

tools of the trade

Systematic Approach

Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. 2nd ed. Peter H. Rossi and Howard E. Freeman. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1982. 351 pp. \$20.

The emphasis of this book is *comprehensive* evaluations, including (1) analysis related to conceptualization and design of interventions, (2) monitoring of program implementation, and (3) assessment of program utility. The authors don't insist that all evaluations must include all three of these aspects, but it's clear that every program has the potential, if not necessity, for being the object of such comprehensive scrutiny.

Each aspect is treated fully with thought-provoking and illuminating special features. One feature is a set of questions that might be asked of any program, with some that are applicable to evaluative research generally and others particular to one aspect. These questions are useful organizers for those of us who recognize the importance and difficulty of getting a clear focus on an evaluation.

A second feature is a set of definitions at the beginning of each chapter for key concepts included in that section. These serve as "advance organizers" for the discussion to follow. For people new to formal evaluative thinking, the definitions are clear indications of the material to be discussed. Overwhelming perhaps, but clear, rigorous, and carefully considered.

Carefully edited examples displayed in grey-colored boxes are a third feature for the reader. Drawn from a broad range of human service studies, each example emphasizes the points in the text and vicariously gives the reader a sense of familiarity with problems an evaluator must face.

This book isn't a repository of quick and easy answers to the few questions most often asked by Extension agents about evaluation. It is, rather, a stimulus for question-raising. Its clarity highlights the standards of clear thinking that the authors demonstrate, and that alone makes it challenging reading.

Some of the ideas and issues raised (definition of services, specificity of treatment, differentiation between concerns of program designers and those of program managers) may be unfamiliar or inappropriate to Extension staff. Many ideas and assumptions are especially apt for an educational organization like Extension ("Evaluators cannot assume . . . that merely providing information assures its use." p. 163).

If the reader of this book heeds its beginning (tailor the evaluation to fit!) and concluding (evaluation is only one of a number of factors in decision making) messages, the

material is well-calculated to improve the accuracy and appropriateness of program evaluations.

Joan Wright
North Carolina State University