Evaluating Program Implementation

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4
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What describes does not explain; patterns are not processes but are the results of them.
Constance Perin
Everything in Its Place

Process evaluations differ from outcome studies in the kinds of questions asked, the nature of the data collected, and the range of methods used to gather and analyze information to answer these questions. These differences are the basis for giving more emphasis in this chapter to issues that cut across social programs, and for providing a less intensive treatment of these issues in the case example, JTPA. In general, the chronology of this chapter follows that of chapters 2 and 3. The first section explores a conceptual framework for process evaluations, the second examines measurement challenges, the third focuses on methodology, and the fourth illustrates some of these issues through JTPA.

The emphasis on generic issues in this chapter fits the nature of studies of program implementation. Such studies have a substantially shorter history within applied research, the influences and relationships to be studied are not as well-identified or as easily defined, and a much broader range of methods can be used. Unlike outcome evaluations, there is no established set of traditional conceptual frameworks or research strategies on which to rely. The evaluator must develop a framework and draw from a wide spectrum of methods in tailoring a research approach and strategy to fit the particular questions guiding an evaluation, within the research resources available in a given setting.
Social programs are created to carry out social policies. More specifically, they are to achieve certain outcomes through the use of particular interventions, or change agents (Pressman and Wildavsky 1979; Shortell 1984). The typical reasoning is: “If we provide $X$, then $Y$ will result, where $X$ is the service(s) and $Y$ is the intended outcome(s).” These “if-then” relationships are a program’s “theory of cause and effect.” This theory proposes that particular kinds of program interventions will produce certain desired outcomes. In chapter 1 it was proposed that two kinds of program interventions, or “strategies,” are involved in this causal theory: an implementation strategy and a service strategy. The service strategy is frequently the intervention for which a program is best known. However, the way in which this service intervention is delivered, organizationally, is also an important part of the theory’s explanation of cause and effect.

In the past, program evaluations have focused mainly on the important relationship between the service intervention and program outcomes. Consequently, little empirical knowledge has been produced about the influence of the organizational context in which services are provided. Yet, those involved in the operation of social programs have long recognized that implementation structures and methods have significant effects on outcomes and are often more open to modification than is the more politically visible service strategy. Fortunately, a new interest in evaluating program implementation has developed over the past decade, stimulated by practitioner information needs and interests, and by the broadening of the applied research repertoire.

In this chapter, the success of a social program is assumed to be dependent on both the appropriateness of its theory about the relationship between interventions and outcomes, and how well this theory works when applied in a pragmatic program setting. It also assumes that it is possible that a program’s service intervention may be appropriate to the problem the program is to address, but the implementation strategy may be flawed, or that the implementation mode may be a feasible one, but the services provided are not appropriate to the problem.
To achieve the outcomes desired, it is assumed that both the implementation strategy and the service strategy must be appropriate to the problem and operate as intended. Furthermore, it is understood that problems in implementing a program and problems in exposing clients to the service intervention are directly amenable to change—that is, to modification—if sufficient information is available about the nature of these problems.

Although few implementation studies are designed specifically to test a program's cause-effect theory, there is a new appreciation of the importance of implementation studies, the complementary nature of information from process and outcome evaluations, and the utility of these different information sources in making policy recommendations and program improvements. In fact, the exploration of how a program's implementation and service interventions are being applied in local settings is now considered an integral part of comprehensive evaluations of social programs.

While impact evaluations inform us about the influence of a program's service strategy on outcomes, they do not explain why these outcomes occurred. Process evaluations fill this knowledge gap by analyzing the implementation strategy that contributed to the outcomes observed. A primary goal is to answer questions about how and why programs are working or not working as intended.

This chapter presents one approach, among a number of possible approaches, for conducting process evaluations. It is based on a simple principle: because most social programs are implemented by organizations, understanding what goes on inside and between organizations involved in the operation of a program is vital to explaining program performance. These organizational relationships are the "black box" that has traditionally been neglected in studying programs. In the approach taken here, a social program is viewed as an organizational system composed of interrelated parts that must work together to produce the outcomes desired.

In carrying out a process evaluation, the organization is broken down into its parts, and each part, as well as the relationship among parts, is
examined to learn more about implementation generally, or more specifically, the reasons for a particular level of performance. When process evaluations are used regularly to evaluate social programs, they are an essential management tool for explaining outcomes and resolving implementation problems, as well as for improving the general functioning of programs.

Consistent with this approach, a model of an organizational system and its environment is presented as a guide for evaluating implementation. There are alternative approaches for studying organizations, but the dominant approach is systems analysis, which is the basis for the model used here. This model (figure 4.1) is a synthesis of a variety of systems analysis approaches (Lyden 1975; Mintzberg 1979, 1983; Hollingsworth and Hanneman 1984; Grembowski 1983, 1986, 1989). The different components of the model are the “parts” of the system. The linkages represent the flow of resources and relationships among the parts. The model’s perimeter is the larger environment in which the organizational system operates.

Some of the parts of the organizational system, such as authority hierarchies, are structural, and some, such as actual organizational practices in utilizing program resources, are functional. The underlying assumption in the model, and in most system models, is that organizational effectiveness and efficiency depend on the degree of integration, or consistency, among the system’s parts, and between the system and its external environment. Therefore, the way in which a program’s implementation and service strategies are actually being applied can be studied by analyzing the characteristics of these components and their interrelationships, and the relationship between this organizational system and its environment.

The model may seem to have an air of finality about it, as if it perfectly matches what actually occurs in social programs (Mintzberg 1983). This impression is not intended. All models are simplifications of reality, which assist the evaluator in managing the study of inherently complex phenomena. Conceptual models of this kind sharpen the major features of organizations, making them easier to understand and analyze.

This chapter will give special attention to this framework for process evaluations, focusing more intensively than do the net impact and gross
Figure 4.1
The Organizational System

**Mission:**
the system's major purpose, goals, objectives

**Work:**
the system's means for achieving the mission

**Coordination:**
the system's means for integrating activity and maintaining optimal linkages with the environment

**Social Climate:**
the system's means for reducing internal tension and conflict which could interfere with goal achievement

**Inputs**
Information Resources

**Key Decisionmaking**
Personnel Decisions
Revenue Decisions
Program Access Decisions

**Feedback**
The Performance Control System

**Outputs**
Outcomes for clients
Outcomes for other individuals/groups
Outcomes for the organizational system

**Impact**
On the environment of the system
outcome chapters on this first theoretical step in the research process. This attention is justified by the lack of guidance from previous research about what should be studied in analyzing implementation, and the multiplicity of conceptual options from which an evaluator must choose. The general framework for an evaluation provides a context in which specific research questions can be developed. These questions then direct the selection of a research design and methods of data collection and analysis. Therefore, the development of a framework for research is the first and most important issue that must be addressed in any process evaluation.

The evaluator conducting net and gross outcome studies can draw from previously tested and refined frameworks that suggest a fairly circumscribed set of alternative research questions. Relating services to outcomes can be very complex, but the nature of the variables and relationships to be studied are often relatively straightforward. This is not the case in studying implementation. A wide variety of variables and relationships can be the subject of study, and there are few established frameworks to guide this kind of analysis.

The questions to be answered in net impact and differential gross impact studies require rigorous methodologies that are more dependent than process studies on the use of advanced statistical methods. On the other hand, because many process variables can only be measured qualitatively, process studies can draw from a broader continuum of established methods of data collection and analysis, such as the case study and the social survey.

Consistent with the strong emphasis in this chapter on the framework for conducting process evaluations, the components, or organizational parts, of the organizational model presented above are briefly described in the sections that follow.

**The Environment**

An organizational system can be viewed as having a boundary that separates it from the larger environment in which it operates. Everything outside this boundary can, for purposes of analysis, be considered part of the environment of the system. In this model, the organizational system
refers to those organizations within a particular service delivery area that are responsible for a program. These will be referred to here as *program organizations*. The system may involve one central organization with both administrative and service delivery functions, or it may involve an administrative organization with a number of subcontractors who deliver services, these arrangements being dependent on a program’s particular implementation strategy.

The *environment* includes other organizations in the same service delivery area which operate related programs or deliver related services, and organizations within and beyond the service area—such as state and federal agencies—that affect the system through such mechanisms as laws, policies, plans, regulations, or administrative directives. Because the environment normally involves influences over which program organizations have less than optimal control, it often represents fixed conditions that act as constraints on decisions and action, to which the organizational system must adapt in order to maintain itself. Information about the environment is, therefore, useful in understanding how external circumstances shape program implementation, why certain kinds of organizational behavior and program outcomes are defined as problems, and what impact the program may be having on the environment itself.

**Inputs, Key Decisions, and Outputs**

The environment is the source of *inputs* that the organizational system uses to achieve its goals—i.e., the goals of the program, and also its goals as a system. Inputs consist of *resources*, such as funds, staff, and clients, and *information*, such as data on the local economy.

The flow of inputs into the organizational system is governed by three kinds of key decisions: *revenue, personnel, and program access* decisions. Revenue decisions determine issues such as budget allocations for achieving goals. Personnel and access decisions determine issues such as who is hired and fired, and whether consultants are needed to provide expertise in certain areas. Access decisions determine issues such as the characteristics of clients entering the system. The system utilizes, or *converts*, inputs to produce desired *outputs*, such as the number of clients whose social or economic problems have been reduced after being
exposed to the program. Outputs, in turn, have an impact on the environment, either by ameliorating or exacerbating the problem a program is meant to address.

**Governance, Management, and Feedback**

The conversion of inputs to outputs is directed by governance—that is, by those individuals with ultimate responsibility for a program’s performance and the actions they take. Operational responsibility is usually delegated by governance to program management. A primary function of governance and management is to establish the goals of the organizational system and make sure they are achieved. Together, the output and impact components of the model measure program performance. Through the feedback process, program outcomes and their influence on the program’s environment inform governance about how well the system is performing. If governance receives information indicating that the system operating the program is not achieving its goals and objectives, the conversion process—the utilization of resources—may be altered to increase performance. If the impact of the system on its environment is problematic, new relationships may need to be developed with organizations outside the system.

**The Conversion Process**

The conversion process can be studied along four dimensions: mission, work, coordination, and social climate. In the model, the mission dimension consists of the goals and objectives of the organizational system, which in many cases are developed by governance through a formal planning process. The mission component has an important influence on the conversion process as the interface between the external environment and the other functions involved in the utilization of resources. Governance must interpret the system’s environment, define the system’s purpose in this environment, and design its work, coordination activities, and social milieu to accomplish that purpose. If gross errors are made with respect to defining the mission, these errors are often repeated in designing and monitoring other functions.
The working assumption here is that if the organization is to operate properly, a "fit"—or consistency—must be maintained between the environment and the mission of the system, and between the mission and the other dimensions of the conversion process.\(^1\) An essential part of studying the conversion process is determining the extent to which a proper fit exists, and identifying what factors are enhancing or acting as deterrents to maintaining consistency among components. The concept of integration or consistency will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The *work dimension* is an organizational system's major means for goal achievement, i.e., the major activities it undertakes to achieve its mission. This dimension includes responsibilities such as the procurement of resources, the development of work flow procedures, the design and maintenance of the pathway clients follow through the system, and the provision of services to these clients. The work dimension, representing essential organizational and service delivery functions for achieving key goals, is critical to study in examining the implementation of a program's distinctive service delivery strategy.

As suggested previously, the *coordination* dimension addresses the necessary integration of an organizational system's mission with its work effort to produce the intended outcomes. In studying this dimension, the evaluator would analyze, for example, the allocation of responsibility among various divisions and personnel within the system, communication patterns within its authority structure, and processes for developing policies and procedures. In many social programs, coordination also involves a number of other factors: internal mechanisms for coordinating the activities of an administrative agency with those of subcontractor organizations providing services; service delivery activities across subcontractors; and the system's administrative and service delivery activities with those of important organizations in the environment. The way in which coordination is handled is considered to have a strong effect on the operation of the system and is, therefore, a significant area for study.

The last dimension, *social climate*, refers to the interpersonal internal environment of the organizational system, such as the social norms and
professional orientations of staff, staff and client morale, the motivation of staff to achieve the mission, and the level of tension and conflict within the system. This dimension has a special relationship to the other three parts of the conversion process: to achieve its goals and survive in its environment, the system must define its purpose, determine what kinds of efforts are required to realize it, and apply these strategies with a minimum amount of interdivisional and interpersonal strain (Lyden 1975).

Conflicts inevitably occur as resources are utilized. Such conflicts can undermine a system's effectiveness and threaten its continuation. Therefore, organizational systems operating programs seek to maintain tensions and conflicts at reasonable levels through various mechanisms, such as involving clients and other interest groups in planning processes, or pursuing an "open-door" management style. Inasmuch as the social climate dimension plays an important role in accomplishing organizational missions, its investigation provides useful information to the evaluator.

In summary, an analysis framework is proposed that treats the organizational system operating programs as composed of a number of essential parts that articulate with one another and with the outside environment to affect the way in which programs are implemented. Process evaluations can usefully focus on each of these component parts, and on the level of integration and consistency across them.

In the next sections, measurement and methodological issues in applying this, or any other, model in process evaluations are discussed.

Measurement Issues in Process Evaluations

Several factors frequently motivate process evaluations: the desire to resolve a specific performance problem, such as increasing the number or changing the composition of clients served; the desire to carry out a comprehensive review of a program’s operations prior to the beginning of a planning cycle; or the wish to explain the results of an outcome evaluation. In some cases, process studies will be limited to those aspects of organizations that have received the most political attention. Some
evaluations may be confined to particular components that are known to be problematic. Other process studies may emphasize components that are working well, with the purpose of identifying and learning more about those features that are most critical to replicate elsewhere. The more comprehensive process evaluations will look at all components of the system and their interrelationships.

Regardless of the rationale for conducting process studies or establishing their comprehensiveness, there is a key difference between process and outcome evaluations that has an impact on the measurement of implementation influences and on the methodologies used in studying them. Two goals of all program evaluations are (1) to sort out what is most responsible for program outcomes and how these influences may be affecting outcomes, and (2) to make recommendations for correcting, sustaining, or improving outcomes by making changes in these critical factors. In most programs, despite the simplicity of their descriptions in legislation, these influences are enormously complex. Both the implementation strategy and the service strategy involve an array of more specific treatments. The relationships among these treatments-within-treatments are also complex.

In conducting outcome studies, evaluators have been able to use previous research to narrow the range of variables studied, with some confidence that the most significant factors have been included. Even so, there has been a tendency in some outcome studies to assume that this carefully selected set of variables, representing particular client characteristics, services, and outcomes, are the only ones of importance. In truth, the effect of a program’s implementation strategy on outcomes can never be totally separated from the effect of its service strategy. Implementation factors are inevitably confounded with service treatments in producing program effects. Therefore, comprehensive evaluations look jointly at both kinds of interventions.

The selection of the most important influences in implementing a program have not benefited from the long research history characteristic of outcome evaluations. A host of factors is involved, and evaluators have not had enough experience in studying them to conclude, with the same level of confidence, which of these influences tend to be the most
important in producing outcomes—either independently, or in combination with the service treatments.

If we are not able to distill a set of variables for studying implementation, then process evaluations must, of necessity, be approached quite differently than outcome studies in terms of the questions directing them, the measurement of the influences implied in these questions, and the methodologies used in answering such queries. Otherwise, the evaluator will be making premature judgments about the critical influences, and may select the wrong ones to study.

Given this context, it is still essential in process evaluations to formulate a manageable set of general research questions, determine how feasible it is to answer them in terms of staff, data, and cost, and consider the measurement and methodological issues involved. A conceptual model, such as the organizational model suggested here, is a useful tool for focusing a process evaluation, highlighting those aspects about which there is some knowledge or clue, and tailoring the study to the concerns and interests of evaluation sponsors and users.

**Measurement Approaches**

The choice of variables, or influences, to study in process evaluations flows from the research questions being asked. Looking at the components of the model, it is obvious that even though the research questions may be clear-cut, the definition of “organizational parts” and “relationships” is a very difficult task.

Although the definition of treatments and outcomes presents problems in outcome studies also, another difference between process and outcome evaluations involves the ease with which the variables selected for study can be defined and measured empirically. Again, outcome studies can rely on previous research, which typically directs the evaluator to a circumscribed set of quantitative indices. Many of these are accessible from ongoing administrative data systems—i.e., treatments, such as “classroom training” and “on-the-job training,” and outcomes such as jobs obtained, hours worked, wages received. These indices can be extracted and inserted readily into bivariate (two-variable) and multivariate (multiple-variable) statistical analyses. In this respect, outcome
studies can more efficiently simplify the complex relationships between service interventions and outcomes than process studies can simplify the complex relationships among different aspects of program implementation. Although process evaluators may be able to develop measures that are just as accurate representations of implementation variables as indices used to define service and outcome factors, they do not have the luxury of using ready-made, easily obtainable indices that economize the research effort.

Therefore, the first challenge in using the model, and one of the greatest research hurdles in implementing process evaluations, is the definition and measurement of those characteristics of the components of the organizational system that are the major focus of a particular evaluation. As with the development of a conceptual framework, this challenge must also be resolved at the front end of the research process. The research questions based on this framework should clearly direct the evaluator to those organizational components and relationships of greatest interest. Then the issues are: how will the major variables be defined, how will indices to represent them be developed, what research designs are appropriate, and what methods can be used in studying an organizational system?²

In general, process evaluations pose different measurement and methodological issues than do gross outcome or net impact evaluations because of differences in research purposes and information uses, the kinds of data collected, and the range of methods used to analyze these data.

**Evaluation Purposes**

Social programs are abstract concepts until applied in actual settings. In the process of translating these abstractions organizationally, the intended implementation mode and service strategy are inevitably molded by organizational forces. It is the purpose of process evaluations to examine how well a program’s implementation strategy and service intervention have been put into practice within the intent of a program’s authorizing legislation, and to make a judgment of the role of implementation in producing program outcomes. The information obtained from...
such an examination and judgment provides a basis for decisions not only about what needs to be changed in improving a program, but how changes might best be made.

As Patton (1987) points out, however, choosing questions to answer in process studies requires the acceptance of a tradeoff between breadth and depth. A few questions may be studied in great depth or many in less detail. The former may provide clear results on specific issues but fail to address other important concerns. On the other hand, collecting less data on a wider range of issues often reduces confidence in the findings. Breadth is often sacrificed for depth when the goal is to explain an outcome or gain insight into the cause of a problem. Identifying a few important questions to study may be critical if it is felt that these issues affect other characteristics of implementation.

The purpose of outcome evaluations, in contrast, is to determine the specific relationship between the service strategy and outcomes—ideally, whether the service intervention has been responsible for the outcomes or these outcomes have been due to some other set of influences or to chance. The information from outcome studies informs policymakers and administrators about the effectiveness of the service intervention, which is critical to decisions about who should be served in the future, and with what mix and sequence of services. This purpose and use is essential, but narrower in scope than the focus of most process evaluations.

**Qualitative vs. Quantitative Measures**

The task of developing operational definitions and indices for key variables in studying the components of a program’s organizational system is also much more difficult in process evaluations because a great deal of the data on implementation are qualitative in nature. Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, the attitudes and behavior of significant participants within and outside the system may need to be defined and measured. Ways to measure the content of decisions, the characteristics of decisionmaking entities and processes, and the nature of service delivery policies and practices also may be necessary. The personal attributes and actions of clients, management, and other actors may need to be defined and classified.
For example, "profiles" of individuals and services may have to be developed using a combination of indices of different variables, such as profiles of the different kinds of clients entering the service delivery system, those provided services, and the combinations of services they received. Defining the "hard-to-serve" client population, for instance, may require the development of a set of weighted social and economic indicators that can be quantified.

However, quantifying variables that are normally described by using qualitative measures, such as the hard-to-serve, require the evaluator to make arbitrary decisions about which indices are the most valid and useful, how highly correlated are these indices with one another, and which should be given more weight than others in representing the phenomenon being studied? Many implementation factors, such as service delivery practices, cannot or should not be quantified. The tradeoff is that qualitative information is necessarily classified and analyzed more subjectively, with less reliance on the use of the statistical methods that characterize many outcome studies.4

Therefore, implementation evaluations cannot depend as much as outcome studies on existing management information systems (MISs). The measures in these automated information systems tend to be simple quantitative data elements that satisfy reporting needs. They are often restricted to a small number of variables and are frequently limited to single indices for these variables. But an MIS can be an important resource for outcome evaluators. For certain aspects of implementation, ongoing monitoring/reporting systems can be of some assistance to process evaluators as well. Certain aspects of implementation are quantifiable—particularly the characteristics of the client flow through the service delivery pathway. Some characteristics of the client pathway, such as the number and kinds of clients enrolled, assessed, and assigned services, are already being collected in these information systems. Additional questions on intake and follow-up forms can capture some of what is currently absent from these MIS systems.

Statistical analyses of these data can then be carried out to determine some of the details of the conversion process (see figure 4.1). The chapter on gross outcome evaluations covers this aspect of process studies, and
will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. However, despite the ability to use quantitative measures for studying certain elements of implementation, the fact that many of the variables studied in process evaluations cannot be measured quantitatively means that the evaluator must use innovative measurement approaches and make a careful selection of a combination of methods for analyzing this information (Patton 1987; Shortell 1984).

In summary, there are several critical measurement issues in studying implementation: (1) the extent to which useful, valid, and reliable quantitative data elements are available for defining important variables; (2) the extent to which a program’s ongoing MIS contains reliable, extractable, and accurate data on these variables; and (3) the extent to which useful qualitative definitions and indices of variables can be developed and collected for factors that do not lend themselves to quantification.

Methodological Issues in Process Evaluations

Performing a process evaluation within the organizational approach proposed is much like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. After the evaluation’s questions are identified, definitions and measures of the important factors are developed, a research design is selected to guide sampling, data collection, and data analysis, and information is collected about each component of the system and its environment, the process evaluator must integrate this information to provide insights about interrelationships within the organizational system and the system’s relationship to its environment. These insights will help the evaluator make a judgment of the efficiency and effectiveness of program implementation, and its probable influence on outcomes.

The integration of this kind of information by a researcher or research team is a combination of art and science, since precise statistical estimates cannot be made about most of these relationships. It is important, given this constraint, that the researcher select the most rigorous methodology possible, in order to make sound judgments based on the information available, and to have a credible basis for defending
these judgments. Therefore, the selection of a research design is the second challenge in planning studies of program implementation.

The purpose and scope of the evaluation, the nature of the research questions, and what is already known about the key variables and their relationships effectively shape the choice of a research design that will guide the sampling of subjects, data collection methods, and methods of information analysis. Other important considerations are the kinds of data available, their quality and accessibility, and their appropriateness for statistical analysis. Whether information to answer the research questions must be freshly collected, such as through questionnaires or interviews, or is available from existing administrative data systems is also a determinant of design decisions.

The Research Design

A prerequisite for deciding what research design is most appropriate and feasible is a clear understanding of the research questions to be answered. This includes decisions about what factors are to be studied and what relationships between them are to be analyzed. In chapter 1, research designs that guide evaluation activities in answering the research questions are classified into four general categories: exploratory, descriptive, quasi-experimental, and experimental. The guide for research that most closely approximates scientific principles is experimental design, which involves the random assignment of research subjects into “program-treated” and “nonprogram-treated” groups. The outcomes of these two groups are compared statistically to determine whether the program’s service intervention is producing intended results.

Experimental designs are appropriate, however, only when there is substantial knowledge of the key independent and dependent variables, which can be measured quantitatively with little error. Otherwise these designs may be inefficient and may direct research attention to the wrong variables. These designs are the preferred choice for net impact studies in fields such as employment and training. The U.S. Department of Labor’s current national field study, the JTPA Experiment, is an example (Bangsor et al., 1988). In some programs, however, such as certain mental health programs, the literature may be equally extensive but some
of the critical outcomes—increased self-esteem, more realistic life expectations, and improved quality of life—are very difficult to measure and quantify.

Experimental designs are not always appropriate for studying the effects of service interventions on outcomes in such programs. In some cases the evaluator may be forced to develop quantitative "proxies" for mental states and behavior that have questionable accuracy. In other programs, new interventions may be tested for the first time and lack a substantial history of evaluation. Experimental designs are not appropriate where the major variables of interest are yet to be identified or clearly defined.

With many social programs, quasi-experimental designs employing a comparison group are a useful fall-back when the political or organizational context of a net impact evaluation precludes withholding a service treatment from one group of eligible clients. These designs are no more appropriate than experimental approaches, however, if either the services or the outcomes are difficult to measure and cannot be incorporated easily into statistical analyses.

In practice, process evaluations primarily utilize exploratory and descriptive designs. These designs reflect a wide range of research approaches, from very simple case studies to very technical social surveys. Any given process evaluation is likely to involve a customized design that combines more than one type of approach within these two general types of designs, based on the questions directing the study and what organizational components and relationships are of greatest interest.

For example, customizing an evaluation of the implementation of a basic educational skills program might involve an exploratory design for studying program decisionmaking, a simple descriptive design for studying the nature of program participation, and a more sophisticated design involving statistical analysis of client flows. Studying governance and management, for instance, involves a range of organizational behaviors—negotiating, decisionmaking, selecting rules and regulations, and monitoring compliance. It also involves structures that permit and shape this behavior—official policymaking bodies, power structures, policy statements, manuals, and reporting requirements. To study
Evaluating Program Implementation

247

this component of the model, the evaluator may initially want to identify key factors by conducting in-depth interviews of governance and management. This may be followed by a more specific and detailed descriptive survey of program decisionmakers, i.e., those whose decisions have an effect at the client level, and clients themselves.

An innovative, customized approach is essential in conducting a comprehensive process evaluation that focuses on all the components of the organizational model and key relationships among them. This may involve an integration of several different exploratory or descriptive designs focusing on different aspects of the organizational system to be studied. The information yielded by this customized approach must then be utilized by the evaluator, based on clearly defined criteria, in judging the "fit" achieved among the different parts of the organizational system and the relationship between the program organization and its environment. This requires a great deal of research and program experience, creativity, and a consideration of all the methodological options.

In conclusion, exploratory process evaluations are important predecessors of outcome studies, for they can identify influences in the organizational system that affect program outcomes. Exploratory designs are also useful in identifying key implementation variables for inclusion in subsequent impact evaluations. The goal of these exploratory studies is to refine the research questions that could subsequently be studied, and to pin down the most important influences to study, using more rigorous designs that rely on quantitative methods.

Sampling

In studying program implementation, we are not only interested in individual program participants, who are usually the focus of most outcome evaluations. The research subjects in process evaluations may be program staff, such as directors, planners, managers, and caseworkers, or individuals outside the program's organizational system who interact with participants or the system but are not formal targets of the program's interventions, such as participants' families, other service providers, employers, or school personnel. Or the "subjects of study" may be far less tangible aspects of the system or its environment, such as...
the components and processes of the organization. Therefore, the question—who or what is to be sampled—requires a more complex answer in process evaluations than in outcome studies. Most process evaluations seek information on a combination of human subjects and a range of organizational phenomena.

When individuals are the subject of study, it is often more economical in terms of time, effort, and money to study a small group of individuals who represent the larger population of interest, such as a sample of personnel who are representative of a program's entire case management staff, or a sample of program participants who are representative of a particular subpopulation within the target group. The way in which the evaluator selects these "representatives," and how many are selected, is critical in preventing bias and in obtaining accurate estimates, as discussed in chapter 1. If the process evaluator wants to draw a sample of those individuals who best represent a larger group, basic sampling principles are necessary to reduce bias and allow for the generalization of results to the same program in a different setting, or to other similar programs (Kish 1965).

Probability sampling is an efficient method to use in studying client flow along the service delivery pathway, mainly because of the large number of clients involved and the ability to list all individuals in the population of interest. This form of sampling assures the evaluator that results are representative of the larger population.

Where the general characteristics of the entire caseload are the main interest, simple random sampling is useful. This allows each case in a population—and all combinations of these elements—an equal chance of being included in the sample.

More often, the evaluator will want information broken down by demographic, labor force, or other characteristics. In this case, a stratified random sample is appropriate. Here the population is divided into various categories, or "strata," and a simple random sample is drawn from each stratum. These subsamples are then joined to form the total sample. For example, in studying the characteristics and patterns of client flow through a service delivery system, the process evaluator may want to know the experiences of different client groups. Each group
serves as a stratum, and a separate random sample of clients is drawn from each stratum.

Probability sampling, however, is not appropriate for gathering much of the information needed in process evaluations. Studies of program implementation may focus on only a small number of individuals or organizations; for instance, those policymakers or organizations that appear to have the broadest effect on a program. In this situation, a wide variety of nonprobability sampling techniques will be more appropriate and useful. *Purposive sampling* is often the most feasible choice (Patton 1987). This involves a careful selection of each individual or entity to be included in the study sample using a set of criteria based on the purposes of the evaluation and the questions to be answered by it. This is a more subjective strategy but is often better suited to the information needs of process evaluations. For example, selecting a "panel of experts" who the evaluator has reason to believe is representative of individuals knowledgeable about a given phenomenon can be more economical, convenient, and useful than questioning a larger group selected through random sampling.  

The problem with nonprobability sampling, however, is that the evaluator has little basis for estimating how representative the information obtained really is. Interpreting the results of evaluations confined to this kind of sampling must therefore be properly qualified. In practice, process evaluations usually involve a combination of the two basic kinds of sampling methods. Integrating information obtained by these different means requires inductive thinking and often produces insights not otherwise available. A wealth of excellent beginning texts is available on sampling issues, strategies, and specific techniques. Some of these are listed in the reference section following this chapter.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

As discussed earlier, studies of implementation tend to utilize an exploratory or descriptive design, and more often, a combination of these approaches. The purpose of exploratory designs is to gather beginning ideas about a particular phenomenon, identify its most important elements and interrelationships, and formulate more precise questions for
further study. Although some of the characteristics of program implementation have been studied fairly extensively, such as management and service delivery, the more distinctive features of a program—i.e., those characteristics intended to be novel, such as the use of performance standards for monitoring program outcomes in JTPA—may not have been well-studied. These new features are expected to have a greater effect than previous program strategies and, therefore, are an important area of inquiry. Exploratory approaches are most useful in examining these unique program characteristics.

An exploratory design calls for relatively unstructured methods for collecting data and usually nonstatistical methods for analyzing this information. Data collection methods such as participant-observation, oral history techniques, and panel-of-experts strategies, which resist reliance on prior assumptions and preconceived frameworks, are examples of standard data-gathering strategies appropriate to exploratory studies. The information collected in this way is processed, distilled, and integrated by the evaluator within the questions of interest.

Where knowledge of a phenomenon already exists, a continuum of descriptive designs can be used in answering process questions. In general, the purpose of descriptive studies is to determine associations among important factors—how these influences are related—which goes beyond the intent of exploratory studies, but stops short of determining cause-effect. Relationships may be assessed using statistical or nonstatistical evidence. Which source of evidence is the more “truthful” depends on the quality of research design: whether the right variables were studied; whether these factors were appropriately defined and measured (either quantitatively or qualitatively); whether these measures were collected reliably and in accordance with the sampling strategy; and whether the resulting data were appropriately analyzed.

The least sophisticated descriptive studies can be illustrated by relatively informal surveys of selected participants, staff, or relevant others, using flexible interview schedules, or the use of a small set of general interview questions chosen to gather in-depth information related to the overall evaluation questions. Collecting this kind of “open-ended” information requires a flexible classification scheme for analyzing data
and, ultimately, a great deal of study and integration of information by the evaluator. The advantage of data collection and analysis flexibility is that the evaluator can make immediate adjustments in both the structure of an interview, based on how an interview is unfolding, and in the way information from interviews is coded or classified, based on the nature of the data emerging from the interviewing process.

The most sophisticated descriptive designs, which permit advanced statistical analysis, require much more structured forms of data collection—for example, standardized questions with quantitative response categories. A number of different survey techniques are possible. Examples are one-time surveys that measure a study sample at only one point in time, and panel surveys—often referred to as longitudinal surveys—that measure the same group of individuals or organizations at various points over an extended period of time. Surveys can differ substantially in terms of the number of people studied, the sophistication of the information-gathering mechanism, the complexity of the information obtained, and the kinds of analysis techniques that are appropriate.

The automated management information systems in social programs used to inform governance, management, and funders about the organizational system are essentially surveys based on intake questionnaires filled out by clients and update forms completed by staff. In client surveys, information is typically gathered on each client at standardized decision points along the service delivery pathway. A new feature of many programs is a one-time, follow-up panel survey of clients (and sometimes others, such as family members or employers) utilizing questionnaires or telephone interviews. These standard administrative data collection techniques typically produce a narrow range of information. Their advantage, however, is that the data are quantified and can be analyzed using statistical techniques.

It is clear, however, that the data collection and analysis choices that must be made by the evaluator are more complicated in process studies. The options are greater, there are different sets of risks and benefits (in terms of bias and utility) involved in each decision, and it is difficult to identify all the important variables at the outset; i.e., many must be discovered as a study progresses. For example, if the researcher wants to
study the content of and motivation for particular policy directives affecting implementation, administrative records are an important source of information. Some of this information can even be quantified, such as how many decisionmakers took a particular position, how many policies were issued and on what subjects, and how many of these were actually implemented.

In many cases, however, information from records must be extracted laboriously, using only a general framework for identifying the relevant influences. The evaluator can supplement this information by interviewing program policymakers, or gathering information from decisionmakers outside the system who are likely to have a special knowledge of program policies and policymakers, using open-ended or more structured techniques. Most typically, the evaluator will choose a mix of data collection and analysis strategies. The nature of the mix depends on the kinds of information available, the kinds of evaluation resources that exist for gathering and analyzing this information, and the quality of data in automated program information systems (Patton 1987; Mintzberg 1983b).

Statistical analysis techniques are powerful tools in the researcher's mix of strategies. Therefore, opportunities to obtain high quality quantitative data must be exploited. Statistical techniques can provide the following kinds of information: (1) information about central tendencies, such as what staff attitudes may be most typical; (2) information about variations, such as whether clients are similar or different regarding self-selection into a program or some other characteristic; (3) information to compare central tendencies and variations across groups, such as how the rate of self-selection may vary between white and minority clients; and (4) information about relationships, such as whether selection into a program may be related to (but not necessarily caused by) staff attitudes and behavior.

As in outcome studies, it must be kept in mind that statistically significant relationships are statements of probability, not certainty. Making causal inferences requires evidence beyond establishing the existence of a relationship, or an association. In nonexperimental studies, such as most process evaluations, the evidence is not sufficient to claim
causality, even though findings may be statistically significant. Since process studies typically involve a combination of statistical and nonstatistical techniques, the evaluator must be careful to judge the importance of statistically significant results in the context of the results obtained by other means, such as through content analysis or some other form of classifying information for analysis.

In summary, a wide variety of data collection and analysis methods can be useful in process evaluations, since the issues studied are substantially different and considerably broader than in most outcome studies. The process evaluator must be familiar with the full research repertoire, selecting a combination of methods that best fit the nature of the questions being asked and the kinds of information desired from a particular evaluation. Because there are many more methodological choices available than in outcome studies, the researcher must take an inventive approach in customizing sampling, data collection, and analysis to the specific purpose of an evaluation. The interpretation of findings yielded by this customized approach will usually necessitate a unique integration of information by the evaluator within an overall analysis framework. Fortunately, process evaluators now have an abundance of methodological material in the research literature to aid them in this task (see references for selected sources).

**Application of the Organizational Model to the Case Example: JTPA**

It is now important to illustrate how a process evaluation can be conducted by applying the organizational model to an existing program. This illustration will focus exclusively on Title II of the federal job training legislation, which is JTPA's major employment and training program for adults and youth. The Title II program is implemented in local service delivery areas (SDAs). Governance occurs through a Private Industry Council (PIC), composed of members from the public and private sectors but dominated by the latter sector as mandated by Congress.

The administrative agency of an SDA, which is responsible for operating the JTPA program, frequently decentralizes service delivery to
other organizations in the community through performance-based or other kinds of contracts. Sometimes PICs and administrative entities are one and the same. Where a PIC and an administrative entity have separate functions, the PIC is primarily responsible for local employment and training policy, coordination, and program oversight, and the administrative organization has operational responsibilities. Mayors are expected to work with PICs as part of a public/private partnership.

Typically, the PIC/local-elected-official partnership, the administrative agency, and the contracting private and nonprofit community agencies that may deliver services comprise the local organizational system of greatest interest in process evaluations. These are the organizations ultimately responsible for program implementation and performance. The main features of JTPA implementation are described in the appendix. To add to the reality and increase the utility of the application of the organizational model, insights and examples from actual studies of program implementation will be woven into this application. (Comptroller General 1985; Cook et al., 1984a, 1984b; Walker 1984, 1985.)

Each component, or group of components of the model, will be discussed separately, in the same chronological order as they were introduced in the first section. Among the many potential influences, measures, and methods that deserve consideration, only a selected few can be covered under each set of components. Three kinds of issues will be addressed under each part of the model: conceptual, measurement, and methodological. Because of its importance, the greatest attention is given to the conversion process.

**Studying the Environment**

**Conceptual Issues**

The environment of an SDA includes local conditions, such as the local economy, as well as other JTPA agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. These agencies form a complex web of organizational relationships that often influence—and, at times, dictate—how the SDA’s programs are implemented. Specific aspects of an SDA’s environment that should be included in a process evaluation are reviewed briefly below.
The Immediate Environment of Programs

The chief task of the evaluator in studying influences emerging from the environment is to identify the factors that operate closest to the program and, therefore, have the greatest effect on its resources. This level of the environment is the city, town, or rural area surrounding the organizations implementing the program. The most important community influences are social, economic, and political, such as labor market characteristics, market trends, demographic characteristics, incidence of social problems, and attributes of local government.

For example, information on the area's poverty population, labor force, and wage structure provides a context for understanding the practical limits placed on program implementation, how program organizations accommodate local conditions and circumstances, and the significance of program outcomes. If, for instance, wages are generally depressed for women, or high-paying jobs scarce, it may be unrealistic to expect that changes in program implementation will improve female participants' situations.

The Inter-SDA Environment

Local organizational systems are influenced also by relationships among SDAs, which may range from a high level of coordination and cooperation to severe tension and conflict. Good relationships among local-level organizational systems may support greater independence for SDAs vis-a-vis the implementation of state policies. Disruptive competition for state incentive money, for example, can undermine collaborative action to pursue local-level goals. Therefore, process evaluations should explore the nature of this particular set of relationships and its potential impact on program operations.

The State Environment

Studying state-level organizations as a source of environmental influences should again involve an investigation of social, economic, and political characteristics. A major emphasis, however, should be on the network of state organizations that develop state program policies, assume state-level administrative responsibilities, craft state program
plans, formulate criteria for monitoring coordination among state agencies and institutions relevant to employment and training programs, make statewide assessments of local performance, and sometimes evaluate SDA program implementation and outcomes.

The Federal Environment

As with state-level organizations, the study of federal environmental influences involves questions such as the following:

1. What social, economic, and political influences are operating nationally to affect federal employment and training policy and practice?
2. What are the specific purposes, policies, rules and regulations, administrative directives, and the actual organizational practices of relevant agencies at this level, such as, the federal agencies and the Congress, which have an impact on SDA implementation?

Although most evaluations of local-level program implementation cannot afford to devote much time to federal-level influences, it is important to acknowledge the larger framework within which implementation occurs.

Interaction Between the Organizational System and Its Environment

The model assumes that program outcomes and what happens in implementing programs are not totally at the mercy of the environment. The characteristics of local implementation have an impact on the environment as well. While this reciprocal relationship is difficult to study, it is a significant aspect of comprehensive process evaluations.

Measurement and Methodological Issues

Measurement Issues

Two kinds of environmental influences, among a wide range of potential variables, are important to define and measure: (1) socioeconomic and political factors, and (2) structural and functional characteristics of state and federal organizations. Table 4.1 provides examples of environmental indicators for these dimensions.

Demographic information on the area’s poverty population and labor force, and labor market information on the wage structure of local jobs
Evaluating Program Implementation

Table 4.1
Examples of Environmental Indicators

I. Demographic and Political Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Local economy</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>A Priority given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>to employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income</td>
<td>Population by</td>
<td>training by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average wage rate</td>
<td>• age</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation rate</td>
<td>• race/ethnic group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>• sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insurance caseloads</td>
<td>• education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number unfilled jobs</td>
<td>• religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Market trends</td>
<td>Social problems</td>
<td>B Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building permits</td>
<td>Crime rate</td>
<td>between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new businesses</td>
<td>Alcoholism/drug abuse rate</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business closings</td>
<td>School dropout rate</td>
<td>and business,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households with female</td>
<td>service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>head (%)</td>
<td>agencies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households receiving</td>
<td>and client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>state/federal</td>
<td>advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assistance (%)</td>
<td>groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Bureaucratic Characteristics of Agencies and Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Indicator/Source of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decisionmaking hierarchy</td>
<td>Organization chart showing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accountability patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policymaking process</td>
<td>Policy statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise of regulatory power</td>
<td>Written regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative procedures</td>
<td>Service plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative directives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination with other agencies</td>
<td>Cooperative agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Written protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sanctions levied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

provide a context for judging the meaning of program outcomes, and the constraints placed on program implementation in resolving outcome problems. Many program organizations regularly document the kinds of conditions suggested as part of their planning process. Normally, indicators of political and bureaucratic conditions are qualitative, designed to capture influences exerted by political and organizational forces on program implementation. While the lists in table 4.1 are incomplete, the
intent is to construct a set of indicators of the relevant conditions affecting the local organizational system, as a useful measurement tool. This helps the evaluator understand, for example, why a wage differential between men and women may have occurred, and why this outcome may be considered problematic.

While many of the variables in table 4.1 can be measured quantitatively (e.g., local wages and unemployment rate), others can only be measured qualitatively (e.g., a written history of state policies regarding a local problem). Although numerous indicators can be constructed, the evaluator's choice is usually determined by the purpose of the evaluation. For example, a process evaluation examining low placement wages for female participants might focus on local wage rates, while an evaluation of job satisfaction among staff might focus on relationships between the state and the local administrative agency. 8

Methodological Issues

Federal and state employment and training agencies regularly collect data on some of the variables in table 4.1 through their ongoing automated management information systems. The Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census collect additional data on a regular basis. A number of national longitudinal surveys provide environmental data. Governors' offices and state employment and welfare agencies analyze state-level socioeconomic and labor market information. Some states conduct periodic social surveys providing a range of information on employment, training, and related programs, and their environments. These quantitative data are relatively accessible for sampling and statistical analysis purposes. Multivariate statistical analyses can be performed to determine which variables are most important, and how they may be associated.

Obtaining and analyzing information on political influences, and on the characteristics of federal and state organizations, are more difficult tasks because of the qualitative nature of the data. Studying organizational structures and processes often requires an analysis of administrative records within a framework devised by the evaluator, supplemented by informal or structured interviews with key actors to provide greater information depth and accuracy.
Studying how a program's organizational system has, in turn, influenced its environment will involve some of the same data sources. For example, the evaluator may want to identify SDA resistance to state incentive policies and how this resistance may lead to modifications in performance standards. Or, the researcher may want to study the influence of exemplary SDA performance in increasing support for testing alternative solutions to problems such as the male/female wage differential.

In summary, much can be learned unobtrusively about the environment from information already available to the evaluator from automated systems and records, some of which lends itself to statistical analysis. Other kinds of data will have to be freshly collected within specific information purposes, using purposive samples, employing questionnaire or interview formats designed with attention to analysis options, and building in ways to reduce bias.

Governance and Management

Conceptual Issues

The conversion of resources into the human, organizational, and fiscal "products" of a program is directed by governance. Governance refers to the body of decisionmakers who develop and communicate the goals and means to be used by the organizational system in achieving its purposes, the rights and responsibilities that guide the behavior of these decision-makers, and their actual attitudes and behavior in carrying out their roles. Management refers to the hierarchies of personnel, under the guidance and supervision of governance, who are responsible for the day-to-day operation of organizations within the system, their duties and privileges, and their actual attitudes and behavior. The pronouncements and actions of these major program actors influence the form and substance of program implementation. In JTPA, governance is the responsibility of the SDA's Private Industry Council (PIC), the SDA's top elected official, and its administrative organization. This arrangement is similar to the state-level governance and management structure headed by the governor, State Job Training Coordinating Council, and JTPA administrative agency.

Through a feedback process referred to in the model as the perform-
ance control system, program outputs inform governance and management about the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational system. The control system will be discussed later, after looking more closely at the conversion process for translating organizational resources into program outcomes.

In JTPA, subcontracting for administrative or client services, and monitoring subcontractors' performance are special functions of governance and management. There is an emphasis in JTPA on "performance-based contracting," which commits governance and management to regular assessments of subcontractor performance, and leads subcontractors to engage in self-monitoring activities.

Measurement and Methodological Issues

Measurement Issues

Two kinds of variables are particularly important to examine in studying governance and management: (1) the characteristics of the power hierarchies directing the system, and (2) the kinds of decisions made at different levels of this hierarchy. The evaluator must distinguish between the kind of hierarchy intended in a program's implementation strategy and the one actually utilized, and the areas of decisionmaking expected to be given highest priority and those actually given the most attention by decisionmakers.

A distinguishing feature of JTPA implementation is the use of a public/private governance partnership. Therefore, an important implementation question is "How well is this partnership between local elected officials and the PIC actually working?" Here, key areas of investigation are the level of cooperation and collaboration, and the merging of expertise and other resources to create a program responsive to the private sector job market. The composition of the partnership and control of decisionmaking are authorized in the legislation. More difficult to define are the partnership's intended functions and actual activities.

The JTPA legislation commits governance to a number of general responsibilities, such as setting job training policy, reviewing job training plans, overseeing performance and monitoring coordination. The
criteria for formulating policies and regulations to carry out these responsibilities, and actual decisionmaking behavior, must be specifically defined. The literature on organizational theory and behavior is a useful resource for measures, but the evaluator will frequently need to develop his or her own indices and criteria based on the data already available and the data that is feasible to generate in a given program setting (Blau and Schoenherr 1971; Simon 1957, 1977; Mintzberg 1979, 1983).

Methodological Issues

Studying governance involves an exploratory or descriptive approach. A traditional data collection device for understanding who is most influential in making particular kinds of decisions in given areas of activity, and through what means, is the selective interviewing of known decisionmakers, using largely open-ended questions. A content analysis of this information is useful in sketching the nature of decisionmaking. On the basis of this preliminary information, more structured interviews can be held with key decisionmakers, and a more thorough study of their documented positions can be made. In analyzing such information, the evaluator will want to look for discrepancies between the intended governance and management strategy and actual practices, and the influence such discrepancies may have on other components of the system—particularly service delivery and outcomes. However, since most of the data on this component will be qualitative, statistical analysis techniques will not be feasible, and the evaluator will need to develop a scheme for classifying data that fits the questions to be answered.

Inputs and Key Organizational Decisions

Conceptual Issues

The environment is the source of needed resources and information. It is also the source of constraints to goal achievement. The myriad inputs coming into the system are sorted and prioritized for use by governance and management, resulting in critical revenue, personnel and access decisions that influence implementation.

Revenue decisions govern the flow of money and other resources into
and through the system. In JTPA, federal allocation formulas determine the nature of monetary resources, but SDAs are permitted to supplement JTPA funds with state and local revenues.

**Personnel** decisions govern the flow of specialized knowledge and technical expertise into the system. These decisions affect the quality of personnel, which directly influences program success or failure (Franklin and Ripley 1984). In JTPA, for example, managerial, service delivery, contracting, information system, and monitoring capability are needed.

**Access** decisions in JTPA govern the flow of program participants, employers, and educators into and out of the system. Given the limitations on funds, only certain individuals among those eligible for the program will enter the system and be exposed to its interventions. This affects the nature of implementation and influences a program's "distributive" outcomes—that is, the outcomes experienced by different groups of clients, such as women vs. men, minorities vs. nonminorities, youths vs. adults. Contracting decisions influence which employers and educational providers will participate in the system, be coordinated with it, and be affected by that relationship. These are examples of the kinds of input and decisionmaking variables to be studied in examining implementation.

**Measurement and Methodological Issues**

**Measurement Issues**

Those resources with the greatest potential influence on implementation and outcomes need to be defined and indices for them developed. Variables involved in funding, such as monetary vs. in-kind contributions, must be defined more specifically. The loan of staff or equipment from a state agency may supplement federal funds in a significant way. Pinning down different kinds of nonmonetary resources is, therefore, important. Job qualifications for staff must be specified in terms of education, experience, and compatibility with political and organizational agendas.

The characteristics of the personnel actually hired and assigned to various responsibilities must be broken down into useful indices. Both
formal client access policies, such as eligibility requirements and recruitment rules, and informal access practices, such as the way in which staff handles outreach and intake functions, must be defined. The division of labor within the system, the structure of decisionmaking and the nature of revenue, personnel, and access decisions must also be defined operationally and studied over the course of the program. In many instances, the evaluation research literature will not provide substantial help, and the evaluator will need to take an innovative approach in defining these variables for study.

The relationship between inputs, revenue, personnel, and access decisions and other components of the organizational system must be defined. Since resources limit possibilities in the conversion process and provide a context for maximizing the use of resources within this process, relationships between resource allocation/utilization and elements of the conversion process are an essential focus in process evaluations.

Methodological Issues

What happens to monetary resources is somewhat simpler to track quantitatively than what occurs with the acquisition and use of personnel or the recruitment and selection of clients. Focusing on relationships among these system parts and other components requires a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs and a variety of data collection and analysis methods.

For example, management information systems can be useful sources of data on participant access. A random sample of clients can usually be drawn from a particular historical cohort to determine typical outreach, intake, appraisal, and service assignment patterns. However, few JTPA information systems record information at the beginning of the service delivery chronology—particularly at outreach, recruitment, intake, and eligibility determination points—where the initial and more subjective access decisions are made.

Some of the more significant characteristics of the attitudes and behavior of staff, other providers, and clients regarding access are not retrievable from information systems, program documents, or client
files, and must be inferred from observations and discussions, or from interviews with these individuals. There is an extensive literature on personal, telephone, and mail survey research that can aid the evaluator in this task (Dillman 1978; Fowler 1984; Yin 1984).

Because different forms of data collection will yield a combination of qualitative and quantitative information, analysis methods will necessarily involve both statistical and nonstatistical techniques. As in all qualitative analyses, the goal of inductive inquiry is to discern underlying patterns in the data (Patton 1987). These patterns and the results of quantitative analyses, together, form a basis for understanding what is happening in this component of the system, and for determining the fit between this and other parts of the system. The integration of this diverse information must be guided by the specific research questions directing a particular evaluation.

**The Conversion Process: Mission**

*Conceptual Issues*

*Goals*

The mission component describes the goals of the organizational system. In JTPA, Congress established three common goals for all SDAs regarding “economic disadvantaged” youth and adults: to increase employment, to increase wages, and to reduce welfare dependency. However, Congress also granted SDAs the discretion to tailor these goals to local employment and training problems. Within the legislative mandate, each SDA develops its own set of goals in response to environmental constraints, the agendas of PIC members, and other considerations. Once these goals are formulated, the objectives that are subsumed under each goal are specified. These serve as “indicators” that inform governance and management about the level of SDA goal achievement.

Because SDAs have considerable autonomy in developing goals, the directives driving the program vary across SDAs. Studying implementation within a particular SDA organizational system, or across SDAs, therefore, requires careful identification and description of organizational goals, or the mission of the SDA system. Without this important
definitional step it is virtually impossible to investigate the influence of a given SDA's distinctive mission on other components—particularly the work component—on other parts of the system, or on outcomes.

A major task in studying goals is distinguishing between *manifest* and *latent* goals. For analytical purposes we can think of goals formalized in legislation or in written policy statements as a system's manifest goals—i.e., those goals presented to the system's environment as its primary guiding principles. These may indeed be the goals that have the greatest influence over the system's activities. Given SDA autonomy, however, other powerful agendas, or latent goals, may actually take precedence. These less tangible goals may represent the major influence on action. Organizational development inevitably results in the emergence of goals idiosyncratic to a particular system.

A second task is establishing how priorities are set among these manifest and latent goals, and what these priorities are. This is essential in understanding decisionmaking processes, other aspects of the conversion process, and the significance of a system's outcomes. For example, in JTPA clients must ultimately be matched with employers in local labor markets. The emphasis an SDA places on employers vs. clients often varies. This is sometimes apparent in mission statements. For example, the two goal statements below are taken from the files of two SDAs.

**Client-Oriented Mission**

To provide comprehensive employment and training services required to prepare and place eligible SDA residents into subsidized employment. Specific emphasis will be placed on selecting employment and training opportunities that will increase the earned income of clients and will result in secure, full-time unsubsidized jobs.

**Employer-Oriented Mission**

To assist local businesses to solve employment-related business problems, allowing both business and individuals to increase productivity and profitability. To support local economic development efforts by the preparation of low-income, unem-
ployed area residents as a workforce for new or expanding business and industry.

These priorities move program implementation in quite different directions.

A third task is to determine how internally consistent or conflicting a system's set of goals may be. Sometimes a system's manifest and latent goals are similar, or at least compatible. In other cases they may be in continual competition or severe conflict. An SDA may have a manifest goal of providing comprehensive services, but a latent goal of providing lower-cost services that meet employer needs. Or SDA goals may be at odds with subcontractor goals.

SDAs typically contract with a variety of organizations—public schools, private industry, the employment services, private sector training organizations, and community-based organizations. An SDA subcontractor may purport to share an SDA's goals, but because subcontractor organizations frequently deliver JTPA services as only one activity among others, agendas independent of the SDA may be the primary influence, and these agendas may or may not be compatible with the SDA's. The less dependent on the SDA a subcontractor is for resources to survive, the more its goals may differ, and the further its implementation of the program and performance may stray from what the SDA intended. Also, the actual goals of the PIC may not be compatible with those of the SDA's administrative agency.

A fourth task is to understand how the system's most important goals—those actually being pursued—are influencing the methods used to achieve them, that is, how goals affect means, or the work component. Some process studies of client selection and service assignment practices in SDAs have suggested extensive "creaming" of job-ready clients, resulting in a neglect of the hard-to-serve (Walker 1984, 1985; Orfield and Slessarev 1986). This has been linked to the mandated use of performance standards, which some studies suggest force SDAs to choose between conflicting goals—serving the disadvantaged vs. meeting standards—with the result that SDA missions have sometimes turned toward the latter in order to secure incentive bonuses.
In summary, the relationship between formally articulated goals and those which must be inferred from organizational activity, and the level of consistency between these sets of goals, have a significant effect on other components of the system. They condition judgment of the system's compliance with a program's intended implementation strategy and the effectiveness of that strategy in producing desired outcomes.

**Planning**

Most organizational systems engage in planning to develop their goals and define the means for achieving them. The plan resulting from this process is based on three kinds of planning decisions: (1) who will be given the program's treatment, or service intervention; (2) what the nature of the treatment provided will be; and (3) how funds will be distributed in order to deliver the treatment.

In JTPA, decisions about who is to receive the program's service strategy determine the general target group of this strategy, and the specific subpopulations of clients to be exposed to the treatment. The Congress establishes general eligibility and target group requirements, which act as screening and sorting mechanisms for assuring that services are provided to those who need them most. In some SDAs, these mechanisms may fulfill this purpose (Walker et al. 1984, 1985). However, client populations involve a range of "job readiness" or "need," and as discussed earlier, the pressures of performance standards sometimes act as powerful incentives to serve those whom staff view as most likely to obtain the higher paying jobs. This phenomenon is an important element to be studied in gaining knowledge of the actual practices of the organizational system.

Treatment decisions direct which general set of services are to be received by clients, and which mix and sequence of services is considered more appropriate for one subpopulation than for another. Distributive decisions regulate the flow of resources to the service delivery system and to clients. They determine what combination of money, personnel, equipment, and support will go to whom. These are political decisions that involve weighing competing claims against an agency's resources by various interest groups, each seeking decisions in their favor (Franklin and Ripley 1984).
In JTPA these may be subcontractors or organizations in the program’s environment. Studies suggest that failing to satisfy such groups has often led SDAs to engage in defensive maneuvers rather than to seek an integration of services related to local needs. In practice, SDA governance tries to strike a balance among competing demands—i.e., the service needs of clients and employers, performance objectives, costs, and politics. Decisions are also made about entering into coordination agreements with other organizations to increase the efficiency of service provision or expand the scope of available services.

In studying planning, it is important to remember that plans may accurately reflect intentions, but organizational systems characteristically remold plans in the process of carrying them out, and sometimes plans are deliberately circumvented. Both the attributes of formal plans and the characteristics of activities flowing from these plans are significant subjects of study.

**Measurement and Methodological Issues**

**Measurement Issues**

Distinguishing between manifest and latent goals inevitably involves qualitative information. The evaluator can identify manifest goals from legislation and recorded policy pronouncements, but these are frequently abstract and require considerably more specification by the researcher. Answering questions such as the following may be of assistance in the measurement process:

1. What is the source of a particular goal statement, and what priority in the hierarchy of goals does it enjoy? For example, it is important in judging the influence of manifest goals to know whether the statement is mandated in the program’s legislation, is unique to the organizational system’s top decisionmakers, or is an interpretation of the legislative mandate by administrators.

2. What information can be inferred from a particular goal statement? For example, the evaluator may want to classify goal statements along the following dimensions: the content of the statement, who is to be most affected by the goal, what outcomes are implied in the goal, and how the goal articulates with other goal statements.
Even more subjective, latent goals are exceedingly difficult to define and measure. Information must be obtained from the self-report of decisionmakers or inferred from organizational activities. Consider the goal of “increased wages” for clients. The evaluator can draw insights about the meaning of this goal by studying resource allocation. If an SDA allocates resources so as to meet both federal performance standards regarding wages and organizational goals that are sensitive to the educational and training needs of certain clients, or if the SDA forgoes the possibility of meeting or exceeding standards in order to provide richer pre-employment services, this difference in allocation priorities will help define the mission component. This illustrates how interrelated the information is that must be developed by studying different components of the system. In this case, the evaluator seeks clues about the latent mission from information about the utilization of system inputs, the nature of governance and management, and the work component of the conversion process.

Measuring goal consistency is essential, but equally difficult. Consistency can be defined in terms of whether different goals imply different means, or different courses of action. Attributes of goals, such as compatibility, competition, or conflict, must also be defined more precisely. The evaluator must usually develop his or her own definition and indices, tailored to the program being evaluated.

The planning process may also pose measurement problems. Some aspects of planning are relatively simple to measure, such as the composition of planning bodies, the characteristics of planning policies and procedures, and the content of plans. Others are more difficult. For example, a chief concern of governance in most organizations is the difference between planned and actual performance. However, in some social programs governance and staff develop a written plan as a prerequisite to obtaining funds, but once these funds are awarded, management may pay little attention to the plan. In this case, the most difficult measurement problem is to classify actual activities in such a way that they can be compared against the plan. Some of these activities are captured by quantitative data in information systems; others must be inferred from observation and interviews.
**Methodological Issues**

Clearly an exploratory or descriptive design is most appropriate in learning about the mission component. An analysis of documents, observational techniques used at meetings of decisionmakers, open-ended interviews with selected policymakers and administrators, and a study of organizational activities, such as the characteristics of the planning process, are examples of useful data collection techniques.

An analysis format must be developed in advance of qualitative data collection, based on the research questions guiding the evaluation and the variables selected for study within the mission component. Once information is collected from different sources, the challenge is to integrate these data to provide an accurate picture of the key goals of the system, which, in turn, affect the means selected for goal achievement and how well the program’s implementation strategy is carried out in practice.

**The Conversion Process: Work**

**Conceptual Issues**

Studying the means a system uses to achieve its mission reveals the distinctive characteristics of the actual mode of program implementation. As indicated earlier, “means” refers to the activities a system engages in to achieve its goals and objectives. To illustrate some of the conceptual issues involved in studying the work component, we will focus on subcontracting and service delivery.

**Subcontracting**

An important aspect of identifying a system’s means for goal achievement is deciding what functions or services will be performed or provided by the SDA, PIC, administrative agency, or organizations under contract to one or another of these entities. In JTPA, subcontractors are an important element of the organizational system. All three of the planning decisions discussed earlier are reflected in the nature of subcontracting entities, the criteria guiding contracting arrangements, and subcontracting processes. Since subcontracting introduces another set of organizations into the system, it increases its complexity. The emphasis on performance-based contracting in JTPA further complicates the work component.
Subcontracting, however, may increase the efficiency of resource allocation by giving SDAs the opportunity to choose among competitors. It may allow a PIC to reap the benefits of successful program performance while spreading the risks among a number of organizations. It may spur the SDA to make specific decisions about which services are to be provided and to which target groups, and how service delivery is to be coordinated. Or accountability may be the paramount concern in awarding contracts, that is, transferring partial accountability from a council or administrative agency to subcontractors (Walker et al. 1985). The organizational politics of subcontracting is, therefore, an important area of study in process evaluations.

There are usually two basic kinds of contracting for services in JTPA: (1) market subcontracting and (2) subcontracting by function. In the former, the subcontractor organization focuses on a particular client group, or geographical region, such as youth, women, minorities, or particular counties within an SDA. In the latter, funds are divided among subcontractors according to a particular service or occupational area, such as the provision of on-the-job training or training in the area of financial services. Both the choice of a subcontracting mode and the selection of subcontractors reveals important features of the system’s goal achievement strategy.

In a decentralized system, accountability for performance is transferred downward through the vehicle of subcontracting. Through a request-for-proposal process, potential subcontractors are informed about SDA expectations: number of clients to enroll, services they should receive, and number of clients expected to achieve the desired outcomes. In subcontracting by function, the PIC or administrative agency is typically accountable for the access, treatment, and distributive decisions incorporated in the contract, while the subcontractor is typically responsible for meeting the performance standards in the contract through its own similar kinds of decisions.

In market subcontracting, organizations may be given greater freedom to decide how their training funds are to be allocated among the services authorized in the contract. A chief task of process evaluators is to study the planning decisions reflected in contracts, the extent to which they are
honored in terms of subcontractor activities, and how these influences affect the overall implementation of the program and its outcomes.

For example, the initial decisions subsequently included in a contract may have been problematic or poorly communicated. Or, subcontractors may have been only weakly monitored for compliance with the contract, or may have simply ignored SDA expectations for performance. Key issues in contracting are (1) the level of coordination and cooperation among subcontractors, and between the PIC or administrative agency and the subcontractors; and (2) the extent to which SDA goals are successfully implemented or gradually displaced by the changing power relationships within a decentralized service delivery system. Competition and dissension in this area have often subverted a program's intended implementation strategy (National Alliance of Business 1984; Walker et al. 1985; Orfield and Slessarev 1986).

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**Figure 4.2**

*Client Pathway*

- **Walk-ins**
  - Telephone Inquiries
  - Etc

- **RECRUITMENT (500)**
  - Referrals and Coordination Links

- **APPLICATION SUBMITTED (220)**

- **ELIGIBILITY/VERIFICATION INTERVIEW (220)**
  - Ineligible
  - Eligible

- **ASSESSMENT (175)**

- **INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLAN (ITP) AND SUPPORT PAYMENTS (122)**
  - (Enrollment)

- **SUBCONTRACTOR JOB TRAINING SERVICES**

- **EDUCATIONAL**
  - Remedial Education
  - Basic Skills Training
  - GED
  - ESL
  - Support Service

- **WORK MATURITY**
  - Workshops
  - Job Counseling
  - Work Experience
  - Support Service

- **PRE-EMPLOYMENT**
  - Workshops
  - Job Club
  - Job Counseling
  - Job Search Assistance

- **OCUPATIONAL SKILLS**
  - Skill Training
  - OJT
  - Try-out
  - Work Experience
  - Customized Training

- **EMPLOYMENT OR OTHER POSITIVE OUTCOME (98)**

- **FOLLOW-UP SERVICES**

- **FOLLOW-UP STATUS (64)**

*Numbers in () are hypothetical cohorts of clients, showing attrition throughout the pathway*
The Service Delivery System

Within the larger organizational system, the service delivery system implements the program's service strategy. That is, the service delivery system is the part of the model that actually provides services to clients. The service strategy is a set of services, and sometimes subsidies. For example, the provision of on-the-job training to clients involves subsidies to employers. In both instances, the intervention is expected to change the behavior of the recipient; the client is to increase his or her work experience and occupational skills, while the employer is to give more attention to hiring the disadvantaged. However, implementation and service strategies rarely work precisely as intended. On-the-job training provided by some employers may be little more than unsupervised "make work." Employers may lay off other, more highly skilled workers in order to acquire subsidized workers. The study of program implementation must capture these nuances.

In virtually all social programs, clients receive services in a standardized sequence of steps, frequently termed the client pathway (Patton 1986). Each step, from entry to exit, is a necessary condition for the one that follows. Each involves certain underlying assumptions that link this chain of activities together. Figure 4.2 illustrates JTPA's client pathway. Table 4.2 suggests common assumptions.

The way stations on the pathway outlined in figure 4.2 represent decision points in the movement of clients through a progression of activities, which ultimately expose them to the program's service interventions and lead to the achievement of outcomes—outreach, recruitment, intake, eligibility determination, assessment, plan development, service assignment, case management, referral, placement, and follow-up. Each step in the chronology needs to be studied and analyzed with respect to the following factors: the nature of the policies and management directives guiding what happens to clients; rewards and sanctions for staff and clients in adhering to these guidelines; staff and client attitudes and behavior; the attitudes and behavior of other key individuals interacting with clients within the pathway, such as employers and the personnel of other programs to which a client may be referred; and relationships between staff, clients, and others involved in the pathway with those outside the organizational system.
Table 4.2
The JTPA Service Delivery System:
A Hierarchy of Program Objectives and Validity Assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy of Objectives</th>
<th>Linking Validity Assumptions</th>
<th>Some Points Where Client/Employer Matching Occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Immediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Recruit individuals to participate</td>
<td>Program must have adequate supply of appropriate individuals to achieve ultimate objectives and performance standards</td>
<td>Employer needs a specific number of individuals trained to perform a specific task(s). A training program is developed to meet the employer’s needs, or qualified participants are referred through placement/job search services. SDA may recruit individuals or draw from applicant pool to meet employer needs. SDA may recruit employers to participate in OJT, institutional training, or other programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Determine eligibility for JTPA services</td>
<td>Services must be targeted to those who qualify to achieve ultimate objectives and performance standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enroll individual if eligible</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employer refers individual (who may or may not be an employee) to JTPA for training. Individual is enrolled if eligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Determine participant needs</td>
<td>An individual’s employment barriers can be determined reliably</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Determine appropriate program (treatment) for participant as allowed under JTPA</td>
<td>Treatments have greatest impacts when targeted to remove an individual’s employment barriers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills, attitudes, and behavior are malleable and can be changed by JTPA services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy of Objectives</td>
<td>Linking Validity Assumptions</td>
<td>Some Points Where Client/Employer Matching Occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Intermediate (continued)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Learn new skills, change attitudes, improve employability skills consistent with aims of program and participant needs</td>
<td>Programs cause behavioral and attitude changes only when completed</td>
<td>Employer hires on-the-job training participant, contingent on successful completion of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Complete training (treatment) program</td>
<td>Credentials are needed to enable participant to compete in labor market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Receive credentials documenting achievements</td>
<td>Completion of program and credentials will enable participant to find employment</td>
<td>Employer hires participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Ultimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Achieve positive proximate outcomes (placement, increased earnings, welfare dependence, performance standard, etc.)</td>
<td>JTPA services enable participants to retain employment over the long-run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Achieve positive final outcomes (employment retention, increased earnings, welfare dependency, performance standards, etc.)</td>
<td>Long-term employment of participants resolves nation's manpower problems as defined by Congress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Accomplish JTPA purposes as specified in the legislation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For instance, studying recruitment may involve determining the effect of scarce resources on the use of outreach services, and ultimately on those served by a program. Important to study is the nature of entry into the service delivery system, i.e., whether a client can enter the system at a single point of contact in a single visit, or whether several appearances at numerous offices are required.

Intake staff often act as system "gatekeepers," making discretionary decisions about access within organizational goals, planning decisions and clients' circumstances (Nagi 1974). An activity as apparently straightforward as eligibility determination can be complicated by conflicts in system goals or staff prejudices and management preferences, which influence the kind of clients who subsequently experience the interventions and are expected to produce the outcomes desired.

Client appraisal and service plans hold another key to the way in which program resources are used to achieve organizational missions. These latter activities are unusually vulnerable to the personal ideologies and agendas of staff, and the self-assessment and communication skills of clients. The actual assignment of clients to services may be conditioned by screening processes designed to determine client motivation, and on assessments linked to satisfying unmet performance standards. The actual provision of services may be fragmented across a number of subcontractors, with the possibility that clients may fail to experience a coordinated mix and sequence of intended services. Or, the assignment of clients may be affected by a "pigeonholing process," which classifies client's needs within a standardized set of categories (Mintzberg 1983a).

This standardization of aspects of the pathway simplifies service delivery and conserves resources, avoiding the customization of decisions at each step. However, predetermined diagnostic tools are not perfect and frequently lead to faulty judgments. The way in which assessment and other semidiscretionary decisions are controlled by predeveloped formats has an important effect on client selection, what services clients receive, how they are treated in the pathway, and their outcomes.

It is also important to analyze changes in clients as they move through the pathway. Attention should be given to whether a service intervention
actually reduces or eliminates a client’s needs, and how much service integrity is involved, that is, to what extent the client received the services formally prescribed in the service plan, or received fewer or less intensive ones, or ones substituted by the subcontractor for those planned.

In summary, these are only a few of the many factors that can be studied in focusing on the work component of the organizational system. Again, the emphasis in a given process evaluation will depend on the research questions that direct the research.

**Measurement and Methodological Issues**

*Measurement Issues*

Given the broad range of variables involved in studying the work component and its relationship to other parts of the system, it is clear that some factors pose minimal measurement problems, some pose many. For example, developing categories to measure the type(s) of subcontracts in an agency is often relatively simple. However, measuring the variation in monitoring procedures, compliance protocols, and enforcement of penalties across types can be difficult and often can only be done qualitatively.

Data collected for reporting purposes can assist the evaluator in measuring the characteristics of the service delivery system. Management information systems selectively describe the client pathway, which permits descriptive analyses of client flows through the pathway. Unfortunately, few MISs contain information on program applicants or precise descriptions of the particular services and subsidies provided to individual participants or to different target groups. These systems rarely contain information on others affected by a program, such as employers. Also, some MISs do not permit easy access to a client’s entire program history, focusing instead on the production of aggregated data.

Therefore, although quantitative measures for some variables are readily available in MISs, a combination of indices routinely used in information systems and data from other sources—both quantitative and qualitative—will be needed in studying the service delivery system and its relationship to other parts of the conversion process. Measures of the service delivery system suggested in the survey research literature can be useful in supplementing data in information systems.
Methodological Issues

Exploratory and relatively unstructured descriptive designs are the choices for studying subcontracting. A review of documents supplemented by interviews with key actors may be the most useful data-gathering techniques (Burstein et al. 1985). A format for analyzing this qualitative information, consistent with the research questions, must be developed by the evaluator.

More rigorous descriptive designs can be used in studying the service delivery system. Documenting what occurs at each major step in the client pathway, and what validity assumptions are involved, is a first step in studying the service delivery system. Determining the nature of attrition as a cohort of clients traverses this pathway, based on figure 4.2, is important, since this identifies the points at which particular kinds of service delivery problems may be occurring. For example, in tracing the origins of a wagedifferential between male and female participants, the attrition patterns for the two sexes can provide significant clues about the sources of wage differences.

Much of what is happening along the pathway is available for analysis in an MIS or case files. For greater information detail, interview or questionnaire techniques can be used with staff, clients, and key others. If response categories are scaled, statistical analyses of this information can be performed. However, qualitative data from in-depth interviews can often yield more useful insights.

The Conversion Process: Coordination

Conceptual Issues

Implementation studies can identify coordination mechanisms and assess their effects on other parts of the organizational system. There are numerous ways to coordinate activities and other phenomena in organizations. One strategy is standardization, which often takes the following forms (Mintzberg 1979):

1. Standardization of outputs through the use of performance standards. Although subcontractors may emphasize different methods for producing outputs, performance standards set parameters that coordinate activities.
2. **Standardization of staff skills.** Because professional skills are needed in program organizations, staff members have considerable autonomy and discretion in applying their skills. Standardizing these professional skills lets each staff member know what to expect from others, which supports coordination.

3. **Standardization of tasks** to be performed. For example, subcontractors responsible for youth services may make the assumption that all youth have similar needs and, therefore, require the same services. While this assumption may not be valid, standardizing the service coordinates activities for youth.

4. **Informal communication** among staff performing a particular set of tasks. Sometimes the most important coordination activities are the product of informal communication networks.

5. **Direct supervision and monitoring** of staff. Coordination can also be achieved through management of staff.

Through strategies such as standardization, the efficiency of the organizational system is increased in terms of workflow and productivity. Some issues that process evaluation can usefully address in this area are the following:

1. **Matching of clients with employers, or the labor exchange function.** The key issue of interest is control over the matching process. If the majority of clients find jobs on their own rather than through the placement efforts of staff, clients are in control of employment outcomes. If most clients are placed through staff job-development efforts, staff have greater control over the matching process. Identifying these differences can alert the evaluator to problems in coordinating the labor exchange function.

2. **Relationships with subcontractors, and organizations in the environment to which clients may be referred for service.** While service delivery may be more effective when responsibilities are distributed among a number of organizations, decentralization requires increased coordination efforts. Problems may occur when it is unclear who is accountable for what responsibilities, which occurs more often when subcontracting is carried out by function (e.g., when accountability for meeting a performance standard is distributed
Accountability, which involves effective coordination, is stronger under market subcontracting. If only one organization is providing services to the hard-to-place, for example, it is clear who is accountable for the performance of programs oriented to that group.

3. **Provision of multiple services delivered by different subcontractors that require coordination over time.** In this case, clients must be appropriately linked to a series of services in the correct sequence. Case management systems can increase the coordination of a client’s sequence of service treatments. If the MIS stores the client’s service plan, the MIS can be used to alert staff about changes in service or service provider before their scheduled occurrence.

4. **Coordination of intake with other steps in service delivery.** If intake is the responsibility of the administrative agency, and other organizations provide the services, it is important to know how smooth and timely the flow of clients is from agency to contractors, and whether these organizations share validity assumptions. Do they define clients’ needs and barriers similarly and agree on the kinds of service to be provided to a given individual? The evaluator needs to determine how problematic the relationship is between the two organizations and how this situation affects the referral network for clients.

5. **Displacement of SDA goals.** Subcontracting can distract an administrative agency from its goals by shifting attention to contracting and monitoring (Mintzberg 1979, 1983). Process studies can determine to what extent goal displacement is occurring.

All organizational systems must coordinate their activities to survive. Governance and management set the coordination agenda in the process of defining the organizational mission and decentralizing the service delivery system. The evaluator’s task is threefold: to identify those areas of the system that are likely to require the greatest coordination, to describe coordination policies and practices, and to examine the effectiveness of coordination strategies in the context of other elements of the conversion process (particularly service delivery) and other components of the system. Coordination issues clearly cut across all components of the model.
Measurement and Methodological Issues

Measurement Issues

Defining and measuring the standardization of client outcomes, staff skills, and organizational tasks involve both qualitative and quantitative indices. Tasks and skills require the development of profiles that involve both kinds of data. Studying work flow, volume, and productivity inevitably requires the same combination of data. Some client outcomes, on the other hand, are measured quantitatively in an MIS.

Work flow can be measured in terms of client time, such as the average time required for a client to move from one point to another in the client pathway, and/or worker time, such as the average time required of staff to complete paperwork or procedures associated with a given step in the pathway. Volume can be measured in terms of performance ratios related to costs, staff, and time. Costs can be measured by units of service or activities, such as cost per counseling session. Staff productivity ratios can be related to workload standards, such as the number of clients per case manager. Time ratios can be based on the frequency of a program activity in a given time frame, such as the number of clients screened for eligibility per month.

Many of the variables and relationships describing different aspects of coordination can only be measured qualitatively, such as staff communication patterns and the characteristics of the referral network. The evaluator can rely on the organizational literature in identifying key variables, but will frequently need to develop his or her own definitions and indices.

Methodological Issues

The kinds of research designs and the range of data collection and analysis methods discussed under other parts of the conversion process apply to the study of coordination. An exploratory design may be most appropriate when the SDA organizational system is complex, with extensive decentralization of responsibilities to subcontractors, and when little is known about the level of coordination. In simpler systems, or where studies of coordination have been conducted previously, evaluations can use fairly sophisticated descriptive designs. Methods
will depend largely on the ability to obtain and analyze reliable, appropriate quantitative data. For example, in studying coordination between organizations within the system, and between the system and organizations in the environment, data on the number and kinds of clients referred to/from these organizations, and the distribution of services within that network, can be accessed from an MIS.

The Conversion Process: Social Climate

**Conceptual Issues**

The level of satisfaction felt by staff, clients, and others is important to the achievement of organizational goals and is as indicator of the efficiency of program implementation. Retaining high-quality, motivated staff is critical to organizational functioning; therefore, identifying the reasons for dissatisfaction and turnover is a significant task for process evaluators. The reasons for staying or leaving may vary by job qualifications, position, amount of training, and other factors. Factors to consider include the degree of job satisfaction and compatibility with professional colleagues (and with the system) regarding values and goals. Sources of stress that may encourage turnover include the use and enforcement of performance standards, personal conflicts over work decisions, and disparities over what is “best” for clients. An employee’s perception of the availability of better job opportunities, or nonwork factors such as family ties, friendships, community relationships, and finances may influence retention and turnover (Flowers and Hughes 1973). In performing this review, the evaluator should also determine whether mechanisms, such as an “open-door” style of management, exist for solving staff grievances as they arise.

In JTPA, employer satisfaction is essential to encourage, since the supply of training and jobs is dependent on good employer relations. In chapter 3, issues related to employer satisfaction are suggested in the discussion of employer surveys. Examples are employers’ overall satisfaction with the program, with program staff working with particular clients, and with the clients they hire or train.

Client satisfaction is frequently studied in terms of the client’s perception of the quality of the program’s services, the manner in which these
services are provided, and the nature of staff-client relationships. A study of CETA classroom training programs illustrates the importance of client attitudes for organizational goal achievement (Simpson 1984a,b). Although clients generally reported high satisfaction with the program, more detailed survey questions revealed that the quality of training received was the key reason for their satisfaction. The following training characteristics had an impact: training that was based on a clear-cut plan; training that felt like employment; instructors who encouraged independence and gave positive feedback about performance; the ability to communicate and negotiate problems with the instructor frequently. The role played by the instructor also was a key factor.

This study also suggested, however, that low client satisfaction was not positively associated with noncompletion of a program. Financial problems, job opportunities, and a change in vocational goals were major reasons for dropping out. In fact, a substantial number of dropouts were quite satisfied with the program. In this sense, studying the reasons for dropping out has implications for the sorting and screening process at the beginning of the client pathway. These findings also have implications for service design and implementation, by either the administrative agency or the subcontractor.

In evaluating satisfaction levels, factors within and outside the organizational system, such as the adequacy of resources to serve all eligible clients, must be studied. Client pathways may create dissatisfaction through waiting lists at intake, attendance requirements in training, and other sorting mechanisms that tend to separate clients on the basis of motivation and satisfaction. The adequacy of job opportunities at the end of program participation can also condition client satisfaction by forcing an organizational system to focus on clients' shortcomings and their "repackaging" to better compete for jobs. This "reform" may produce high employer satisfaction but low client morale.

**Measurement and Methodological Issues**

**Measurement Issues**

The definition and measurement of variables such as satisfaction, motivation, and morale involve attitude measurement, a major area of
concentration in social psychology. Although one thinks of attitudes as qualitative variables, the field of attitude scaling involves quantification of response categories in highly structured survey instruments, such as questionnaires and interviews, which are designed specifically to obtain information on the values, beliefs, and emotional states of respondents.

Attitude scaling has often been confined to outcome studies, partly because of their more rigorous nature and longer research history. Process studies have tended to rely on qualitative information obtained by more open-ended surveys. The substantial literature on attitude measurement, however, offers the process evaluator an opportunity to use a combination of indices, which can expand the knowledge base on program implementation (Edwards 1957; Upshaw 1968).

Methodological Issues

The collection and analysis of information on attitudes, regardless of the level of rigor, are complicated by the inevitable measurement errors involved in self-reporting. All surveys depend on respondent honesty, openness, and insightfulness. The more sophisticated data collection and analysis techniques used in studying attitudes tend to force choices, and may not permit the respondent to fully express the true range or intensity of feelings, to explain the context in which they occur, or to provide the reasons for feeling them.

Open-ended survey questions afford more opportunities to probe for this kind of detail. Statistical analysis of scaled data and content analysis of more informally collected data have different tradeoffs. Again, the status of previous knowledge about the research questions of interest, and the willingness of the evaluator to accept different degrees and kinds of bias, will determine the methodology used in studying this aspect of the conversion process.¹⁰

Outcomes and Impact

Conceptual Issues

Several kinds of outcomes can be produced in the JTPA conversion process: (1) mandated outcomes for clients, in particular, increased employment and earnings and reduced economic dependency; (2) poten-
tial outcomes for employers, such as lower employee recruitment and training costs; (3) required outcomes for the organizational system itself, in terms of meeting performance standards, achieving local goals, and increasing the efficiency of program operation; and (4) possible outcomes for other systems, such as reduced caseloads and costs in the welfare and/or unemployment insurance systems.

As indicated in table 4.2, achieving long-run impacts that go beyond immediate program outcomes is the ultimate aim of JTPA. Outcomes for clients measured at follow-up points beyond program exposure may not be as positive as outcomes at program completion. The effect of the program on its environment may be minimal. For instance, the program may not have reduced unemployment in the community. The number of economically dependent clients making demands on other programs may not have been decreased. Referral networks among service providers may not have experienced better coordination. Implementation may not be the source of problems, but the process evaluator will want to look for possible relationships between components of the organizational system and long-term impacts.

*Measurement and Methodological Issues*

Outcome measurement has been covered in chapters 2 and 3, in terms of outcomes at program exit and outcomes at follow-up points. The impact of the environment on the program has been recognized in outcome studies, but defining variables and developing measures describing the impact of the program on its environment have traditionally been neglected, largely because of data accessibility and the difficulty in sorting out the separate effects of implementation and service strategies from forces in the environment. In most cases, estimating a program's effects on the environment is beyond the scope of process evaluations.

*Feedback: The Performance Control System*

*Conceptual Issues*

Some kind of mechanism for keeping governance and management continually informed about program outcomes and the broader impacts of a program is necessary if the organizational system is to be fine-tuned
or modified to increase efficiency and effectiveness over time. The performance control system is designed to accomplish this task (Mintzberg 1979). It consists of two parts: (1) a plan describing desired outputs and impacts within mandated performance standards and local goals, and (2) management controls to determine whether the plan has been achieved. The performance control system is, therefore, a monitoring mechanism used by governance to manage program and organizational performance.

In a highly decentralized system involving multiple subcontractors with considerable autonomy, administrators usually lack the authority, and sometimes the resources, to control subcontractors' means for producing outputs. Therefore, monitoring strategies are limited to checking on a narrow range of outputs that can be quantified in an MIS, or relatively easily coded and analyzed from program forms or questionnaires.

To be effective, the monitoring function has to involve rewards for compliance with the plan and sanctions for nonconformance. In terms of state-level performance control systems, the reward is increased funding to the SDA, which can be used for its own purposes within broad state guidelines. The sanction is compulsory technical assistance provided by the state to the SDA in order to identify and correct performance problems. In the case of the SDA monitoring system, the reward can be renewal of a subcontractor's contract or provision of a bonus or increased autonomy, and the sanction can be technical assistance provided by the PIC or administrative agency to the subcontractor, or cancellation of a contract.

Monitoring systems represent a way to reinforce an organizational system's compliance with goals and a means for judging the system's success in accomplishing its mission. However, monitoring can also be intrusive and disruptive, creating tension between the monitor and the monitored (Mintzberg 1979, 1983). Performance control systems that extend beyond basic oversight—checking on the meeting or exceeding of performance standards, verifying expenditures and conformance with basic rules and regulations—can also consume excessive administrative resources and reduce staff morale.

For example, technical assistance in JTPA sometimes involves a
Evaluating Program Implementation 287

managerial technique, such as imposing more goals or increasing the intensity and frequency of monitoring. At the SDA level, this increased administrative pressure frequently engenders resistance and can redirect subcontractors toward compliance-oriented activities, which may further interfere with successful overall performance. SDA staff may be driven to ignore the social consequences of their decisions in order to meet performance standards, which can result in a neglect of those most in need of service. If the competence of subcontractor staff is the problem, tougher monitoring techniques can be a waste of the SDA’s administrative energy.

Monitoring is also ineffective if the performance control system does not include a commitment to reporting, or providing feedback to governance and management. The quality of monitoring and reporting affects decisions about modifying the system. Faulty feedback can lead to flawed changes. In general, although performance control systems are essential, overdeveloped systems can stifle innovation, encourage conservative program management, and overemphasize easily quantifiable economic outputs, such as earnings, while downplaying less easily measured social outcomes, such as increased employability.

The use of an MIS may contribute to these potential problems. MISs appear to be the most efficient way to manage such information, but, in fact, reliance on them restricts the content of monitoring plans and limits monitoring strategies. As a result, governance and management may misjudge the underlying causes of performance problems. Therefore, actions that the system’s leadership takes to ameliorate these problems may be based on misleadingly sparse or unrealistic information.

**Measurement and Methodological Issues**

As mentioned earlier, a key task is classifying the content of written monitoring plans and procedures, which includes the following dimensions: (1) goals and rationales, (2) alternative courses of action to be taken regarding compliance, (3) rewards and sanctions, and (4) information to be reported to governance and management. The same process can be applied to the monitoring strategy practiced by the agency, which includes (1) activities used to identify various forms of noncompliance, (2) actions taken to correct compliance problems, (3) activities involved
in rewards and sanctions, and (4) information actually reported to governance and management about these activities. Discrepancies between the written plan and actual practice may point to potential breakdowns in the operation of the feedback system.

Monitoring and reporting involve the judgment of information about program outcomes and the impact of these outcomes on a program’s environment, and the communication of this information to those responsible for adjusting program implementation and performance. A basic question is whether administrators are actually receiving and using information from the performance control system in decisionmaking. Descriptive designs and qualitative methods are most useful in answering this question. In-depth interviews of an SDA’s monitoring staff and decisionmakers in the PIC, administrative, or contract agencies can supplement content analysis of monitoring and reporting documents.

**Studying the “Fit” Among Parts**

At the beginning of this chapter, a model of an organizational system was presented to be used in evaluating program implementation. An underlying assumption of the model is that organizational effectiveness and efficiency depend on the degree of integration, or consistency, among the system’s parts (Lyden 1975; Harrison 1987). Thus, after collecting information about program implementation, a chief task is to determine the degree of consistency among the following elements in the model’s conversion process:

1. Between the mission component and the environment.
2. Between the mission and work components.
3. Between the mission and coordination components.
4. Between the mission component and the feedback system.

Two other factors must also be assessed. First, organizational systems cannot perform well if the mission, work, or coordination components are “missing” from the conversion process. For example, organizations without goals (a mission component) or a well-defined client pathway (work component) often have poor performance records. Information collected during the course of the process evaluation is used to make this
Second, the social climate of an organizational system is an indicator of how well the system is operating. Thus, the degree of satisfaction and tension in the system must also be assessed, as discussed earlier.

These are the major, initial points of inquiry. If the evidence suggests that inconsistencies exist, or that components from the conversion process, or that staff morale is low, further data collection analysis is often necessary to discover the underlying reasons for these problems. Process evaluations have distinct cycles: a *macro* cycle to assess the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Conversion Process</th>
<th>Proper Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied.</strong> Goals are well-defined and governance actively manages the SDA through the performance control system</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied in part.</strong> Goals and access decisions are consistent with local conditions. Performance standards and treatment decisions are consistent with each other but are inconsistent with local conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied in part.</strong> Steps in the client pathway are interrelated with each other, but staff show little awareness of intake procedures mandated by governance</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied in part.</strong> Work component is consistent with mission component's goal to provide comprehensive services, but dominance of performance standards in mission component forces SDA to rely on screening mechanisms to sort out less qualified clients. Females seem to fare worse than males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied.</strong> Responsibilities well-defined and managed</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied.</strong> Mechanisms exist to coordinate the SDA's activity with the subcontractors' activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Climate</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied.</strong> Although outcome differences exist, no differences in satisfaction among male and female clients</td>
<td><strong>Satisfied in part.</strong> Stress in enforcing subcontractor performance standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
overall operation of the organizational system, and one or more *micro* cycles targeted at specific issues discovered at the macro level.

**Are the Parts Consistent?: An Example**

An example may clarify these points of inquiry. An evaluator has just completed a process evaluation to determine why female clients have lower placement rates and wages than male clients. The first task is to compare the information collected for the environment and each component of the conversion process. The goal of this inductive analysis is to discover common patterns by performing the consistency checks described above.\(^\text{12}\) The major results of this effort are organized to help compare findings across components of the model, as shown in table 4.3.

In our simplified example, a lack of fit appears to exist between the mission component and the work component. Given this source of the performance problem, a second round of micro-level analyses could be targeted at discovering its likely cause(s), such as poorly designed screening procedures, inadequately trained intake staff, or simply that few females with work experience apply to the program.

In summary, in the course of this investigation the evaluator has taken the following steps:

1. Reviewed the research literature to learn more about issues the program is meant to address.
2. Become thoroughly familiar with the program being evaluated.
3. Developed a clear understanding of the research questions of major interest and the use to be made of the answers.
4. Collected trustworthy information on the separate influences and components of the system.
5. Utilized applied research skills innovatively in integrating this diverse range of information.
6. Relyed on inductive judgments about "fit," qualifying the assumptions underlying these judgments honestly and fully.

In documenting this process in the final report, any alternative (but less convincing) interpretations of the data should be presented to demonstrate that a thorough analysis was conducted. Recommendations for changing the parts of the system to achieve a proper fit among its parts
should also be included. In our example, performance standards might be lowered to increase the consistency of the mission and work components. In addition, new intake procedures might be installed along with better management controls to assure proper selection of clients.

**Did the Implementation Strategy Work?**

Once the above analysis is completed, the evaluator can examine the merits of the program’s underlying implementation strategy. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, each social program involves a theory regarding program implementation. The actual implementation of the program may differ from the theory. For example, the public-private partnership in JTPA, which increased the role of business in the governance of employment and training programs, was intended to increase client placements, but this might not happen in practice.

In interpreting the findings of process evaluations, two overriding potential questions are, therefore, “Is the theory valid, and does the implementation strategy work?” (Scheier 1981). In practice, process evaluations tend to ignore the first question and concentrate on the second. If possible, process evaluations should seek clues about both. If information from an evaluation suggests that the theory itself is problematic, then improvements are indicated in the social ideology or policy on which the theory is based. If the theory appears sound but the implementation strategy does not seem to be working as intended, then improvements in the way the program is organized and operated are indicated. Sorting out the information from process studies along these lines provides important guidance in planning change.

**Conclusions**

A complementary relationship exists between process and impact evaluation. Impact evaluation, which is part of an organization’s feedback system, determines the results, or outcomes, produced by the program. However, by their methods, impact evaluations typically treat programs as “black boxes”; what goes on inside the program (or box) to produce the results is rarely assessed. Process evaluations fill this gap by analyzing the processes that produce program results.
Findings from a process evaluation often provide direction for conducting impact studies (Patton 1987). A process evaluation might be conducted to discover important issues and develop hypotheses, which are tested using the gross impact model in the previous chapter. For example, qualitative results may suggest that participants receiving a thorough needs assessment have better outcomes than those who are not assessed. This hypothesis could be tested in a gross impact model by including a dummy variable indicating whether the participant received a needs assessment. Shapiro (1973) provides an example of how differences between quantitative and qualitative results were resolved in a study of elementary education.

In summary, there are several characteristics of process evaluations that should be remembered. Compared to outcome studies, process evaluations require that much more consideration be given to the development of research questions and a study design capable of answering them. This requires a much more deliberate selection process for focusing evaluation activities on those influences and relationships of greatest interest and relevance for information users, within the constraints imposed by a sparse research literature, the difficulty in defining and measuring some of the key variables, and the necessity of collecting qualitative data that are not designed for statistical analysis.

Second, in designing a process evaluation, a unique mix of data collection and analysis methods must be carefully selected to fit the research questions to be answered.

Finally, because of greater difficulty in measuring implementation variables and heavier dependence on qualitative data, the process evaluator usually has more discretion than the outcome evaluator. This methodological freedom has a cost, however, for it makes the task of integrating and interpreting the range of information collected during the course of the study much more complex.
Evaluating Program Implementation

NOTES


2. Patton (1987) presents methods for addressing these issues in evaluating program implementation, which may be applied to the analysis of an organizational system.

3. Differences between quantitative and qualitative data are also discussed in chapter 1 as well as in Patton (1987), Schwartz and Jacobs (1979), and Mintzberg (1983a), among others.

4. If the quantitative approaches are subject to measurement error (and most of them are), the tradeoff may be greater accuracy. In this case, qualitative data may be the more accurate source of information.

5. Patton (1987) describes a variety of purposeful sampling strategies that may be employed in evaluations of program implementation.

6. The possible bias associated with nonprobability sampling may be reduced by collecting information from multiple samples. If the information is consistent across samples, a degree of convergent validity may be obtained.

7. Some programs are implemented directly at the state or federal level, such as special programs under JTPA for dislocated workers operated by states, and programs for Native Americans operated by the federal government. Studying program implementation in these instances involves the same general variables and relationships, but primary attention is given to the level at which the most important aspects of implementation occur, treating the other levels as "the environment."

8. The literature on studying program environments is sparse. However, a useful resource is a recent special issue of one of the American Evaluation Association's journals, which is listed in this chapter's references. (See) Conrad and Roberts-Gray (1988: 40).


10. Simpson (1986) and Grembowski (1986) present questions for measuring client, employer, and staff satisfaction in employment and training programs.

11. Sometimes organizations emphasize one component over others at different stages of their development (Lyden 1975). For example, at start-up an organization's chief concern might be to produce tangible results. It, thus, puts emphasis on the work component, which later shifts to the coordination component as confusion mounts. Later, attention might shift to the mission component as questions are raised about whether the organization is making a difference in the outside world.

12. A key concern in this and all analyses is the validity, or accuracy, of the findings. Patton (1987) explains how "triangulation" can be used to verify the initial results of this exercise.
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Evaluating Program Implementation 295


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