

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ON
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

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Implementation Evaluation: An Overview

During the past decade, more and more individuals have come to accept the premise that effective criminal justice programming requires a feedback loop that provides information as to whether or not projects are working and why. In its elemental form, this is what we mean by evaluation -- a procedure for judging the value of projects or activities.

The idea of evaluating social programs is not new. Neither is it unique to the field of criminal justice. For example, we know that there were individuals who advocated the experimental evaluation of "new deal" programs in the 1930's (Stephen: 1935). During the 1950's, mental health and public service programs devoted considerable attention to the issue of program or project evaluation, and throughout the 1960's educational, social welfare, delinquency prevention and some penal programs were included in this list. Eventually, with the maturing of LEAA, the notion of evaluation has been expanded to the entire criminal justice system.

As with other areas of social programming, the interest in evaluating criminal justice projects has progressed from simple procedures of auditing how much money was being spent to more sophisticated studies attempting to determine the results achieved by projects. In general, however, these studies have been disappointing to public officials because most projects do not appear to achieve the results anticipated of them. This is true in the field of criminal justice as well as other areas of social programming (Kelling, et al: 1974; Bernstein and Freeman: 1975; Demerath et al: 1975; Lipton et al: 1975; Murry and Krug: 1975).

There are at least three reasons for this apparent lack of project success. The first reason may be identified as programmatic over-expectation. That is, our expectations for the success of such programs may be grossly exaggerated. There is certainly abundant evidence to support this possibility.

In general, planned social interventions are directed toward problems that we have not been able to solve through the normal mechanisms of society. This really means that if target problems were easy to solve, they would already be solved. Thus, the results-particularly in cost-benefit terms-that we can expect from new programs are probably going to be lower than the achievement of the dramatic changes usually anticipated and often promised when projects are initiated. At the extreme, this is what Campbell means by over-advocacy (Campbell: 1969; 409-410).

The second reason projects may not produce the results expected of them is because of conceptual failure. That is, projects may fail because the theories concerning causation and relationships upon which the projects were based were inaccurate or incomplete. This is usually what we mean when we talk about a project not working or failing to produce the anticipated effects. Presumably, all projects are based upon some underlying theoretical framework. The intent of the project is to intervene into some identified causal network, thus affecting the intended outcome. However, if the theoretical framework underlying the project is inappropriate, the causal network is never activated, and hence the "idea" failed (Kerr: 1976; 351-363).

The third reason projects may appear to fail is because they were never put into operation as intended. In other words, the ideas - the impact model - upon which the project was developed was never tested because the project was not carried through as originally intended. We refer to this as implementation failure.

All three of these factors may influence the apparent success or failure of a project or planned innovation.* This study, however, focuses attention on the problem of implementation failure.

*In this paper, planned innovations are defined as concepts, activities and technologies that are new to the particular setting in which the project is being conducted.

In general, the issue of project implementation has been neglected by organizational researchers and evaluation specialists, as well as by policy-makers and program developers. It is almost as if everyone concerned wished to ignore the fact that policies, programs and projects must be implemented in organizational settings by organizational members. In direct contrast to the existing pattern, this paper stresses the importance of organizational factors and the relationships between both individuals and organizations to the successful implementation, goal achievement and institutionalization of projects.

Conceptual Framework

Using a simplified model, the time period associated with planned innovations may be divided into three stages: (1) problem analysis and project initiation; (2) attempted implementation; (3) institutionalization/rejection. During the first stage (problem analysis), the existing situation is diagnosed, alternative futures identified, specific innovations selected to help achieve desired goals and efforts made to acquire the necessary resources. This is followed by the implementation stage which is characterized by efforts to operationalize the ideas and activities selected during stage one. The final stage represents the period in which the innovation or some adaptation of it is institutionalized or rejected by the host organization and its environment. Obviously the actual institutionalization or rejection of innovations is influenced by the outcomes of preceding stages and the effects produced as well as a variety of environmental (contextual) factors.

Briefly, the study is based upon the following series of assumptions concerning the relationships between organizations and their environments:

1. Planned innovations take place in and/or are operationalized through host organizations that may be viewed as open systems which are characterized by both internal and external environments.
2. In terms of their internal environment, host organizations are consciously created social systems (formal organizations) intended to achieve relatively specific goals characterized by a formal authority structure and division of labor designed to process inputs (materials, people or information) into outputs in order to facilitate goal achievement.
3. Planned innovations represent potential changes in the internal environment (goals, division of labor, role expectations, etc.) of the organizations in which implementation is attempted.
4. The degree to which planned innovations are implemented will be influenced by the support/opposition they receive from the internal environment of the organization in which implementation is attempted.
5. Open systems are also characterized by their constant interaction with and dependency upon their external environment (particularly other organizations in their organizational set) for a supply of inputs and the consumption of outputs.
6. Given this dependency, the external environment of an organization may influence the goals and activities of the focal organization.
7. Planned innovations represent potential changes in the external environment of an existing organization or the creation of an external environment for a new organization.
8. The degree to which planned innovations are implemented will be influenced by the support/opposition they receive from the external environment of the organization in which implementation is attempted.
9. The degree of implementation will influence both the effects achieved by and the potential institutionalization of an innovation.

Drawing upon the planned change and organizational development literature, we have developed a series of research questions concerning environmental influence on project implementation, effectiveness and institutionalization.

These quasi-hypotheses focus on the clarity of organizational goals and functions, intra and inter organizational consensus and the distribution of power. Specific questions to be discussed in this paper include:

1. the relationship between environmental consensus on the benefits to be derived from an innovation and its support and implementation;
2. the relationship between the involvement of relevant actors in the planning and development of an innovation and their ultimate support for and utilization of the innovation;
3. the relationship between the clarity of project goals and environmental support and utilization;
4. the relationship between environmental consensus on project goals and its support and utilization;
5. the relationship between the power of the host organization and the environmental support received by a project.

Design and Methodology

The data for this paper are derived from an effects oriented study of pro-active police units presently being carried out in collaboration with the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice Programs. These projects include surveillance units, saturation patrols and regionalized detective bureaus which are intended to reduce the incidence of crime and criminal activity (ultimate effects). For the most part, the projects are intended to focus on major part 1 crimes such as auto theft, larceny, burglary, and robbery. Each project seeks to achieve the reduction in crime and criminal activity by improving the investigative or patrol capability of the parent organization. Figure 1 presents the basic impact model for these projects in diagramatic form.

Beyond their ultimate focus on crime reduction, the special police units also emphasize their contribution to improved investigative capabilities through the units' activities as information processor. Thus, the units

FIGURE 1: BASIC SPECIAL POLICE UNIT IMPACT MODEL

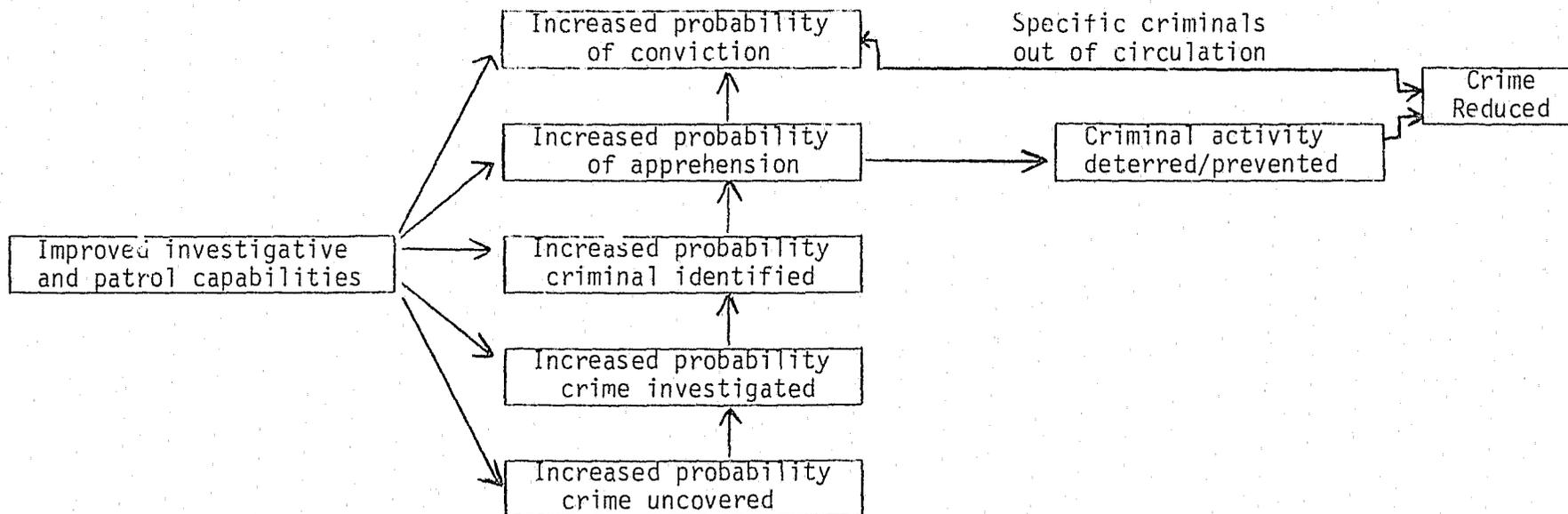
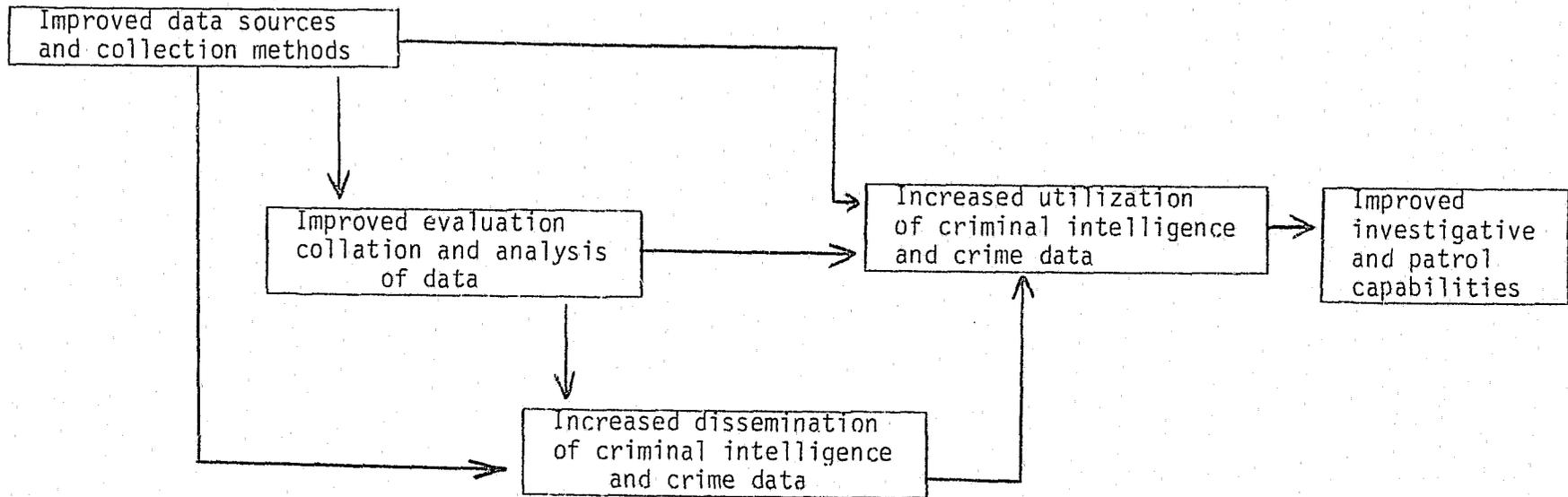


FIGURE 2: CRIMINAL INTELLIGENCE AND CRIME ANALYSIS IMPACT MODEL



may be viewed as a type of criminal intelligence unit (information processing system). Figure 2 presents a diagrammatic version of the impact model from which this emphasis is derived.

In our opinion, special police units provide an ideal opportunity to study the implementation process because they are projects over which the environment may exert a great deal of influence. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these potential points of contact, each of which creates relationships that may either facilitate or impede goal attainment. This is particularly evident when considering the units dependency upon other units or departments for both the supply and utilization of information. For example, the initiation of a criminal investigation unit is predicated upon the assumption that information will be exchanged between the unit and different units in the same department and even other departments in the same area. If this exchange is not forthcoming, or only partially so, the new unit is relegated to a position of impotence before it has had the opportunity to establish its effectiveness.

As part of the larger study we have developed a series of questionnaires focused on implementation issues such as intra and inter organizational support, efforts at environmental management, goal clarity and consensus and individual utilization and evaluation of the projects. Seperate questionnaires have been developed for and are being completed by the incumbents of a variety of positions in the projects total environment. These positions include: the members and commanders of the special units; police chiefs, and the commanders and members of patrol divisions and detective bureaus both within and outside of the host departments. These questionnaires will be used to explore a series of propositions concerning the implementation process, utilization support, and evaluations of special units.

The examples reported in this paper, however, are preliminary in that they are derived from a series of intensive structured interviews from which the questionnaires were developed. These interviews were conducted at six of the twenty-six possible sites and involved unit members, unit commanders, patrol and detective bureau members, patrol and detective bureau commanders, chiefs of police and public safety directors, members of city councils and county commissioners, prosecutors, and representatives of regional planning agencies.

These interviews focused on the development of each project, its actual operation, the social-political context in which it operated and the identification of factors that appeared to facilitate or hinder the success of the unit and/or its institutionalization by the host organization. This material has been used to develop detailed profiles (case studies) of each special unit. In turn the case studies have provided the insights upon which this paper is based.

While we must exercise caution to avoid over-interpreting these preliminary findings, we believe that they are indicative of the results we will obtain from the quantitative analysis we are presently conducting. This confidence is buttressed by two additional sources of information. First, we are obtaining similar results from an ongoing implementation evaluation of diversion oriented youth service bureaus. Second, we have obtained reports and actually witnessed similar developments in a variety of social intervention areas dating back to the proto-type of OEO programs in the early 60's. Thus, we are fairly certain that our examples could be replicated within every SPA throughout the country.

Findings

Data collected from the structured interviews with unit personnel and relevant actors in the external environment provided the basis for a qualitative analysis of individual responses. Five of the primary issues concerning the implementation process will be discussed in this paper. These are: (1) project goal and objective clarity; (2) goal consensus; (3) interdependence of vested interests; (4) local motivations for obtaining and utilization of federal support, and (5) project institutionalization. While there is a high degree of overlap with regard to the issues raised each will be discussed separately to illustrate its independent effect upon project implementation.

Project Goal and Objective Clarity

Perhaps one of the most critical issues raised regarding project implementation concerns the clarity of project goals and objectives. In each of the sites where intensive interviewing was conducted, the clarity of project goals and objectives proved to be a major factor in determining the character of implementation and in some cases whether or not the intended project was implemented.

Project descriptions, grant proposals, and program narratives tend to be more implicit than explicit. The establishment of clear concise goals and objectives are more the exception than the rule. Vague notions of crime prevention or reduction are consistently mentioned but the actual operational procedures and their relationship to goal attainment are usually ignored. Even when mentioned, they are often at cross purposes. For example, saturation patrol units are theoretically organized toward the primary goal of crime prevention. Therefore, the activities of unit personnel should be directed toward creating high levels of police visibility in "high crime areas" of the city. It is assumed under this orientation that by

saturating a given area with highly visible police personnel, the deterrent effect anticipated under the project goal will be actualized, and crime will be prevented.

Surveillance units, on the other hand, are operationalized in precisely the opposite manner as saturation patrols. Surveillance units are organized to maximize the immediate apprehension of a given criminal offender. While general deterrence is a secondary goal of such units, the primary goal is that of crime suppression by taking offenders out of circulation. Consequently, surveillance units are typically organized to minimize police visibility and thus increase the probability of apprehending offenders during the commission of their crimes.

All too often the projects under analysis begin to confuse the distinction between the two types of units. As a result, we have examined units which were originally intended as saturation patrols whose objectives and operational definitions have pushed unit operations in the direction of surveillance activities. This is also true of surveillance units who operated as saturation patrols. The impact that such shifts in project orientation have upon both the implementation and evaluation efforts is critical.

First, the implementation process itself is modified by the redirection of project objectives. Externals expecting to receive benefit from saturation patrol activities and finding themselves confronted with a surveillance unit may withdraw support from the project entirely. This was the actual case in one of the sites selected. The resulting implementation and, hence, institutionalization of the project may be irreparably damaged.

Secondly, consideration of the project's use of resources toward goal attainment requires the identification of the "real" purpose of the unit. If the unit was operationalized as a surveillance unit and the

physical resources, (i.e. equipment, training, etc.) employed where those more appropriate for a saturation patrol unit the initial translation of goals to operations has been eluded. Consequently, units who claim to be surveillance oriented, yet who selected patrol officers for assignment, trained them as patrol officers, and equipped them with potentially visible police equipment have decreased the probability that any "covert" operations will be successful. Consequently, any evaluation premised upon the theoretical underpinnings of surveillance, as previously discussed, is bound to indicate the non-attainment of project goals.

Goal Consensus

The second issue to be discussed is the problem of goal consensus. In the projects studied, the issue of goal consensus emerged almost immediately with respect to both the internal environment (unit members and commander) and the external environment (detective bureaus, patrol divisions, and other area police departments). In many respects, the issue of goal consensus can be directly related to our previous considerations of goal and objective clarity.

In general, individuals who occupy different positions in an organization's environment may have different expectations as to what a project is intended to accomplish and the manner in which it will be achieved. Because project goal statements are usually vague they often allow a continuation of this variation in project expectations. This lack of consensus regarding project goals and objectives impacts directly on the rate and success of implementation efforts. For example, in one site the project initiator designed the project to augment the patrol function. However, the personnel in the unit, as well as most externals viewed the unit as a surveillance operation. In the three years of the project's existence, its operations vacillated between being a saturation patrol and a surveillance unit.

The internal organizational disruption created by this situation resulted in numerous changes in unit personnel, including at least six unit commanders. As a result, it was not until the last half of the third year that the project gained enough operational stability to begin to measure its impact.

A similar situation occurred in a project which was designed to be a multi-jurisdictional crime specific task force. While unit personnel apparently agreed on the goals and objectives to be achieved, there was little consensus in the external environment. Critical actors in area police departments neither agreed with nor supported the unit's goals and objectives. Consequently, the exchange of information concerning crimes and criminals which was expected never materialized. As a result, the unit was forced to generate its own information on many occasions. This impeded the unit's implementation and ultimately its overall productivity of the unit.

Interdependence of Vested Interests

As indicated above, the flow (direction) and exchange of information between specialized police units and various actors in the external environment is essential to the proper functioning of these units. As depicted in Figure 2, a primary feature of the crime analysis function is the acquisition of reliable sources of initiating information. Among our research sites, this information flow never developed and on occasion information was even withheld from the unit by critical actors in the external environment. Much of this stemmed from the predominant view among external sources of information that the unit was in some way in competition with the purposes of the external organizations. This was particularly evident in multi-jurisdictional arrangements, although the attitude existed in single department projects as well.

The reward structures of law enforcement agencies tend to be based upon the productivity of individual officers and usually emphasize "making good arrests". Thus, most departments (and officers) are not prepared to deal

with interdependent team efforts that involve complicated divisions of labor. As a result, area detectives as well as detectives and patrol officers in the same department are often reluctant to share information that may lead to "good arrests". These new units directly challenge the capacities of the existing reward structure because they are predicated upon a sophisticated conception of mutual interests and benefits. The obstacles which this presents to the implementation of the project are evident. Without the exchange of information the new unit must initially flounder until it has acquired allies in the larger system. However, to develop its clientele group and thus acquire allies, the new unit must be in a position to offer inducements to outsiders. Without its own information upon which to base the exchange, the units ability to induce outsiders is severely circumscribed. The resulting dilemma imposes serious limitations upon implementation efforts.

Local Utilization of Federal Support

Questions regarding the sincerity of local grantees' efforts to obtain and properly utilize federal support dollars have been raised in every area of social programming. The prevailing view is that of the deceiving local jurisdiction attempting to solicit federal resources. However, the issue of grantor/grantee relationships has yet to be fully explored in its appropriate context.

The preliminary data collected to this date suggest certain relationships between granting source and funded jurisdiction which greatly affect the efforts to implement and institutionalize an intended project. Of primary concern are the relationships which develop at the funding acquisition stages. By and large, the process of securing federal assistance is one in which the needs of the local area are tailored to suit a predetermined set of criteria established within the granting agency. Federal, state and regional plans provide the categorical basis for most grant requests and the written

articulation of local needs usually follows closely those desired at the granting agency level. The use of "official buzz words" to obtain federal assistance is the predominant method of local level grantsmanship.

This situation has an immediate effect on project implementation efforts once funding is acquired. One example of this impact is evidenced in the development and implementation of a regionalized detective bureau in northwestern Michigan. The initiator of the project originally viewed the establishment of a county-wide detective bureau composed of investigators from the one large city in the county and the county sheriff's department. This proposal was taken to the funding source and was rejected because the funding source was giving priority to multi-jurisdictional arrangements. In this case, the initiator was told to seek the cooperation of a neighboring county sheriff's department and its largest city. Project participants contend that this "forced marriage" was never really consummated and resulted in great tensions between participants until the second county and city eventually withdrew from the project. In a similar circumstance, a police chief who was attempting to develop a saturation patrol unit was informed that it was necessary to form an alliance with three other local jurisdictions to gain funding. Moreover, in order to gain funding, he also changed the project into a hybrid combination of saturation patrol and surveillance unit.

These examples indicate the need to consider actual local needs in the grant approval stages. Unfortunately, the attractiveness of federal assistance often encourages local officials to obscure the purposes for which the funds were originally intended. Conversely, in their desire to aid local agencies and distribute funds, higher level officials often overlook inconsistencies and even conflicts which may limit the results achieved by a project.

Implications

If our preliminary findings are correct, we believe that they have implications that go way beyond the operation and evaluation of special police units. In fact, they raise fundamental questions about the reasons projects are funded, the manner in which they are developed and the type of evaluation to be conducted. These include the possibility of recognizing at least three types of funding purposes (local initiative revenue sharing, organizational change and idea testing) and of utilizing evaluation designs most appropriate to the funding purposes. In this paper, however, we will limit our suggestions to those that are directly related to the issue of project implementation.

First, we suggest that if the idea is important, the development of new projects should involve a great deal more site preparation than is presently customary. This step appears to be necessary if we are going to overcome the problems created by the goal ambiguity and the lack of goal consensus among relevant individuals and organizations. We believe that until such conditions exist it will be almost impossible to implement projects as intended by the funding source. Obviously, this issue is critical for projects designed to promote organizational change or to test ideas. It is also important if we hope to develop the political support necessary for the local institutionalization of successful projects.

Second, we suggest the early phases in the implementation of new projects should involve a greater emphasis on "formative" as opposed to "summative" evaluation efforts. This appears to be necessary because no matter how well thought out a project may be, there are always problems which have not been anticipated but which may influence the success or failure of the project. Thus, the major thrust of initial evaluation efforts should be designed to provide insightful feedback to be used in the further development of the project - formative evaluation. Obviously, such efforts are compatible

with our emphasis on the evaluation of the implementation process. Once a project is operational (if ever), it is then appropriate to shift the major evaluation emphasis to the issue of effects.

Finally, we believe an emphasis on the evaluation of the implementation process is necessary to provide the opportunity to more adequately deal with the problem of "external validity" or "the generalizability of findings beyond the confines of a particular project. Obviously, the issue of "external validity" is critical if you are interested in the transferability of a project to other sites or types of clients. Our own experience indicates that despite surface similarities, the social context in which projects are implemented are never identical and/or that projects are adapted to contend with the specific social-context in which they must operate. As a result, there is always some question concerning the generability of evaluation results. New efforts to overcome such problems can be achieved through an emphasis on the evaluation of the implementation process.

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