Diagram showing an outline of the process of Soft System Methodology

(Source: Soft System Methodology in Action: Wiley Publication –November 2000)
Checklist of Project Evaluation Questions

Set out below is a comprehensive checklist of questions that may be used in the evaluation development projects and in the formulation of project management case studies (from Goodman & Love, 1979)

Phase 1 - Planning, Appraisal and Design

a) Identification and Formulation

Was the project identified in the course of the national development planning process? If so, what was the policy-making character of this process?

Can the national planning process ensure that policies and programs for economic and social development at the national level are translated into or integrated with counterpart plans at regional and local levels?

- Did the original project idea relate to problems identified in the national or sectoral or regional plan?

- What were the major environmental factors - political, economic, social, cultural, technical, or others - that led to the project?

- What was the primary source of the project idea?

Who were the individuals or groups that first proposed the project?

- Did other organisations become involved in defining the project?

Who, other than the earliest proposers, supported the project idea? Who opposed it?

Were other groups or individuals involved in the preparation, such as: clients, users, beneficiaries, political supporters or opponents, resource suppliers, and potential project implementors?

How and by whom was the initial idea justified in order to be included in the country's investment program? Should it be in the program at this stage? If so, how?

Were prefeasibility studies done?

- How clearly and explicitly were the purposes and goals of the project stated or defined? Were the major potential problems also identified at this time? Were the time constraints taken into consideration?

Was there general commitment to the goals of the project by all of the constituencies in its design? From whom could political administrative support be initially counted upon? What resources did these supporters have? What conflicts arose and how were they settled?

b) Feasibility Analysis and Appraisal

- How extensive was the preliminary design? Who prepared it?

- Was a formal feasibility analysis conducted?

- Who conducted it? Was it a national organisation, an international assistance agency, a consultancy team, or a combination thereof?

- How comprehensive and detailed were:
  - the technical feasibility studies (project location and lay technology needs, training of technical personnel)?
  - the financial feasibility analysis (investment analysis, project capital needs at various stages)?
  - the economic feasibility analysis (national economic benefit demand forecasting, comprehensive economic analysis)?
the market and commercial feasibility studies?
® the location studies?
® the political feasibility assessment?
® the administrative, organisation, and managerial studies?
Did the studies reveal and weaknesses in the project that might affect future operations? If so, what were these weaknesses?
What appraisal criteria were used? Who had the authority for appraisal?
What procedures were used during the appraisal process? How many stages did it go through?
Did the appraisers and reviewers make an onsite inspection?
Were there any reservations about the overall ability of the project to succeed? If so, what were these reservations? Were there any other problems that other appraisers foresaw that were not included in the final appraisal?
How were uncertainties and gaps in the reliable estimates or projections affecting project appraisal dealt with?

c) Design

What were the major sources of data or of information used in designing the principal components of the project?
How well did the project design reflect the initial objective and targets of the project idea?
How clearly and explicitly were the purposes and goals of the project defined and stated? Were immediate goals distinguished from longer-range goals? Were project objectives related to broader development policies?
Did the proposal include measurable targets for attaining objectives and specifications for the project’s outputs?
Did the source of the project's identification influence how it was prepared and designed?
Was an attempt made to identify the potential project manager and to involve him in project design?
Were the project's activities, functions, tasks, and components clearly identified and defined?
How many and what kind of design alternatives were considered and analyzed?
How were these alternatives evaluated and chosen?
Were preconditions or prerequisites of success considered during the design task?
Were potential problems or bottlenecks to successful implementation identified?
- Were potential social and cultural impacts of the project taken into consideration in its design? Were adverse effects identified? If so, how was the design modified?
- Did the project design indicate an adequate mechanism for internal and external communication requirements?
Were linkages and relationships with complementary or competing projects examined?
- In how much detail were plans, specifications, job descriptions, and work schedules prepared?
- Were alternative organizational arrangements for project execution and operation considered? Were plans made for expanding administrative capacity of the potential project implementation unit?
- Did the project organization maintain a balance appropriate to project task - between technical and managerial person's functions?
Were the different elements of the project design integrated in a coherent whole?
Was there one person responsible for integration?
Phase 2 - Selection, Approval & Activation

«) Selection and Approval

What appraisal and selection criteria were used?
- How many stages of review were necessary before final selection approval? Who participated in the review, selection, and approval processes? Did these stages involve:
  ® obtaining legislative authorization?
  ® obtaining executive approval?
  ® confirming procedures for budget operation, personnel management, and interagency operation?

Did any changes occur in the project environment from the time of the feasibility study that affected project approval?

How long did the appraisal, selection, negotiations, and approval process take?

What were the manor sources of delay, if any?

What major factors - political, social, technical, economic, administrative, or others - influenced decisions at each stage of the review?

How were uncertainties and gaps in the reliable estimates or projections affecting project appraisal and selection dealt with?

Was the proposal in competition with other ones? If so, was the project appraised and evaluated comparatively with these others?

Which of the following criteria were used in selection:
  ® linkage with national or local development thrusts?
  ° Accelerating the pace of economic and social progress in the area?
  ® Availability of natural resources and raw materials?
  ° Considerations of priorities dictated by political pressures?
  ® Cost and duration?
  © Other criteria?

From the sources was the project to be financed and funded? Which organisation - national or international - provided other basic resources or inputs?

Who was involved in negotiation of loans or grants or other forms of funding for the project? What were the major issues of negotiation? What were the positions of the negotiators? How were differences resolved? Design or operation by the selection, approval, or funding authorities? Was the plan modified to conform to those conditions.

b) Activation

What criteria were used in choosing a project implementation unit or executing agency?

What variables influenced the choice of organisational structure?

What was the relationship between the project implementation and higher organisational authorities in terms of responsibilities and support?

- Who was included in the project team? Were they transferred from their previous responsibilities temporarily or permanently? Were they on a part-time basis or on a full-time basis?

What were the criteria used in personnel selection for the project staff and for the project manager? What recruitment methods were used?

- Were the project leader and the project team given their responsibilities clearly? Were they provided an orientation or a period of retraining?

What working contracts and activation documents were used? Who prepared them?
Was an adequate information and control system provided after the activation phase? If not, why not?

- How was the project organised internally with regard to "
  - work and task division?
  - authority, responsibility, and supervision?
  - communication channels among divisions and with support organisations?
  - relationship between technical and administrative divisions?
  - resource procurement and allocation?
  - monitoring and reporting?

- What types of system or procedures were established for bidding or contracting?
  - financial resources?
  - materials, supplies, equipment, and facilities?
  - manpower?
  - political support?
  - technology?
  - public participation?

Were detailed and realistic project operation plans formulated for:
  - budgeting?
  - recruitment and training of personnel?
  - data collection /
  - work and activity scheduling?

Phase 3. Operations Control and Handover

a) Operations

- How were work activities and projects scheduled?
- Did the project management team make use of such techniques as CPM and PERT analysis? What other techniques were used and why were they selected?
- Was there an adequate management information system? Did it define:
  - information requirement
  - sources of information
    - systematic procedures and organisation for collecting data?
    - a coordinated design to integrate internal and external project activities?
- Were feedback channels and feedback elements identified? Was adequate use made of these channels? Was adequate use made of information received from these channels?
- Were formal problem-solving or troubleshooting procedures established?
- What arrangements were made for coordination of project activities with supporters, suppliers, and clients?
- What was the nature of the leadership style of the project manager during the implementation phase? Could it be characterised as:
  - management by control?
  - management by objectives?
  - management by exception?
- Was the project redesigned or modified to meet unanticipated problems during implementation?
b) Supervision and Control

- Were formal systems or procedures created to:
  - procure, inspect, and inventory at optimum levels raw materials and other resource inputs?
  - ensure vigorous requirement and optimum manpower utilisation as regards their efficiency and output?
  - monitor budget performance, cash flows; forecast deviations from funding requirements?
  - test and adapt transferred technology?

Were formal management techniques such as network analysis and operations research used to:
- provide information on project progress to constituent beneficiaries?
- coordinate the work of contractors?
- reallocate resources to behind-schedule activities?

What methods were used to report progress and problems to authorities? What type of information was reported? How frequently were reports made? To whom were they addressed?

How were remedial actions initiated and performed when monitoring and control procedures indicated problems?

Did conflicts occur:
- between technicians from different disciplines or specialization?
- between administrators and technicians?
- between project managers within the parent organisation?
- Between the project implementation unit and other organization.

c) Completion and Handover

- Were project completion reports prepared and reviewed?
- Was a plan prepared either for replication or for the transition of successful experiment, pilot, or demonstration project to full-scale operation?

- What arrangements were made for diffusion of project outputs and results?
  - Were replicable components of the project identified?
  - Were arrangements made for follow-up investment or multiphase funding?
  - Were extension or technical assistance services created to assist clients or users to adapt project output and result?
  - Were the procedures and methods of handover and a continuation in an ongoing organisation well established? Were they complied with? If not, why not?

- What kinds of arrangements were made to transfer unutilized of excess resources - human, financial, physical, and technical - from the project at completion to other projects or organizations?

- What arrangements were made for credit or loan repayment?

- Would levels of outside funding change considerably upon handover to an ongoing organization?
  - Were project personnel reassigned to new duties at the project's completion. were they prepared and trained for this?

- Did the handover mean that new persons took over the project activities, or were the same persons transferred to a different organizational setting?
  - What restructuring or modification was required of the receiving agency or institution?
  - What difficulties arose as a result of the transfer and rundown?
Phase 4. Evaluation and Refinement

a) Evaluation and Follow-up

Was the need for the evaluation adequately perceived? Were the objectives of the evaluation sufficiently clear?

What type of evaluation was decided upon? Was the focus to be short-term, medium-term, or long-term effects/benefits of the project?

Were formal evaluation procedures established? Was an evaluation timetable set up?

What techniques were used in the evaluation (cost/benefit analysis, baseline measures, etc.)?

Who did the evaluation? Was it an individual or a team? If a team, was it composed of individuals independent and outside of the parent institution, or of individuals from within, or both? Why?

- What levels of seniority did the evaluator(s) have?

Was adequate background information and data provided for evaluation purposes? Was the evaluation team provided with adequate administrative support?

What were the results of the evaluation? Were the intended benefits realized? If not, why not?

Was project efficiency measured from time schedule, budget, and performance output considerations? What were the major factors causing delay, cost overruns, and lack of meeting project performance criteria?

Was variance analysis used to measure the difference between projected and actual results?

Did the evaluation consider the appropriateness of the following aspects of the project:

- management information system?
- operating design?
- manpower capabilities?
- organisational structures and flexibilities?

Did the outcome of the project support the programme and national policy goals for which the project was designed and of which the project was a part?

What was the overall impact of the project on the local, sectoral, or national setting? What was the prevailing attitude and reaction of the end users at the start of the project? What was it at the end? Did they perceive the project objectives in the same way?

Did the evaluation identify unmet needs? Did the evaluation identify piggyback or follow-up projects?

- Did the evaluation identify replicable components of the project? Did it identify follow-up investment or multiphase funding?
- Did it detect unforeseen side effects of the project, whether fortunate or unfortunate ones?
- Were formal evaluation reports written up and presented? To which individuals or agencies were they given? When? How were they used?

- Did the project team see the reports of participate in their formulation or preparation.
b) Refinement of Policy and Planning

- Were the results of the evaluation followed up? If so, by whom and how soon afterwards? If not, why not? If so, what were the results?
- Did the evaluation results lead to the formulation of proposals for other projects? Did they lead to improvements or modifications of new policy?
- What lessons and insights were learned from the project? Was there an analysis of the reasons for deviations in implementation from the operating plan? Did the analysis reveal both long-term and short-term lessons? How can these lessons be applied to refine the project of future projects?
- How can these lessons be applied to future policy decisions on project management?