Rethinking Use in Evaluation Studies

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Objectives

- A better understanding of the process of use in evaluation studies

- What research tells us about the influences on use

- What strategies might be employed to enhance use
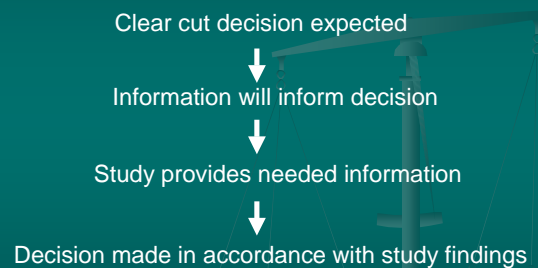
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Workshop schedule

8:30 – 9:00	Welcome
	Background on use and influence
9:00 – 10:00	Group work - program description
10:00 – 10:30	Morning tea/coffee
10:30 - 11:30	Group work - analysing use
11:30 - 11:45	Group reporting and discussion
11:45 – 12:00	Discussion on enhancing use

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Traditional perspective

Clear cut decision expected

⬇

Information will inform decision

⬇

Study provides needed information

⬇

Decision made in accordance with study findings

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What do we mean by use?

- Instrumental Use (Decision Making)
  - overt decision making

- Conceptual Use (Enlightenment)
  - to better understand a program/policy or the issues related to it

- Strategic Use (Persuasive)
  - to persuade others or to use it to gain particular outcomes

- Process Use (Engagement)
  - learning from involvement in the evaluation process

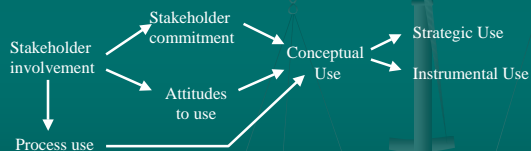Rick Cummings   September 2006

Factors influencing use

- Context factors
  - Information needs and competing information
  - Political and financial climate
  - Decision characteristics
  - Personal characteristics especially commitment

- Process factors
  - Evaluator credibility
  - Quality of study, including timeliness, communication, relevance
  - Findings of study

- Interactive factors
  - Involvement/participation of stakeholders
  - Interaction of evaluator and stakeholders
  - Social processing by stakeholders

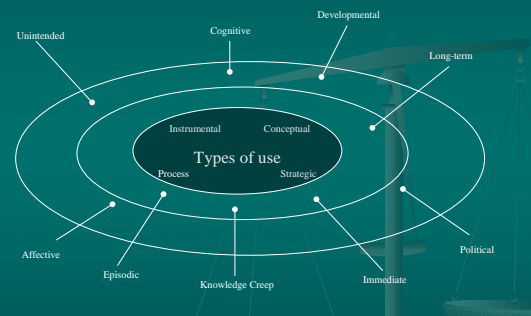Rick Cummings   September 2006

Stakeholder involvement & use

Stakeholder involvement → Stakeholder commitment → Conceptual Use → Strategic Use
Stakeholder involvement → Attitudes to use → Conceptual Use → Instrumental Use
Stakeholder involvement → Process use → Conceptual Use

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Expanded understanding of evaluation use

Types of use
Instrumental   Conceptual
Process   Strategic

Unintended, Cognitive, Developmental, Long-term, Affective, Episodic, Knowledge Creep, Immediate, Political

Based on Kirkhart, 2000, p6

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Kirkhart's integrated theory of influence

Intention: Intended, Unintended
Source: Process, Results
Time: Immediate, End-of-cycle, Long-term
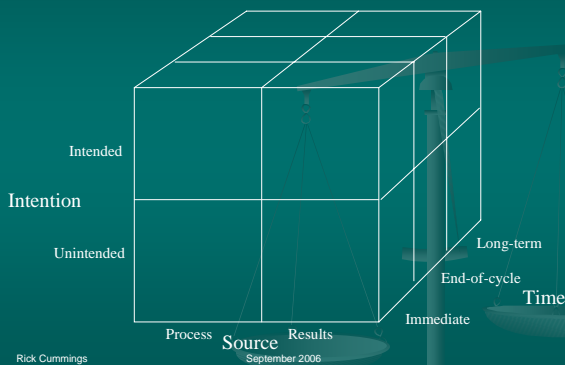
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Issues/implications for evaluators

- Are evaluators agents of change or providers of independent information?
  - Should evaluators just provide information to be used by others?
  - Are evaluators entitled to try to influence?

- Is the role of evaluators jeopardised by taking either of these positions?

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Implications for evaluation practice

- Define use/influence broadly
- Use/influence is multifaceted but common and can be increased
- Plan the evaluation study for use/influence
- Involving stakeholders may be the most important influence on use/influence
- Involve stakeholders right from the beginning
- Two way flow of information is critical
- Report regularly with an eye to use/influence

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Delineating

- Explicitly identify stakeholders and assign a priority

- Involve stakeholders in identifying evaluation questions

- Involve stakeholders in designing the study
  - Design for use
  - Program logic (Funnell)
  - Theory of action (Patton)
  - Realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley)

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Obtaining

- Cycle of delineating, obtaining & providing

- Participatory evaluation
  - (Greene, Fetterman)

- Process use
  - (Patton)

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Reporting

- Stakeholders specific reporting

- Interim reports encourage use

- Ideas on improving reporting (Patton)
  - Be intentional and purposeful in reporting
  - Focus reports on primary intended users
  - Avoid surprising stakeholders
  - Think positive about negatives
  - Distinguish dissemination from use

- Final report - the horse has bolted

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Utilising

- Identify likely users and their uses
- Provide information in a way which can be used directly
- Threats to utility (Patton, 1997)
  - Failure to focus on intended use by intended users
  - Inadequate involvement of stakeholders in design of study and changes
  - Low evaluator credibility
  - Low stakeholder understanding of and/or commitment to the program or evaluation study
  - Evaluator is politically naive
- Evaluator follow-up

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