Evaluation Guidelines for Art Organizations

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Introduction

Evaluation has become increasingly important for arts organizations. The accountability demanded in a tightening economic climate coupled with recent concerns for responsiveness to diverse audiences has resulted in increasing attention to visitor expectations. The American Association of Museums report, *Museums for a New Century* (1984), for example, shifts emphasis from collecting and preservation of objects as the major mission of museums to education. This newer concept of "proactive visitor enhancement" has resulted in increased need to evaluate visitor involvement.

As with other organizations, factors such as anticipated cost, time, politics, tediousness or lack of understanding about evaluation methodology may speak against evaluation. For arts organizations, evaluation is especially confusing because some believe that it may limit the creative artistic process.

It is the purpose of this study to investigate evaluation and its relation to art programs and organizations. Does the nature of art dictate that an arts organization, itself, is so different from other organizations that evaluation might not be appropriate? If evaluation should be done, can methods be designed in such a way as to facilitate the artistic creativity associated with the arts?

An Approach: Art as Open System

An understanding of art and arts organization is the key to addressing evaluation concerns. Art has been described in many ways through the centuries of philosophic inquiry. Abrams (1953) identified four major orientations in aesthetic theory: mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective (pp. 3-29), noting that all art theories, even though a mixture of these orientations, always seem to exhibit a discernible orientation. Similarly, another aesthetician, Rader (1979), observed that ways of describing art have tended to overlap rather than be mutually exclusive in a definitional sense.

Morris Weitz (1956), in his work on the role of theory in aesthetics, observed that even though the great aesthetic theories in the history of art claim to be definitional and converge on the attempt to state the defining properties, none add up to sufficient properties for a definition (p. 30). Since definition implies "the statement of the necessary and sufficient properties of what is being defined" (p. 27), a true definition or statement of the essential properties of all works of art would have to pose the criteria without which there would not be a work of art.

Weitz surveyed prior theories showing them to be inadequate. While claiming to be complete, each left out something others considered important. His intent was to criticize aesthetic theory itself, "as a logically vain attempt to define what cannot be defined, to state the necessary and sufficient properties of that which has no necessary and sufficient properties, to conceive the concept of art as closed when its very use reveals and demands its openness" (p. 30).

Weitz qualified that the theory of art should not and cannot function as definition. Art demands openness. "The problem with which we must begin is not, 'what is art?,' but 'what sort of concept is art?'" (p. 30). In trying to look at the concept of art, we find strands of similarities. It is an open descriptive process rather than a definitional one:

> New conditions (cases) have constantly arisen and will undoubtedly constantly arise; new art forms, new movements will emerge, which will demand decisions on the part of those interested, usually professional critics, as to whether the concept should be extended or not (p. 32).

There can be legitimate and serviceable closed concepts in art which set condition boundaries for a special purpose, for example, the School of French Impressionism is closed as opposed to the general concept "impressionism" which has open possibilities.

The "open" concept can be further understood from the work of von Bertalanffy (1968). In *General System Theory*, he described systems as "sets of elements standing in interrelation" (p. 38). There can be closed systems (those considered isolated from their environment) and open systems (which receive and adjust to inputs from the environment). The chemical equilibria of physical chemistry, isolated from the environment, are examples of closed systems. Living organisms are open systems. They maintain a steady state with continuous inflows and outflows from the environment. As opposed to unequivocally determined initial conditions automatically resulting in a predictable final state (closed system), the open system allows that the same final state may be reached from different conditions and in different ways. It is possible through the import of energy (negative entropy) in an open system to reach states of increased order and organization as opposed to the tendency toward maximum probable disorder in a closed system. The input of information (communication theory) into

an organization is just such an example of energy input. Many aestheticians including Beardsley (1958), Cohen (1968), Kaelin (1968) and Mukarovsky (1978), use systems concepts. Approaching "arting" as an open system allows possibilities for creativity and growth while countering the limiting effects which could result from treating it as a closed system. With appropriate channels for evaluation in place to facilitate information flow, creativity and adaptability could be encouraged.

Art Organizations and the Open System Concept

Contemporary theorists in organizational structure, notably Katz and Kahn (1966), have applied von Bertalanffy's general systems theory to organizational theory. Traditional organizations, they noted, emphasized hierarchical management and internal functioning without inputs from the environment. Without feedback, these organizations tended to be rigid — just the opposite of what is needed in today's rapidly changing society. An open system approach gives flexibility.

In developing their organizational theory, Katz and Kahn (1978) identified characteristics which seemed to define all open systems. *Energy importation* relates to the fact that open systems continuously find and import human and material sources. *Throughput* is the process which occurs as inputs are reorganized and work gets done within the system. An *output* results when the material and nonmaterial products are exported to the environment where they have an impact. A *cycle of events* results through input, transformation, and output cycles in which outputs provide the inputs for a new cycle. By importing energy from the environment, *negative entropy* (increased order) is produced. *Feedback* allows inputs of resources and information from the environment which provides a steering mechanism for the organization and prevents entropy (tendency to disorder). A *dynamic equilibrium* results as the open system seeks a stable state. Over time the system becomes more specialized or differentiated and requires greater *integration* and coordination in order to continue functioning in a unified manner. Norms and values must be integrated; roles, tasks, and authority must be coordinated. Also, open systems have *equifinality,* meaning that they can reach the same state even though they start from different conditions or travel by different paths (pp. 23-30).

Can these open system concepts can be applied to the "arting" system and to the arts organizations? Breithaupt and Gotesky (1959) defined an art institution as "an institution engaged in the production, distribution, and consumption or appreciation of art objects such as paintings, sculpture, novels, architectural structures, poetry, musical compositions, etc.' (p. 233). They noted that the difference between an art institution and any other kind of social institution was primarily in the purpose attributed to the products rather than in the processes by which art objects were produced, distributed, and consumed. Like other social institutions, the art

institutions have a defined structure and well established relations with other art and non-art institutions.

Since social systems are essentially contrived systems with complex behavior patterns anchored in the motivations and expectations of human beings, they are difficult to locate, bound, and comprehend. Permeable at their boundaries, the barrier conditions between the systems and their environments are especially important. Barrier transactions can be a measure of system openness. As "demarcation lines or regions for the definition of appropriate system activity, for admission of members into the system, and for other imports into the system" (p. 65), boundaries constitute the barrier for many types of interaction between those on the inside and those on the outside.

Boundary functions can link with the environment, but at the same time provide separation. Katz and Kahn noted how psychological separation may be maintained by visible symbols such as uniforms, dress, or insignia and more subtly by differences in behavior or speech. Boundary separations can be beneficial to the members of an organization in boundary positions, those concerned with the export of services from the system or the import of materials, by establishing their ties with the organization and its policy. Although boundary positions facilitate environmental interaction as an essential feature of open systems, the members occupying boundary positions are subject to the conflicting pressures of their own organization and the environment; the stressfulness of boundary positions has been studied by Kahn (1964). Because system boundaries are so permeable, social organizations must be concerned with barriers, boundary personnel, and the environmental interactions. This can be addressed through evaluation.

The Role of Evaluation

How outputs from "arting" or the arts organization are translated into energy to reactivate the system is the purview of evaluation. It can provide negative entropy and feedback to return energy to the system. Feedback mechanisms from the environmental field are necessary in order for the social organization to survive. Evaluation, when appropriately done, can provide the feedback to keep the arts organization, a social organization, responsive to its environmental field.

Evaluation of the art organization system and the arting system each require different information. The arts organization, as a social system, is a boundary position of service between the art (the arting system) at its center and the clients set within the complex multiple social systems of the environment. The arts organization is the boundary linking the art with the environment and, at the same time, providing needed separation. Evaluation information can target this interaction and provide feedback to enhance opportunities for creativity.

Many aspects of arts organizations can be evaluated such as programs, exhibitions, audiences, community benefits, use of funds or management.

Evaluation Concepts for Arts Organizations

On the premise that the arts and arts organizations are open systems, it follows that evaluation must be methodologically compatible with the open system approach. Comprehensive reviews of evaluation have been presented by researchers including: Guba (1977), Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Nevo (1983) in educational evaluation; Chelimsky (1985) in public program evaluation; and Loomis (1987) in museum visitor evaluation.

Stake's (1975) responsive approach to evaluation is notable because it incorporates open system concepts. "It is an approach that trades off some measurement precision in order to increase the usefulness of the findings to persons in and around the program" (p. 14). It responds to audience requirements for information that are better determined from unobtrusive measures such as conversations. According to Stake:

> To do a responsive evaluation, the evaluator conceives of a plan of observations and negotiations. He arranges for various persons to observe the program, and with their help prepares brief narratives, portrayals, product displays, graphs, etc. He finds out what is of value to his audiences, and gathers expressions of worth from various individuals whose points of view differ. Of course, he checks the quality of his records: he gets program personnel to react to the accuracy of his portrayals; authority figures to react to the importance of various findings; and audience members to react to the relevance of his findings. He does much of this informally—iterating and keeping record of action and reaction. He chooses media accessible to his audiences to increase the likelihood and fidelity of communication. He might prepare a final written report, he might not—depending on what he and his clients have agreed upon (p. 14).

Several outcomes result: it allows for audience diversity whether from culture, region, or interest and it puts the evaluator in touch with the audience. Evaluation design emerges during the evaluation rather than through a preordinate plan. The evaluator is drawn into the activity which puts them more in tune although the results may be less objective. Methods move toward qualitative studies and ongoing communication to encourage feedback—an open system approach.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) expanded and qualified concepts of the Stake model. Particularly they discussed the audience as organizer for responsive evaluation. It becomes important for the evaluator to recognize concerns and issues, collect data and proceed appropriately. Nevo (1983), in what he termed an analytical review of the literature in educational evaluation,

suggested evaluators "organize their own perceptions of evaluation... rather than adopting piously one evaluation model or another" (p. 126). Evaluators are encouraged to organize their perceptions within the context of particular needs.

Parallel trends are found in public program evaluation. Developments in the field, summarized by Chelimsky (1985) in *Program Evaluation: Patterns and Directions*, identify two approaches: the first emphasizing analytic techniques such as "policy analysis, cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, systems analysis, [and] operations research" (p. 2) and the later, a compilation of work in many fields such as education, public health, and crime and delinquency and disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, and applied statistics, emphasizing qualitative methodology (compatible with open systems).

Robert Wolf (1980) proposed a naturalistic view of evaluation applied to the museum setting. According to him, evaluation becomes naturalistic if it: (1) focuses on current and spontaneous activities, behaviors and expressions rather than a narrow set of prespecified objectives; (2) responds to staff members' needs for different kinds of information; and (3) accounts for the different values and perspectives that exist whenever the question of impact is introduced. Naturalistic evaluation takes a broad holistic view of the program, exhibit, or institution being studied (p. 40).

The process of focusing on behaviors and expressions, responding to staff members' needs, and accounting for different values relates to the responsive idea put forth by Stake (1975) in his model expanded by Guba and Lincoln (1981). The use of portrayals and interviews such as suggested by Wolf was encouraged. In naturalistic evaluation, observations and interviews are performed within the setting in which the program or exhibit occurs and are done in a conversational style. Wolf (1980) observed that considerable skill and sensitivity were demanded on the part of the evaluator because the structure of the interaction depended on the circumstances.

Wolf identified four major operational phases of naturalistic evaluation: *negotiation* related to the practical matters such as budget, logistics, and clarification of purpose and procedures; *issue identification* obtained from staff interviews; *in-depth investigation* of the issues included both the process itself of collecting the data through visitor interviews and observations and also ongoing meetings with the investigation team to insure being on track and to allow for emergent new data; and *analysis and presentation of the data* to the museum staff at all levels in such a way as to encourage them to: profit from the information, use it, and obtain suggestions for new ways to look at the data (p. 42, 43). This model, which requires a high level of participation among everyone involved, is described by Wolf. It allows for expressive results making possible an open system approach with built-in feedback.

Other researchers focused on evaluation as a tool to determine what was gained for the visitor. Harris Shettel (1973) and C.G. Screven (1974)

worked on exhibit evaluation for educational potential. Screven made suggestions for interactive learning features which would encourage visitor response to questions or involve them in problem solving.

Loomis (1987), in his book *Museum Visitor Evaluation: New Tool for Management*, noted that it was not until the late '50s that evaluation which involved a description of the audience was really recognized. By the end of the '60s, there was a stronger emphasis on exhibits as learning environments. Loomis, concluding his comprehensive review of visitor evaluation in museums cited Edward Robinson who, in 1933, had envisioned the time "when every major museum would have a staff person to evaluate" (p. 29).

Proposed Guidelines and Recommendations

Since the arts and arts organizations are open systems, the open system "process" approach to evaluation is a pivotal concept. The three "open" systems (art, arts organization and evaluation) are in continual interaction. The following guidelines and recommendations are suggested to facilitate evaluation as an ongoing open-system-based process for arts organizations.

1. Recognition of Similarities and Differences between the Arts and Arts Organizations

Arts and arts organizations are similar by being open systems, but different because each uses a different set of information for its system. Awareness of the operant open system concept can, through feedback, allow for synergistic effects between the two: the arts organization as the boundary organization between the art and the audience can encourage creativity and growth of the art; similarly the art impacts the arts organization in its relationship to the audience or the environment.

2. Policy as the Starting Point for Evaluation

Because policy is a common ground in the organization, it is important to focus on policy as the starting point for evaluation. Here also differentiations should be made between policy for the art and policy for the organization.

3. Institutional Self-Study as the First Step

As Chelimsky (1985) noted, Wildavsky had suggested organizations evaluate their own activities: "The ideal organization would be self-evaluating. It would continuously monitor its own activities so as to determine whether it was meeting its goals or even whether these goals should continue to prevail. When evaluation suggested that a change in goals or programs to achieve them was desirable, these proposals would be taken seriously by top decision makers" (p. 247). Loomis also emphasized institutional self-study:

Self-study involves an analytical effort to define overall goals and long range plans for an institution... Any self-study should use such information sources as staff interviews, archival records, meetings with support groups, financial analysis, and visits to similar institutions. Surveys of the public can also be included... (p. 14).

4. Use of the Process (Open System) Type Model

Since the open system theory provides the vehicle for interrelation of the arts and the arts organizations, a parallel open system model, a "process" model, is recommended.

The organization is encouraged to consider several stages: formulation, involving the design of a program; execution, looking at how the program is implemented; and, finally, accountability, asking about whether the program should continue, change, or terminate. What is also implied in the open system approach to evaluation is that the evaluation system, itself, is subject to feedback and change.

Much work has been done in educational evaluation by Guba and Lincoln (1981) in the development of a responsive evaluation model. Sources for specific evaluation designs for arts organizations include work done by Loomis (1987) and Wolf (1980, 1981) for audience evaluation, and Screven (1974) for exhibit evaluation. Evaluation research in many fields including education, sociology, and public administration can become source materials as well.

5. Awareness of Open System Variables

An understanding of possible configurations for the arts and arts organizations is a key to successful implementation. The model presented (see Figure 1: A Model of Supported Art Systems) offers a visual representation of interactions of arts organizations, arts and their support systems.

The model relates the various open systems and subsystems which impact upon each other thereby creating many differing motives for evaluation. The main system at the center is the "supported art system" consisting of the art organization and its supported art, both within the context of the artistic mission. The point of overlap of the two circles is the art product resulting from the interaction. This could include, for example, art objects, performances, or events. All of these open systems together form the supported art system which is also an open system. Evaluators should consider whether the artistic mission shared by the arts organization and its supported art has been maintained by both before looking further.

On the left side of the figure, the formal support systems for the supported art system are shown. These include the governmental, nonprofit and for profit organizations who designate formal channels for arts support. Generally an arts organization may receive support from any one of these subsystems independently or from more than one as in the case of matching

funds on a grant, for example. The informal support systems identified on the right side of the model include the community of artists and the art experts as well as the consumers of art. These groups also interact with the art organization and its supported art in ways which could impact evaluations.

Included in the model are social and physical environmental relationships which interact with the supported arts system. The social environment could include societal organizations as well as the general public who may enjoy art products upon occasion, but are not regular consumers of art. As well, the consideration of diverse audiences with their own cultural systems emerges as an important area.

Among all these systems and subsystems, inputs and outputs occur constantly. Since the inputs of a system are its own needs or demands while its outputs may be the demands of another system, the role of the evaluator is especially complex.

Table 1 identifies possible inputs and outputs which could affect evaluation of supported art systems. In formal support systems, for example, accountability may be stronger. Evaluators for the government are concerned about responsibility for funds—a stewardship develops. In the for profit sector, a corporation wants evaluation to benefit the corporate image as well as to show that funds were used carefully. Generally speaking the formal support agencies require a stricter form of evaluation which approaches control because in it necessary for them to maintain their desired inputs. Accountability is necessary to keep political impact high and to show how public good has been attained.

Process evaluation can become nurturing to the organization by encouraging players to assess current situations and future directions in the context of the supported art and the artistic mission. Further, it can raise the awareness level within and around the organization which could promote a climate conducive to creativity and growth. By considering possible inputs and outputs of each system, the evaluator could become more aware of motivations or hidden agendas driving evaluation demands. The informal support systems also have complex inputs and outputs related to the supported art system. The community of artists, for example, might look to the supported art system to give them more prestige in the community. On the other hand , the community of artists may view the supported art as a competitor and work against its support.

Also in the informal support system, art experts play major roles in determining support. Critics may make or break the run of a play or give a museum exhibit favorable or unfavorable reviews. Experts are frequently asked to join panels which control recommendations for grant funding. The interactions can be complex between critics and the supported art system.

The support of the art consumer does not go without impact on the arts organization. Needs for aesthetic experiences as well as social and educational opportunities are demands evaluation should address. Members

of the general public, the tax payers, frequently have opinions about art experiences and culture which impact evaluation. The supported arts system receives the outputs generated by all these systems and subsystems. Whether all inputs are desirable and what the consequences, are considerations for the evaluation process.

Further, the evaluator needs to be aware of the outputs of the supported arts system and how they become inputs to other systems. Whether the artistic mission remains a driving force as it should or whether it becomes changed by other demands should be an important question for the evaluator of arts organizations. The question of trade-offs must be understood and given appropriate consideration. Evaluation in arts administration involves a complex set of variables which must be related to each supported arts system.

6. Use of Qualified Evaluators

The evaluator should be an expert in the field or someone who becomes familiar with the field by exchange with experts within the arts organizations. Participation by professionally trained staff is essential. The choice between evaluators from within, who undoubtedly have a bias, to those from outside, who may not understand the functioning of the organization, depends on the situation.

7. Interaction with Concerned Parties

In open system evaluation it is especially important to interact with all those in the arts organization who would be concerned (affected by) the evaluation. Interaction not only brings out all possible factors relating to the evaluation, such as hidden agendas, but also results in a "buy in" by those involved.

8. Use of Qualitative Methodology

The use of qualitative methodology is important even though the required experimental design is more complex. Qualitative methods produce quantities of data which require organization and interpretation. Weiss and Rein (1969) suggested an approach to data at three different levels of generalization. In the first level, organization would center on descriptions of concrete cases such as the case studies: "the analysis problem would be to organize materials into a story which can be grasped, while finding the right mix of detail and condensation" (p. 247). On the next level reports could be written which contain some degree of abstraction emphasizing "types of systems, structures, or processes observed" (p. 247). Concrete detail could illustrate the generalizations.

Finally a report would be written on a very abstract level which would still use some concrete examples, but which would present a general model for understanding of the results and their consequences. This final stage would have to emerge from the initial data and be checked against it.

As the authors conclude, each evaluator would use different analysis styles, but would need to bring a form of systematic and organized treatment to the qualitative data. Visual organization such as the use of graphs or charts could be another variation to the report format.

9. Awareness of Possible Self-Serving Motivations
Self-serving motivations are common and should be recognized: political influences, hidden agendas by staff, desire to terminate an employee, etc. The positive side is that the evaluator can use this as an opportunity to identify hidden agendas.

10. Targeting One Set of Initial Actions
Because problems result from overburdening staff and causing confusion with evaluation "jargon," it is recommended that the evaluator target one set of initial actions to begin the process. The Stake model (1975), for example, proposed the evaluator conceive of a plan of observations and negotiations to find out what is important to his audience before gathering the evaluation data.

11. Immediate Processing of Results
When results are reported promptly and fed back into the system, the participants benefit and take the evaluation process more seriously. Successful evaluation cannot be achieved without a vehicle to assure the immediate processing of results and return to the system.

Conclusion
This paper set out to explore the feasibility of evaluation in arts administration with the proposed outcome being comprehensive evaluation guidelines appropriate for arts organizations. A theoretical investigation of the nature of the arts and arts organizations established that both can be viewed as open systems with consequent correspondent interrelationships. Based on open system theory, it was concluded that evaluation is not only appropriate, but essential for arts organizations. Evaluation is the vehicle which contributes to creative growth which, through feedback, can promote flexibility and change.

Appropriate evaluation can actually serve as positive energy for the organization within which the art resides. Finally, the evaluation process, itself an open system, becomes a creative endeavor.

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Table 1

Evaluation Guidelines for Art Organizations

Possible Inputs/Outputs Which
Could Affect Evaluation of Supported Art Systems

Factors	Desired Inputs	Outputs
FORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS		
Governmental	political impact	funds
	public good	favorable legislation
	personal factors	gen. support services
Nonprofit	public good	public services
	aesthetic value	funds
	personal factors	influence
For profit	profit	direct contributions
	corporate image	in-kind services
	community responsibility	influence
	personal factors	
INFORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS		
Community of	artistic advancement	consumer awareness
artists	influence	advocacy
	support	in-kind services
		funds
Consumers of art	aesthetic experience	consumer funds
	social benefit	membership
	educational opportunities	contributions
		volunteerism
		advocacy
Art experts	aesthetic excellence	critical response
	creativity	aesthetic judgements
	influence	advocacy
ENVIRONMENTAL		
Social	economic	tax dollars
	quality of life	public opinion
	education	economic
	culture	social trends
Physical	aesthetic standards	aesthetic motivation
		and impact
SUPPORTED ARTS SYSTEMS		
Art(s)	creative climate	art production
	funds	outcomes/artistic mission
	facility	advocacy
	benefits	
	interactive opportunities	
	stability	
Art(s) organization	formal/informal support	structures of art product
	artistic activity	cultural programs
		education
		political impact
		public good

Figure 1

A Model of Supported Art Systems