HANDBOOK of CRIMINAL JUSTICE EVALUATION

edited by

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ISSN 0163-9056

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INTRODUCTION

It is not common practice for an editors' introduction to constitute a personal statement. However, the format and content of this handbook are a direct reflection of the editors' views, so it is best that we describe these at the outset.

We were alerted to the need for this statement by the very first response to the publisher's announcement of the *Handbook*. We received a phone call from a surprisingly incensed researcher who wanted to know (1) how on earth the announced contributors were selected, (2) why the contributors were not "representative" of the work currently being done in criminal justice evaluation, and (3) why he or his particular colleagues had not been invited to contribute, given their very substantial level of funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

The answers stem from our view of what is currently needed in a major statement on criminal justice evaluation. We believe an overview of what is now being done is less important than a careful consideration of major *issues* to be faced. Thus, no attempt at "representativeness" has been undertaken. Further, we feel that these issues provide a more useful framework than would a set of substantive categories such as police/prosecution/courts/corrections or prevention/enforcement/prosecution/rehabilitation. Finally, we have been very concerned with the audiences for this handbook, and have oriented our efforts less toward displaying evaluations and more toward explaining issues and reviewing trends. In this sense, we have tried to develop a "teaching handbook."

Given this concern for issues rather than for representation of work done or traditional content areas, and given our sensitivity to the need to present these issues to a variety of evaluation audiences, the selection of contributing authors became an admittedly personal enterprise. The editors sought the counsel of a small group of advisors in whom they had personal confidence. The advisors gave generously of their time in suggesting both content and contributors.[1] The outline for the *Handbook* was then developed and reactions again obtained from the advisors and from the initial group of invited contributors.

Our aim in this process, and in the selection of contributors, was to seek not only demonstrated competence in *doing* evaluation, but also to seek those with experience and wisdom in *explaining issues* in evaluation. The editors made the

selections on these bases, and not to represent disciplines or particular facets of the criminal justice system. In this sense, it is almost happenstance that disciplines represented by the contributors include sociology, political science, psychology, economics, operations research, criminology, and the law. By contrast, there is no happenstance that sociologists are the predominant group among the contributors.

In selecting and organizing the chapters of this handbook, we have been guided by two major foci: concern with conceptualizing criminal justice evaluation and concern for the divergent and sometimes opposed audiences of evaluation.

As to the first concern, conceptualization, there are several points to be made. First, we are firmly of the opinion that the most valuable evaluations are those that can draw conclusions about *idea systems*, be these theories, paradigms, or conceptual frameworks. This opinion also means that we have been dissatisfied with a major portion of the evaluation literature, for much of this literature is insufficiently concerned with conceptual issues. It is not surprising that the reader will find many of the chapters in this handbook to mirror this fundamental interest in the conceptual or theoretical basis of evaluation research.

Likewise, we are interested in the relationship between evaluation research and more traditional forms of social science research, both basic and applied. It is clear that evaluation research is to some extent different—otherwise, why a handbook? But it is equally clear to us that much of evaluation research has suffered by inattention to the basic logics associated with more traditional endeavors. Evaluation research is a development, not a new phenomenon. Accordingly, many of our contributors were selected because of their background in both evaluation and traditional research and because of their appreciation for the contribution of the one to the other.

Also, we have found a number of evaluation proposals and projects in the criminal justice field attempt to divorce content from method. Evaluation paradigms and methods cannot be divorced from the substantive content of the field; there is an interplay between content and method which requires the evaluator to be conversant with issues of criminal justice. Methods cannot be overlays. Thus, the reader will find that a number of the *Handbook's* chapters reflect this content/method connection.

Finally, under this heading we admit to a genuine concern that a technological imbalance is developing in criminal justice evaluation. New developments within the field, along with importations of advancing technologies from other disciplines, threaten to stamp what is not new as of lesser value. Some of the chapters solicited for the *Handbook* are intended to present what is new, but we have chosen the writers of those chapters specifically because of their understanding of the place of the "new" within the constraints of the "old" as the

latter is reflected in issues, content, and method. Again, our aim is to stress the conceptual component of the evaluation enterprise so that developing technologies derive their value not from their novelty or abstruseness, but from their capacity to illuminate idea systems.

Much of the above can be summarized operationally by applying a simple test to every evaluation research proposal and project. The test is to ask of each decision made, *why* it was made. If there is a coherent idea system underlying the evaluation, then the answer to each *why* should derive from that idea system, or be explainable as an exception thereto. Decisions on geographic areas, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, time periods, practitioner/ research feedback mechanisms, and projected statistical models are all examples of decisions relatable to the underlying idea system. If readers of a proposal or site-visitors of a project can be shown how each decision is related to (preferably, determined by) the idea system leading to the project, then they can have some genuine faith that the project will pay off, that its conclusions will have both short-range and long-range value. Where the test has consistently been failed, worthwhile projects are hard to find. Good evaluation emanates from good ideas and, one hopes, permits their modification and improvement.

Our second major focus, beyond this fundamental concern with conceptualizing evaluations, is an interest in the audiences of evaluation efforts. Perhaps the greatest divergence of opinions concerning evaluation research is a function of this one aspect of its intrinsic nature, namely that it has divergent audiences. In the past, research tended to be carried out by scientists *for* scientists or by agency personnel *for* agency personnel. The first stressed discipline-building while the second stressed short-term agency needs and accountability. In between were occasional one-way contracts (scientists consult in terms of agency goals) analogous to engineering. In all three paradigms, action and research were typically well separated.

But when action and research meld, then values face off against values and one's audiences are forced out into the open. Scientists worry about being "seduced" by agency concerns; agencies complain of the impractical concerns of scientists. The chapter by Ward Edwards (and the implicit confrontation with companion chapters in Part II) is based, conceptually, upon this very fact of conflicting audiences and values and the conclusion that evaluation must somehow involve recognition of all relevant audiences.

Indeed, Edwards's approach might well appear to be an appropriate solution. Yet the other paradigm illustrators in Part II stop short of this, in a sense allow *their* values to direct their selection of pertinent audiences. And so the issue is joined and the problem of multiple audiences highlighted.

If there is no general consensus on values and audiences, then perhaps more time must be spent in making explicit the audience dimension in the evaluation enterprise. We hope the *Handbook* will serve this function by itself being

responsive to several diverse audiences. Specifically, we intend the *Handbook* to speak to six of *our* audiences.

First among these, and in the current state of criminal justice evaluation perhaps the most important, are the funders of evaluation. At the federal, state, and local levels, funders sometimes do and almost always can establish the criteria by which evaluation proposals, projects, and reports are to be judged. So far, the funders deserve more blame than praise, because short-range, often politically determined, criteria have permitted the design and completion of conceptually limited criminal justice evaluations. There is a base on which to build; the *Handbook* is in part designed to encourage the broadening of that base.

The second audience consists of the policy makers in the legislatures and executive offices of our political structure who are increasingly calling for accountability in criminal justice operations. We hope they will become more sensitive to the complexities of achieving worthwhile evaluation results and more insistent that those who fund and monitor evaluation efforts will demand competent efforts (in our terms, of course). Many chapters in the *Handbook* contribute to the demonstration that competency can be achieved.

The third audience, who along with policy makers are the usual "consumers" of evaluation, are the practitioners who make the system work. At both the line and command levels, police, prosecutors, defense lawyers, judges, correctional officials, and various community agents and leaders have evidenced their sincere desire to achieve more than has yet been achieved. They share the frustration of high hopes and disappointing results. They resent our crime rates and our seeming inability to effect significant change. And with most competent evaluations consistently demonstrating the ineffectiveness of their target programs, practitioners are understandably suspicious of the evaluation enterprise. Effective action/research collaboration is severely damaged by such suspicions; and better understanding of the evaluation process may be a first step in overcoming practitioner reticence to be evaluated and to contribute substantially to the process.

Fourth among our audiences—and here we betray a slight bias—are the nonacademic evaluators who currently comprise a substantial portion of the evaluation community. They are part of a rapidly growing industry which understandably tends to be responsive to the market (i.e., the funders, our first audience). In our view, they have sometimes been overly responsive, settling for funder-established goals ("deliverables" is a common term for limited final reports) when more conceptually oriented products would be in their own long-range interests. Evaluation research, as a prideful profession, will develop in direct proportion to the extent that evaluators serve their funding masters and the development of their disciplines at one and the same time.

The fifth audience consists of our academic colleagues, some of whom have and some of whom have not as yet seen the value of evaluation research opportunities for building the knowledge base of their disciplines. There is, among some, a disdain for research smacking of an applied or a policy nature. Among others, there is simply not enough familiarity with the issues and opportunities of evaluation research. For both groups, we hope the *Handbook* will serve to enlist their talents and to alert them to both the problems and the procedures for building their professions through participation in evaluation programs.

And finally there is our favorite audience, the students, formal and informal, of evaluation research. It rests upon them to determine the future of the field. We have tried very hard to bring together in this handbook a great deal of the experience of others upon which students can build their own incursions into the evaluation arena. Whether theirs is a problem focus or a discipline focus, we urge them to search these pages for the excitement and challenge to their interests that we find intrinsic to criminal justice evaluation.

NOTE

ON THE STATE OF THE ART

Malcolm W. Klein and Katherine S. Teilmann

The old joke describes the meeting of two friends: "How's your wife?" asks the first. "Compared to what?" responds the second. Assessing the state of the art in criminal justice evaluation raises the same question: Compared to what?

The current standard of criminal justice evaluation could be compared with the past; we have come a long way. But it could be compared with the future; it is commonplace to hear that our technology is barely in its infancy. It could be compared to other areas with strong evaluation interests; it seems we must now more a borrower than a lender be. And it could be compared to where various pertinent audiences would like it to be; for some it is insufficiently useful and for others, already incomprehensible.

In the broadest sense, evaluation research as we now know it can be traced back to the interests of social and other scientists in "applied" science. Applied psychology, for instance, has a long history as an acknowledged subdiscipline. However, it seems more appropriate to assign to Kurt Lewin and his students the principal role in building the foundation for modern evaluation research. Lewin's field theory was applied to a series of practical interpersonal, group, and organizational problems in which the "intrusion" of practical goals into the rigors of the research process became legitimated through the conception of "action research." It was the essence of action research that there was an interplay between research process and social action, that the research served the goals of the action while drawing from it refinements of theoretical propositions. Action researchers "got their hands dirty" in the practical problems of social

service. They found havens in public health and education, in "group dynamics" and "human relations" and "sensitivity groups."

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the development of evaluation research out of this action research background is the greater focus now on the policy level rather than the direct practice level of social service. Social programming in America has inexorably led to a greater concern for accountability. The failure of the 1960s War on Poverty programs to be able to demonstrate their effectiveness has increased the salience of accountability at the policy level, so that today both social planners and politicians are coming to expect tangible proof of "results."

In response, evaluation researchers have developed a rather full armament of logics and techniques to suit all occasions. But in this development, they may have moved past their policy-making audience. Is it likely that program administrators, program monitors, and members of legislatures can be very familiar with time-series analysis, with the distinction between cost-benefit and benefit-cost, and with Bayes's Theorem? When is a field at a "cutting edge," and when merely esoteric?

The chapters in Part I are concerned with such questions. For both the policy maker and the student of research, the technical advances in evaluation research must be made available and, one hopes, understandable. Clearly, we can become seduced by new technologies. Clearly, we can become too dependent upon available data sources. Clearly, we can become defensive in the face of technologies imported from other fields and applied by "outsiders" to our own field of criminal justice.

The rational response to such "dangers" is to become more familiar with the developing state of the art and the directions it seems to be taking. If audiences other than the technologists of the art can be brought closer to the cutting edge, the value of the product of research cannot help but be reinforced. The four chapters of Part I were solicited with this in mind; they report on past styles of criminological research, current trends in methodology, recently available statistical procedures, and broadly available sources of data for evaluation purposes.

For students interested in the form of criminological research in the past, the chapter by Wolfgang provides a very detailed review of who we have been and what we have done. For researchers concerned with contributing to the *quality* of research in the field, Wolfgang has provided valuable historical data and made it abundantly clear that there is room for growth in quality. We are invited to enter the arena; and in particular, the weak but important areas are suggested by Wolfgang so that evaluators and policy makers alike may combine to concentrate their efforts where they may be most readily felt.

The Silberman chapter follows this directly with descriptions and specific examples of methodologies being developed in response to an assessment of needs in the field. For researchers seeking the cutting edge and for students