

The Impact of Evaluation on Public Services: Engine of Change or Bridle of Conformity?

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What is behind the title?

Do the findings and recommendations from research and evaluation activities influence social care practice, and if so how, and what are the competing forces researchers are up against?

Does research and evaluation these days simply affirm the status quo, define “what works” and build on the emerging evidence?

Does research and evaluation challenge the dominant political, managerial and professional views about social care practice today, or provide enlightened and informed debate about how we should proceed in the social care community?

The Frustrated Evaluator

“They get the reports, they crawl all over them. They take out all the bad messages and then they publish them. Whether they look at them to improve policy, I don’t know.

“Give us some good news!” That’s what they say.”

(Evaluator quoted from “Finding Out What Works” Kings Fund 2004)

Setting out the journey to be covered

- Defining the terrain and acknowledging some mountain ranges we will not climb today.
- Briefly describing the equipment for the journey (research methods, key findings and asserting the central proposition.)
- Showing the map (sticky ground, water holes and an oasis)
- Describing the next camp site.

Defining the terrain

- Using the terms “research” and “evaluation” interchangeably.
- Avoiding the debate about is social work a profession, but considering how “professionalism” in social work is a rallying call.
- Acknowledging that there is something called “managerialism” operating in social services.
- Recognising that bureaucratic practices are very influential in social work, as are “informal networks” in organisations.

The equipment described

- Putting the central proposition or hypothesis.
- The research approaches used to test the proposition.
- The key findings from the research.
- Exploring the question why?

Central Proposition

That the impact of evaluation on social care services is substantially determined by the organisational and occupational context practitioners and managers operate within.

Organisational Context: 3 Dimensions

- ***Bureaucracy*** which defines hierarchical structures and control mechanisms, procedures and administrative practices in shaping social care practice and managerial approaches.
- ***Learning environments*** which encourage adaption, flexibility, challenge, reflection and development.
- ***Informal networks*** and the “shadow” side of organisations including friendships, alliances, unwritten rules, understandings of codes of conduct and privatised survival techniques.

Occupational Context

- **“Professionalism”** as a value base which describes conduct, and draws on external theories and knowledge to help explain behaviour and suggests actions based on that knowledge.
- **“Managerialism”** as a value base drawing on management techniques including, business planning, priority setting, process management and performance monitoring. Turning social problems into technical problem solving activity.

Research Methodology

Based on interviews with social services managers and practitioners, in metropolitan and county council social services departments, during 2003.

Purpose of research to ascertain how research and evaluation findings influence their work practices and values.

Taking;

1. Decision Making
2. Shaping values in the work place.

Decision Making Profile of Practitioners and Managers

A scoring schedule covering factors effecting decision making, and connected to organisational and occupational perspectives.

- Decisions based on needs of users.
- Decisions based on experience and craft of practitioners and managers.
- Decisions based on policies and procedures.
- Decisions based on the views of line manager.
- Decisions based on evidence based research findings.
- Decisions based on budgets.
- Decisions based on other factors.

Shaping Values Profile of Practitioners and Managers

A scoring schedule covering factors effecting values, using value statements, and, connected to organisational and occupational perspectives.

- Values based on independence of actions and advocacy for users.
- Values based on supporting and protecting staff and colleagues.
- Values based on policies and the law.
- Values based on knowledge and expertise from research.
- Values based on acquired technical expertise.
- Values based on acquired internal practice wisdoms.
- Values based on applying administrative procedures.
- Values based on other factors.

Key Findings on Decision Making

- Managerial factors more influential than professional factors in decision making (high scoring for views of manager, budgets, policies and procedures. Low scoring to needs of clients, craft and use of research.)
- Bureaucratic factors more influential than learning and informal network factors. (high scores on policies and procedures, budgets and line managers. Low scores on craft, experience and use of research)
- For managers the bureaucratic factors of views of senior manager, budgets and policy were high, but also high were support for staff and needs of users.
- For managers learning factors also scored high, with research findings having relatively little influence.

Key Findings on Shaping Values

- For practitioners the managerial perspective scored higher than professional perspectives in shaping values (high on policies and procedures, low on independence and advocacy) Highest score on acquired internal practice wisdoms (Informal network)
- Wide range of responses from practitioners on the place of administration. The place and use made of research findings was lowest scoring for practitioners.
- For managers, bureaucratic and managerial factors showed highest scoring, with professional and learning values scoring lowest. But, internal wisdoms and expediency scored highest indicating individualism and independence.
- Marginal place of reading research and applying findings for both practitioners and managers in shaping values.

Organisational and Occupational Contexts (The Map)

Organisational Context	Occupational Context	
	Professionalism	Managerialism
Bureaucratic Structures	1.	4.
Learning Environments	2.	5.
Informal Networks	3.	6.

Professionalism and Bureaucratic Structures

Organisational Context	Professionalism	
	Firm bureaucratic structures dominate over professional practice	Professional practice dominant within loose bureaucracy
Bureaucratic Structures	Practitioner as administrator Research findings marginal.	Practitioner as Professional Research used as evidence base.

Professionalism and Learning Environments

Organisational context	Professionalism	
	Learning and adaption are part of Practitioner value base	Learning contained within professional interest
Learning Environments	Practice based on learning Research used as practice improvement	Professional as expert. Knowledge acquisition as career development

Professionalism and Informal Networks

Organisational Context	Professionalism	
	Informal networks strong & shapes practice	Informal networks weak & practice externally supported
Informal Network	Practice based on custom, survival habits, favours. Research used to validate rather than challenge.	External knowledge base used. Research used to assist individual role definition.

Managerialism and Bureaucratic Structures

Organisational Context	Managerialism	
	Firm bureaucratic structures & processes dictate management practice.	Management independence within loose bureaucratic structure.
Bureaucratic Structures	Management by rules and procedures. Research findings marginal.	Management by expediency and innovation. Research used to advance managerial changes.

Managerialism and Learning Environments

Organisational Context	Managerialism	
	Learning and adaption valued by managers	Learning contained within managerial interest.
Learning Environments	Managers as technical experts. Research used to advance change.	Management based on tacit knowledge and anti intellectual. Research marginal

Managerialism and Informal Networks

Organisational Context	Managerialism	
	Informal networks strong & drives management practice	Informal networks weak & managers externally controlled
Informal Networks	Management by favour, friendship & expediency. Research marginal & interest driven	Management through policy and hierarchy. Research connected to policy objectives.

Conditions for Social Care Managers to be receptive to evaluation findings

- Where bureaucratic structures are subservient to management approaches that are characterised by devolved decision making, and innovation.
- Where learning and adaption are cherished values in management practice.
- Where informal networks support management practice based on knowledge acquisition and learning.

Conditions for Practitioners to be receptive to evaluation findings

- Where bureaucratic structures are subservient to professional practice, where judgements are based on informed and evidence based practice.
- Where research based learning is valued and is demonstrably shown to lead to service improvements.
- Where informal networks support professional practice based on a learning ethos.

Extending the impact of research on practice (Next Camp Site 1)

- Emerging adults and children's integrated services may weaken the bureaucratic grip in these new organisations.
- The learning traditions in the health and education worlds offer new opportunities for social care research and evaluation to flourish.
- The realignment of occupational groups in multi agency settings creates new opportunities to break with old and worn habits, and to draw creatively on "practice expertise" and new approaches based on research findings.
- Practitioners and managers in these new worlds will need all the help they can get to assert their contribution and expertise, using research.

Extending the impact of research on strategic direction (The Next Camp Site 2)

- Defining the culture shift everyone is talking about in short hand, and helping bring it about.
- Part of the future of SSRG is providing the support, understanding and signposts to help re position social care.
- More research now than ever before.
- Central government moving from performance management, audit, quantitative analysis to outcomes, demonstrable improvements and the place of participative evaluation.

And Finally.....

- If you want to find out more about the research covered in this presentation please contact David Allan on

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