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The Evolution of Value-Based Monitoring and Evaluation in Africa: Examining Michael Scriven's Influence on the Adoption of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems by African governments: A case of the Zimbabwean Government

SISIMAYI Tapiwa P¹, NGWENYA Sifelani² and MABWE Linda M³

¹ Lecturer in the Department of Development Studies Midlands State University. P Bag 9055; GweruZimbabweSisimayitp@staff.msu.ac.zw; yimasisi@yahoo.com; +263716800145; +263 772605195; ORCID: 0000-0003-3690-4733.

² Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Evaluation Science Lupane State University P.O Box 170 Lupane, Along Bulawayo-Victoria Falls Highway, Zimbabwe; drsngwenya@lsu.ac.zw; ORCID: 0000-0002-7898-7322.

³ Lecturer in the Department of Accounting Sciences Midlands State University P Bag 9055; GweruZimbabweMabwel@staff.msu.ac.zw.

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Address for Correspondence:

SISIMAYI Tapiwa P, Lecturer in the Department of Development Studies Midlands State University. P Bag 9055.
(GweruZimbabweSisimayitp@staff.msu.ac.zw; yimasisi@yahoo.com)

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Abstract

This study examines how Michael Scriven's value and valuing process has influenced the adoption and development of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems within Zimbabwe's governance framework. The study investigated the transformation from traditional output-based evaluations to value-based assessment approaches using qualitative research methods including document analysis and stakeholder interviews. Guided by Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, the study reveals that Zimbabwe's M&E systems are increasingly incorporating Scriven's principles, evidenced by a shift toward impact-oriented evaluation frameworks. The findings indicate significant progress in areas like Results-Based Management and public sector accountability. However, significant hurdles to fully implementation include political interference, limited resources, and a lack of technical expertise. The study concludes that although Scriven's valuing process has had a positive impact on Zimbabwe's M&E landscape, enhanced political commitment and bolstered institutional capacity are crucial for fully realizing the effectiveness of these systems in governance.

Keywords

enhanced unified ethic decision-making model, ethical dilemmas, public administration, administrative evil

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1.0 Introduction and Background

Over the past decades, the global community has increasingly emphasized the need for development efforts to achieve greater effectiveness, especially when using limited or scarce funds and resources (Kabeyi, 2018). Hence, there is a need for programs, projects and interventions to be well executed or managed to realize better results or outputs (Kabeyi, 2018; Barry et al., 2018). Therefore, M&E frameworks were developed to enable organizations and entities to attain better results or outputs. As such, adopting effective M&E systems becomes paramount for all governments the world over. M&E systems play a vital role in assessing the impact and value of various policies and programs implemented by governments. According to Goldman et al. (2018), the evaluation concept is not widespread in Africa, as they are instigated by governments rather than donors who have seen M&E as an important way to improve the performance of the public sector globally (Goldman et al., 2019). Goldman et al. (2018) elaborate that evaluation has been perceived to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and accountability of government policies and programmes. Hence, the emphasis of M&E systems by African governments, and its intensification as a response to the global demand for accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

Despite its intricate historical, political, and socioeconomic settings, the adoption and implementation of M&E systems present special difficulties (Morkel & Sibanda, 2022; Goldman et al., 2018). Smith (2010) opines that Michael Scriven's work provides insightful information that might guide and transform M&E procedures in Africa. The study explores Scriven's work to understand how his theories have influenced the Zimbabwean government's adoption of monitoring and evaluation systems. Scriven (1991) affirms that his value lies in his expertise in designing evaluation frameworks, facilitating data collection and analysis, and providing evidence-based recommendations for improving policy outcomes. Additionally, Scriven (1991) explains that the valuing process is a systematic approach to assessing the value and impact of policies and programs. This process determines and assesses the worth, significance, and effectiveness of policies, programs, and interventions (Scriven, 1991). Therefore, value and valuing extend beyond simply measuring outputs and outcomes; they highlight the significance of comprehending the underlying values and principles that drive these interventions. Scriven's major contributions to evaluation include the development of the Goal-Free Evaluation approach, which prompts evaluators to assess the value and impact of programs without being influenced by preconceived goals or objectives (Scriven, 1991). By emphasizing actual results and outcomes rather than predetermined expectations, Goal-Free Evaluation offers a more unbiased and comprehensive assessment. Therefore, Scriven's emphasis on valuing has had a profound impact on evaluation practices by governments around the world.

In the United Kingdom, the government adopted Scriven's valuing concepts to improve its evaluation processes. Consequently, the United Kingdom's National Audit Office (NAO) highlights the importance of valuing in their evaluations, concentrating on assessing the worth and impact of government programs and policies (NAO, 2017; NAO, 2022). This approach helped improve accountability and transparency in decision-making. In Canada, Scriven's valuing process has influenced the federal government's evaluation practices. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat has adopted a results-based management approach that aligns with Scriven's ideas on valuing and evidence-based decision-making (Bourgeois & Whynot, 2018; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2008). This approach ensures that government programs and policies are evaluated according to their outcomes and impacts, ensuring a more accurate and effective assessment of their success and value.

The Australian government has also embraced Scriven's valuing concepts in its evaluation framework. The Department of Finance in Australia cited in Ballintyne & Mintrom (2018) has highlighted the importance of valuing in its evaluation guidelines, emphasizing the need to assess the value and effectiveness of government initiatives (Ballintyne & Mintrom, 2018). This approach helps inform policy development and resource allocation. While not specific to any level of government, Scriven's valuing ideas have had an impact on evaluation practices in the United States. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) in the United States has recognized the significance of valuing in its evaluation methodology, aiming to assess the value and impact of federal programs (GAO, 2012). This approach has significantly contributed to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government interventions, making it a valuable tool in the realm of public administration.

Scriven's valuing process has prompted African governments to enhance their accountability mechanisms. In Kenya, the government has adopted a results-based monitoring and evaluation system influenced by Scriven's valuing approach (Jones, 2021; Government of Kenya, 2022). This system focuses on assessing the value and impact of government programs, leading to increased transparency and accountability in the use of public resources. Scriven's valuing process has contributed to policy improvement in African governments. For example, the Ghanaian

government has integrated Scriven's ideas into their evaluation practices, leading to the identification of program strengths and weaknesses and the subsequent refinement of policies and interventions (Johnson, 2021). This iterative process of evaluation and adjustment has helped enhance the effectiveness and impact of government programs. African governments have also recognized the importance of Scriven's valuing process in evaluation practices. For example, the South African government has integrated Scriven's ideas into their evaluation framework, emphasizing the assessment of program worth and impact (Bester, 2009; Goldman et al., 2019). This has led to a more comprehensive evaluation approach that considers not only outcomes and outputs but also the value and effectiveness of government initiatives.

The Zimbabwean government has made efforts to adopt M&E principles aligned with Scriven's ideas (Yoon, 2022). The establishment of the Zimbabwe Monitoring and Evaluation (ZIMMET) unit in 2004 marked a significant step towards institutionalizing M&E practices (Makadzange, 2022). ZIMMET's mandate includes promoting stakeholder participation, conducting context-sensitive evaluations, and utilizing mixed methods approaches, all of which reflect Scriven's theoretical framework (Makadzange, 2022). However, the implementation of these principles has faced challenges. Limited capacity within ZIMMET and other government agencies, coupled with resource constraints and political pressures, have hindered the effectiveness of M&E systems (Mlambo & Govender, 2021).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation was significantly shaped by the Diffusion of Innovations theory as articulated by Everett Rogers (1962), which has experienced various revisions and updates in its subsequent editions, culminating in its publication in 2003. This theoretical framework examines the mechanisms through which novel concepts, technologies, or practices are assimilated and disseminated within a social system (Rogers, 1962). In this context, the implementation of M&E systems, influenced by Michael Scriven's valuation framework, can be conceptualized as an innovative practice within governmental structures. In this study, the Diffusion of Innovations theory was utilized to examine the factors influencing the acceptance and integration of these systems. These factors include the inherent attributes of innovation, the communication methods used to disseminate information, the social system's readiness for change, and the perceived benefits and obstacles associated with the adoption process. By utilizing these theoretical lenses, the study explored how various stakeholders interpret Scriven's valuation framework, the methods used to communicate information about its benefits and implementation, and how the unique attributes of the Zimbabwean government as a social system affect the diffusion and adoption of these monitoring and evaluation systems.

1.2 Objectives

1. To assess the extent to which Michael Scriven's value and the valuing process have influenced the adoption of M&E systems by the Zimbabwean government.
2. To examine the impact of the adoption of M&E systems influenced by Michael Scriven's valuing process on the accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making practices of the Zimbabwean government.

1.3 Methodology adopted by the study

The study utilized multiple case studies to investigate the adoption of Michael Scriven's valuing process by the Zimbabwean government and its impact on the M&E systems (Brown, 2019). These case studies involved in-depth analysis of selected programs or policies, focusing on the process of adoption, implementation and the perceived impact on accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making by ministries and departments. This method provided detailed insights into the practical applications and outcomes of Scriven's valuing process in the Zimbabwean context.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, and evaluation practitioners involved in M&E systems in the Zimbabwean government. These interviews provided insights into their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of the influence of Michael Scriven's value and the valuing process on the adoption of monitoring and evaluation systems (Smith, 2020). Open-ended questions were also used to allow participants to elaborate on their views and provide rich qualitative data (Brown, 2019).

Document analysis was carried out by way of a thorough review and analysis of relevant government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature (Jones, 2018). This involved reviewing existing evaluation frameworks, guidelines, and policy documents related to M&E systems in the Zimbabwean government, including the National M&E Policy Frameworks (2015), the Zimbabwe Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (2021-2025), the Zimbabwe National Development Strategy (NDS1) (2021-2025), Zimbabwean Results-Based Management (RBM) (2005), the National Health Strategy for Zimbabwe (NHSZ) (2021-2025), government budget reports highlighting M&E allocations, and evaluation reports from the Office of the Auditor General (2019-2024). The document analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the context, policies, and practices related to M&E systems and their adoption. Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data collected through interviews and document analysis, involving the identification of patterns, themes, and recurring ideas present in the data (Johnson, 2020). The data was coded and categorized to pinpoint key findings regarding the influence of Scriven's valuing process on the adoption of monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as their impact on accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making within the Zimbabwean government.

1.4 Findings and Discussions

The Scriven valuation methodology has significantly contributed to a paradigm shift from output to outcome-based evaluations. Policies and programs are increasingly evaluated on their broader social and economic ramifications rather than merely based on deliverables. Within the framework of the Zimbabwe Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), the education sector has historically measured success by the number of classrooms constructed. Currently, evaluations incorporate results of student performance and literacy rates to ascertain whether educational investments are producing intended learning outcomes. The same has also been noted by Mthiyane, (2011) and further supported by a Zimbabwean government official who remarked that,

"Historically, our focus was solely on the establishment of schools, but now we evaluate whether there has been an enhancement in students' learning outcomes. The goal is to promote quality and inclusive education which is people centered"

One notable achievement is the establishment of the Zimbabwean Results-Based Management (RBM) (2005) framework, which underscores the necessity of delineating explicit objectives, assessing progress, and ensuring accountability of governmental entities regarding their performance outcomes (Alesani, 2023). This framework is congruent with Scriven's advocacy for the significance of precise objectives and stringent evaluative measures. The senior management elucidated how the conceptualization of valuing has culminated in the integration of RBM to attribute value to the contributions of employees, as evidenced in various domains including healthcare policies, educational reforms, agricultural initiatives, and economic development programs. A director from one of the governmental ministries articulated that:

"Scriven's scholarship has profoundly impacted the methodical evaluation of the value, worth, and effects of programs and policies, enabling decision-makers within the government to execute informed decisions grounded in empirical data and stakeholder perspectives."

Nevertheless, the comprehensive execution of the RBM framework has encountered obstacles due to insufficient resources and a deficit in capacity building within governmental agencies.

Scriven's framework has fostered the integration of multifaceted perspectives in policy evaluation, thereby augmenting both credibility and legitimacy. In health policy evaluations conducted under the National Health Strategy for Zimbabwe (NHSZ) (2021-2025), input from community health workers and patients is now systematically incorporated to ensure that governmental health programs effectively address genuine community needs beyond mere statistical analysis. A representative from civil society articulated,

"We now possess platforms that facilitate community engagement in the evaluation of government programs, thereby ensuring that their voices are duly acknowledged."

Zimbabwe influenced by Scriven, amalgamates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to render a more holistic evaluation of governmental initiatives. The Zimbabwe Agricultural Policy Framework (ZAPF) now encompasses both quantitative crop yield data and qualitative farmer interviews to evaluate the efficacy of governmental subsidies in enhancing food security. Studies support the same (Amankwah & Gwatidzo, 2024). A policy analyst also elucidated that,

"Presently we no longer solely depend on numerical data; we also undertake comprehensive interviews with beneficiaries to obtain a complete understanding of the impact."

The implementation of Scriven's principles has also facilitated enhanced accountability frameworks, with performance audits (Valipour, Fatahi, Jafari, & Ahmadi, 2015) and independent evaluations becoming increasingly prevalent. In accordance with the Zimbabwe Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (2019), the Auditor General's Office has embarked on conducting impact assessments for public infrastructure initiatives, thus guaranteeing that the funds designated for roads and bridges produce meaningful economic advantages for local communities. A case in point is the habilitation of Gweru Mhandamabwe Road, which has economic value. An auditor noted,

"Independent evaluations have become standard practice, guaranteeing the efficient utilization of public funds. Back then, it came in as an afterthought or when there was an inquiry"

Furthermore, there has been a heightened commitment to the dissemination of evaluation reports and the active engagement of the public in M&E processes. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, in alignment with the Zimbabwe National Development Strategy (NDS1) (2021-2025), now publishes annual M&E performance reports, making them accessible to the public via governmental websites and stakeholder consultations to foster transparency. Ministers are also now assessed, and their performance results are made public. A government spokesperson remarked,

"We have now made M&E reports readily available online to enable citizens to hold us accountable. If you remember last year in 2024, Ministers of Provincial Affairs and Devolution were assessed and The Midlands Minister of Provincial Affairs and Devolution honorable Owen Ncube came out as the best performing Minister "

Policy modifications are increasingly predicated on empirical evidence rather than political imperatives, thereby enhancing the efficacy of governance. Within the context of the Zimbabwe National Drought Management Strategy (NDMS), the government has recently amended its drought response strategy after data derived from independent M&E assessments that indicated previous food aid distribution models were inadequate in reaching the most vulnerable households. A senior policymaker asserted,

"The Agricultural policy was revised and is now more grounded in impact assessments rather than political pressures. Back then Agriculture policies were framed around expected political outputs. The Pfumvudza approach attests to this point"

The study highlights the importance of political commitment, policy improvements, institutional integration, stakeholder engagement, and a culture of learning in Zimbabwe's implementation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). It also emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, and value-driven evaluation as proposed by Scriven. Despite these insights, respondents also recognized several challenges faced by the Zimbabwean government in adopting M&E systems influenced by Scriven's valuing process. These challenges include high levels of corruption, lack of expertise (Mapaona, 2024), lack of human capacity, lack of political will and commitment, lack of finance (Vhanda, Chinowaita, Chinowaita et al., 2023), poor funding for M&E, resistance to change (Woude, 2022), poor publicity, limited capacity, resource constraints, lack of data availability and quality data, lack of knowledge, implementation issues, and fear of M&E as an audit. The keynote respondents had this to say,

"Embedding Scriven's valuing process in monitoring and evaluation systems requires long-term commitment and sustainability. Lack of continuity, changes in political leadership, or shifting priorities can jeopardize the institutionalization of the process. Developing mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of the M&E systems is crucial. Key challenges in adopting M&E systems influenced by Scriven's valuing process in Zimbabwe have been the institutional culture and resistance, limited data quality and availability, minimal utilization of findings, and resource constraints. Implementing M&E evaluation systems that incorporate Scriven's valuing process requires skilled evaluators and professionals who are trained in evaluation methodologies, data analysis, and reporting. Building the necessary capacity within the government and relevant institutions can be a challenge, particularly if there is a lack of human resources and expertise in evaluation."

The study reveals that Scriven's concepts have had a limited but visible impact on Zimbabwe's M&E landscape. While Scriven's ideas resonate with some practitioners and policymakers, challenges remain in translating them into practice (Mapaona, 2024). A principal challenge is the interference of political dynamics as certain evaluations encounter opposition stemming from the potential revelation of governance shortcomings. Within the framework established by the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), disclosures related to the misuse of public

resources have occasionally been concealed or postponed to avoid political repercussions. This obstruction hinders essential evaluations, thereby weakening the effectiveness of M&E systems in fostering transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, another substantial impediment is the limitation of resources, wherein inadequate funding allocated for M&E initiatives adversely impacts capacity-building (Chigudu, 2015) and technological progress. A pertinent illustration of this phenomenon is the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), which has faced challenges in executing extensive household surveys owing to budgetary restrictions. This constraint diminishes the accessibility of reliable data, thereby complicating the ability of policymakers to base their decisions on comprehensive and contemporaneous information.

Moreover, lack of technical expertise is a major obstacle to the effective implementation of M&E methodologies. Many governmental ministries under the National Development Strategy (NDS1) lack adequately trained data analysts, leading to inconsistencies in the interpretation and application of M&E data for informed decision-making. Therefore, in the absence of sufficient expertise, evaluations are vulnerable to poor execution or misinterpretation, which reduces their effectiveness in guiding policy improvements.

1.5 Conclusion

The adoption of Scriven's valuation methodology within Zimbabwe's M&E landscape has resulted in both noteworthy accomplishments and considerable challenges. The country has made substantial progress in shifting from output-based to outcome-based evaluations, as evidenced by the establishment of the Results-Based Management (RBM) framework and the integration of multifaceted evaluation approaches across various sectors including education, health, and Agriculture. Nevertheless, numerous significant challenges still hinder full implementation, with considerable political interference and resistance, especially when evaluations are likely to expose governance deficiencies. Mthiyane (2011) also observed similar trends, noting that the effectiveness of outcome-based evaluations can be compromised by political influences. Resource constraints also hinder capacity-building efforts and impede technological advancement. Additionally, there is a lack of technical expertise in data analysis and M&E methodologies. For Zimbabwe to fully leverage the advantages of Scriven's valuation approach, it is imperative to enhance political commitment, boost investment in M&E capacity, and better align national priorities with external support. Although the current implementation has shown promising results, addressing these challenges is essential for establishing a more robust and effective M&E system that can truly serve the country's development needs. These findings also provide a foundation for further research on value-based M&E frameworks in other African governance contexts.

1.6 Recommendations

Moving forward, the M&E framework in Zimbabwe requires substantial strategic improvements. The government should establish specialized M&E units within various ministries and enforce standardized evaluation protocols. Investment in human capital through targeted training initiatives and academic collaborations is essential for developing local expertise. Adequate financial resources must be specifically allocated to M&E initiatives, supported by collaborative partnerships with development stakeholders.

To ensure the independence of evaluations, strong legal frameworks should be established, along with incentives that encourage best practices in M&E. It is essential to implement modern methodologies for data collection and analysis, along with quality assurance mechanisms. Additionally, the mandatory public disclosure of findings and the creation of independent oversight bodies would greatly bolster transparency and accountability. These focused interventions aim to strengthen Zimbabwe's M&E system in accordance with Scriven's principles of valuation.

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