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From Consilium to Advice: A Review of the Evaluation and Related Literature on Advisory Structures and Processes

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Abstract

The literature in evaluation and related disciplines on advice and advisory structures and processes is described and analyzed. The purposes of evaluation advisory groups and evaluation consultation groups are discussed, and working and formal definitions of each are provided. ©Wiley Periodicals, Inc., and the American Evaluation Association.

In everyday evaluation practice, working evaluators seek advice from colleagues, potential and actual contractors, and from others with an interest in their specific project—including intended users, articles, and books, even friends and family. Some evaluators formalize their advice—seeking and giving advice in a group they consult more or less often over a short to a longer term, whereas other evaluators seek counsel informally, more or less regularly.

Seeking advice from others and from texts is normative practice in all professions, presumably, although it may only be formalized in some (e.g., medicine). Professional texts in many fields exhort the use of external advice. Evaluation texts also recommend the use of advice from others for conceptualizing, conducting, and completing an evaluation, and especially

for enhancing the use of the evaluation and its findings for policy and program improvement (e.g., Daponte, 2008; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Pankaj, Welsh, & Ostenso, 2011). Indeed, well-known models of evaluation practice advocate for the involvement of others in an evaluation so as to make more likely the effective use of the evaluation and its findings (e.g., Patton, 2008; Ryan & DeStefano, 2000).

Given the presence of the topic of advice giving in evaluation texts, articles, and reports, there is surprisingly little practical advice published on when and how to organize, manage, and utilize formal and informal evaluation consultation. This issue fills this gap. It also contributes to a beginning theorizing of advisory/consultative structure and practice. Our strategy is to introduce advice-giving and formal structures for this, present eight case studies of formal and informal structures for advice giving, and then conceptualize and theorize this practice in the categories—ethos, craft orientation, skills, and practices—in this way adding to our earlier work on evaluation capacity building (Compton, Baizerman, & Stockdill, 2002) and managing evaluation (Compton & Baizerman, 2009).

Orienting Questions

By the end of this *New Directions for Evaluation* issue, the following questions will have been addressed, and the reader should have a deeper appreciation for the subject and a firmer grasp on several approaches to organizing, managing, and utilizing an evaluation advisory group (EAG)/evaluation consultation group (ECG). Suggestions for a training curriculum and for research on EAG/ECG complete the final chapter.

Practical Questions

- What is an evaluation advisory group/evaluation consultation group?
- What is it useful for?
- How can it contribute to better and/or more useful evaluations?
- What are the basic structures of an evaluation advisory group/evaluation consultation group?
- How is an EAG/ECG constructed?
- How does it operate?
- How can it be managed?
- Can it be evaluated?
- What are formats for requesting advice and counsel?
- How does one assess and decide whether to use EAG advice?
- What is the timing for requesting advice?
- What are some ways to use EAG/ECG for policy making and program improvement?
- What are some other uses of an EAG/ECG?
- Why should I not use an EAG/ECG?

Conceptual and Theoretical Questions

- What are the ethos, craft orientations, skills, and practices of EAG/ECG practice?
- What might be included in a training program for EAG practice?
- What empirical research and evaluation of EAG/ECG should be done?

Why Ask for Advice?

Simply put, advice is another person's point of view, their take on you and your situation (and you in your situation), and guidance intended to help (we presume) you think about and act in a specific situation, or more broadly and longer term. Advice can guide, it can help one get unstuck, it can teach, and can make one feel better. The Latin root of advice is *advere*, to see, hence a viewpoint (point of view). In personal relations we often seek advice from family, friends, and experts; at work we often seek out an expert first, and may also include friends and family. Why the latter two? Because they know us, and hence may know how we may not see or think about certain things (going on) and importantly because we trust them to look over/look out for our (best) interests. All of this is quite ordinary, however interpersonally complicated it may get, especially with family and friends.

When the subject or problem at hand is technical in nature, as in evaluation, it may be far more reasonable, efficient, useful, and politically and interpersonally comfortable and safe to seek counsel from experts, typically in one's own or in a nearby professional field. This can be done informally, on an ad hoc or more formal basis, once, more often, or regularly, in the short to longer term. Or one can consult and ask advice within a formal process. This formal process, along with a formal, longer-term advice-giving structure, is our focus—the evaluation advisory group/evaluation consultation group.

Whether informal or formal, advice seeking, advice giving, and advice using are practical, if at times contentious and contested ways of "getting outside" and beyond oneself to get another perspective on one's practical situation, or on a broader issue. It is also a way to gain political legitimacy and a political base for one's plan or practice, a way to find allies for proposed and ongoing actions. Such agency politics are often necessary to ensure that an evaluation can be conducted accurately, on time, and with a good chance of being used for accountability, policy, decision making, or program improvement. Politics can also take the form of perceived or actual resistance to an evaluator or to the technical aspects of their proposed or ongoing study. Agency politics are surely crucial when a major goal of an evaluation is to propose how to improve a program or an agency. It is important to remember that asking for advice is an interpersonal process, even when the advice process is formalized.

Advice is an interpersonal process, with its own politics of sex, race/ethnicity, ideas, feelings, and status. It is cultural and social in our society to seek advice, and it is also sociocultural to wonder about one's need and want to do so, and how one who seeks counsel will be perceived by others, for example, as weak, unsure, not expert, as the wrong evaluator for the job, perhaps. In some fields, formalization of the advice process may work to marginalize such private and social concerns, yet the same formalization could also exacerbate these concerns and feelings. To ask for advice and to use it or not can show that advice can be a contested space.

Advice as such can be a contested space (VeLure Roholt & Baizerman, 2012), a place of disagreement and tension. Such disagreement can be about the substance of ideas, about style, about preference—about alternative views and ways, or about more. When advice is taken as embodied, such differences can be about more than alternative ideas and practices; advice can become personal.

Formal advice structures can work to make more or less prominent the political, interpersonal, and contested aspects of the advice process. How the structure is contested, how it is given legitimacy (and of what types), how its size, member recruitment, screening, training, and representativeness; the type and frequency of meetings; and its own ways of working are some of the practical, everyday, subjects of interest when deciding whether and how to develop and use a formal advisory structure—topics we take on in the case studies and in the final chapter. Whether or not to seek advice is a relatively simple decision; to use a formal advice structure is more complicated; whether or not to seek and use advice and counsel regularly from the same set of individuals working together in a group is even more complex a decision. By the end of this text, you should be better prepared to decide for yourself, based on your context and situation.

On Advice

Advice giving and advice taking are everyday practices in personal and social life: Should I wear these shoes to match my outfit? Which MD should I see? Who has the best pizza? What horse should I bet on? Should I go out with him? What statistical test would work best for these data? How would you go about getting management on board to use the findings from our evaluation? What groups should be represented on my evaluation advisory committee? These ordinary, mundane, everyday questions in the advice domain show that *advice* is a close sibling to *opinion*, *suggestion*, and *recommendation* in everyday speech. This blurring of meaning in everyday use between and among advice, opinion, suggestion, and recommendation is challenged in technical language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) where an *opinion* is different from a *suggestion* and also from a *recommendation*. Each of these terms has technical meanings in different technical worlds, such as

social science research and evaluation, and may have yet other, different technical meanings within the social sciences and between these (psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science) and evaluation.

In everyday English usage, native speakers distinguish among *advise*, *suggest*, and *recommend*. In technical/professional fields, there are clear practical and often legal differences among the three. In everyday native English, grammatical differences also obtain, with *advice* less strong an action requirement than *suggest*, and that less so than *recommend.* Each of these three terms has different Latin roots, whereas *suggestion* and *recommendation* both share *advise* in a thesaurus. *Advice* itself in its Latin origin joins *ad* (to, toward) to *videre* (to see). Advice: to see, inform, consul, tell, notify. It is also as if advice, in its foundational meaning, means "to see as I do." *Concilium* is a close relative in meaning (counsel), and is the name of the earliest formal Roman advisory structure, *Concilium Principis*, a group offering counsel to the first Roman Emperor, Augustus (Cook, 1955). Our use of the terms *advice*, *advisory*, and *consultation* will be conventional and follow everyday U.S. English meanings, except when we explicitly change to a technical meaning.

We use both the conventional advisory committee and consultation (consultative) committee in recognition of and deference to U.S. federal governmental usage, which tightly restricts the use of "advisory groups" (Croley & Funk, 1997; Smith, 2007).

In current evaluation texts, it is common to find advice, suggestions, and recommendations that the evaluator solicit, assess, and use informal and formal input (i.e., advice, suggestions, and recommendations) from intended users from a variety of constituencies of a particular study, colleagues, and others (e.g., Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Such advice can be informal, formal, or some of each, can be given by one or more persons individually and/or by persons in/as a group. This input can be more or less formally organized as an ad hoc group, a formal ongoing advisory group, or the like. The group can be called a user group, consultation group, or an advisory group.

Advice is a common word and a common, often (almost) invisible social process; it is a complex interpersonal process that can implicate one's self-conception, expertise, and vulnerability, as well as one's positional authority and one's very job. In our increasingly complex, global, fast-moving world, one often needs help from others—their perspective, insight, reflections, thoughts—what they see and think—and what they suggest—their advice. All of this ordinary advice asking and advice giving is the subject of social science research (Brown, 1955; de Leon, 1988; Maynard-Moody, 1983; Moore, 1971), as will be shown. But it is only of interest to us here when it is contextualized in a formal advice-giving structure for evaluation studies (and somewhat for evaluation policy and the managing of evaluators and an evaluation unit (Compton & Baizerman, 2009)). Yet we must

remember that everyday practices very often are the same or closely similar to formal, professional practices. As Schon (1983) long ago pointed out, it is useful to distinguish "espoused theories" (or practices and skills) from "theories in use" (or practices and skills): How we talk about what we do does not necessarily map onto what we do and how we do it; as Dreyfus (2001) also shows. This means two things for us: (a) that informal, everyday advice practices can infuse, underlie, or even be the same as, formal advice practices, in part or wholly, and (b) how we talk about informal and formal advice practices may differ, whereas actual in-use practices may be similar or the same. The practical task here then is to be on the lookout for whether, to what degree, where, and how everyday advice practices turn up in formal advisory structures and practices. The literature review below illuminates some of these similarities in informal and formal advice giving, advice assessing, advice taking, and advice using.

To give this a different turn, in part we will be after "the embodied knowledge that comes only from engaging in practices in concerted co-presence with others" (Rawls, 2005, p. 5)—practices that are "things done, said, heard, felt—those recognizable" (Rawls, 2005). Put differently, how do formal evaluation advisory/consultation groups work and how does this map onto the working of everyday advice practices?

Advice practices are primordial in everyday human life; especially conjugal and group life: We ask others to help us live our lives, to make us wiser, to make those asked feel and think differently about themselves. Advice is a communicate transaction and as such is socioculturally bound to place and time. Who can be asked for advice, given who the asker is, and who can give advice of what type to which asker are socially related, everyday practices, important to us only to the extent that it reminds us that constructing a formal evaluation advisory structure means selecting members, orienting, training, and working with them, and how this is to be done with a committee may (is highly likely to) be based on practices in the larger society and culture. It is the evaluator's responsibility to attend to this.

Advice-seeking behavior can be directed at family, friends, texts, and others. Among these others are professionals chosen for their expertise, their specialized knowledge (Ericsson, 2009; Higgs & Titchen, 2001). This is simply said, but quite complicated in practice. How do we as laypersons know what is/are the relevant expertise we need/want? (by referral). How do we know if a particular other has it? (by credential). How do we assess whether the suggested expert is right for us? (by experience). All of that is pretty easy. To make it more difficult, in an evaluation context, do we want to know what school of thought the consulting evaluator subscribes to and uses? Do we want to know the exact expertise of the evaluator expert? For example, are they more qualitative than quantitative in their approach? Have they evaluated chronic disease programs before? How well does the

consultant work with local physicians? Does he or she have training and/or knowledge in medical terminology?

The obvious point here is that there is expertise and there is "expertise," and it is not always easy to know or discern what this is and what one needs/wants (Briggle, 2008). This is the relevance problem. And it is not always easy to assess the appropriateness of a particular expertise to one's purpose at hand, for example, the construction and use of a formal evaluation advisory/consultation group. Here too the evaluator must take note of these distinctions in expertise. In the last chapter, we show the practical relevance of expertise assessments and decisions.

Dreyfus's five-stage model of expertise (see Compton & Baizerman, 2009) names the highest stage of expertise in Aristotle's term, as *phronesis*—wisdom, the joining of the moral and the technical. Benner, Tanner, and Chesla (1996) in nursing also make this point—the joining of the technically correct with the morally right. The evaluator who is constructing a formal evaluation consultative structure such as a group or council should attend to this distinction, especially if the evaluator intends evaluation findings to be used for policy, decision making, and program improvement—all normative (and frequently moral) choices.

We present next our formal and working definitions of evaluation advisory groups and evaluation consultation groups. These have family relationships to our definitions of evaluation capacity building (Compton et al., 2002) and managing evaluation (Compton & Baizerman, 2009).

Definitions of Evaluation Advisory Group

Evaluation advisory groups can be formally defined, but also are defined in an everyday and working sense.

Formal Definition

An evaluation consultation/advisory group is an intentionally organized and managed formal structure composed of competent and willing individual members who have agreed to proffer (offer) useful advice on how to create, conduct, and use one or more evaluation studies. By *intentionally organized and managed* is meant membership is a political appointment and may also be a substantive appointment, where members are selected on the basis of, and invited for, their technical, process, or political knowledge, and for their position in the constituency of the program being evaluated, its host organization, and/or its funder. By *competent and willing* is meant members voluntarily participate in the committee, and they can provide good advice. By *proffer useful advice* is meant members provide advice that supports a particular purpose at hand. By *create, conduct, and use* is meant that these groups are constructed by evaluators (their managers or clients) to enhance the quality of an evaluation (technical concerns), the conduct

of the evaluation (process concerns), and the use of evaluation findings (utilization concerns).

Everyday Definition

An evaluation consultation/advisory group is a committee or group without governing authority or responsibility that is put together and managed by an evaluator for technical advice, legitimacy, credibility, and/or prestige, and is composed of individuals with expert evaluation knowledge and experience, and may also include those with expertise and/or experience in the problem or condition being evaluated, the program, service, or its host organization, and other relevant aspects of a particular evaluation, type of evaluation, evaluation function, or evaluation unit.

Working Definition

An evaluation consultation/advisory group is a group that is based on expertise and advises an evaluator on how to best conduct evaluation and use findings. It has no governing authority, nor can it impose its advice on the evaluator who manages it.

Toward Theorizing Evaluation Consultation Advisory Groups

Evaluation consultation groups/advisory groups are structures constructed by evaluators (their managers or clients) to enhance the quality of an evaluation (technical concerns), the conduct of the evaluation (process concerns), and the use of evaluation findings (use concerns) for decision making, policy, or program improvement. Technical concerns are about scientific and methodological issues; process concerns are about the politics and practices of doing a study; and use concerns are those that join what should/can be used from an evaluation to how to best accomplish use. Use concerns are technical, processual, and political. Advisory/consultation group members may be selected for their technical, processual, and/or political knowledge, and for their position in the constituency of the program being evaluated, its host organization, its funder, or the like. Committee membership is a political appointment and may also be a substantive appointment, where the member is chosen for his or her technical evaluation competence (Stevahn, King, Ghene, & Minnema, 2005) and/or processual know-how. Members can be insiders or outsiders of the program or host organization, and those with evaluation technical competence may be more likely to be outsiders (there are very few empirical data on this). Members can be seen as supplementing the evaluator's technical competence and bringing processual and political know-how to an evaluator who is him- or herself typically an outsider to the program they are evaluating and also to its organizational home. All committee members are in some

way stakeholders in the program, the host organization, the program's clients, its funders, or the evaluation itself.

Members bring these types of expertise (technical, processual, and political) to enhance the evaluation study and its use; their involvement can also serve to legitimate the study and the goal of evaluation use, and it can provide political muscle and protection for the evaluation and its use. Members may be selected because they have single or multiple types of expertise or because they represent—politically (agent of), symbolically (client or patient), or substantially (technical, processual, or political)—a constituency (stakeholder) or they possess a particular expertise. These groups are political structures as much as they are structures of expertise, and this includes the politics of expertise—different paradigms, different schools of thought, different ideas and strategies are present and to be negotiated. Types of expertise means forms of knowledge, including the technical and everyday, lay knowing, such as rules of thumb, and cookbook knowledge—the latter useful for the processual and political work of and within the committee.

Not all input by committee members meets the test of good advice. Some advice is flawed (Argyris, 2000) in that it is technically wrong or bad in terms of process or politics—that is, ineffective. Not all advice is helpful for the evaluator even when it is technically correct. Neither is all advice useful for the evaluator, in general or for a particular purpose at hand. The subject of advice giving, advice assessment, and advice taking is complex in an advisory/consultation context; the advice system can be a contested space. In this sense too, committee consultation to the evaluator is a political space, often of cross-cultural tension, if not confusion, where the cultural forms are professional expertise and lay interests. Even more complex is when the cross-cultural tensions are between or among professional expertise and lay expertise, as when the client or patient with disease and treatment experience in the program being evaluated sits on the same advisory group as physician specialists in that condition. The emergence of lay experts with lay expertise is part of a larger democratization of knowledge that has clear implications for advisory groups in several fields, including science policy (Steinbrook, 2004; Weingart, 1999) and scientific practice. Professionals no longer own and control legitimacy over technical and processual knowledge (Fischer, 2009), and they never had it over political know-how. A democratic urge is pushing advisory/consultation groups toward particular membership, and this in turn will have consequence on constructing and using evaluation advisory/consultation structures.

Theorizing EAGs/ECGs will be done more deeply in the final chapter after the case studies. Here, note only that when taken broadly, there are the interfaces between advice structure and government, and within this, between expertise and government/governing, and between professionalism and expertise and these two and governing (Fischer, 2009). This nexus of advice, expert and professional authority, and governing, that is, policy

formation, decision making, program development, and improvement, covers an increasing domain in complex, active, Western scientific, and technological societies, as well as in those societies where expertise is not based in Western science or technological competence, but in religious, spiritual, or other types of expertise, including experience, age, and group membership; and including social status, as, for example, group identity, or simply, citizen. Empirically based advice may be other than scientifically proven advice in the Western sense, being also what outsiders might call indigenous expertise (see Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). In this postmodern moment (Mabry, 2002), there are many sources of knowing and expertise that are given legitimacy, credibility, prestige, authority, and power. One such is "practice knowledge" and "practice wisdom" (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). How this is contested space is presented in some of the literature reviews that follow.

Advisory groups do their work consultatively, typically (our case studies tell us) by request of the evaluator and/or a funder or the program's management. In this, advisory groups are outsiders and hence are like outside consultants advising by request of an evaluator. The literature on consulting is thus relevant to our work and is taken up in the literature review below.

Theoretically consultation, expertise/competency, professionalism, the advice system, small groups, intraorganizational politics, and evaluation practice broadly understood are some of the sources for deepening understanding of evaluation advisory/consultation structures. Almost all of this literature lives outside the evaluation field, but is easily found. Also easy to find is the limited advisory literature in evaluation, to which we turn next.

Research on Advisory Groups

There is a limited evaluation literature on EAGs/ECGs. We review this limited section first, and then review literature on advisory groups more generally from other fields. Why include a long section about advisory/consultation groups that are not for evaluation? Because there is so little written in evaluation about the theory and day-to-day practice of actually constructing and working with these structures, literature from other fields can teach these structures, how they (can) work, and how one can adapt them for evaluation use.

A review of 43 U.S. evaluation texts (see Table 1.1) primarily published since 2000 found mention in 26 (61%) to some advisory structure—a board (10, or 23%), committee (8, or 18%), group (7, or 16%), panel (2) task force (1), steering committee (1), or working group (1). When referred to, emphasis was on the value of outside advice, especially evaluation expertise, on the insights from outsiders on the program being evaluated, and on the political utility of such groups for gaining legitimacy for the evaluator study. This is sound advice, but lacks deeper philosophical, theoretical,

Table 1.1. Sources of Research on Advisory Groups

Source	*Advisory Board*	*Advisory Committee*	*Advisory Group*	*Advisory Panel*	*Review Panel*	*Advisory Task Force*	*Expert Panel*	*Steering Committee*	*Working Group*	*No Mention*
Abramson and Abramson (2008)										×
Alkin (2004)			p. 121							
Baker (2000)										×
Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry (2011)				pp. 140, 141, 300	p. 141					
Bingham and Felbinger (2002)										×
Boulmetis and Dutwin (2005)										×
Braverman, Constantine, and Slater (2004)	p. 111									
Davidson (2005)				p. 215						
Edwards, Scott, and Raju (2003)			p. 61	p. 46						
Fink (2005)										×
Greenbaum (2000)										×
Grembowski (2001)	p. 232									
Grinnell, Gabor, and Unrau (2012)	p. 21[a]									
Guerra-Lopez (2008)										×
Hannum, Martineau, and Reinelt (2007)	p. 338	p. 484								
Hodges and Videto (2011)	pp. 9, 15, 109–110	p. 109–110								
Holden and Zimmerman (2009)							p. 14			
Kapp and Anderson (2009)	p. 124		p. 114							
Madans, Miller, Maitland, and Willis (2011)										×
McDavid and Hawthorn (2006)										×
Oermann and Gaberson (2009)										×

(*Continued*)

Table 1.1. (Continued)

Source	*Advisory Board*	*Advisory Committee*	*Advisory Group*	*Advisory Panel*	*Review Panel*	*Advisory Task Force*	*Expert Panel*	*Steering Committee*	*Working Group*	*No Mention*
Patton (2011a)		p. 98	p. 214							
Patton (2011b)	pp. 28, 69, 76, 78, 104[a]									
Patton (2002)										×
Patton (2008)		p. 219				p. 250				
Pirog (2009)										×
Posavac and Carey (2010)										×
Preskill and Tzavaras (2006)		pp. 57–58	p. 64		pp. 57–58			pp. 57–58	pp. 57–58	
Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004)		p. 392	p. 402							
Royse, Thyer, and Padgett (2009)	p. 337	p. 331								
Ryan and Cousins (2009)	p. 352									
Sanders (1994)										×
Smith (2010)										×
Spaulding (2008)										×
St. Leger and Schnieden (1992)										×
Stake (2004)										×
Steckler and Linnan (2002)										×
Stout, Evans, Nassim, and Raney (1997)										×
Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007)		p. 189		pp. 296, 665, 680						
Wadsworth (1997)										×
Weinbach (2005)										×
Wholey, Hatry, and Newcomer (2010)		p. 673	pp. 39, 642							
Yarbrough, Caruthers, Shulha, and Hopson (2010)										

[a]Phrasing searched for is mentioned, but is not necessarily relevant to evaluation advisory boards.

methodological, or political discussion about the advice system or advice structure.

Texts were found using general searches in Google Scholar, Google, Amazon.com, and the University of Minnesota library system. Publisher-specific searches were also run on major evaluation publishers: Sage Publications, Jossey-Bass, Wiley, and Lyceum Press. Book indexes and tables of contents were initially searched for the terms *advice*, *advisory*, *advisory board*, *advisory committee*, *advisory group*, *steering committee*, *committee*, and *working group*. Full text searches were made of texts available on Google Books (http://books.google.com). When such titles were available in tables of contents, texts were also searched for phrases like *stakeholder engagement*, *advisory board*, *participatory evaluation*, *evaluation management*, and so forth.

Few textbooks and handbooks available at the time of this survey contained any mention whatsoever of evaluation advisory boards/groups/committees. Indexes and tables of contents did not specifically mention these topics under *advisory*, *board*, *group*, or *committee*. When information was found, it was almost always identified under the topical areas *engagement of stakeholders*, *management of evaluation*, and sometimes *participatory/democratic evaluation*. No specific sections of any books examined thus far contain specific or substantive information about evaluation advisory boards. Characteristics of advisory boards examined seem to indicate that advisory boards are valuable, meaningful parts of many types of evaluation.

Characteristics included in one or more descriptions of evaluation advisory boards/groups/committees were:

- EABs have some to great decision-making authority over the evaluation (Braverman, Constantine, & Slater 2004, p.111).
- EABs are made up of members from a variety of backgrounds, often including and sometimes even dominated by clients of programs being evaluated (Braverman, Constantine, & Slater, 2004, p. 112).
- EABs often consider "important substantive issues, preliminary evaluation plans, draft evaluation methods or instruments, ongoing findings and results, and possible directions for policy and action" (Braverman, Constantine, & Slater, 2004, pp. 111–112; Fink, 2005, p. 19; Royse et al., 2009, p. 337; St. Leger & Schnieden, 1992, p. 17).
- EABs provide advice to evaluators on questions to ask or people to interview (Fink, 2005, p. 19; Wholey et al., 2010, p. 642).
- EABs review evaluation findings during and following the evaluation (Herman, Lyons Morris, & Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, 1978, p. 48; Wholey et al., 2010, p. 642).
- EABs make evaluation findings relevant and encourage utilization (Hannum et al., 2007, p. 338).
- EABs increase the validity of evaluation findings (Grembowski, 2001).
- EABs provide an aura of authority to evaluation findings (Rossi et al., 2004, pp. 392 and 402).

- EABs engage stakeholders and provide stakeholder ownership and buy-in to the conduct of the evaluation and evaluation results (Hannum et al., 2007, p. 338).
- EABs serve as a "member check" on results of evaluations (Herman et al., 1978, p. 48).
- EABs can provide support for internal evaluators under pressure from organization higher-ups and can prevent evaluation from turning into public relations (Patton, 2008, p. 219).
- EABs exist under several names, although such names do not always indicate that the group is an EAB. Examples include Evaluation Advisory Board, Evaluation Advisory Group, Evaluation Advisory Committee, Evaluation Task Force, Evaluation Working Group, Evaluation Steering Committee, Evaluation Team (Preskill & Tzavaras, 2006, pp. 57–58).

Advisory Groups in Other Fields

There is a small literature on formal advice structures in several fields. Much of this is about law, policy, rules, and practices for organizing and using required advisory groups (McKenzie, Neiger, & Thackeray, 2009; National Consumer Technical Assistance Center, 2005; Smith, 2007). One type of EAG/ECG is for citizens, typically nonexperts who "represent" the broad public (e.g., Encyclopedia of Government Advisory Organizations, 1973). Such structures follow citizen engagement, citizen involvement, and citizen participation requirements, and at times, demands that those who are to be affected by a policy or program "have a voice"(Kitsap County, 2011; San Diego County, 2008). These are not directly our concern, although attention is paid to how the advice structure is organized and, less so, the rationale for the structure and how it is used. When organized at the U.S. federal level, there are strict guidelines for advisory committees.

An introduction to U.S. federal guidelines for Federal Advisory Committees is spelled out in the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (Smith, 2007). Croley and Funk (1997) review FACA and its workings. Of likely limited interest to most evaluators, the Croley and Funk (1997) discussions of issues concerning the creation and administration of an advisory committee may be interesting, if not instructive for their practice. The rationale for outside advice to public employees is important in the context of a philosophy of government and the role of expertise for governmental policy and program development, and for research focus and quality (Fischer, 2009).

Beyond the legal guidelines about U.S. federal advisory groups, there is interest in the public sphere about advisory groups, both citizen (Schaller, 1964) and technical. Examples of work done on the interface between advisory groups and government include Balla and Wright (2001) on Congress, Brown (1955) on government and public advisory groups, and Preston and Hart (1999) on the nexus between political leaders and advisory systems.

Rayner (2003) looks at expertise and democracy in public-sector decision making. Little of this work gets at the practical concerns of practicing evaluators, but it does show the deeper, more complex issues surrounding citizen participation, expertise, advisory roles, and government; some of these can inform evaluation of citizen advisory structures and processes (Krieger, 1981; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). In the technical sphere, Renn, Webler, and Wiedemann (1995) write on evaluating models for environmental discourse in citizen participation. For a British view on advisory groups to public bodies, see Anderson (1995).

A second literature, one closer to our interests, reports on scientific advisory structures. These are often studies of different types of advice structures and practices used for natural science and are typically on national or international levels. A more focused text, cited above, is by Renn et al. (1995), on environmental citizen involvement and evaluation models. At the level of the big-picture policy issues of citizen involvement and expert advisory groups is a European Commission Study (Glynn, Cunningham, & Flanagan, 2003) of scientific advisory structures and scientific advice production methodologies. This is for the government reader who wants to think broadly and widely about advisory groups and how they could be helpful. A bit closer to everyday practice is the United Kingdom's House of Commons report (2006) on scientific advice, risk, and evidence-based policy making. A political reading of U.S. scientific advisory groups is in Steinbrook (2004), showing the partisan political (mis)use of such groups. Environmental science is one such contested space. Practical, specific tool kits for advisory groups are available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2009), Superfund Community Involvement; there are also fact sheets and lessons-learned material (Axelrod, 1990). This topic gets closer to everyday issues that are in the penumbra of evaluations of family planning services and other socially contested moral issues.

A third literature is more generic and is on advisory committees in a variety of fields, academic (Houghton, 2003; Nickel, 2012), business (Clark, 1995; Clark & Fincham, 2002; Clark & Salaman, 1998), and human services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The latter can be interesting because the advice givers may be clients of a social or health service. This brings these examples much closer to our interests, where it is not unusual to include employees and clients of a service or program on advisory/consultation groups.

In higher education, advisory committees are not unusual. For example, the University of Washington has a research advisory structure consisting of a Research Advisory Board, a Faculty Council on Research, and a Human Subjects Policy Board and Research Compliance and Integrity Committee. The University of Kansas Medical Center (2011) and the University of South Australia (2004) give details about advisory committee structure and practices. The medical and health domain also has a history of use of formal advisory committees.

Medical and health agencies use advisory/consultation structures for technical and stakeholder involvement (Berrow, 1993). This is true in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010) and in the United Kingdom (House of Commons, 2006), among many other countries. An example from the latter is a service users' research advisory group (Rhodes et al., 2002); another is on medical audit advisory groups (Houghton, 2003).

Moving to practical advice-giving, beyond the area of program evaluation advisory groups and across programmatic domains, a good overview of practical stories and models from the field of health planning in the United States is by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These reports include models and stories of community health planning advisory groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Their tool kit is clear, practical, and useful, but limited, and covers relevant topics such as the difference between a board of directors and an advisory group, "how to form an effective advisory group," and recruiting new members. An even better piece is on the website of San Diego County, California (USA) (San Diego County, 2008): "All you need to know about how to organize, plan, run, document and have a successful Advisory Committee Meeting." It includes guides and forms from a variety of organizations. Its self-evident limitation is that it is meeting focused and hence does not take up the construction of the EAG/ECG, what can/should/needs to be done between meetings, or the evaluation of the EAG/ECG. In contrast, similar examples for evaluation advisory groups are in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention piece (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

Some of what is missing in the San Diego and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services examples is found in the Art Beyond Sight website (www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/advisory-prac1.shtml), *Developing an Advisory Board: Practical Considerations*. Note the use of the word *board* instead of *committee*. This is a distinction with a difference depending on the domain of practice. The terms are interchangeable, as in this piece for nonprofits:

> Typically, the Board of Directors is the governing board for the nonprofit, responsible for hiring, firing and evaluating the . . ., identifying vision, mission, and values, setting strategic direction, and monitoring towards goal attainment in accordance with the strategic plan.

An advisory board is a committee or group without governing responsibility. They support the nonprofit's activities by providing information, resources, prestige (e.g., letterhead value), money, and so on, to the nonprofit.

This distinction also holds in business, the private sector (entrepreneur.com, *Selecting an Advisory Board: 6 Tips for Finding the Best Advisors for your Business*):

1. Recruit advisors for short-term objectives.
2. Advisors can help establish credibility.
3. Look for advisors in unusual places.
4. A free lunch is often better motivation than equity.
5. Don't treat advisors like employees or suppliers.
6. Set term limits.

Some of these points are easily transferable to evaluation advisory groups.

A point is made with these examples: There is much written about advisory groups in general in many fields, and much of it is good background reading and offers practical guidance for considering, organizing, working with, and, less so, evaluating an evaluation advisory/consultation committee. Although EAG/ECG practice may be undertheorized, it surely is neither underdiscussed nor underadvised. A related literature is less about advice structures as such, being focused on consultation structures and practices, especially in business (Clark, 1995). This is in the family of the advice system and its uses; it ties in experts and their presence in the consultation process (Argyris, 2000).

Consultation is an advice process in the family of the advice system: soliciting, assessing, evaluating, and using advice by outsiders and insiders on evaluation and on almost anything else. There is an analytical, critical literature in management on consultative advice (Argyris, 2000; Clark, 1995; Clark and Fincham, 2002; Clark & Salaman, 1998). Clark, alone and with colleagues, titles his work suggestively: "The Management Guru as Organizational Witch Doctor" (Clark & Salaman, 1996); "Telling Tales: Management Guru's Narratives and the Construction of Managerial Identity" (Clark & Salaman, 1998); and *Critical Consulting: New Perspectives on the Management Advice Industry* (Clark & Fincham, 2002). However, to Schein (2011), consultation is not advice, but is rather a form of helping. To Clark and Salaman (1998) it is. Together they clarify some of the issues for a more scholarly understanding of this everyday practice, the latter from sociology and the former more from psychology. Both sensitize the evaluator to the complex social, interpersonal, and psychological issues basic to understanding, providing, and using consultants. Although not specific to evaluation, questions about good versus flawed advice are significant and require evaluators' reflection, practices, and other actions. As with EAGs/ECGs, consultants can provide content, structure, and processual legitimacy, credibility, and prestige (and still be wrong!). Although not all consultants or advice givers are seen as (or aspire to be) "gurus," guru status itself may add value to the advice or work to blind the advice recipient to the truth value of the content. There are evaluation gurus: Caveat emptor! Finally note the title of the Clark and Salaman (1998) paper, with its focus on the effects on the manager of guru advice. Evaluators may want to attend to this: "I brought in—. (S)he said—, Therefore,—."

Advisory Groups and Expertise

Another relevant literature is on expertise in one's own and in related "communities of practice" or professions. Here, interest is in types, forms, and legitimacy of advice from the perspective of how to understand, select, screen, train, and use the expertise of advisory group members. Indeed, what is the expertise of each (potential or) actual member? Is that the expertise you want for the EAG/ECG, or might it be that you (really) want that person because of who he or she is? If EAGs/ECGs are expert advice structures, then a brief introduction to the topic of expertise could be useful.

There are enormous scholarly (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2004; Evans, 2008; Fischer, 2009), professional (Scarbrough, 1996), and practice (Benner et al., 1996) literatures on expert(ise) in many fields; we showed some of this in our *New Directions for Evaluation* issue on managing evaluation (Compton & Baizerman, 2009). The subject has great salience for evaluation advisory/consultation groups because one reason given for their existence and use is that members provide at least "expert advice" on conceptualizing, conducting, and using evaluation studies for accountability, decision making, policy formation, and program improvement.

On the surface, the expertise available from an EAG/ECG is about evaluation practice, broadly read, the theoretical, conceptual, and other everyday work of evaluation practice. Whoever can contribute to that may/should be solicited for advice. Does this mean only evaluators? Does it mean only professionally trained evaluators? Does it mean only evaluators professionally trained in a named evaluation education or training program? For example, is a doctorate in social work in a program that required two evaluation courses sufficient to qualify someone as an evaluator, and to accept that person's knowledge about evaluation as expert? All of this is both real and silly, and in practice far more real than silly because it is not only the advice content as such that matters with an EAG/ECG, but the legitimacy given (a) the advice giver, (b) the advice content, (c) the evaluation, (d) the EAG/ECG, (e) the evaluator, (f) their employer, and so on. There is much more here than is on the surface!

An EAG/ECG may be organized and used for other reasons beyond the purely/largely technical. A second purpose and use could be to assuage funders or other agencies; a third could be other uses such as accountability, program improvement, and policy development. How do these purposes influence what expertise is needed on the committee, and also the choice of whom to select?

An EAG/ECG is more than each advice giver or more than the set of potential advice content. It is a group to be managed (Scarbrough, 1996). There are individual members as persons and as experiences and as expertise, and there is the set of individuals who could become a social group or just a sounding board, or individuals with no pretense of groupness. As these possibilities are played out, consider too the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and

needs and wants of the evaluator who will (or not) organize and work with the EAG/ECG: What ethos, craft orientation, skills, and practices might they need/want to work effectively with the EAG? What should be their expertise?

Remembering the Argyris (2000), Schon (1983), and Argyris and Schon (1974) crucial distinction between espoused theories and theories in use, what are the theories in use of evaluators who work with EAGs/ECGs? The case studies and final chapter will explicate and discuss these. Remember the insight that expert practitioners, when asked about why they do as they do, often provide simple, incomplete, and even inaccurate answers because their expertise is so integral to who they are; they no longer can separate out or disaggregate the elements of their practice. Where does this leave us with regard to the evaluator and the EAG/ECG?

Applied Social Science, Policy Science, and Advice

The last relevant literature is a close relative to evaluation. Simply and incompletely put, applied social science is intended to be useful, and one form of use is providing advice (Beck, 2005; de Leon, 1988; Freeman & Rossi, 1984; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

During the 1980s, there were calls for social science to become more practical, that is, useful, and to become more helpful in solving social problems. Typically, this meant providing valid, useful empirical data to policy and other decision makers. Currently, the drive, the urge to engage civic and social problems and individual troubles (Mills, 1959), is named *empirically based practice*. All of this is about advice giving, whether it is the provision of data only, data and interpretation, and/or data-based suggestions or recommendations, such as policy advice (de Leon, 1988). In its aspiration, methodology, and practice, evaluation is closer to applied than theoretical social science. Mathison (2008, p. 189) frames the contrast (as) between evaluator and research this way:

- Evaluation particularizes, research generalizes.
- Evaluation is designed to improve something, while research is designed to prove something.
- Evaluation provides the basis for decision making; research provides the basis for drawing conclusions.
- Evaluation—so what? Research—what's so?
- Evaluation—how well it works? Research—how it works?
- Evaluation is about what is valuable; research is about what is.

Whether applied social science, research, or evaluation (in Mathison's view), data, whether quantitative or qualitative, are insufficient to drive advice or decisions until these are read, that is, interpreted. It is here where complications arise because interpreting data means making sense of it in a frame; that is, giving meaning is always giving meaning in/using a frame.

This hermeneutical process is basic to advice giving in that it works to transform information/data into a useful or practical frame—that is, make it useful. In this sense data as such are not self-evidently useful, but can be made useful for a particular purpose (at hand). Metaphor aside, data do not tell us what they mean for a particular purpose; the reader must make sense of the data and in an aesthetic, psychological, and sociopolitical sense, "make practical, usable sense." The reader can interpret the quantitative and qualitative data variously, reading it through social science or other theory or philosophy and/or through the demand of practical advice.

All of this points to philosophical (epistemological), methodological (hermeneutic), social structural (consultant–consultative organizations, formal relations, and the like), and individual issues, which frame and contextualize the use of social science and other data for practical advice giving by evaluators (and others) to government, social agencies, business, citizens, and whomever, for policy, program improvement, other decision making, accountability, and the like.

Evaluation advisory/consultation groups move into these reticula of issues when their advice is about more than what method, tool, or technique to employ in a study, and is, rather, about everything else, from how to think about the problem to using evaluation findings.

Conclusion

Where does this leave us? For the moment, and until after the case examples and discussion of these, we are left with a deeper appreciation of the advice system and a claim for why this *New Directions for Evaluation* issue is appropriate, even necessary. Advice structures and their use are not really as simple as these first appear. By the end of this issue, these structures and practices will be (more) clear and complex, as will be the practice of working with EAGs/ECGs.

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