



February 1986

# FBI

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

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# SPECDA

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ACQUISITIONS

**The Cover:**

Operation SPECDA is designed to assist young people in resisting the temptation to use drugs. See article p.1

# FBI

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

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**William H. Webster, Director**

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# Evaluation

## A Tool for Management

**"Meeting the informational needs of the decisionmaker is of paramount importance and should be the goal of the evaluator."**

How many times have you made a major policy decision wishing you had more or better information? Have you often wanted more time to study an issue before deciding on a course of action? Have you ever, in exasperation, believed your decisionmaking process could best be described as "muddling through"?<sup>1</sup> Are you sometimes skeptical of claims made by your managers citing the success of programs under their direction? This article will describe a technique to increase the amount and quality of information you need to better manage your resources, improve your decisionmaking process, and reduce the level of uncertainty in the management process.

Law enforcement functions in a complex environment. Policy decisions by managers are often subject to intense review and scrutiny, not only by those immediately affected within the organization but also by the public and media. Difficult decisions made on complex issues within short time frames often preclude indepth research. Policy making is never a clear cut process, seldom presents clear choices, and usually results in compromises among many options. Many times we "muddle through" the decisionmaking process with insufficient information. Information may be available to assist the decisionmaker but is not used because it is unavailable at the time or in an unusable form.

The effectiveness and productivity of important programs may go undetermined because of a lack of suitable measurement criteria. Programs implemented for a legitimate cause may be left unattended and become stagnant and ineffective or drift away from their original intent. Programs with merit sometimes never become effective because of faulty design or improper implementation. "Ideas in good currency" fail to even reach program status because they lie buried under layers of bureaucracy, unable to surface due to the lack of a suitable management mechanism for review.

Evaluation is the management technique that can help alleviate these problems and aid the decisionmaker. The thesis of this article is that the technique of program evaluation can assist managers and administrators in making better informed decisions and reduce uncertainty about programs by furnishing relevant, useful information in a timely fashion.

Program evaluation has been defined as the "application of systematic research methods to the assessment of program design, implementation and effectiveness."<sup>2</sup> Although this definition accurately describes the business of program evaluation, our view of evaluation is broader and places an evaluation staff in the role of an internal management consulting firm. In addition to evaluation activities, the skills and experience of an evaluation staff can be used in a variety of problem-

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solving situations and is a valuable resource for managers.<sup>3</sup>

### The FBI Experience

Formal, structured evaluations in the FBI began in 1972 with the formation of the Office of Planning and Evaluation (OPE), with six Special Agents reporting to an Assistant Director. The purpose of the office at that time was to serve in an advisory capacity to the Director of the FBI, coordinate Bureauwide planning, promote research and development, evaluate plans and policy, and conduct surveys and studies.<sup>4</sup> Since that time, the size of the staff has fluctuated between 6



Deputy Assistant Director Sonnichsen



Special Agent Schick

and 14, with evaluators selected from the ranks of Special Agent investigators who are potential candidates for executive positions in the Bureau.

In our opinion, the advantages of an in-house evaluation staff outweigh the use of outside consultants for the FBI. Using experienced Special Agents as evaluators brings instant credibility when conducting interviews with other Agents. The Agent evaluator also has knowledge of the structure and administration of the FBI, and due to his varied experience, has a working knowledge of most of the investigative programs to be evaluated.

Evaluators in the FBI are used primarily in three different ways: (1) In a classic evaluation sense: reviewing major investigative programs on a 5-year cycle; (2) as policy analysts, studying topics selected by top management with a short response time; and (3) as management consultants, reviewing specific management problems to determine the most effective and efficient means to manage. The majority of projects chosen for evaluation or study originate from an annual survey of field executives; however, some studies are self-initiated by the staff where a problem has surfaced during other evaluation activities.

Although the FBI evaluation staff is organizationally located in the Inspection Division reporting to the Director, evaluation is distinct from the inspection function and should not be confused with it. While the usual purpose of an inspection is to check compliance and determine responsibility where deficiencies are encountered, evaluation has as its purpose program improvement. Successful evaluations are conducted in a spirit of cooperation with the program manager contributing

input throughout the evaluation. Numerous studies have shown,<sup>5</sup> and our experience validates, that use of evaluation findings by affected decision-makers is significantly dependent on cooperation during the evaluation process and the extent of involvement of the individual program manager.

Much of the available literature on evaluation refers to "evaluation research." The word "research," used in conjunction with evaluation, evokes a strong, negative reaction in the minds of many executives who fear they will be overwhelmed and intimidated by the material presented. Use of this terminology creates unnecessary impediments to the use of evaluation findings. Usefulness should be the major criteria for measuring evaluation findings. Meeting the informational needs of the decisionmaker is of paramount importance and should be the goal of the evaluator. The policy maker's questions should drive the evaluation process. It is the responsibility of the evaluator to produce information that is timely, relevant, and in a form easily understood by the user. Complex statistical analysis can be counterproductive and is seldom necessary.<sup>6</sup> A noted evaluation author, Michael Quinn Patton, has said, "I would rather have 'soft data' on important questions than 'hard data' on unimportant questions."<sup>7</sup>

Evaluation can be used to effect organizational change. Our experience has been that program change usually begins when an evaluation starts and is not dependent on the completion or issuance of a report. The analysis of programs and objectives can redefine and sharpen policy procedures, thereby creating a more effective and efficient organization. Monitoring program output makes information available on resource usage that can affect future manpower distribution patterns.

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**“... program evaluation can assist managers and administrators in making better informed decisions and reduce uncertainty about programs by furnishing relevant, useful information in a timely fashion.”**

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Quantitative data from information systems can be illuminated with qualitative data gathered by experienced evaluators through indepth interviews of program managers and participants.

#### **Establishing An Evaluation Staff**

Before committing to the concept of evaluation as a management tool, you, as a law enforcement executive, should conduct a mini-evaluation of your own. You need to reflect on your style of management and leadership and the environment of your department to determine if this technique might be of assistance. Contemplating your own situation is critical before establishing an evaluation staff. To assist in making this decision, we have developed a nine-point diagnostic test to determine if an evaluation group could be of assistance.

- 1) Am I comfortable with the quality and quantity of information I have available to make major decisions?
- 2) Am I sufficiently knowledgeable of all major aspects of my department to make informed decisions?
- 3) Do I know if my policies and programs are being practiced or given lip service?
- 4) Are my programs efficient and effective and do I have a system for feedback on program performance?
- 5) Am I comfortable with the productivity levels of units under my command?
- 6) Do I have sufficient information available to me to judge comprehensively the performance of my subordinates?
- 7) Do I have a selection method for identifying potential top executives?

8) Is any part of my department responsible for organizational change or program improvements?

9) Is my managerial style such that I would solicit and use information from an evaluation group if I had one?

Asking yourself these questions should assist in defining the current state of organizational development in your department and force you to examine not only the organizational climate but your own management style. The questions are designed to establish a mental, schematic diagram of the information availability, flow, and usage in your organization.

An evaluation staff will divert some resources from other areas. The critical question then is cost effectiveness. Although difficult to measure, criteria can be established to determine the effectiveness of evaluation activities.

A few examples from our experience may help demonstrate the value of evaluation. A major philosophical shift in the FBI's approach to investigative activities occurred in the mid-1970's and was made possible by a staff of evaluators responding to a mandate from newly appointed FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley to examine the FBI's management structure and traditional approach to investigations. This multi-year project in OPE resulted in a resource management and utilization concept. It was aided by an information system which redirected limited Agent resources to the most significant criminal investigations.

An evaluation of the FBI's foreign language program determined its administration was divided among four divisions at FBI Headquarters. Recom-

mendations to consolidate all functions under one division have increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. Evaluation of the methodology used to determine the training needs of our veteran investigators has improved that procedure. An evaluation of the management of FBI resident agencies (small offices outside of a headquarters city) recommended three options for managing these offices to maximize productivity and insure proper workload distribution. Recent evaluations of our property crimes, fugitive, and general government crimes investigative programs resulted in recommendations to increase the efficient use of available manpower. Automation of indices, Special Agent transfer policy, and procedures for conducting background investigations are examples of administrative evaluations we conduct.

The Evaluation Unit is structured to examine quickly policy issues of concern to top management, and a 30-day turnaround time on these studies is not uncommon. The evaluation staff was recently requested to analyze the staffing and organizational structure of one of the FBI's regional computer centers. Neither complex in design nor scientifically rigorous, these short studies nevertheless aid the decisionmaker by furnishing him timely, relevant data.

The value of the evaluation process does not rely solely on the conduct of the study and the issuance of a report. It has been our experience that the mere presence of the evaluators causes managers to re-evaluate their programs, and many times, issue their own recommendations for program improvement long before the completion of the evaluation.

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**“... use of evaluation findings by affected decisionmakers is significantly dependent on the amount of cooperation during the evaluation process and the extent of involvement of the individual program manager.”**

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### Organizing For Evaluation

*Be clear on purpose*—Before the first line is drawn on an organization chart and before the first personnel file is reviewed for candidates, the purpose of the staff you are about to form should be very clear in your mind. Evaluation staffs can be used effectively in a variety of ways—as personal emissaries of the chief, as independent auditors, as an internal consulting staff to aid in the development of programs, or in any of an endless number of variations on these themes. Additionally, some evaluation staffs complete their evaluation activities with a written and/or oral report of their findings and make no recommendations for improvement; others make recommendations based on their findings, while still others not only make recommendations but get actively involved in implementation. The correct mode is the one which fits best with your personal managerial style and philosophy. What is important is that the manner in which the evaluation staff will be used and the purpose to which it will be put are clear at the outset and made clear to the staff. While there may be legitimate political and bureaucratic reasons to use an evaluation staff to legitimize decisions which have already been made, such use will quickly become apparent to the staff and others and is not a sound way to attract and keep talented people.

*Locate staff correctly*—Once you have conceptualized the purpose of the evaluation staff, you must locate it correctly within the organizational structure. We have found that the fewer layers of bureaucracy between the evaluation unit and the chief executive officer, the better. The fewer information filters between the evaluators and the executive, the less

distortion you will hear. We have also found that obtaining information is generally facilitated when the evaluation staff is perceived as operating with a direct mandate from the top. If you should choose to locate the evaluation unit further down in the organizational ladder, you should take steps to communicate personally and directly with the staff periodically in order to be aware of what they are doing and let them know of your concerns and support. An evaluation unit can be your eyes and ears, stay in close touch with them.

*Staff well*—The success or failure of your evaluation staff will depend to a large extent on the caliber of the people you choose. A good evaluator should have a broad range of experience and skills. He should be innovative and creative, critical and analytical, with a strong bias against “we’ve always done it that way” reasoning. He must be able to express himself well orally and in writing. Ideally, he should have an educational and/or professional background in management with a facility for using statistical and other quantitative techniques. Finally, he should be a sworn officer with sufficient time on the street to give him a thorough understanding of police work and credibility with fellow officers with whom he will have to interact. The evaluation staff in the FBI is comprised exclusively of Special Agents. While we occasionally sacrifice some technical expertise, we believe this is more than offset by the Agents’ understanding of the nature of our work and the credibility these Agents have in the organization.

How many individuals are appropriate to staff your evaluation unit depends, of course, on the size of your department and the resources you have available. We believe a critical mass for an effective evaluation unit is

probably three individuals; one or two people will not have the dynamic interaction which generates creative thought processes and innovative solutions to problems.

*Choose appropriate subjects*—Take care in choosing issues for your evaluation unit to review, particularly at the outset while the staff is still getting its legs. The primary criterion is that issues should be something you care about. Nothing will destroy the morale of an evaluation unit faster, and cost it more credibility, than being assigned meaningless tasks or assignments which everyone concerned knows have no solution. Avoid the temptation to duck a difficult issue by saying “we have that under study.” You may wish eventually to have all functional areas of the department evaluated on a cyclical basis; however, at the outset, pick areas that are of primary concern and where you will feel comfortable implementing changes.

### Tasking

Now that you have defined the evaluation unit’s purpose, located it within the organization, staffed it, and chosen initial subjects for evaluation, you must inform the staff of what you expect and how you expect it to be accomplished.

*Focus on utility*—While the investigation of esoteric subjects and the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge’s sake is attractive in an academic atmosphere, the focus of evaluation efforts should be on the usefulness of the information developed. You will find one of the primary complaints of the evaluator is “nobody uses our product.” Minimize this frustration and capitalize on your valuable evaluation resources by encouraging your staff to bear in mind constantly the importance

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of developing information that is useful to you as a decisionmaker, not elegant research models and sophisticated analytic techniques.

Insist that your evaluation staff be objective, rigorous, and complete in their review of any set of activities, but do not demand that they always be "scientifically rigorous." While questions of causality and "replicability" are important to scientists, you are primarily interested in gaining objective information to improve your decision-making in an imperfect world. An exception to this would be in a situation where the basis for your decision may be challenged in court and you may be required to demonstrate the validity of the data. The development of hiring standards is an example of an area where you may wish to take pains to ensure the research is done in a scientifically supportable fashion.

*Insist on time limits and clarity*—Information is a perishable commodity, and the most accurate data analyzed in the most elegant fashion is useless if it arrives after a decision has already been made. We have found that without a sense of urgency from top management, evaluation projects can take an ever-increasing amount of time as new issues develop demanding further and further study. Set deadlines and insist they be met.

By the same token, evaluation results that lack clarity are not usable to you as a decisionmaker, and in the worst case, can add to the confusion they are meant to reduce. Whether you choose oral briefings, written reports, or what we have found to be most effective, a combination of the two, demand that evaluation results be presented to you in a clear, jargon-free, and concise fashion.

*Make recommendations*—Some evaluators take the position that their responsibility stops with the presentation of findings. We have found that taking the extra step and making recommendations for action is worthwhile. The evaluator is usually more familiar with the details of a particular issue and is in a better position to craft a recommendation than the executive. Once approved by the executive, the recommendations take on the character of directives.

Keep in mind also that over the period of the evaluation, much information comes to the attention of the evaluator that never reaches the final report and opinions are formed that cannot always be documented in a rigorous way. Although many evaluators are reluctant to comment outside the scope of the report, don't hesitate to solicit their opinions for they may be of value to you.<sup>8</sup> An advocacy role supporting the recommendations in an evaluation does not compromise the evaluator, if the evaluation was conducted in an objective and unbiased manner.<sup>9</sup>

*Follow up*—Like other directives, some approved recommendations are implemented and some seem to fall through a crack. In the FBI, we contact the entity to whom the recommendations are directed 6 months following approval. We do sufficient review at that time to assure ourselves that the recommendation either has been implemented or over-riding circumstances have made it either impossible or counter-productive. Our studies are not closed until all approved recommendations have been brought to closure.

### **Evaluation Process**

Certain features are common to most, if not all, evaluations, and you should have an idea what to expect

from the process.<sup>10</sup>

### *Literature Review*

The evaluation staff will familiarize itself with the subject matter under review and determine what research has already been done in the area. Typically, the review of available literature will include manuals, policy files, internal memoranda, a review of data from internal management information systems, and if applicable, academic research done in the area. The literature review will help define the scope and objectives of the evaluation and should assist the staff greatly in choosing an evaluation strategy.

### *Evaluation Plan*

Following the literature review, the evaluator in charge of the study should develop an evaluation plan. We have found this to be a critical document, because it forces the evaluator to focus his thinking and reduce to paper exactly what he intends to accomplish and how he intends to accomplish it. The plan should contain, at a minimum, the purpose of the study, the scope, specific objectives that will be accomplished, a detailed statement of the methods by which various questions will be addressed, and a proposed time table with specific due dates for various phases of the project. This plan should be reviewed by the official requesting the study to ensure that his concerns are being addressed adequately.

### *Data Gathering*

Once the study plan has been approved, the next phase is generally data gathering. In the FBI, this often includes field visits to a representative number of our 59 field divisions. Data gathering can take many forms, such



as reviews of incident reports and case files, observation, interview, and questionnaires. If your staff is skilled, you should not have to be overly concerned with this phase of the project. You should, however, caution your staff that all data gathering, particularly interviews, should be conducted in an unbiased manner so as to convey the impression that the evaluation team has no axe to grind nor has made up its mind as to the outcome before the evaluation is complete.

#### *Analysis and Report Writing*

At the conclusion of the data gathering phase, you can expect the evaluation staff to consume about as much time as it took them to gather the data to analyze and report their findings. You should require a written report, supplemented if you wish by an oral briefing. If you have given your evaluation staff the mandate to make recommendations, we suggest the recommendations be set forth in a memorandum separate from the evaluation report. This will give you the flexibility to approve or not approve various recommendations without affecting the findings of the evaluation which are reflected in the report.

#### *Conflict*

One byproduct of many evaluations which you should expect is conflict. New ways of doing things, new ways of looking at information, and new ways of defining success can threaten people. A natural resistance to change may manifest itself in the rejection of the evaluation's findings by those whose area of responsibility has been evaluated. You will occasionally hear a host of counter arguments as to why proposed changes are not feasible. Kept within professional bounds, such conflict is healthy for it forces managers to articulate the reasons things are done the way they are and it can point out fallacies in the evaluation staff's reasoning and conclusions. Don't be afraid of conflict, manage it.

#### **How To Tell If Its Working**

The efficacy of an evaluation staff is, to a large degree, in the eye of the beholder. If you as chief executive and user of the product think the staff is producing the desired results, they probably are. Although this is a subjective criterion for success, it can be supplemented with quantifiable data. Recommendations approved and implemented and program improvements are two additional criteria that can be used in determining the success of an evaluation staff.

It can sometimes be difficult to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship between the work done by an evaluation staff and changes in operations. Very often, the change process begins as soon as the evaluators appear on the scene and begin asking questions. By the time the study is completed and the report written, a great many changes may have taken place, none of which will be attributed to the evaluators. It simply does not seem to be human nature for a manager to run into his chief's office and announce, "My narcotics operation was floundering, but those guys doing that evaluation really had some good ideas and things are a lot better now!" More likely you'll hear, "Well we had some problems but we knew all about them and were going ahead with our own solutions when that evaluation began." Does it matter who's right? Probably not. The important thing is that problems were uncovered and corrected. Who gets the public credit is really immaterial, frustrating to the evaluators, but immaterial.

What is material is that the product being produced, the findings and recommendations, is useful to your department. Utility is the primary criterion you should apply in evaluating the evaluation process. Look for work that is on point, recommendations that are feasible, and an attitude that fosters cooperative action.

#### **Conclusion**

The technique of evaluation can be a powerful tool for aiding managers in the decisionmaking process and determining organizational performance. In creating an evaluation staff, if you have done your work well and have brought together the right people, tasked them clearly and correctly, held them to high standards, and supported them, you will have given your department an added dimension for development, that of self-examination and critical review.

**FBI**

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through,'" *Classics of Public Administration*, eds. Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde (Oak Park, IL: Moore Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), pp. 202-213. Lindblom claims administrators are incapable of analyzing the vast amount of information relevant to a given situation.

<sup>2</sup>Elinor Chelmsky, ed., *Program Evaluation: Patterns and Directions* (Washington, DC: ASPA PAR Classics VI, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>For an examination of the role of the internal consultant, as well as the external consulting process, see Gordon Lippitt and Ronald Lippitt, *The Consulting Process in Action* (San Diego, CA: University Associates, Inc., 1978).

<sup>4</sup>From policy files maintained by the FBI's Office of Program Evaluations and Audits.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Quinn Patton, *Utilization-Focused Evaluations* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978) (Patton calls this the "personal factor"); Ray C. Oman and Stephan R. Chitwood, "Management Evaluation Studies, Factors Affecting the Acceptance of Recommendations," *Evaluation Review*, vol. 8, No. 3, June 1984, pp. 283-305; Judith A. Dawson and Joseph J. D'Amico, "Involving Program Staff in Evaluation Studies, A Strategy for Increasing Information Use and Enriching the Data Base," *Evaluation Review*, vol. 9, No. 2, April 1985, pp. 173-188; Karolynn Siegel and Peter Tuckel, "The Utilization of Evaluation Research," *Evaluation Review*, vol. 9, No. 3, June 1985, pp. 307-328.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Kotler, "Conducting Short-term Policy Evaluation Studies in the Real World," a paper presented at the Evaluation Research Society Conference in San Francisco, CA, October 1984.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Quinn Patton at an evaluation workshop conducted at the FBI Academy, Quantico, VA, 4/17-18/85.

<sup>8</sup>From an address by Hale Champion, Executive Dean, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, to a joint meeting of The Evaluation Research Society and The Evaluation Network, October 11, 1984, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>9</sup>We frequently become involved in the policy-making process, upon completion of an evaluation, attending meeting, writing memoranda, preparing briefings, and advising line managers all in support of the findings and recommendations.

<sup>10</sup>Many of these features are more fully described in *Evaluation Basics, A Practitioner's Manual*, Jacqueline Kosecoff and Arlene Fink (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982).