

BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

AT THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
www.nationalacademies.org/bbccs

WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

MARCH 2010

FIELD EVALUATION IN THE INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE CONTEXT

Workshop Summary

Many new analytic tools and methods have been developed based on behavioral and social science research intended for use by the intelligence and counterintelligence community. This growing trend introduces important testing and evaluation questions related to the scientific rigor of these products. For example, have the tools and methods been adequately tested in the context in which they would be used (field evaluation)? What are the specific obstacles introduced by the intelligence and counterintelligence context? Are there lessons to be drawn from other fields and/or from other countries? On September 22-23, 2009, the Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences of the National Research Council held a Workshop on Field Evaluation of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences-Based Methods and Tools for Intelligence and Counterintelligence in Washington, DC, to explore these and related topics. The goal of the workshop was not to provide specific recommendations but to offer some insight—in large part through specific examples taken from other fields—into field evaluations as applied to intelligence work.

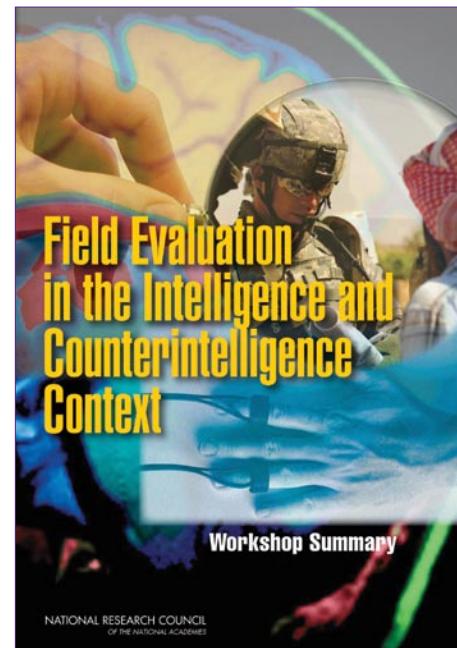
OBSTACLES TO FIELD EVALUATION

Several obstacles to conducting field evaluation within the intelligence community must be overcome for field evaluation to become more broadly accepted. One such obstacle is the pressure to use new devices and techniques as soon as they become available, without waiting for rigorous validation. Because lives are at stake, those in the field often push to adopt new methods and tools as quickly as possible and before there has been time to evaluate them adequately. Once a method is in widespread use, anecdotal evidence can lead its users to believe in its effectiveness and to resist rigorous testing, which may show that it's not as effective as they think.

Another obstacle is an apparent lack of appreciation among many in the intelligence community for the value of objective field evaluations and a tendency to rely instead on informal—and often misleading—approaches. This lack of appreciation is exacerbated by institutional biases, such as an inclination to underreport negative results concerning existing methods.

LESSONS

Lessons that can guide future efforts to expand the practice of field evaluation by the intelligence and counterintelligence community may come from outside it. Speakers described field evaluation practices in





such areas as criminal justice, forensics, health sciences, education, and organizational psychology. The workshop also featured presentations by speakers from the intelligence communities of other countries. From these talks several themes emerged concerning what is necessary for field evaluation to be successfully adopted in any given field. Several keys to success were identified by various speakers:

- *A trigger:* Christian Meissner of the University of Texas at El Paso discussed the recent surge of research on and evaluation of eyewitness testimony. A major impetus for that surge was the spate of DNA exonerations, in which people convicted of crimes, often on the basis of eyewitness testimony, were shown by DNA evidence to be innocent. Such a trigger can convince people that new approaches and new ways of thinking are needed.
- *Sufficient funding:* As R. Grover Whitehurst of the Brown Center on Education Policy noted, there is a tremendous amount of knowledge and expertise in academia that could be put to work in developing and evaluating techniques for use in intelligence, but, generally speaking, academics prefer working with other academics. One key to convincing them to get out in the field and work with members of the intelligence community is to provide sufficient funding.
- *A research base:* If field evaluations are to be convincing to practitioners, they need to be part of a larger, multimethodological research base in which the different pieces are consistent and support each other. Cynthia Lum of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University said that such a solid body of evidence is crucial in convincing members of a community to accept and apply the research.
- *Engagement with practitioners:* Many workshop participants spoke of the importance of researchers establishing and maintaining a good relationship with practitioners in the field. For example, David Mandel of Defence R&D Canada suggested that the scientists who are best able to engage with practitioners are those who can become interested in the challenge of solving their problems in the field, rather than just working to test scientific theories.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

In addition to the lessons learned from other areas about successfully implementing field evaluation, the workshop also addressed a variety of implementation issues specific to the areas of intelligence and counterintelligence. One major implementation challenge is the development of appropriate metrics for evaluating the performance of different techniques being considered. Another is finding an appropriate balance between the need for adequate testing and the sense of urgency in the field. And in some areas of the intelligence community, such as among analysts, just getting the practitioners to try new techniques can be a challenge.

Finally, a number of participants spoke of the possible value of creating an intelligence institute dedicated to producing solid research on issues of importance to intelligence. As Robert Boruch from the University of Pennsylvania noted, unless a clear place for scientific evidence is set aside in a governmental organization, very little science is likely to be introduced there.

For More Information . . . This brief was prepared by the Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences (BBCSS) based on the workshop summary *Field Evaluation in the Intelligence and Counterintelligence Context* (National Academies Press, 2010). The workshop was sponsored by the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The responsibility for the published workshop summary rests with the workshop rapporteur and the institution. Copies of the workshop summary are available from the National Academies Press, 500 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001; (800) 624-6242; www.nap.edu or via the BBCSS webpage at www.nationalacademies.org/bbccss. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, with no additions or alteration.

Copyright ©2010 by the National Academy of Sciences.

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine

The nation turns to the National Academies—National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council—for independent, objective advice on issues that affect people's lives worldwide.

www.national-academies.org