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User-focused evaluation of training programme effectiveness in a South African industrial company.

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FIGURE 2.3

Explanatory Map of Patton's View of Evaluation

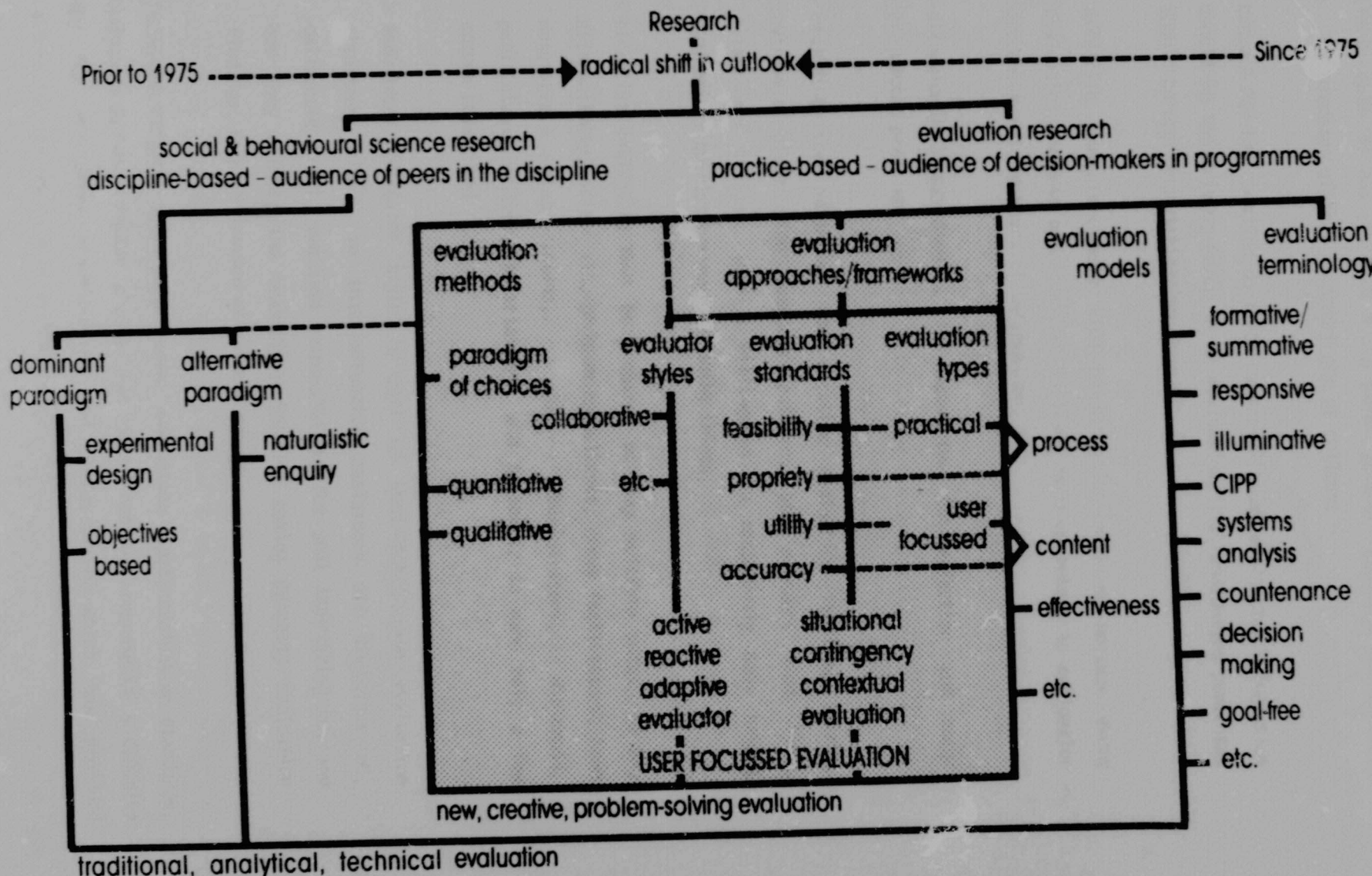
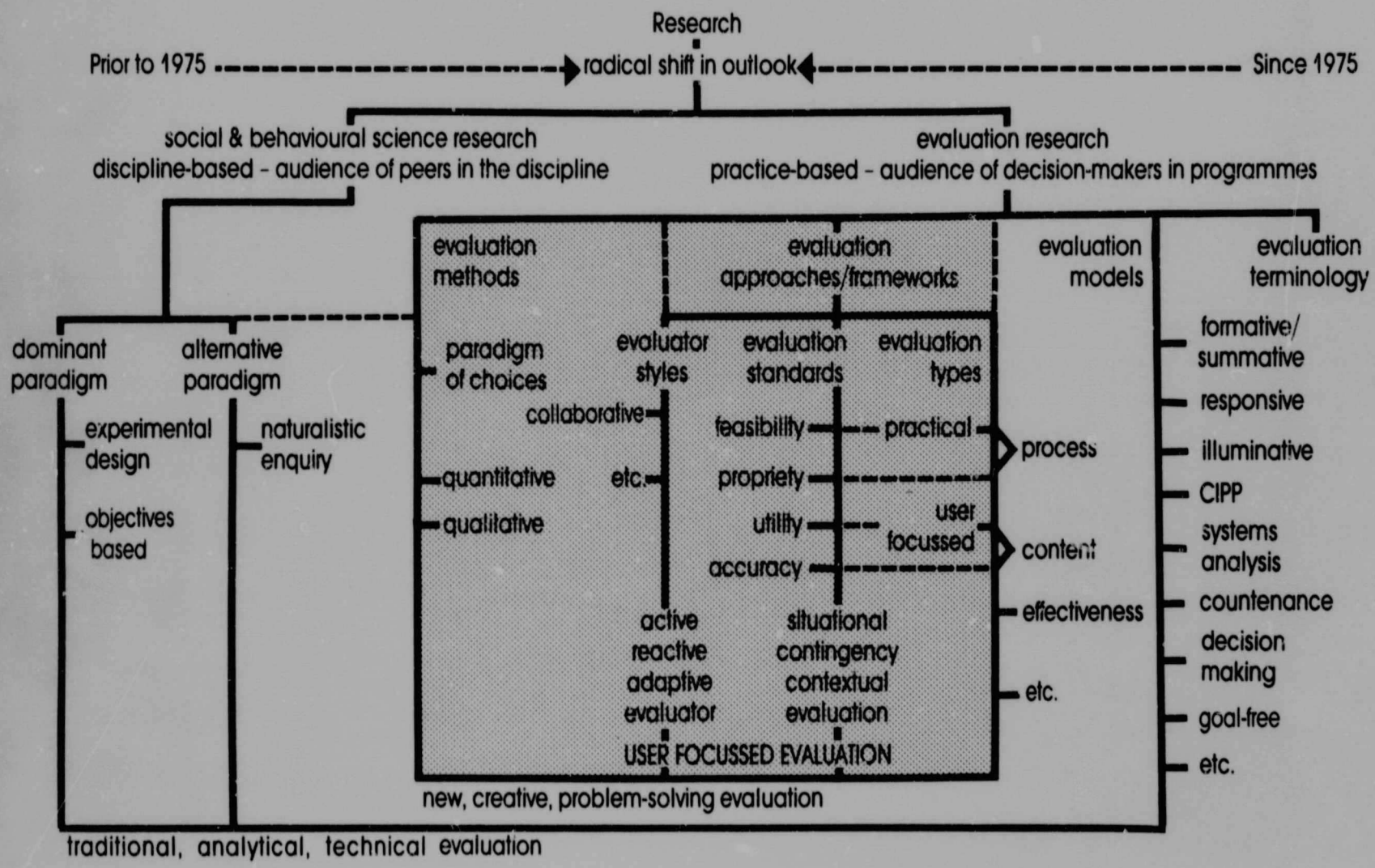


FIGURE 2.3

Explanatory Map of Patton's View of Evaluation



2.2.5.1 Patton's Evaluation Framework

Patton (1982, pp18-19) has proposed a six point general framework for evaluation practice. The premises of that framework are as follows:

- concern for how specific decision makers will use evaluative information should be the driving force in an evaluation, i.e. evaluation processes should be user and utilization focused;

- effective evaluators must also be effective trainers because every evaluation presents opportunities to train decision makers in evaluation processes and the users of information;

- situational responsiveness is imperative for effective and moral evaluation practice;

- realizing the potential for creative evaluation requires, first, awareness of routine response patterns and blinders that limit situational insight, then a willingness to consciously move beyond limitations to risk new ways of doing things;

- effective evaluators must be prepared to play multiple roles, to be, alternatively, scientists, program consultants, group facilitators, keen observers, statisticians, project administrators, diplomats, politicians, writers, entertainers, and teachers, to name only a few common roles; and

- individual evaluator style is part of what makes each evaluation situation unique, so that effective evaluators are conscious of, deliberate about, and take responsibility for what they bring to, and how they affect, the evaluation decision making process, evaluation findings, and utilization of those findings.

This framework includes three main themes: evaluation types, evaluation standards, and evaluator styles. Patton claims that this framework represents a cohesive ideology for evaluation practitioners and professionals which has profound implications for the practice of evaluation.

His framework focuses attention on the operational features of evaluation research. He has attempted:

> ...to construct a general framework that goes beyond the grab-bag approach of technique mongering that leaves one with a limited bag of tricks, but no real foundation on which to build new approaches to deal with new situations and unanticipated problems (Patton, 1982, p 18).

He believes that research that is not grounded in a set of standards and basic premises, research that is without an actively selective point of view, is ultimately empty.

2.2.5.1.1 Evaluation Standards

There are now standards for evaluation practice. These standards of conduct are guidelines which specify how evaluators should practice their profession. The standards are meant to apply to all evaluation situations indicating what constitutes excellence and professional conduct.

The most comprehensive effort at developing standards was worked out over five years by an 18 member committee appointed by 12 professional organisations, including the Evaluation Network, the Evaluation Research Society and the American Educational Research Association, with input from hundreds of practising evaluation professionals. The standards were published by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1981).

> The standards that will be published essentially call for evaluations that have four features. These are utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. And I think it is interesting that the Joint Committee decided on that particular order. Their rationale is that an evaluation should not be done at all if there is no prospect for its being useful to some audience. Second, it should not be done if it is not feasible to conduct it in political terms, or practicality terms, or cost effectiveness terms. Third, they do not think it should be done if we cannot demonstrate that it will be conducted fairly and ethically. Finally, if we can demonstrate that an evaluation will have utility, will be

> feasible and will be proper in its conduct then they said we could turn to the difficult matters of the technical adequacy of the evaluation, and they have included an extensive set of standards in this area (Stufflebeam, 1980, p90, emphasis in the original, cited in Patton, 1982, p16).

The requirements are that evaluations should be:

- utilisation-focused
- feasibility-conscious
- propriety-oriented, and
- accuracy-based

in that order.

This dramatically reflects the ways in which the practice of evaluation has developed and changed during the last decade. The Joint Committee did not precipitate the changed approach to evaluation research - they accurately reflected it. Evaluation had become concerned about what constitutes good evaluation, rather than good evaluators, although the two would usually be found together.

In doing evaluations a great many decisions have to be made. Who is the evaluation for? What is the purpose of the evaluation? What will be studied? What methods will be used? How will data be analysed? How will results be reported? In the past it was the decision concerning methods which was all important. Now it is the usefulness of the evaluation, the practicality of the research and the ethics of the evaluator's conduct which are more important. Implementation of these standards will require situational responsiveness, methodological flexibility, multiple evaluator roles and political sophistication.

Patton maintains that taking the standards seriously means consciously and deliberately integrating attention to the standards into each evaluation one conducts, i.e. translating them into concrete patterns of practice. The standards should have real implications for how an evaluation is conducted. The utility and feasibility criteria represent the greatest departure from traditional scientific standards, but at the same time are the highest priority in the new standards.

2.2.5.1.2 Utilization-focused Evaluation

How information is used should be the driving force behind how the evaluation is designed and conducted. Utilization should not only become a concern at the end of the evaluation. It should be an important concern from the very beginning of the evaluation and at every step of the evaluation process. Utilization-focused evaluation plans for utilization before data are ever collected. The question that underlies the ongoing interactions between evaluators and decision makers is 'What difference would that information make?'

Utilization-focused evaluation is user-focused evaluation. The personal factor, who cares about the evaluation, is the critical factor which determines how the information will be used. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the identification and organisation of specific, relevant decision makers and information users, not vague passive audiences, who will use the information the evaluation produces. The evaluator works with these persons to focus relevant evaluation questions.

A flowchart (Patton, 1982, pp68-69) depicts the process of utilization-focused evaluation. This is a process for making decisions about the focus and content of an evaluation, but the content itself is not specified or implied in advance. Any of the major models in evaluation, or any method might emerge as the guiding direction in utilization-focused evaluation. The decision-making process does not exclude any particular approach, outcome, method, question, assumption or audience. Utilization-focused evaluation is a strategy for making decisions about all of these.

Utilization focused evaluation replaces the search for truth with a search for useful information and replaces objectivity with fairness and conscientiousness in taking account of multiple perspectives, interests and realities. The people who use the information may be decision makers, stakeholders, information users, evaluation clients, policy makers, or any others.

This kind of evaluation is not just one of the decision making models as suggested by House (1980). In all other models the content of the evaluation is determined by the evaluator's beliefs about evaluation. User-focused evaluation describes a

process for making decisions about the content of an evaluation - it all depends on what are the information needs of the people for whom the evaluation is being done. The emphasis is on people, not decisions. A detailed outline of the utilization-focused approach to evaluation is provided in Patton (1982, pp68-69).

2.2.5.1.3 Feasible/Practical Evaluation

Patton (1982, p25) makes the following points:

> A practical evaluation process is one that can reasonably be implemented within the constraints of a particular situation. The constraints that must be dealt with include inevitable limitations of time, resources, and knowledge and attention to political boundaries that can impinge on all aspects of an evaluation. A practical evaluation process is do-able. It is manageable, understandable, feasible, and applicable within a given context.

He continues:

> Making the content of an evaluation practical is what the utility standards are about. The priority in evaluation is on producing practical knowledge, i.e. knowledge that can be used to do something. The utility criterion in the new evaluation standards is aimed at this mandate to produce practical knowledge.

The need to make the process practical is laid down by the Joint Committee as follows:

> Practical Procedures
> The evaluation procedures should be practical, so that disruption is kept to a minimum, and that needed information can be obtained.
>
> Political Viability
> The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their

co-operation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.

Cost Effectiveness

The evaluation should produce information of sufficient value to justify the resources expended (Joint Committee, 1981, cited in Patton, 1982, p24).

The need to make the content practical is laid down by the Joint Committee (1981) as follows:

> Utility, the first category, contains standards for guiding evaluations so that they will be informative, timely, and influential. These standards require evaluators to acquaint themselves with their audiences, ascertain the audiences' information needs, plan evaluations to respond to these needs, and report the relevant information clearly and when it is needed...
>
> Overall, standards of Utility are concerned with whether an evaluation serves the practical information needs of a given audience (Joint Committee, 1981, p13 cited in Patton, 1982, pp 24-25).

There is a close relationship between the feasibility of an evaluation process and the utility of an evaluation's findings.

Patton (1982, p19) concludes:

> Fulfilling the mandate to be practical may sound like a mundane, simplistic, and uncreative process. Quite the contrary; my own experiences suggest that finding feasible solutions to enormously complex problems is the epitomy of the evaluation challenge, requiring hard work, flexibility, and all the pains and insights of creative problem solving grounded in evaluation fundamentals.

2.2.5.1.4 Situational Evaluation

Patton suggests that the new standards of evaluation require situational responsiveness rather than the implementation of standardized procedures. Decisions about utility, feasibility and propriety can only be made with reference to a particular situation involving specific people, a specific programme and specific constraints. What is appropriate in one situation will not be appropriate in another.

Situational evaluation means that evaluators have to be prepared to deal with a lot of different people and situations. Patton points out that:

> Situational responsiveness is a challenge because the evidence from behavioural science is that in most areas of decision making and judgement, when faced with complex choices and multiple possibilities, we fall back on a set of deeply embedded rules and standard operating procedures that pre-determine what we do thereby effectively short circuiting situational adaptability (Patton, 1982, p 17).

Patton (1981, pp25-26) illustrates a few of the many situational variables an evaluator is supposed to be aware of and take into account in conducting a utilization-focused, feasibility-conscious, propriety-oriented, and accuracy-based evaluation.

Patton (1981, p23) explains that what is new is the recognition that there is no one best way to conduct an evaluation.

> This insight is critical. On this belief rests all the new principles, standards, and premises of the evaluation research discipline. Every evaluation situation is unique. A successful evaluation (one that is practical, ethical, useful and accurate) emerges from the special characteristics and conditions of a particular situation - a mixture of people, politics, history, context, resources, constraints, values, needs, interests, and chance.

Patton (1981, p23) points out that:

> Despite the rather obvious, almost trite and basically commonsense nature of these observations, there are a host of subtleties and new answers implicit in the shift in perspective from evaluation judged by a single standard, and universal set of criteria (methodological rigour as defined by the dominant hypothetico deductive paradigm) to situational evaluation where decision criteria are multiple, flexible, and diverse. This shift in perspective, this revolution in standards of excellence places new demands on evaluators.

The new standards of evaluation emphasize the importance of contextual sensitivity in making methods decisions:

> The context in which the object of an evaluation exists is the combination of the conditions surrounding the object that may influence its functioning. These conditions include the geographic location of the object, its timing, the political and social climate in the region at the time, relevant professional activities in progress, the nature of the staff, and pertinent economic conditions.
>
> These and other contextual factors must be examined to assure that the evaluation can be designed, conducted, and reported in relation to them. Maintaining an understanding of the context is necessary if the evaluation is to be designed and carried out realistically and responsively (Joint Committee, 1981, p104, cited in Patton, 1982, p 186).

2.2.5.1.5 Evaluator Styles

The role options available to evaluators include these three evaluator styles.

The law enforcer, auditor or detective

This is the surveillance and compliance approach of aggressively independent and highly critical auditors committed to getting the 'baddies' on a programme. In this type of evaluation, the evaluator is the Lone Ranger and programme staff are potential or suspected outlaws. The evaluator is on a mission of law enforcement and emphasizes justice.

The aloof and value-free scientist

The aloof and value-free scientist focuses single-mindedly on acquiring technically perfect data. The objective scientist is on a mission seeking truth. Programme staff are research subjects to be labelled and studied in accordance with the rules of science. The evaluator emphasizes truth.

The collaborative consultant

The evaluator works in a consultative, consensus-building process to help policy makers and staff co-operatively and openly clarify their information needs and use information to improve their effectiveness. Evaluators and information users are partners in the search for useful information. The evaluator emphasizes utility.

Patton's utilization-focused approach to evaluation is associated with the consultative style. His reason is simple pragmatism. Little would be gained by identifying what is wrong with a programme if the findings are ignored or discredited. Wrongs will never be righted if the evidence is never brought to the attention of the right people. Similarly, discovering the scientific truth about a programme is a waste of time if the truth is ignored or misused.

The consultative style is a sensible option because involving decision-makers and information-users in the evaluation process will increase the chances of the evaluation findings being used. Also, programme staff do not take kindly to being treated as outlaws or research subjects, while involving them in the evaluation will secure their co-operation, goodwill, and interest. The evaluator depends on this kind of support.

> The consultative style of evaluation is aimed at four practicel accomplishments: getting decision makers and information users to share responsibility for the evaluation; getting decision makers and information users to care about the evaluation; making sure that decision makers and information users understand the evaluation process and evaluation findings; and increasing the personal commitment of decision makers and information users to actually use evaluation processes and findings (Patton, 1982, p 59).

Patton continues:

> A collaborative approach is one in which the evaluator works directly and in partnership with a group of stakeholders (people who have a stake in how the evaluation comes out) to focus key evaluation questions, design the evaluation study, interpret results, and apply findings. The collaborative process is one of shared decision making about key aspects, of the evaluation. The people who have a stake in the evaluation collaborate in solving evaluation problems and making research decisions (Patton, 1982, p 55).

This evaluator style is in marked contrast to the way in which evaluators have worked in the past. Evaluators usually enter a programme as research specialists where they expect, and are expected to, make all the main methodological decisions concerning the evaluation. They are given, and then assume full responsibility for the conduct of the evaluation. When they meet with people who have a stake in the evaluation, if they do so at all, it is to gather information for the evaluation, not to involve them in the decision making process.

In contrast what Patton (1982, p71) envisages is as follows:

> An evaluation task force is organised to make major decisions about the focus, methods, the purpose of the evaluation. The task force is a vehicle for actively involving the stakeholders in the evaluation. This helps guarantee that the evaluation is relevant, appropriate, and useful. Moreover the very processes involved in making decisions about

> an evaluation will typically increase the commitment of stakeholders to the utilization of evaluation results while also increasing in knowledge about the evaluation, their sophistication when conducting evaluation research, and their ability to interpret evaluation findings. Finally, the task force allows the evaluator to share responsibility for decision making and utilization by providing a forum for the political and practical perspectives that best come from those stakeholders who will ultimately be involved in the utilization of evaluation results.

However, Patton (cited in Smith, 1982a) has commented that this is one aspect of his work which has been misunderstood and is an issue which he needs to address further.

> One such issue is how to develop close working relationships with decisionmakers and program staff without losing one's integrity or perspective. Some critics of the book believe that a utilization-focused approach means "selling out" or "caving in" where decisionmakers' vested interests are concerned. Were I to revise the book, I would give more attention to the problem of maintaining professional integrity, and to legitimate concerns about the mis-utilization of evaluation findings, or the over-utilization of poor quality evaluations.

2.2.5.1.6 Active-reactive-adaptive Evaluation

It is not easy to be an active-reactive-adaptive evaluator - a term used to capture the dynamic nature of the evaluation consultative process in working with decision makers and information users. Patton explains:

> The evaluator is active-reactive-adaptive in facilitating an evaluation process that addresses the concerns, interests, questions, and information needs of a group of stake holders organised into some kind of evaluation task force. In facilitating the evaluation decision making process, the evaluator helps task force members deal with the issues of utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy, but the evaluator does not decide unilaterally how these standards of excellence will be met (Patton 1982, p 55).

Patton does not aim to prescribe any particular approach to organizing and facilitating consultative practice with groups. Instead he hopes to stimulate the thinking of other evaluators concerning their own consulting patterns (heuristics) because evaluators bring to evaluation situations their own styles, personal histories, and professional experiences. The process which he describes he calls the active-reactive-adaptive style of utilization-focused evaluation aimed at facilitating the work of an evaluation task force. This can be used for making comparisons, drawing contrast, and stimulating the development of each evaluator's own consulting style.

Elsewhere, he describes the active-reactive-adaptive approach as a consulting style - a strategy for making evaluation decisions, including, but not limited to, methods decisions. Also active-reactive-adaptive evaluators find opportunities in virtually any evaluation to train decision makers, funders, information users, staff and stakeholders in the basics of evaluation. It is not entirely clear what Patton is getting at with his idea of an active- reactive-adaptive evaluator. However, one feels [illegible] meant to be interpreted in the spirit in which it is intended rather than according to the letter.

2.2.5.1.7 Evaluation Methods

Evaluation methods may be either quantitative, or measurement-based, and qualitative, or descriptive. In the past quantitative methods have been identified with the dominant paradigm of experimental design or objectives. Naturalistic enquiry has been associated with qualitative methods.

2.2.5.1.8 The Paradigm of Choices

From a utilization-focused perspective on evaluation research, neither quantitative or qualitative methods are better than each other. They represent alternatives from which the active-reactive-adaptive evaluator can choose between qualitative/ naturalistic methods or quantitative/experimental methods. Choice of methods does not have to be tied to choice of paradigm - quantitative methods to hypothetico-deductive paradigm and qualitative methods to holistic-inductive paradigm (Patton, 1978, pp203-204 & 207).

Patton (1980a) advocates qualitative and mixed methodologies and a diminishing trend to operate within one paradigm only. However, it is on this issue that there has been particularly strong debate. Patton and the authors Reichardt and Cook (1979) have exchanged views in the literature on their respective views concerning the freedom which evaluators really have to mix their methodologies.

Reichardt and Cook (1979) attacked Patton's view of alternative paradigms because, as they understood it, it offered only two mutually exclusive options: either qualitative/naturalistic methods or quantitative/experimental methods. However, Patton disclaims that he was advocating that a choice had to be made between one paradigm or the other. He argues that what he intended was exactly the opposite and it is evident to this author that Reichardt and Cook had in fact missed the point he was making.

The problem as Patton (1980a, p220) saw it, was that Cook and Reichardt (1979) treated what were meant to be descriptive paradigms as prescriptive.

> The purpose of describing alternative evaluation research paradigms is to sensitize evaluators to the ways in which their methodological prejudices, derived from their disciplinary socialization experiences, may reduce their methodological flexibility and adaptability. The purpose of describing how paradigms typically operate in the real world is to free evaluators from the bonds of allegiance to a single paradigm. This is quite different from prescribing that evaluators should always operate within one or the other paradigm.

Patton (1980a) draws the following distinctions between Cook and Reichardt's (1979) views and his own:

- A method type is not irrevocably linked to a paradigm so that allegiance to a paradigm provides the sole means of choosing method types, but a method-type is typically linked to a paradigm so that a basically unconscious allegiance to a paradigm is usually the major (but not the only) basis for making methods decisions.

- Because they see the world in a different way, researchers do not have to, but nevertheless typically will use different methods of inquiry.

- If one's theory of evaluation is more closely related to the attributes of paradigm A than paradigm B then one will not automatically, but nevertheless will usually favour those research methods that are linked to paradigm A.

- The qualitative and quantitative paradigms are not assumed to be rigid and fixed with the only choice available being between them, but the qualitative and quantitative paradigms are assumed to be ideal types and real world choices will tend to exemplify the attributes of one or the other paradigm.

- The paradigms are not so hard and fast that modifications are not possible but nevertheless ideal-types and modifications would merely be deviations from the ideal type, which would nevertheless retain its essential attributes.

- Qualitative and quantitative methods cannot not be used together but typically have not been used together.

Patton (1980a) asserts that he does not advocate one paradigm over another, but describes two alternative evaluation paradigms while advocating a new paradigm - a paradigm of choices, which recognises that different methods are appropriate for different situations. He goes on to advocate the use of multiple methods, both quantitative and qualitative, wherever possible.

> Triangulation is ideal, it is also very expensive. Most evaluations involve limited budgets, short time frames, and political constraints. Certainly, one important strategy for conducting evaluation research is to employ multiple strategies. However, in the real world of local program evaluation, attempts at triangulation may mean a series of poorly implemented methods rather than one approach well executed...

> Where possible, triangulation is to be highly recommended. Indeed, the capability to implement a strategy of triangulation means that evaluators must include in their repertoire of skills the ability to use qualitative methods (Patton, 1980, p109, emphasis in original).

The polarisation of methods and paradigms needs to be broken down to release the evaluator to make the best decisions. Patton describes the evaluator's role: "...the evaluator is a negotiator who strives to obtain the best possible design and the most useful answers within the real world of politics, people and methodological prejudice." (Patton, 1980a, p 18). Patton argues that the two paradigms/methods choices are not logically incompatible, although in practise they are often made to seem so, by evaluators themselves, who tend to practise exclusively in one or the other mode. Forced choices do not have to be made - rather it is a case of variations in emphasis when choosing methods. Patton believes that the flexible, responsive evaluator can make mind shifts back and forth between paradigms within a single evaluation setting, and illustrates this point (Patton, 1980, p15).

Much evaluation practice is based on habit rather than on situational responsiveness. This is particularly true when making methods decisions, routine association of methods with paradigms constrains methodological flexibility and creativity. Practical evaluators need to be more concerned with the views and needs of their client and less concerned about the customary practices which could limit their freedom to make the best methods choices for the job.

2.2.5.1.9 Creative Evaluation

In conceptualising the explanatory map of Patton's view of evaluation, the writer discovered that the idea of a new, creative, problem-solving evaluation in contrast to the traditional, analytical, technical evaluation, was a key concept in distinguishing what was different about Patton's approach compared with the rest of the evaluation field. This key concept was the last to fall into place, because, for some reason, it is not clearly articulated in Patton's writing.

In spite of one of Patton's books being entitled Creative Evaluation (1981), the writer only saw the significance of this point after several re-reads of all the

books (Patton, 1978, 1980b, 1981, 1982), and then only by chance. This may be explained by the fact that Creative Evaluation (1981) does not have an index.

The index to Practical Evaluation (1982) contains 13 references to 'creative evaluation' (not counting page numbers) but not one of these clearly relates the three words 'new', 'creative' and 'problem-solving' evaluation. In contrast, the words 'traditional', 'analytical/critical', 'technical' evaluation are found in various combinations throughout Patton's books. However, in Creative Evaluation (1981, p29) he states:

> Creative evaluation is a problem-solving approach that emphasizes adaptation to changed and changing conditions, as opposed to a technical approach, which attempts to mold and define conditions to fit preconceived models of how things should be done.

It was this statement which finally brought home to the writer what was the missing link in her explanatory map of Patton's view of evaluation, i.e. new, creative, problem-solving evaluation, as opposed to traditional analytical, technical evaluation.

The need for problem-solving evaluation is also addressed by Rich (1979). Problem solving can be thought of as a process which results in an outcome which by some standard, such as an evaluation, represents an improvement over the previously existing situation. In this sense, solving a problem does not require getting to the bottom of the problem, but requires reaching an outcome that is considered to be acceptable by all stake-holders.

The solving of the problem may not be a solution in the long-term - it simply represents a compromise which is acceptable at a given point in time. In view of this, Rich (1979) suggests that 'solution' may be a misnomer and the term 'problem grappling' may better reflect the process which evaluators go through in establishing a particular evaluation outcome, i.e. the process of getting from here to there while overcoming obstacles and resistances.

> It is critical to remember that we are dealing with a process - problems seldom get solved, and it is probably misleading to believe that they do, or to orient programs toward the goal of reaching a solution. Rather one makes progress towards goals. Goals may be adjusted and re-adjusted over time to take into account past development (Rich, 1979, p10).

The need for more creative evaluation practice has been taken up by another evaluation author, Smith (1981a and 1981b). He propounds a rationale for the development of new evaluation methodologies through the adaptation of existing methodologies from the arts, sciences, and world of practical affairs. The source of dissatisfaction for the revisionist evaluators is the inability of the traditional methods to handle emergent problems in dynamic settings. What is required is more emphasis on process variables, more audience-defined outcome indicators and more complex designs to account for contextual differences. This reflects a recognition of the fact that evaluation is primarily an inquiry-based social service designed to serve clients, rather than a field-based research activity designed to advance knowledge.

Methodology, it is suggested, ought to be developed to study phenomena as they exist, rather than the manipulation of phenomena to accommodate methodology. Those who seek new approaches to evaluation hold the former, not the latter view. Most of those who search for new evaluation methods see evaluation as exploratory, 'seeking to identify and describe currently unknown relationships, rather than to confirm existing assumptions of treatment impact' (Smith, 1981a, p22).

Smith (1981a p30) argues that:

> Evaluation shares a) a search for understanding with such areas as physics, anthropology, geography, astronomy, biology and psychology; b) a search for value with such areas as music, art, poetry, literature, and theater; and c) a search for social improvement with such areas as law, journalism, medicine, education and engineering.

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