



Resistance to Evaluation

A Psychological Perspective

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Programme evaluators frequently encounter resistance from individuals affected by evaluation. Resistance occurs throughout the evaluation process, from the inception of an evaluation to the utilization of its findings. This article addresses possible psychological explanations for such resistance. The objectives of the article are: to provide a review of the relevant evaluation literature; to offer a theoretical analysis of social (and organizational) psychological concepts (e.g. control, reactance, competition, etc.) with regard to their explanatory value for the resistance phenomenon; and to derive strategies on how to deal effectively with resistance. In order to investigate the empirical legitimacy of the proposed theoretical explanations, we conducted a study asking 21 expert evaluation practitioners about their views on the plausibility and practical relevance of the suggested psychological explanations.

KEYWORDS: expert survey; organizational change/development; psychology; resistance; stakeholder acceptance; utilization

Introduction

As programme evaluators we frequently encounter stakeholders' resistance to engage in evaluation. In the evaluation literature, resistance has been discussed mainly in terms of the (lack of) utilization of evaluation results. Although more attention is now being paid to process use of evaluation (e.g. Patton, 1997), in-depth analyses focusing on resistance as a general problem throughout the evaluation process are scarce. In particular, psychological factors have rarely been systematically explored. Donaldson et al. (2002), in an article entitled 'Strategies for Managing Evaluation Anxiety: Toward a Psychology of Programme Evaluation', called for an integration of 'theory and practice from the psychological and behavioural sciences toward addressing challenges to [...] evaluation practice'. Similarly, Datta (2001) argued that evaluators need to 'learn more

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about how to get cooperation from those who are evaluation resistant . . .' (also see Monsen, 2002).

One possible goal of evaluation, through its process as well as its findings, is to contribute to individual, team and organizational learning and improvement (e.g. Preskill and Torres, 1999) – in other words, to support favourable changes in social settings. In the organizational development literature, resistance to change is a widely recognized phenomenon (Cummings and Worley, 1993; Staehle, 1999; Rogers, 1983); some consider it the core problem in the process of organizational change (Dienstbach, 1972). In analysing resistance to change, organization literature often refers to social psychological theories and concepts. Similar to organizational development, programme evaluation involves people who are entangled in social and organizational networks; evaluation affects the individual in his or her social context. Social and organizational psychological theories and concepts were therefore considered especially useful in answering the following questions: how can we explain stakeholders' resistance to evaluation? In practice, which explanatory factors are more relevant than others? Finally, how can we as evaluators deal effectively with such resistance?

Upon initial inspection, a number of reasons for resistance to evaluation come to mind. Resistance can originate in:

- the evaluation itself, e.g. stemming from disagreements over the adopted approach, methods and interpretation of results;
- the context in which the evaluation takes place, e.g. due to particular programme characteristics and features of the broader environment;
- the various individuals and groups affected by the evaluation, encompassing such things as programme-staff values and expectations, as well as evaluator characteristics.

Evaluation, context and human aspects are all important in explaining resistance – and in practice they all interact. However, this article will focus on the role that stakeholders, particularly programme staff, play with regard to the resistance phenomenon. This focus calls for a social and organizational psychological analysis. Thus, in the context of this article and borrowing from the organizational development literature (e.g. Schmidt, 1996), we define resistance as human behaviour aiming to maintain the status quo, in the face of some form of real or perceived pressure (e.g. through evaluation) to change this status quo.

In an investigation of resistance to programme evaluation, what justifies the focus on the role of stakeholders, particularly programme staff? After all, programme evaluation investigates programmes – not people. Reasons why stakeholders may nevertheless feel affected by the evaluation are well known in the evaluation community. For example, competition and individual achievement motivation usually ensure at least a minimum level of personal involvement in job performance. Due to such personal involvement, staff extend evaluative judgements about the programme to their individual performance (see Scriven, 1991) – with effects on their self-image. Bonoma (1977) states that '[evaluation] means critical judgement; since programmes are the brainchildren of humans, often of the humans staffing or administering the evaluated unit, it is these

persons who are ultimately being judged'. The higher someone's commitment to the programme (its goals, programme theory, potential outcomes, etc.), the more they feel affected. Furthermore, programme evaluation results in personal involvement because evaluation usually has salient tangible consequences. These can be positive (e.g. renewed funding or recognition of good work), or they can be negative (e.g. time and effort invested in evaluation tasks, loss of status or even loss of programme). Many authors have discussed the political nature of evaluation (e.g. Weiss, 1987; Patton, 1997).

Stakeholder resistance can be a problem throughout the entire evaluation process. For example, the *announcement of the evaluation* might cause the involved staff to remember previous negative experiences with evaluation, causing them to resist it. When *evaluation purpose and questions* are determined, conflicting power relations and conflicts of interest may arise and result in resistance of certain individuals or groups. As mentioned above, lack of utilization of *evaluation findings and recommendations* may also be based on stakeholder resistance. We thus do not only consider resistance to evaluation use, but more broadly analyse resistance to the implementation of evaluation.

After a review of the relevant evaluation literature, we describe social and organizational psychological theories and constructs with explanatory value for stakeholder resistance to evaluation. Based on this discussion, we derive eight summary statements ('Implications'). In an exploratory empirical study following our theoretical work, we attempt an initial validation of these eight explanations using evaluation-expert surveys and interviews. After a short overview of this study we conclude the article by linking our theoretical and empirical analyses back to evaluation practice, proposing strategies for minimizing the impact of resistance.

Review of Evaluation Literature

Reviewing the relevant evaluation literature we found numerous, more or less psychologically insightful, explanations for resistance to evaluation utilization or – less frequently – lack of acceptance of evaluation in general. We attempted to disentangle certain core concepts contained in these sources and present them under separate headings; some authors appear under more than one heading because they touch on multiple concepts.

Attitudes toward evaluation Patton (1997) addresses resistance in terms of the negative attitudes of staff toward evaluation. These negative attitudes serve as one of 20 situational factors influencing evaluation utilization. Besides these contextual factors, Patton (1997: 47) discusses the so-called 'personal factor' as the most crucial in assuring utilization: 'Use [. . .] is determined in large part by real, live, caring human beings'. Owen and Rogers (1999) also mention that personal characteristics, which refer to the attitudes of individuals to evaluation and their influence and experience in organizations, have a significant impact on the use of evaluation results. Drewello (2001) studied the attitudes of programme staff toward evaluation and identified a so-called sceptic factor: a factor that could

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explain staff's negative attitudes and resistance toward evaluation. Survey items 'loading' on this sceptic factor were related to: control issues; cost-benefit analysis; and power considerations of the programme staff.

Maintaining the status quo For Weiss (1998), resistance to evaluation results when staff feel they need to defend the status quo, based on individual or organizational values and goals. In an earlier study, Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) found that evaluation reports were used most when they confirmed already existing knowledge or questioned existing procedures to only a minimal extent. Along similar lines, Wottawa and Thierau (1998: 23) dedicate one chapter of their German evaluation textbook to 'psychological preconditions' of programme staff for their acceptance of evaluation. Evaluation tends to be welcomed when staff:

- accept that changes may occur and that they are needed;
- are willing to risk failure when attempting to make changes, in spite of the current conditions being perceived as more rewarding or predictable; and
- accept the evaluation findings as guidelines for decision making, even if they might contradict existing values and beliefs.

Carter (1971: 119) adds, 'the greater the difference between the client's or manager's concept of social reality being studied and the research findings, the greater will be his resistance to the results' (also see Dibella, 1990). Kilburg (1980) stresses the importance of compatible philosophical and value bases (e.g. positivism vs humanism) between evaluator and clients, especially in the case of negative research findings. Scriven (1991: 290) offers a brief analysis of the resistance problem under the heading 'Psychology of Evaluation'. In his view, resistance is largely related to the fear evaluation often evokes, specifically the fear to be criticized, to lose one's job, and more generally, to lose self-esteem and power (see Morss [1979] for a similar list of threats associated with evaluation).

Power Davidson (1993) outlines the connection between power and resistance to evaluation. She distinguishes different sources of power and their specific effects on resistance by programme staff. Similarly, Bonoma (1977) posits that the type of power relationship between evaluator and clients determines resistance. Because evaluation involves power differences and different interests among stakeholders, evaluation always requires some form of a conflict resolution between the evaluator and the stakeholder groups. McGarrell and Sabath (1994), and Palumbo and Hallett (1993), hold the opinion that it is not possible to resolve all conflicting interests and goals of different stakeholder groups, and that therefore resistance cannot be fully avoided.

Reactance Reactance, briefly defined, is a response to a (perceived) restriction to one's freedom. Wottawa and Thierau (1998) mention this psychological construct to explain roadblocks that the evaluation team might encounter. Carter (1971) notes that evaluators' insistence on changes and utilization of evaluation findings may result in more intense resistance (reactance). Davidson (1993) describes how individuals react with resistance to perceived threats to valued

freedoms, especially when the evaluation is externally mandated. Mosen (2002) observes that excessive external pressure on teachers to engage in school-based evaluation is counter-productive because it evokes suspicion of a hidden agenda and is associated with a loss of control over professional matters.

In summary, we found that, although discussions related to evaluation acceptance and utilization sometimes address the problem of stakeholder resistance (if only in passing), explanations for resistance are not usually investigated as a specific research question, nor studied from a well-founded psychological standpoint. Thus, the systematic theoretical investigation of psychological explanations provides a novel framework for an in-depth analysis of stakeholder resistance to evaluation.

Relevant Social Psychological Constructs

In this section we assume that the basic and applied research in social and organizational psychology can be transferred to the field of evaluation (see Herrmann, 1992; Patry and Perrez, 2000). We will describe a selection of relevant psychological concepts, elaborate on how they could be operationalized in the context of programme evaluation, and present statements *summarizing the implications* of each concept, resulting in a tentative theoretical framework that can help explain (and ultimately, predict and modify) resistance to evaluation. This process was informed by German-language, advanced social psychology textbooks (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997; Herkner, 1991; Bierhoff, 1998; Stroebe, 1990), but also by the prior review of the evaluation literature and personal experiences as practising evaluators.

Learning Theory

Learning theory states that an individual's behaviours are acquired, maintained, and changed through interaction with reinforcers (rewards) and punishment (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 53). Individuals anticipate behavioural consequences based on prior learning experiences, model learning, and stimulus generalization. Attitudes toward evaluation are based on prior experiences with evaluation or processes perceived as similar, like organizational change processes. Attitudes can also be formed and influenced by statements of others who have the status of models. The psychology literature refers to this as model (or vicarious) learning. If these prior experiences or model influences were negative, and if stakeholders generalize and anticipate similar aversive consequences of the current evaluation, they will likely be resistant. However, attitudes toward evaluation can be adjusted following new (direct or vicarious) learning experiences.

Examples of anticipated negative consequences of evaluation include:

- negative judgement which affects self-esteem, social comparison, treatment by superiors;
- loss of control by experiencing restriction of perceived freedom;
- loss of control because of insecurity concerning consequences of the evaluation;

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- loss of power following a renegotiation of resources (e.g. status and decision-making power);
- loss of rewarding tasks and other reinforcing situations (e.g. freedom to structure the work day individually); and
- direct costs of the evaluation (e.g. time and effort).

All these consequences may be restated in an inverse manner to serve as examples of stakeholders' positive anticipations.¹

Implication 1 Sometimes, stakeholders have had *previous experiences* with evaluation (or processes perceived as similar to evaluation). If these experiences were mostly negative, the possibility for future resistance toward evaluation increases. Stakeholders may also adopt other people's negative opinions about evaluation.

Implication 2 With the prospect of an evaluation, the stakeholders will undertake a personal *cost-benefit analysis* and may anticipate more disadvantages than advantages from the evaluation, e.g. loss of approval or valued tasks, feedback of failure, or the dedication of time and effort to evaluation. In this case, the stakeholders will try to prevent the anticipated negative outcome and may resist evaluation.

Power

Fischer and Wiswede (1997: 464) define power as a special case of social influence resulting from an unequal distribution of resources. Power is based on the control over rewarding and punishing stimuli (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 468). He who exerts power has control over consequences experienced by others (Herkner, 1991: 401). For example, in the context of evaluation, information may be a source of power. The evaluator collects data that the stakeholders perceive as a source of reinforcement or punishment (see above for possible positive and negative consequences of evaluation). Therefore, evaluation has the potential to either increase or decrease the power of stakeholders. For example, they may anticipate a loss of expert status that had previously legitimized their position of power. Under such circumstances, disadvantaged stakeholders' resistance only seems natural.

Implication 3 Stakeholders may show resistance to evaluation if the evaluation is seen as potentially changing the existing *power structure*, and if, consequently, they perceive their own (valued) position and extent of influence over their environment endangered. In addition, stakeholders may interpret the information collected by the evaluation as a source of power that recipients (e.g. decision makers) might use to derive non-negotiable negative consequences.

Reactance

When evaluation is perceived as an exertion of power or as a control measure, stakeholders may experience reactance. Reactance is an aversive state brought

about by the perceived restriction of, or threat to, the freedom of choice and decision making (Brehm and Brehm, 1981). Threats to freedom (or perceived loss of control) occur when individuals perceive the linkage between behaviour and consequences to be beyond their influence, or unpredictable. Control over, and predictability of, the relevant individual environment are regarded as basic human needs (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 312).

In the case of evaluation, individuals affected in one way or another by the evaluation may experience loss of control if they were not involved in procedural decisions throughout the evaluation process. Bandler et al. (1968) found that unpleasant situations, which subjects chose voluntarily, are perceived as less aversive than unpleasant situations, which subjects did not choose. Stakeholders may experience reactance if they have to accept evaluation questions, design, measurement instruments, and criteria of judgement as determined by someone from the outside – especially if they fear their performance will not be measured adequately. Anticipating negative consequences due to the perceived loss of control intensifies reactance. This is particularly true if the satisfaction of other so-called ‘basic needs’ is threatened. One such basic need is the desire to maintain a positive self-image (see below for further details on self-esteem). Reactance may also arise when person A (let’s call him Alf) is trying to force an opinion on person B (Beth). Beth will be especially reactant if Alf uses status, social pressure, or if Alf’s motivation to convince Beth is clearly a selfish one. Because of these dynamics, evaluators who must convince others that evaluation is a worthy project may involuntarily evoke reactance.

Implication 4 If stakeholders feel that their perceived freedom, concerning behaviour and decision making, is limited by the evaluation, they will experience a negative emotional state known as *reactance*. Stakeholders may feel disrespected, as the autonomy they have come to value is being restricted. This happens when the evaluation is mandated and when staff have no say throughout the evaluation process. Freedom can be significant to the stakeholders for satisfying certain important psychological needs. For example, evaluation becomes aversive if it limits the possibility for the stakeholders to perceive the environment and their performance with a positive bias.

Control

Control is an underlying concept for both power and reactance. These three concepts can be seen as theoretically distinct yet related, and are practically often indistinguishable. Loss of control (or a state of insecurity) is perceived as a general aversive condition because of its negative effect on the likelihood to attain (tangible or intangible) reinforcement and to prevent punishment (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 479). According to Herkner (1991: 121), control consists of two components: a) *perceived causation* and b) *predictability*; both are relevant in the context of evaluation. Perceived causation is affected when the stakeholders feel they cannot sufficiently influence the contingency between behaviour (their work/programme’s performance) and consequences (the evaluative judgements). Predictability is limited when the evaluation process lacks transparency

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and brings about changes that are not clear to the stakeholders. Examples of factors or situations which contribute to real or perceived loss of control include:

- information sharing with the evaluator;
- changes in (preferred, or at least familiar) power structures, interaction patterns, status distribution;
- changes in work routines, schedules and task lists, or restriction of the freedom to design work as one considers most effective;
- observation by external people resulting in judgement of performance;
- use of idiosyncratic, esoteric, or controversial success criteria as the basis for judgement;
- consequences which are unknown and therefore unpredictable;
- contingencies (between behaviour and consequences) which are not clear or not accepted by the stakeholders; and
- the need to process information as enhancing the self-image and ensuring a positive outcome in social comparisons (see below).

Implication 5 Stakeholders often perceive evaluation as a *control* measure. Stakeholders might feel that evaluation limits their own possibilities of exerting control. For example, stakeholders may fear that they cannot control the criteria and standards by which they (by way of the programme) will be judged and how their work will be organized in the future. That is, stakeholders might anticipate that the evaluation will change existing group norms, power hierarchies, or reward systems which previously helped orient the members of the organization and made their environment seemingly predictable and controllable. To maintain control, stability, and predictability, stakeholders might resist the evaluation.

Competition and Conflict

Pruitt and Rubin (1986) define conflict as ‘perceived divergence of interest or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously’. In an evaluation, stakeholders often pursue different interests; conflict is bound to take place. Conflict can be dealt with in two contrasting ways: competition or co-operation. Maximal co-operation results when all involved parties perceive co-operation as mutually beneficial and as having a high probability of success. Not only actual but also expected partner behaviour is taken into account. In developing such expectations, people tend to base their judgement about other people’s motivation on their own motivation (Stroebe, 1990: 327). When evaluation has a negative image, as is often the case, unco-operative behaviour may be present from the start. According to Herkner (1991: 416), a negative emotional state (often triggered by evaluation because of its association with ‘doubting’, ‘testing’, ‘judgement’, etc.) has a negative effect on co-operative behaviour. If, in addition, evaluation is being determined without the consultation of programme staff, they will infer a lack of co-operation on the part of those contracting the evaluation. Such a pervasive breakdown of trust can result in all involved parties being in a vicious circle.

Even an initial willingness to co-operate in the evaluation – for example, if all

agree on a common goal (e.g. programme improvement) – can result in conflict. In this case, conflict can arise if the question of how to reach the consented goal becomes a source of dispute. If there is a clash of different interests concerning outcomes, the only solution is usually to change the availability and distribution of resources (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 590). Stakeholders defend and compete for control over resources (e.g. status, time, money), which means power (see above). On the one hand, evaluation can make the current resource distribution transparent; on the other hand, evaluation can mean a redistribution of resources, dreaded by some, welcomed by others. Under such competition, people tend to be less willing to communicate effectively, that is, they may withhold information or make false statements. Differences are perceived more vividly than agreements, and mistrust becomes common. In contrast, communication and information exchanges are crucial in increasing the tendency to co-operate. In addition, symmetric (power) relationships contribute to the tendency to co-operate (Stroebe, 1990: 314; Herkner, 1991: 415).

Implication 6 Evaluation is often associated with *competition*. Competing interests clash because scarce resources are (re)distributed. Sometimes, stakeholders have little or no trust in the co-operation of others. There is low inclination to co-operate if the evaluation does not pursue goals the stakeholders can identify with and if different parties try to impose their respective goals on the others.

Performance Feedback

Evaluation judges performance and gives performance feedback. Generally, individuals attribute their failures to external sources and their successes to themselves in order to support a positive self-image. In the context of achievement motivation, Atkinson (1964) distinguished two prototypes: *success seekers* and *failure avoiders*. The success seekers have learned to approach negative feedback in a constructive way. They favour tasks with a demanding yet realistic chance of success in order to expose themselves to learning experiences, so as to constantly improve their performance. The failure avoiders have learned that negative feedback is mostly frustrating. Therefore, these individuals try to avoid negative outcomes by seeking out tasks whose chance of success is very high. At the same time, they prefer vague (as opposed to exact, specific) performance measures and feedback (Rothblum, 1990).

By definition, evaluation makes performance transparent. Those involved with the object of evaluation will see their own performance standards be compared to external (evaluation) criteria. Thereby, their source of motivation can shift from the internal (intrinsic motivation) to the external (extrinsic motivation). That is, the judgement of the quality of the performance is removed from the individual's control to be handled by an external agent (the evaluator). This can result in resistance in the form of reactance because it restricts the individuals' freedom to set and monitor their own performance standards. When evaluation provides negative feedback, people often react by doubting the credibility of the information source – something evaluators often experience. When evaluation gives group feedback, the effect of the feedback on the individual is dependent

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upon the level of identification with the group's performance, and the extent to which individual consequences result. From a learning perspective, evaluative feedback is especially useful when it provides specific, accessible, timely information (e.g. based on monitoring) aimed at (programme) improvement.

Implication 7 Individuals can be broadly differentiated on the basis of how they approach particular *performance situations*. There are those who seek challenge (success seekers) and those whose main objective is to avoid failure (failure avoiders). The former may not fear negative feedback through evaluation as much as the latter and may therefore be less likely to show resistance to evaluation. Failure avoiders experience psychological stress even when merely anticipating possible negative results. These stakeholders are more likely to judge both the criteria and the measurement of the evaluation to be invalid, that is, they are less likely to accept, and profit from, the evaluation process and findings.

Self-image

The sum of judgements about oneself constitutes the self-concept. Such judgements form from interactions with the social environment. For explaining resistance to evaluation, social aspects of the self-concept are important, namely the tendency to boost one's *self-esteem*, and so-called *impression management*.

Psychological research has found a self-serving bias to be inherent in human perception and attribution (Fischer and Wiswede, 1997: 346). Evaluation may threaten this biased perception because it depicts reality by collecting, analysing, and giving feedback based on empirical data. This threat applies especially to those individuals who suffer from high 'evaluation anxiety' (Wine, 1982). Those individuals react strongly to any signs of assessment. They try to avoid situations that provide performance feedback (also see above) (Rothblum, 1990: 504).

The second important concept, impression management, describes the tendency of people to shape their behaviour so that they make a positive impression on those around them. To a certain extent, evaluation takes this possibility out of the hands of those affected by the evaluation because the evaluator gains (more or less objective) information which he can pass on to others. At the same time, the evaluator herself is also confronted with impression management behaviour by those being evaluated.

Implication 8 Evaluation gives performance feedback, which – in achievement-oriented societies – is highly relevant for the *self-image*. By heightening self-awareness, it becomes harder for stakeholders to perceive themselves/their performance in a (naturally) positively biased way. Evaluation can therefore make explicit the existing discrepancies between internal expectations and reality, thereby creating dissatisfaction. In addition, evaluation supports social comparisons with relevant others and can get in the way of impression management. Stakeholders are likely to resist evaluation if they feel threatened by such comparison processes.

Relevant Organizational Psychological Constructs

Most of the organizational psychological concepts we identified as pertinent to resistance to evaluation build on the social psychological concepts discussed in the previous section. On a continuum from basic to applied and field-specific research, the organizational psychology literature can act as a bridge that connects social psychology to evaluation.² We support this assertion by briefly discussing three organizational psychological concepts.

Polarity of Organizational and Individual Goals

Conflicts can arise due to the *polarity* of organizational and individual goals (Gairing, 1999). Evaluation may be perceived to represent organizational goals (e.g. accountability). In situations where the staff affected by the evaluation do not feel part of the evaluation process or are weakly committed to the programme or the organization as a whole, their individual goals are likely to dominate their actions. Conflicts between individual and organizational goals can therefore be the cause of resistance to evaluation.

Trust

The organization literature establishes *trust* as key to co-operating in and accepting organizational change (e.g. change associated with evaluation). It is often hard to build trust among those who have a stake in an evaluation. As Patton (1997) notes, even the word 'evaluation' (because of negative pairings and generalizations) creates negative, or at least sceptical, expectations. At the same time, evaluation is often seen as a control measure, indicating mistrust by those calling for its implementation.³ Those affected by the evaluation are likely to react reciprocally with mistrust and resistance. As discussed earlier in terms of co-operation and conflict, this may be the start of a vicious circle.

Waves in Organizational Change and Development

Evaluation may also be perceived as just one more organizational change and development (OC&D) measure *en vogue* today, but soon to be proven ineffective, and substituted (see Kieser [1996] on waves in OC&D).⁴ This holds true in countries or organizations where evaluation has seen a recent increase in visibility and funding. Evaluation perceived as a 'buzz word' might mean that stakeholders do not know about its unique features, doubt its long-term contributions, and therefore do not want to waste resources participating in it.

A Short Description of an Exploratory Empirical Analysis

As with any theoretical article, the reader will always be left wondering about the empirical legitimacy of the proposed framework. Mindful of this concern, we conducted an exploratory study to further qualify our conceptual work. While not the focus of this article, we will briefly outline the design and results of this study. We used expert surveys and interviews to get a better idea of the plausibility and practical relevance of our theoretically derived explanations.

Twenty-one experienced evaluation practitioners first shared their spontaneous subjective explanations for the resistance they faced during their work. Then the experts read the theoretically derived implication statements (see above) and generated examples for each of them from personal professional experience. Finally, the experts rated the explanations for clarity and comparative relevance. Overall, the study provided support for the practical worth of our psychological explanations, particularly regarding the concepts 'control', 'individual cost-benefit analysis', 'prior experiences' and 'power'.

When spontaneously explaining resistance, experts most frequently referred to the perceptions of those affected by the evaluation (34 statements). Factors connected to the evaluation itself or characteristics of the evaluator were also addressed frequently (25 statements), whereas experts rarely mentioned context factors (5 statements). We later found our analysis to correspond to Alkin's (1985) categorization of factors enhancing the use of evaluation findings. He distinguished human factors, evaluation factors and context factors in explaining the extent of evaluation utilization (as opposed to our focus on resistance to evaluation implementation).

More specifically, regarding the human factors (we called it 'perceptions of those affected by the evaluation', excluding the evaluator), the experts most frequently talked about cost-benefit considerations (8 statements) and control issues (7 statements), and to a lesser extent about power issues (5 statements) and prior experiences with evaluation (3 statements). Thus, we found considerable compatibility between the subcategories derived from the spontaneous expert explanations and our theoretically derived explanations. This means that our theoretical approach to finding explanations for resistance to evaluation seems to have practical relevance. Without having received any information on our theoretical work at this point in the study, the evaluation experts generated explanations that corresponded with four of our eight theoretical explanations.

Experts were then confronted with the theoretical explanations (in the form of the implication statements), rated their clarity, and generated examples for each one of them. The last step was for them to rate their comparative relevance based on their extensive practical evaluation experience. Six out of eight implication statements were rated between 2.0 and 3.5 on a six-point Likert scale (1 = highly relevant; 6 = not at all relevant). This narrow range makes a differentiated statement difficult. However, if we were to report the explanations rated highest, they would be – not surprisingly – identical with those four explanations that the experts inductively generated in the first part of the survey: prior experiences (2.0), power issues (2.1), control issues (2.2), cost-benefit considerations (2.5). It makes sense that the experts rated those concepts most relevant that they themselves had spontaneously mentioned as explanations in the first part of the survey. Some experts (6 out of 21) noted that the explanations we offered seemed to overlap. It appears that, although the experts considered each implication statement in itself quite clear (as their clarity ratings indicate), both the generation of examples and the comparative relevance ratings resulted in some difficulty to differentiate the concepts. Perhaps the differentiation between certain theoretical concepts is

justified for theoretical purposes, but it is not clear enough for the transfer to applied questions.

Strategies to Address Resistance to Evaluation

Finally, we examined the question of how to address resistance in daily evaluation work (see Table 1). We would like to stress that evaluators should see resistance not only as a burden but also as an important source of information. Resistance is related to development and change, and its analysis helps the evaluator choose the most effective evaluation activities.

In discussing the practical implications of the human factors to resistance, we invariably have to revisit the evaluation and context factors mentioned earlier. It is quite clear that the usefulness of the human (in our case, psychological) explanations is determined in part by these other two factor areas. This means that not all psychological causes identified in the preceding analysis are applicable in all situations, for all evaluations conducted.

Let us briefly elaborate on how the evaluation factor area can affect the implementation of the strategies we suggest. First of all, the ease with which these strategies can be incorporated in practical evaluation work depends on the evaluation approach. Some of our suggestions reiterate research findings on factors enhancing evaluation use – e.g. continuous effective communication and involvement (see Cousins and Leithwood, 1986; Kitinoja, 1989). These same evaluation features are also found to ameliorate the likelihood of organizational learning due to evaluation (e.g. Forss, 1994; Preskill and Torres, 1999). Likewise, according to a basic assumption of participatory evaluation, increased participation of programme staff leads to higher acceptance of evaluation (e.g. Greene, 1988). Summative evaluation often poses a greater threat than formative approaches (e.g. Morss, 1979). In summary, certain evaluation approaches pay particular attention to the psychological dimension of the evaluation enterprise and thereby lend themselves particularly well to the implementation of the suggested strategies.

With regard to context, the multitude of existing evaluation contexts makes it hard to relate a set of strategies to characteristics of a particular context, organization or programme (see Alkin, 1985). More research is necessary on this topic. For now it is the task of our readers to assess for their particular evaluation situations which strategies are most beneficial.

Conclusion

In this article we proposed a psychological framework for addressing the problem of stakeholder resistance to programme evaluation. In trying to simplify the complexities of resistance formation, we now present a number of fundamental psychological needs and mechanisms that can be said to underlie other, more refined concepts. Thus, the basic *need for control* can lead to a defence of the status quo and to reactance. Likewise, the *need for a positive self-concept* can cause individuals to reject performance feedback and to engage in unco-operative

Table 1. Strategies to Address Resistance

<i>Psychological construct</i>	<i>Evaluator strategies</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Attitudes toward evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing prior experiences with evaluation • Informing about purposes and uses of the evaluation; process transparency • Educating about evaluation, increasing stakeholder knowledge about evaluation • Mutual exchange (as opposed to one-sided communication) • Use of informal channels (internal or external promoter) • Attitude changes by taking into account favourable characteristics of communicator, message, and recipient (e.g. convincing without evoking reactance) 	High level of communication and knowledge about the evaluation increases its predictability; therefore less threat, more trust, higher motivation to co-operate
Personal cost–benefit analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively (experientially) communicate possible benefits • Making explicit and addressing anxieties (e.g. fear of negative results) 	If there is personal interest in the evaluation because of an individually positive cost–benefit ratio, the costs of evaluation will be more easily accepted (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation)
Control and reactance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of stakeholders in the entire evaluation process (goal definition, criteria of judgement, etc.) • Long-term trust building • Accommodating to existing organizational structures • Using group decision-making processes • Introducing counter-measure-groups (devil's advocates) 	Identification/ownership regarding the evaluation, common goals increase commitment, trust improves co-operation, granting personal freedom and influence impedes reactance, control over evaluation process and results improves acceptance, sceptics see their issues addressed and are drawn into the evaluation
Power and conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipation of conflicts of interest of different stakeholder groups • Conflict management (e.g. emphasizing common goals) • Awareness of organizational context, power hierarchies, and decision-making processes 	Knowledge of organizational context is prerequisite to adapting/optimizing evaluation strategies; effective support for the implementation of the evaluation and the utilization of results, de-escalation of conflicts, and focus on effective problem solving
Performance feedback and self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stressing the focus on program instead of personnel evaluation • Arranging for self-serving (positive) experiences 	Increased self-esteem means less anxiety of possible negative performance feedback through evaluation

behaviour. A third such basic mechanism could be the human tendency to *maximize rewards while avoiding punishment*. Finally, *prior learning experiences* fundamentally influence a whole range of topics, including attitudes toward evaluation. From the perspective of a practising evaluator, ensuring that these basic needs are taken into account and are not grossly violated by evaluation might be the most effective way to minimize resistance. The strategies we propose in Table 1 are intended to support such efforts.

Our theoretical focus on the human factors in carrying out evaluations clearly provides support for the user-oriented, participatory, organizational learning evaluation approaches. We recognize that contextual variables sometimes make the application of these approaches difficult or even undesirable, but the foremost aim of this article is to contribute to a general awareness of the psychological dimension of evaluation and its implications for the resistance phenomenon – especially if the chosen evaluation approach is of a more methods-oriented (e.g. quasi-experimental) or judgement-oriented (e.g. expert-analytical) nature. We hope that such a theoretically well-founded awareness constitutes another step toward less wasteful, more beneficial evaluation processes for all those involved.

Notes

1. According to Bandura (1977), one has to differentiate between outcome and efficacy expectations. The former are equivalent to what we discuss as anticipated (positive or negative) consequences; the latter concern people's confidence that they can actually cope with a particular situation. Referring to this particular type of expectation, it seems important in the course of an evaluation to ensure that, in addition to pointing out the benefits of evaluation, stakeholders will feel empowered and confident that they indeed reach them.
2. However, it is important to keep in mind the differences between the OC&D process and the evaluation process. Among many other factors, the main focus of evaluation is different from that of OC&D. The latter occupies itself with optimizing and redesigning organizational processes, project contents, structures etc. Evaluation, on the other hand, intends to assess the quality of such measures. Per se, evaluation does not have planning and restructuring responsibilities or programmatic impact.
3. Podsakoff et al. (1990) found that superiors especially damaged their employees' trust if they challenged their working methods (as is often the case in evaluation). Neubauer (1999) found that employees perceived fairness and accuracy of performance assessment as equally dependent on both the type of assessment tool and the trusting relationship with their superior.
4. On the other hand, evaluation can be used to demystify existing OC&D measures by empirically examining their effectiveness. This will result in resistance to evaluation by all those who profit from such measures and, therefore, fear potential negative findings.

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