing inevitable conflicts. Lest we give the impression that involving primary intended users in evaluation is always a lovefest, consider this incident in the Colorado evaluation. In the process of involving community people in designing a survey, Connor reports,

> The discussion got so heated that I actually ended up having the sheriff come to the parking lot . . . There was a religious right segment of the community that was invited to participate. They attended, but they did not come to participate. They came to collect information to send to their attorney, they said, to sue these people because they were spending blood money—money that came from abortionists. (Quoted in Christie 2005:374)

The situation got resolved, but that group dropped out of the process. And this makes an important point about identifying primary intended users. Not everyone is interested in data for decision making. Not everyone is an information user. Not everyone will buy into evaluation. Some may participate for ulterior motives. Later in this chapter, we'll discuss how to locate and involve those who make good primary intended users.

A Long-Term Evaluation Partnership: The Colorado Community Trust Community-Based Collaborative Evaluation

This evaluation stretched over a long period of time [8 years]. People come and go. Reality happens. Life happens. It takes patience, and it takes an evaluation team that really wants to be partners with the communities and to follow the journey with them— through the good times and challenging ones. . . . It was a long process. And I'm still in touch with some of the people there.

—Evaluator Ross Connor
(quoted in Christie 2005:374)

In summary, the need for interactive dialogue at an interpersonal level applies to large-scale state, national, and international evaluations as well as in smaller scale, local evaluations.

Evaluation's Premier Lesson

The importance of the personal factor in explaining and predicting evaluation use leads directly to the emphasis in utilization-focused evaluation on working with intended users to specify intended uses. The personal factor directs us to attend to specific people who understand, value, and care about evaluation and further directs us to attend to their interests. This is the primary lesson the profession has learned about enhancing use, and it is wisdom now widely acknowledged by practicing evaluators, as evidenced by research on evaluators' beliefs and practices.

Brad Cousins and his colleagues surveyed a sample of 564 evaluators and 68 practitioners drawn from the membership lists of professional evaluation associations in the United States and Canada. The survey included a list of possible beliefs that respondents could agree or disagree with. Greatest

consensus centered on the statement, "Evaluators should formulate recommendations from the study." (I'll discuss recommendations in a later chapter.) The item eliciting the next highest agreement was, "The evaluator's primary function is to maximize intended uses by intended users of evaluation data" (Cousins, Donohue, and Bloom 1996:215).

As part of a review of developments over the first 10 years of the AEA, Preskill and Caracelli (1997) conducted a survey of members of AEA's Topical Interest Group on Use. They found that 85 percent rated as extremely or greatly important "identifying and prioritizing intended users of the evaluation" (p. 216). The only item eliciting higher agreement (90 percent) was the importance of "planning for use at the beginning of the evaluation." Preskill and Caracelli also found that 80 percent of survey respondents agreed that *evaluators should take responsibility for involving stakeholders in the evaluation processes.* Fleischer (2007) asked the same question on a replication survey of AEA members in 2006 and found that *98 percent agreed with this assertion.* In rating the importance of eight different evaluation approaches, "user-focused" evaluation was rated highest. Stakeholder involvement in evaluations has become accepted practice in evaluation practice.

In a review of models of evaluation use, Shulha and Cousins (1997) found significantly increased attention to the way in which context affects evaluation use, where context includes different kinds of stakeholder environments and varying relationships with intended users. They noted especially "the proliferation of collaborative modes of evaluation . . . [which] aspire to more equitable power relationships between evaluators and program practitioners leading to jointly negotiated decision making and meaning making" (p. 200).

> **Evaluators' Responsibility for Intended Use by Intended Users**
>
> In a 2006 online survey of members of the American Evaluation Association, 77 percent of 1,047 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: Evaluators should take responsibility for *being accountable to intended users of the evaluation for intended uses of the evaluation.*
>
> SOURCE: Fleischer (2007).

Jody Fitzpatrick (2004) examined patterns in evaluations chosen as exemplary by the Awards Committee of the AEA and subsequently featured in the *American Journal of Evaluation.* She examined case studies of all eight exemplary evaluations and found that regardless of the evaluation model, methods, or theories guiding the evaluation, "stakeholder involvement is a central component in these exemplary evaluators' practice" (p. 552). Christina Christie (2003) examined the "practice-theory relationship in evaluation" by conducting research on the actual practices of prominent and influential evaluation theorists. She found,

> Regardless of the extent to which theorists discuss stakeholder involvement in their writing, results from this study show that all theorists involve stakeholders in the evaluation process. . . . This revelation is interesting, because not all theorists have traditionally been proponents of stakeholder involvement. . . . I offer as a plausible explanation of this finding that, in practice, the trend has turn toward increased stakeholder involvement, even across a broad theoretical spectrum. (Christie 2003:30)

Alkin (2003), House (2003), and King (2003), in commenting on this finding, concur that some degree of stakeholder involvement has become central to

exemplary evaluation practice, but important differences remain in the depth, breadth, and nature of stakeholder involvement advocated and practiced by difference theorists. Of the theories examined, *utilization-focused evaluation came out on the high end in advocating and practicing active involvement of key stakeholders throughout all aspects, stages, and decisions in an evaluation* (Christie 2003:15–30).

In a simulation study of how different evaluation theories and theorists approach evaluation (Alkin and Christie 2005), a common theme was *stakeholder engagement.* Again, however, there were important differences in what stakeholder engagement meant.

In a major review of evaluation use in national not-for-profit organizations, the Independent Sector concluded that attending to "the human side of evaluation" makes all the difference. "Independent Sector learned that evaluation means task, process <u>and</u> people. It is the people side— the human resources of the organization— who make the 'formal' task and process work and will make the results work as well" (Moe 1993:19). The same emphasis is true in *practical* approaches to evaluation in government (Newcomer et al. 2004).

Attending to the personal factor also applies cross-culturally and internationally. Long-time Kiwi evaluator Bob Williams has conducted his own research on what he elegantly calls "getting the stuff used," uncovered the importance of "the personal effect" and has related it to how things work in New Zealand.

> In the interviews I conducted . . . , most people stressed the importance of personal relationships within and between government agencies. There are close and often personal relationships between ministers, policy advisors, politicians, programme providers, and clients of programmes. . . . Things happen here in New Zealand because of who knows whom and their particular reputations. Process matters—a lot. Evaluations and evaluation processes that sustain or improve these relationships are inevitably more welcome than those that undermine them. (Williams 2003:198–89)

Williams' description of how things happen in New Zealand applies to many countries and many localities. For example, Rosenström, Mickwitz, and Melanen (2006) and Mickwitz (2006:63–64) have documented the critical importance of involving influential local actors in the development of sociocultural indicators as part of an environmental evaluation framework in Finland. Maclure (2006) has described the pragmatic approach that led to successfully involving key stakeholders, including beneficiaries, in an evaluation of humanitarian aid in Sierra Leone. Salmen and Kane (2006) offer examples of the value of including beneficiary perspectives in designing and evaluating development projects throughout the world.

Given widespread agreement about the desired outcome of evaluation, namely, intended uses by intended users, let's now examine some of the practical implications of this perspective.

Practical Implications of the Personal Factor

1. *Find the right people.* It can be helpful to conduct a stakeholder analysis to distinguish different degrees of potential involvement for different stakeholders based on personal factor considerations: their interest, influence, importance, availability, connections, and capacity for contributing to the evaluation and its use. Bryson (2004), based on the work of

Eden and Ackermann (1998), offers a process for sorting stakeholders by degree of interest and amount of power. Those with high interest and considerable power can be excellent candidates to become primary intended users. Those with high power but low interest may become obstacles to use. Those with high interest but relatively little power may provide connections to those with power. Those with low interest and little power, for example, the program's intended beneficiaries are often in this category, may require extra attention and support to generate interest and enhance their capacity to participate in the evaluation. Exhibit 3.2 presents the "Power Versus Interest" grid from Eden and Ackermann (1998:122).

A more refined stakeholder analysis distinguishes five levels of stakeholder engagement: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. Each level of engagement involves a different promise from the evaluator and varying degrees of commitment. Menu 3.1 provides details of this approach to stakeholder analysis.

2. *Find and train information users.* To work with primary intended users to achieve intended uses, the evaluation process must surface people who want to know something. This means locating people who are able and willing to use information. The number may vary from one prime user to a fairly large group representing several constituencies, for example, a task force of program staff, clients, funders, administrators, board members, community representatives, and officials or policymakers (see Exhibit 3.3). Cousins et al. (1996) surveyed evaluators and found that they reported six stakeholders as the median

EXHIBIT 3.2

Stakeholder Analysis: Power versus Interest Grid

	Low-Power Stakeholders	*High-Power Stakeholders*
High-interest stakeholders	Support and enhance their capacity to be involved, especially when they may be affected by findings, as in the case of program participants. Their involvement increases the diversity of the evaluation.	High potential as primary intended users. These are often key "players" who are in a prime position to affect use, including using it themselves as well as drawing the attention of others.
Low-interest stakeholders	Inform them about the evaluation and its findings. Controversy can quickly turn this amorphous "crowd" of general public stakeholders into a very interested mob.	Need to cultivate their interest and be alert in case they pose barriers to use through their disinterest. They are "context setters" (Eden and Ackermann 1998:122).

MENU 3.1

Alternative Degrees and Kinds of Stakeholder Involvement

Types of involvement	*Inform*	*Consult*	*Involve*	*Collaborate*	*Empower*
Promise evaluator makes:	We will keep you informed of the evaluation's progress and findings.	We will keep you informed, listen to you, and provide feedback on how your input influenced the evaluation.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns are considered and reflected in options considered, make sure you get to review and comment on options, and provide feedback on how your input is used in the evaluation.	We will incorporate your advice and suggestions to the greatest extent possible, and give you meaningful opportunities to be part of the evaluation decision-making process.	This is your evaluation. We will offer options to inform your decisions. You will decide and we will support and facilitate implementing what you decide.
People especially important and useful to . . .	Disseminate findings and create interest in the results	anticipate issues, identify landmines, suggest priorities, and enhance the credibility of the evaluation.	affirm the importance, appropriateness and utility of the evaluation, attracting attention to findings, and establish credibility.	serve as primary intended users because of their high interest, interpersonal style, availability, influential positions and/or connections, and sense of ownership of the evaluation.	capacity development, using the evaluation to build their capacity to engage in evaluative thinking and practice.

SOURCE: Inspired by and adapted from Bryson (2004b:33).

number typically involved in a project. While stakeholders' points of view may vary on any number of issues, what they should share is a genuine interest in using evaluation, an interest manifest in a willingness to take the time and effort to work through their information needs and interests. Thus, the first challenge in evaluation is to answer seriously and searchingly the classic question posed by Marvin Alkin (1975): "Evaluation: Who Needs It? Who Cares?" Answering this question, as we shall see, is not always easy, but it is always critical.

EXHIBIT 3. 3

A Statewide Evaluation Task Force

The Personal Factor means getting key influentials together, face-to-face, to negotiate the evaluation. Here's an example.

In 1993, the Minnesota Department of Transportation created seven "Area Transportation Partnerships" to make decisions about roads and other transportation investments in a cooperative fashion between state and local interests. To design and oversee the evaluation of how well the partnerships were working, a "technical panel" was created to represent the diverse interests involved. Members of the technical panel included

- The District Engineer from District 1 (Northeast)
- The Planning Director from District 6 (Southeast)
- The District Planner from District 7 (South central)
- Planner for a Regional Development Council (Northwest)
- Department of Transportation Director of Economic Analysis and Special Studies, State Office of Investment Management
- An influential county commissioner
- Director of a regional transit operation
- Director of a regional metropolitan Council of Governments (Western part of the state)
- Member of the Metropolitan Council Transportation Advisory Committee (Greater Minneapolis/Saint Paul)
- A county engineer
- A private transportation consultant
- A city engineer from a small town
- A metropolitan planning and research engineer
- The State Department of Transportation Interagency Liaison
- A University of Minnesota researcher from the University's Center for Transportation Studies
- An independent evaluation consultant (not the project evaluator)
- Five senior officials from various offices of the State Department of Transportation
- The evaluator and two assistants

This group met quarterly throughout the evaluation. The group made substantive improvements in the original design, gave the evaluation credibility with different stakeholder groups, and laid the groundwork for use.

3. *Find tipping point connectors*. Formal position and authority are only partial guides in identifying primary users. Evaluators must find strategically located people who are enthusiastic, committed, competent, interested, and connected—*tipping point* connectors, people who are looked to by others for information (Gladwell 2002). Our data suggest that more may sometimes be accomplished by working with a lower-level person displaying these characteristics than by working with a passive, disinterested person in a higher position. However, the lower-level person needs to be able to connect with, have credibility with, and be able to

influence higher-level people. Evaluation use is clearly facilitated by having genuine support from the program and organizational leadership. Those people are not always the best for detailed, hands-on engagement along the way, but reaching them with findings remains important.

4. *Facilitate high quality interactions*. Quality, quantity, and timing of interactions with intended users are all important—but quality is most important. A large amount of interaction between evaluators and users with little substance may backfire and actually reduce stakeholder interest. Evaluators must be strategic and sensitive in asking for time and involvement from busy people and be sure they're interacting with the right people around relevant issues. Increased contact by itself is likely to accomplish little. Nor will interaction with the wrong persons (i.e., people who are not oriented toward use) help much. It is the nature and quality of interactions between evaluators and decision makers that is at issue. My own experience suggests that where the right people are involved, the amount of direct contact can sometimes be reduced because the interactions that do occur are of such high quality. Later, when we review the decisions that must be made in the evaluation process, we'll return to the issues of quantity, quality, and timing of interactions with intended users.

5. *Nurture interest and develop capacity in evaluation*. Evaluators will typically have to work to build and sustain interest in evaluation use. Identifying intended users is part selection and part nurturance. Potential users with low opinions of or little interest in evaluation may have had bad prior experiences or just not have given much thought to the benefits of evaluation. The second chapter discussed ways

of cultivating interest in evaluation and building commitment to use. Even people initially inclined to value evaluation will still often need training and support to become effective information users.

6. *Develop facilitation skills*. Evaluators need skills in building relationships, facilitating groups, managing conflict, walking political tightropes, and effective interpersonal communications to capitalize on the importance of the personal factor. Technical skills and social science knowledge aren't sufficient to get evaluations used. People skills are critical. Ideals of rational decision making in modern organizations notwithstanding, personal and political dynamics affect what really happens. Evaluators without the savvy and skills to deal with people and politics will find their work largely ignored or, worse yet, used inappropriately. Jean King and colleagues have paid special attention to the interpersonal and other competences that evaluators need to make evaluations useful (Ghere et al. 2006; Stevahn et al. 2005, 2006; King et al. 2001).

7. *Strategize about appropriate involvement*. A particular evaluation may have multiple levels of stakeholders and, therefore, need multiple levels of stakeholder involvement. For example, funders, chief executives, and senior officials may constitute the primary users for overall effectiveness results, while lower level staff and participant stakeholder groups may be involved in using implementation and monitoring data for program improvement. Exhibit 3.4 provides an example of such a multiple level structure for different levels of stakeholder involvement and evaluation use.

8. *Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and competence*. Involvement of stakeholders and primary intended users has to be adapted to cultural and contextual factors (Madison 2007; Kirkhart 2005, 1995;

Riddle 2005; Connor 2004; Hood 2004; Symonette 2004; King, Nielsen, and Colyby 2004; SenGupta, Hopson, and Thompson-Robinson 2004; Patton 1999c, 1985). Clayson et al. (2002) examined negotiations between evaluation stakeholders in Latino communities and found that they had to be especially attentive to power inequalities and a dynamic environment. Along the way they had to play a variety of roles, including interpreters, translators, mediators, and storytellers. Relationships among people in evaluation situations are affected by larger societal issues, including the challenges of involving people with disabilities (Gill 1999; Lee 1999), racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice that engender conflict and misunderstandings (Hopson 1999; House 1999; Patton 1999a; Stanfield 1999). Moreover, the norms for and challenges to stakeholder involvement and evaluation practice vary greatly across cultures and geographies (Laperrière 2006; Stern 2004; Lunt et al. 2003; Williams 2003; Leeuw 2002; Patton 1985).

Culturally Competent and Responsive Evaluators

Diversity, in its many dimensions and manifestations, is increasingly acknowledged as a necessary prerequisite for excellence. . . . Diversity fires and fuels creativity, innovation, and generative engagement in all sectors of life and living. . . . Multicultural development requires moving beyond tolerance, accommodation, and pressure to fit in toward a focus on changes in policies, processes, and practices in order to genuinely invite and engage the full spectrum of diverse voices, perspectives, experiences, and peoples.

Clearly, evaluative judgments are, by their very nature, inextricably bound up with culture and context. So, where there is sociocultural diversity, there very likely is some diversity in the expected and preferred evaluative processes and practices that undergird judgments of merit, worth, value, quality, significance, congruence. Maximizing accuracy, appropriateness, respect, and excellence calls for an openness to the decentering realities and complexities of difference and diversity.

SOURCE: "Walking Pathways toward Becoming a Culturally Competent Evaluator." Hazel Symonette (2004:96, 107).

In beginning an evaluation training program with Native Americans, I started off by asking them, as part of introducing themselves, to mention any experiences with and perceptions of evaluation they cared to share. With 15 participants, I expected the process to take no more than a half hour. But deep feelings surfaced and a dialogue ensued that took over 2 hours. Here is some of what they said.

• "I'm frustrated that what constitutes 'success' is always imposed on us by somebody who doesn't know us, doesn't know our ways, doesn't know me."

• "By white standards I'm a failure because I'm poor, but spiritually I'm rich. Why doesn't that count?"

• "I have a hard time with evaluation. We need methods that are true to who we are."

• Said through tears by a female elder: "All my life I've worked with grant programs and evaluation has been horrible for us—horribly traumatic. Painful. Made us look bad, feel bad. We've tried to give the funders what they want in numbers but we know that those numbers don't capture what is happening. It's been demeaning. It's taken a toll. I didn't want to come here today."

• Spoken in his native language by a spiritual leader who had opened the session with a smudge ceremony and blessing, translated by his son: "Everything I do is connected to who I am as an Oglala Lakota elder, to our way as a people, to what you call our culture. Everything is connected. Evaluation will have to be connected if it is to have meaning. That's why I brought my son, and my neighbor, and my friend, and my granddaughter. They aren't signed up for this thing we're here to do. But they are connected, so they are here."

• Respecting and honoring culture is a significant dimension of the personal factor. As these quotations show, culture is personal. Everyone who comes to the evaluation table brings culture with them. To ignore it is to disrespect those present and imperil use.

9. *Anticipate turnover of intended users.* One implication of the personal factor concerns the problem of turnover. An experienced, utilization-focused evaluator recently wrote me,

> I've very nearly finished all the revisions to the final reports for a 4 year national evaluation and none of the people I'm now working with were involved in the evaluation design. During the project, there were SEVEN different people in the position of signing-off on critical stages of the evaluation. This is quite a typical experience and has obvious effects on utilization. How can evaluators deal with the more usual turnover issue, apart from trying to do more rapid cycles of planning, implementing and reporting evaluations before the next round of musical chairs?

Turnover in primary intended users can be the Achilles' heel of utilization-focused evaluation unless evaluators watch for,

anticipate, and plan for turnover. The longer the timeframe for the evaluation, the more important it is to engage with multiple intended users, build in some overlap, and, when turnover happens, bring the new people up to speed quickly. This will sometimes involve making some later-stage design changes, if possible, to get their buy-in and increase their sense of ownership of the evaluation.

10. *Strategize about different levels of evaluation influence.* Henry and Mark (2003) have called attention to different mechanisms through which evaluation produces influences at the individual, interpersonal, and collective (organizational) level. "Because the influence of a single evaluation can transpire through numerous outcome chains, there are multiple possible pathways of influence" (p. 305).

Menu 3.2 summarizes these 10 practical implications of the personal factor for use.

Diversions Away from Primary Intended Users

To appreciate some of the subtleties of the admonition to focus on intended use by intended users, let's consider a few of the temptations that evaluators face that lure them away from the practice of utilization-focused evaluation.

First, and most common, evaluators are tempted to make themselves the major decision makers for the evaluation. This can happen by default (no one else is willing to do it), by intimidation (clearly, the evaluator is the expert), or simply by failing to think about or seek primary users (Why make life difficult?). The tip-off that evaluators have become the primary intended users (either by intention or default) is that the evaluators are answering their own questions according to their

EXHIBIT 3.4

A Multilevel Stakeholder Structure and Process

The Saint Paul Foundation formed a Donor Review Board of several philanthropic foundations in Minnesota to fund a project "Supporting Diversity in Schools" (SDS). The project established local school-community part-nerships with communities of color: African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Southeast Asian. The evaluation had several layers based on different levels of stakeholder involvement and responsibility.

Stakeholder Group	Evaluation Focus	Nature of Involvement
Donor Review Board (Executives and Program interim Officers from contributing Foundations and School Superintendent)	Overall effectiveness policy implications; sustainability.	Twice-a-year meetings to review the design and evaluation results. Final report directed to this group.
District Level Evaluation Group (representatives from participating schools, social service agencies, community organizations, and project staff)	Implementation monitoring in early years; district level outcomes in later years.	An initial full-day retreat with 40 people from diverse groups; annual retreat sessions to update, refocus, and interpret interim findings.
Partnership Level Evaluation Teams (teachers, community representatives, and evaluation staff liaisons)	Documenting activities and outcomes at the local partnership level: one school, one community of color.	Annual evaluation plan. Completing evaluation documents for every activity. Quarterly review of progress to use findings for improvement.

own interests, needs, and priorities. Others may have occasional input here and there, but what emerges is an evaluation by the evaluators, for the evaluators, and of the evaluators. Such studies are seldom of use to other stakeholders, whose reactions are likely to be, "Great study. Really well done. Shows lots of work, but, honestly, it doesn't tell us anything *we* want to know."

A less innocent version of this scenario occurs when academics pursue their basic research agendas under the guise of evaluation research. The tip-off here is that the evaluators insist on designing the study in such a way as to test some theory they think is particularly important, whether or not people involved in the program see any relevance to such a test.

A second temptation is to fall prey to the seemingly stakeholder-oriented "identifica-tion of audience" approach. Audiences turn out to be relatively passive groups of largely anonymous faces: the "feds," state officials, the legislature, funders, clients, the program

MENU 3.2

Attending to the Personal Factor to Plan for Use

- Conduct a stakeholder analysis with attention to variations in interest and power. Distinguish and determine appropriate types and degrees of involvement in the evaluation for different stakeholders (see Menu 3.1).
- Find and cultivate people who want to learn.
- Find strategically located people who are enthusiastic, committed, competent, interested, and connected. Formal position and authority are only partial guides in identifying primary users.
- Focus on quality interactions with primary intended users. The quality and timing of interactions are more important than the amount of interaction.
- Nurture stakeholder interest. Evaluators will typically have to work to build and sustain interest in evaluation use. Building effective relationships with intended users is part selection, part nurturance, and part training.
- Hone facilitation and communication skills. Evaluators need people skills in how to build relationships, facilitate groups, manage conflict, walk political tight ropes, and communicate effectively.
- Strategize about different levels and types of stakeholder involvement. A particular evaluation may have multiple levels of stakeholders and therefore need multiple levels and different types of stakeholder involvement.
- Be sensitive to cross-cultural and international factors that affect stakeholder participation, especially inequalities in power, status, and education.
- Watch for, anticipate, and plan for turnover in primary intended users. Bring new users up to speed quickly and, when possible, add design features that increase their interest in the evaluation.
- Strategize about different levels of evaluation influence: individual, interpersonal, and collective (organizational).

staff, the public, and so forth. If specific individuals are not identified from these audiences and organized in a manner that permits meaningful involvement in the evaluation process, then, by default, the evaluator becomes the real decision maker and stakeholder ownership suffers, with a corresponding threat to utility. This is my critique of "responsive evaluation" as advocated by Stake (1975) and Guba and Lincoln (1981). Responsive evaluation "takes as its organizer the *concerns and issues of stakeholding audiences*" (Guba and Lincoln 1981:23). The evaluator interviews and observes stakeholders, then designs an evaluation that is responsive to stakeholders' issues. The stakeholders, however, are no more than sources of data and an audience for the evaluation, not real partners in the evaluation process. That, at least, has been the classic approach to responsive evaluation. More recent conceptualizations and applications, for example, Abma (2006), include face-to-face interactions and dialogue among stakeholders as a central element in responsive evaluation.

The 1994 revision of the Joint Committee Standards for Evaluation moved to language

about "intended users" and "stakeholders" in place of earlier references to "audiences." Thus, in the new version, "the Utility Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of *intended users* [italics added]," as opposed to "given audiences" in the original 1981 version (Joint Committee 1981, 1994). The first standard was changed to "Stakeholder Identification" rather than the original "Audience Identification." Such changes in language are far from trivial. They indicate how the knowledge base of the profession has evolved. The language we use shapes how we think. The nuances and connotations reflected in these language changes are fundamental to the philosophy of utilization-focused evaluation.

A third diversion from intended users occurs when evaluators target organizations rather than specific individuals. Targeting organizations appears to be more specific than targeting general audiences, but really isn't. Organizations as targets can be strangely devoid of real people. Instead, the focus shifts to positions and the roles and authority that attach to positions. Since Max Weber's seminal essay on bureaucracy gave birth to the study of organizations, sociologists have viewed the interchangeability of people in organizations as the hallmark of institutional rationality in modern society. Under ideal norms of bureaucratic rationality, it doesn't matter who's in a position, only that the position be filled using universalistic criteria. Weber argued that bureaucracy makes for maximum efficiency precisely because the organization of role-specific positions in an unambiguous hierarchy of authority and status renders action calculable and rational without regard to personal considerations or particularistic criteria. Such a view ignores the personal factor. Yet it is just such a view of the world that has permeated the minds of evaluators when they say that their evaluation is for

"the federal government," "the state," "the agency," the "foundation," or any other organizational entity. Organizations do not consume information; people do—individual, idiosyncratic, caring, uncertain, searching people. Who is in a position makes all the difference in the world to evaluation use. To ignore the personal factor is to diminish utilization potential from the outset. To target evaluations at organizations is to target them at nobody in particular—and, in effect, not to really target them at all.

A fourth diversion away from intended users is to focus on decisions instead of on decision makers. This approach is classically epitomized by Mark Thompson (1975:26, 38), who defined evaluation as "marshalling of information for the purposes of improving decisions," and makes the first step in an evaluation "identification of the decision or decisions for which information is required." The question of who will make the decision remains implicit. The decision-oriented approach stems from a rational social scientific model of how decision making occurs:

1. A clear-cut decision is expected to be made.

2. Information will inform the decision.

3. A study supplies the needed information.

4. The decision is then made in accordance with the study's findings.

The focus in this sequence is on data and decisions rather than people. But people make decisions and, it turns out, most "decisions" accrete gradually and incrementally over time rather get make at some concrete, decisive moment (Weiss 1990, 1977; Allison 1971; Lindblom 1965). It can be helpful, even crucial, to orient evaluations toward future decisions, but identification of such decisions, and the implications of those decisions for the evaluation, are best made in

conjunction with intended users who come together to decide what data will be needed for what purposes, including, but not limited to, decisions. This important nuance means that *utilization-focused evaluation is always user-oriented* (Alkin 1995) *but only sometimes decision-oriented.* User-focused evaluation involves an evaluation process for making decisions about the content of an evaluation—but the content itself is not specified or implied in advance, including whether the primary focus is a decision.

A fifth temptation is to assume that the funders of the evaluation are the primary intended users, that is, those who pay the fiddler call the tune. In some cases, this is accurate. It is hoped that funders are among those most interested in using evaluation. But there may be additional important users. Moreover, evaluations are funded for reasons other than their perceived utility, for example, wanting to give the appearance of supporting evaluation; because legislation or licensing requires evaluation; or because someone thought it had to be written into the budget. Those who control evaluation purse strings may not have any specific evaluation questions. Often, they simply believe that evaluation is a good thing that keeps people on their toes. They do not care about the content of a specific evaluation, they only care that evaluation—any evaluation—takes place. They mandate the process but not the substance. Under such conditions (which are not unusual), there is considerable opportunity for identifying and working with additional interested stakeholders to formulate relevant evaluation questions and a correspondingly appropriate design.

A sixth temptation is to put off attending to and planning for use from the beginning. It's tempting to wait until findings are in to worry about use, essentially not planning for use by waiting to see what happens. But experienced evaluator Bob Williams (2003) warns, "Evaluation use is

not something to think about at the end of an evaluation. The initial conditions, the negotiations, the development of the evaluation design, the implementation of the reporting phases all influence the use of an evaluation" (p. 212). In short, use has to be planned for and anticipated. Planned use occurs when the intended use by intended users is identified at the beginning. Unplanned use can occur in any evaluation, but relying on the hope that something useful will turn up is a risky strategy. Eleanor Chelimsky (1983:160) has asserted that the most important kind of accountability in evaluation is use that comes from "designed tracking and follow-up of a predetermined use to predetermined user." She calls this a "closed-looped feedback process" in which "the policy maker wants information, asks for it, and is interested in and informed by the response" (1983:160). This perspective solves the problem of defining use, addresses the question of who the evaluation is for, and builds in evaluation accountability since the predetermined use becomes the criterion against which the success of the evaluation can be judged. Such a process has to be planned.

A seventh temptation is to convince oneself that it is unseemly to enter the fray and

Fundamentally Changing the Evaluator's Role to Enhance Learning

From a distant, research-oriented person trying to systematise the known and unearth the hidden, she or he will become a process facilitator whose greatest skill is to design and organise others' learning effectively. Stakeholder analysis, communication knowledge and skills become increasingly important as well as managing group dynamics.

SOURCE: Engel and Carlsson (2002). European Evaluation Society (2002:13).

thereby run the risks that come with being engaged. I've heard academic evaluators insist that their responsibility is to assure data quality and design rigor in the belief that the scientific validity of the findings will carry the day. The evidence suggests this seldom happens. An academic stance that justifies the evaluator standing above the messy fray of people and politics is more likely to yield scholarly publications than improvements in programs. Fostering use requires becoming engaged in building relationships and sorting through the politics that enmesh any program. In so doing, the evaluator runs the risks of getting entangled in changing power dynamics, having the rug pulled out by the departure of a key intended user, having relationships go bad, and/or being accused of bias. Later, we'll discuss strategies for dealing with these and other risks, but the only way I know to avoid them altogether is to

stand aloof; that may provide safety but at the high cost of utility and relevance.

An eighth and final temptation is to allow oneself to be co-opted by acquiescing to powerful stakeholders who ask for or demand subtle or significant changes in the evaluation after it is underway (this can happen up front during design but it's easier to deal with then), or who become gradually more resistant as time goes by as it becomes apparent that they will not be able to control findings. Particularly powerful stakeholders will sometimes act in ways that undermine the involvement of less powerful stakeholders. This is a particular danger for less-experienced evaluators or those who lack the skill to deal with powerful stakeholders. Chapter 14 will discuss in greater depth dealing with such political interference.

Menu 3.3 summarizes these eight use-deadly temptations that divert evaluators

MENU 3.3

Temptations Away from Being User-Focused: Use-Deadly Sins

1. Evaluators make themselves the primary decision makers and, therefore, the primary users.
2. Identifying vague, passive audiences as users instead of real people.
3. Targeting organizations as users (e.g., "the feds") instead of specific persons.
4. Focusing on decisions instead of decision makers.
5. Assuming the evaluation's funder is automatically the primary stakeholder.
6. Waiting until the findings are in to identify intended users and intended uses.
7. Taking a stance of standing above the fray of people and politics. That just makes you irrelevant.
8. Being co-opted by powerful stakeholders.
9. Identifying primary intended users but not involving them meaningfully in evaluation decision making.

from clearly specifying and working with intended users.

User-Focused Evaluation in Practice

Lawrence Lynn Jr., Professor of Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, has provided excellent evidence for the importance of a user-focused way of thinking in policy analysis and evaluation. Lynn was interviewed by Michael Kirst for *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.* He was asked, "What would be a test of a 'good policy analysis'?"

> One of the conditions of a good policy analysis is that it is helpful to a decision maker. A decision maker looks at it and finds he or she understands the problem better, understands the choices better, or understands the implications of choice better. The decision maker can say that this analysis helped me. (Lynn 1980a:85)

Note here that the emphasis is on informing the decision maker, not the decision. Lynn argues in his authoritative and still-relevant casebook on policy analysis (Lynn 1980b) that a major craft skill needed by policy and evaluation analysts is the ability to understand and make accommodations for specific decision maker's cognitive style and other personal characteristics. His examples are exemplars of the user-focused approach.

> Let me take the example of Eliot Richardson, for whom I worked, or Robert MacNamara, for that matter. These two individuals were perfectly capable of understanding the most complex issues and absorbing details—absorbing the complexity, fully considering it in their own minds. Their intellects were not limited in terms of what they could handle. . . . On the other hand, and I do not want

to use names, you will probably find more typical the decision makers who do not really like to approach problems intellectually. They may be visceral, they may approach issues with a wide variety of preconceptions, they may not like to read, they may not like data, they may not like the appearance of rationality, they may like to see things couched in more political terms, or overt value terms. And an analyst has got to take that into account. There is no point in presenting some highly rational, comprehensive piece of work to a Secretary or an Assistant Secretary of State who simply cannot or will not think that way. But that does not mean the analyst has no role; that means the analyst has to figure out how he can usefully educate someone whose method of being educated is quite different. The analyst needs to see and understand things in a different style (Lynn 1980a:85–86).

Lynn studied the Carter administration's handling of welfare reform issue, especially the role that his different analysts played. Joe Califano, a senior presidential advisor, dealt with information through a political lens. Califano was a political animal with a relatively short attention span—highly intelligent but an action-oriented person. When his analysts attempted to educate him in a purely logical and rational manner, without reference to political priorities, communication problems arose. Califano's cognitive style and his analyst's approach just did not match.

Lynn also used the example of Jerry Brown, former Governor of California. Brown liked policy analyses framed as a debate—thesis, antithesis—because he had been trained in the Jesuitical style of argument. The challenge for a policy analyst or evaluator, then, becomes grasping the decision maker's cognitive style and logic. President Ronald Reagan, for example, liked *Reader's Digest* style stories and anecdotes. From Lynn's perspective,

an analyst presenting to Reagan would have to figure out how to communicate policy issues through stories. He admonished analysts and evaluators to "discover those art forms by which one can present the result of one's intellectual effort" in a way that can be heard, appreciated, and understood:

> In my judgment, it is not as hard as it sounds. I think it is not that difficult to discover how a Jerry Brown or a Joe Califano or a George Bush or a Ted Kennedy thinks, how he reacts. All you have got to do is talk to people who deal with them continuously, or read what they say and write. And you start to discover the kinds of things that preoccupy them, the kinds of ways they approach problems. And you use that information in your policy analyses. I think the hang-up most analysts or many analysts have is that they want to be faithful to their discipline. They want to be faithful to economics or faithful to political science and are uncomfortable straying beyond what their discipline tells them they are competent at dealing with. The analyst is tempted to stay in that framework with which he or she feels most comfortable.
>
> And so they have the hang-up, they cannot get out of it. They are prone to say that my tools, my training do not prepare me to deal with things that are on Jerry Brown's mind, therefore, I cannot help him. That is wrong. They can help, but they have got to be willing to use the information they have about how these individuals think and then begin to craft their work, to take that into account. (Lynn 1980a:86–87)

Lynn's examples document the importance of the personal factor at the highest levels of government. Differences among people matter just as much at state and local levels and in communities around the world. Focusing on the personal factor provides direction about what to look for and how to proceed in planning for use.

Beyond Just Beginning

This chapter has emphasized that utilization-focused evaluators begin by identifying and organizing primary intended evaluation users. They then interact with these primary users throughout the evaluation to nurture and sustain the commitment to use.

Use as a Two-Way Interaction

Far from being a one-way process of knowledge flow, as many traditional texts would indicate, evaluation utilization needs to be understood as a complex, dynamic transaction. The stakeholders or users cannot be construed as passive receptacles of information. Evaluation utilization is an <u>active process</u> in terms of which meaning is shaped by both the evaluator and those involved in evaluation.

SOURCE: McKegg (2003:222), *New Zealand Evaluator.*

For there is *a ninth deadly-use sin:* identifying primary intended users at the outset of the study, then ignoring them until the final report is ready.

Involving specific people who can and will use information enables them to establish direction for, commitment to, and ownership of the evaluation every step along the way from initiation of the study through the design and data collection stages right through to the final report and dissemination process. If decision makers have shown little interest in the study in its earlier stages, our data suggest that they are not likely to suddenly show an interest
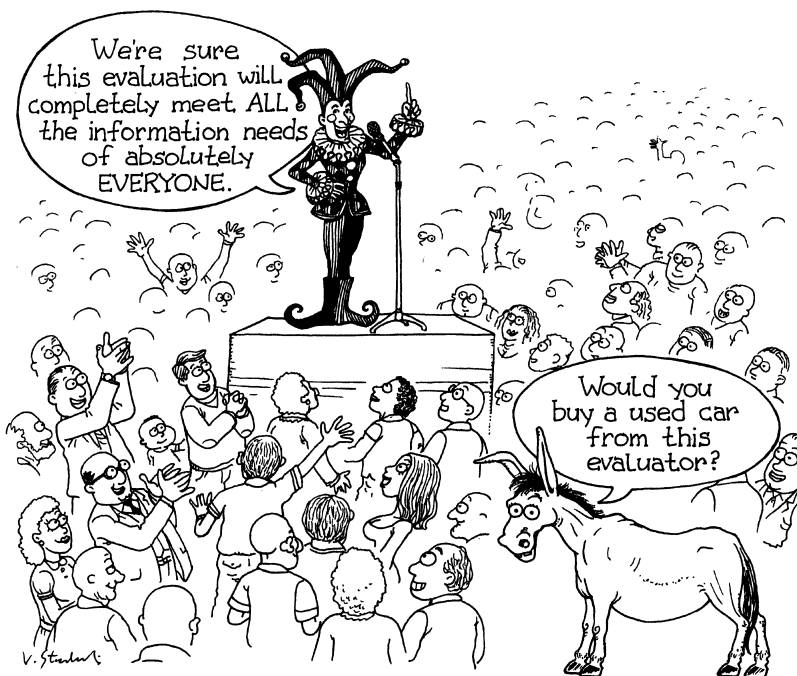
in using the findings at the end. They won't be sufficiently prepared for use.

The remainder of this book examines the implications of focusing on intended use by intended users. We'll look at the implications for how an evaluation is conceptualized and designed (Chapters 4 through 10), methods decisions (Chapters 11 and 12), and analysis approaches (Chapter 13). We'll also look at the political and ethical implications of utilization-focused evaluation (Chapter 14).

Throughout, we'll be guided by attention to the essence of utilization-focused evaluation: *focusing on intended use for specific intended users.* Focus and specificity are ways of coming to grip with the fact that no evaluation can serve all potential stakeholders' interests equally well. As Spanish baroque philosopher Baltasar Gracian observed in 1647 in *The Art of Worldly Wisdom:* "It is a great misfortune to be of use to nobody; scarcely less to be of use to everybody."

Follow-Up Exercises

1. Find a published evaluation. Does the report identify the primary intended users? If so, can you identify their degree of participation in the evaluation? If intended users are not identified, what can you infer about who determined the focus and methods of the evaluation?

2. Conduct a stakeholder analysis for a program or policy issue. Identify any well known program or a program with which you are personally familiar. List the various stakeholder groups in one column, and next to each stakeholder group, identify as best you can what you think the priority evaluation issues would be given their "stake" in the program.

3. Think about some people you know well who process information differently. Identify at least four different people with varying information-processing styles.

Perhaps one person likes to always see both sides of an issue. Perhaps another likes stories to understand things. Yet another may prefer numbers. Still another may be highly opinionated with little attention to facts. Use these examples to discuss how differences in learning styles and information-processing preferences would affect how you, as an evaluator, would work with these different people.

4. Interview a program director in your area about his or her views about and uses of evaluation. Conduct your own utilization study of a particular agency or a specific evaluation that has been done.

Notes

1. At the time of the study, in 1976, I was Director of the Evaluation Methodology Program in the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. The study was conducted through the Minnesota Center for Social Research, University of Minnesota. Results of the study were first published under the title, "In Search of Impact: An Analysis of the Utilization of Federal Health Evaluation Research" (Patton et al., 1977). For details on the study's design and methods, see Patton (1986:30–39). The 20 cases in the study included 4 mental health evaluations, 4 health training programs, 2 national assessments of laboratory proficiency, 2 evaluations of neighborhood health center programs, 2 studies of health services delivery systems programs, a training program on alcoholism, a health regulatory program, a federal loan forgiveness program, a training workshop evaluation, and 2 evaluations of specialized health facilities. The types of evaluations ranged from a 3-week program review carried out by a single internal evaluator to a 4-year evaluation that cost $1.5 million. Six of the cases were internal evaluations and 14 were external.

Because of very limited resources, it was possible to select only three key informants to be contacted and intensively interviewed about the utilization of each of the 20 cases in the final sample. These key informants were (1) the government's internal project officer (PO) for the study, (2) the person identified by the project officer as being either the decision maker for the program evaluated or the person most knowledgeable about the study's impact, and (3) the evaluator who had major responsibility for the study. Most of the federal decision makers interviewed had been or now are office directors (and deputy directors), division heads, or bureau chiefs. Overall, these decision makers represented more than 250 years of experience in the federal government.

The evaluators in our sample were a rather heterogeneous group. Six of the 20 cases were internal evaluations, so the evaluators were federal administrators or researchers. In one case, the evaluation was contracted from one unit of the federal government to another, so the evaluators were also federal researchers. The remaining 13 evaluations were conducted by private organizations or nongovernment employees, although several persons in this group either had formerly worked for the federal government or have since come to do so. Evaluators in our sample represented more than 225 years of experience in conducting evaluative research.

2. Citations for quotes taken from the interview transcripts use the following format: [DM367:13] refers to the transcript of an interview with a decision maker about evaluation study number 367; this quote was taken from page 13 of the transcript. The study numbers and page numbers have been systematically altered to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees. EV201:10 and PO201:6 refer to interviews about the same study, the former being an interview with the evaluator, the latter an interview with the project officer.

3. Examples from a quarter century of research reported in the evaluation literature that supports the importance of the personal factor, working with primary intended users, and involving stakeholders to enhance use: Mohan, Tikoo, Capela, and Bernstein (2007); King (2007a, 2007b); Sridharan et al. (2006);

Cousins and Shulha (2006); Nance (2005); Weaver and Cousins (2004); Christie (2003); Christie and Alkin (2003); Leviton (2003); Feinstein (2002); Morris (2002); Cousins (2001); Michalski and Cousins (2001); Brandon (1998); Johnson, Willeke, and Steiner (1998); Johnson (1995); Cooley and Bickel (1985); Lawler et al. (1985); Siegel and Tuckel (1985); Bedell et al. (1985); Dawson and D'Amico (1985); King (1985); Cole (1984); Evans and Blunden (1984); Hevey (1984); Rafter (1984); Glaser, Abelson, and Garrison (1983); Campbell (1983); Bryk (1983); Lewy and Alkin (1983); Stalford (1983); Saxe and Koretz (1982); Beyer and Trice (1982); King and Pechman (1982); Barkdoll (1982); Canadian Evaluation Society (1982); Leviton and Hughes (1981); Dickey and Hampton (1981); Braskamp and Brown (1980); Alkin and Law (1980); and Studer (1978).
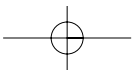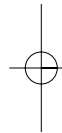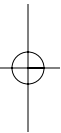
4

Intended Uses of Findings

If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else.

—Yogi Berra

Evaluation Wonderland

*When Alice encounters the Cheshire Cat in Wonderland, she asks, "Would you tell
me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where—" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the Cat.
"—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."*

—Lewis Carroll