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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MILITARY CIVIC ACTION

Case Study by PHILIP L. BREWSTER
COLONEL, USAF



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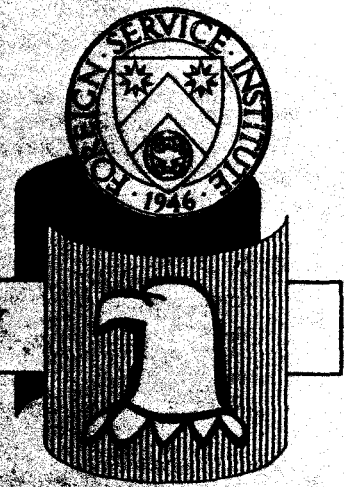
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SIXTEENTH SESSION

SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY

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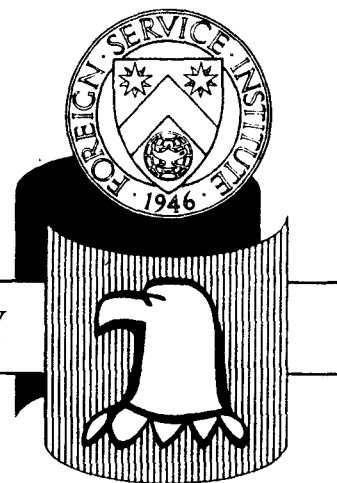
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SUMMARY

This case study examines the procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of military civic action by the armed forces of Panama, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and the United States military in those countries. The basic finding is that no formalized procedures exist in any of the four countries. Problems in evaluating military civic action are discussed and it is concluded that the biggest obstacle to establishing a formalized evaluation system is the lack of a perceived need for such a system.

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FOREWORD

The genesis of this case study was a conversation with Mr. Anthony J. Auletta, Civil Affairs Branch, Department of the Army. Mr. Auletta observed that the United States military simply did not have any feasible means for evaluating the effectiveness of their civic action programs or projects. While my knowledge of military civic action was cursory, I knew that it had been a subject of considerable emphasis in recent years. This knowledge, plus a prior assignment which had stressed the necessity of evaluation in every project, caused me to question Mr. Auletta's observation. Perhaps naively, it seemed inconceivable to me that we or any other nation would devote significant military resources to programs whose effectiveness we did not, or could not, evaluate.

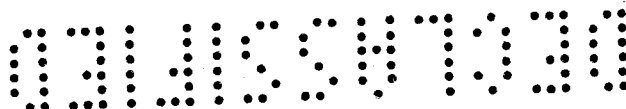
Preliminary research, to my chagrin, tended to support Mr. Auletta's observation with regard to U. S. forces. There was, however, little information available on the armed forces of other nations. The objectives of this case study thus became the confirmation of the preliminary research findings, plus a sampling of other nations' practices in evaluating the effectiveness of military civic action.

An appendage lists the majority of persons interviewed for this study. Their candidness and cooperativeness are greatly appreciated. Individual acknowledgement for their statements or views has not been made in the study for two reasons. First, and foremost, my recorded impressions of military civic action in each country are largely a synthesis of several interviews and project visitations. De-synthesizing my impressions in order to give individual credit would have been very difficult, if not impossible. Secondly, in some cases individual credit might prove embarrassing to a person and that would be poor thanks, indeed, for their frankness.

An acknowledgement of appreciation is also due to the many people who, although not interviewed, facilitated the conduct of this study in a variety of ways.

Any errors in fact, misinterpretations, or omissions are sincerely regretted, but are the sole responsibility of the author.

Philip L. Brewster
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BACKGROUND

The Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage, JCS Pub. 1, defines military civic action as:

The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military with the population. (United States forces may at times advise or engage in military civic actions in overseas areas).¹

The origin of the term, military civic action (MCA), is uncertain; however, the concept of the military contributing to the economic and social development of a country has deep historical roots. Since biblical times, military forces have been used to explore and colonize new lands, construct roads and other public works - all of which today would be termed MCA. Some examples of early MCA include the Etruscan army construction of the Roman aqueducts, the irrigation systems installed by the ancient Incan army in Peru, and, of course, the enormous contributions made by the U. S. military in the settlement of this country. In regard to the latter, people often overlook the essential contribution toward the settlement of North America that was made by the reports and maps published by the War Department as a result of their directed expeditions, e.g., those of Lewis and Clark, Pike, Long, Bonneville, Cook and many others. In addition, the military post in the U. S. west was often both a source of economic stimulus in terms of roads, public facilities, and expanded trade opportunities as well as a source of social development through its schools, teachers, physicians, chaplains, and libraries. The military management of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s is a more recent example of military involvement in socioeconomic activities. A host of other examples could be given, but suffice to say there is much evidence to support the contention that, by whatever name it is called, MCA has been a "prime factor in good soldiering for centuries."²

The late 1950s and 1960s saw extra emphasis placed on MCA as a means of combating insurgencies. To recap the events briefly, the Mutual Security Act of 1959 encouraged the use of military units in underdeveloped countries for public works and economic development. The so-called Draper Committee (appointed by President Eisenhower in 1958 to study the U. S. Military Assistance Program) urged the continuation and expansion of MCA. Civic action training teams were established in 1960. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 confirmed and strengthened the basic authority for MCA. Doctrinally, MCA was recognized by a Joint Chiefs of Staff redefinition of counterinsurgency in March, 1963, to include civic action as one of the means taken by a government to defeat subversive insurgency. In February 1962, the Department of Defense and the Agency for International Development agreed upon a funding formula for sharing the costs of joint civic action projects. Courses on civic action were started in April 1963 at the U. S. Army Civil Affairs School and have since spread to practically every service school whose curriculum touches counterinsurgency.³ The priority which came to be placed on MCA is indicated by the following excerpts from the U. S. military Joint Manual for Civil Affairs:

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... military civic action projects are fully as important
in promoting security and stability as are conventional
tactics, weapons and roles, social and economic advance-
ment to which military organizations make tangible con-
tributions constitute an all-important preventative
measure against the inequities and discontent which
spawn insurrection."4

An attempt to determine the dollars devoted to MCA in recent years was terminated due to the complexities of the various funding arrangements and the difficulties in distinguishing between dollars for MCA and those for other forms of support. Some appreciation of the amount may be gained by the fact that during fiscal years 1962-1970 just under 60 million dollars were appropriated for MCA projects.5 This amount is probably significantly lower than the actual amount expended since from 1966-1967, civic action in three Southeast Asian countries has been wholly service funded and not included in the Military Assistance Program.6

The preceding paragraphs have attempted to illustrate that while MCA is not a new concept, it has been a subject of considerable emphasis in recent years and has received appreciable monetary support. Under these circumstances, one might be tempted to assume that means had been developed by which to judge the effectiveness of MCA projects. A voluminous and apparently well researched report on MCA by the Research Triangle Institute had these comments:

"Six hundred after action reports, involving 1,028 projects, covering the military civic action activities of the U. S. Armed Forces were reviewed... Analysis of the data... indicates that while subjective results are reported on the average of 59.3% of the cases studied... indications of success or failure are reported so infrequently (less than 6.0%) that the reports have little or no value in evaluating the success or failure of military civic action projects. It can be inferred from these data that there is no dedicated military civic action evaluation system. This conclusion is consistent with the lack of any definitive information on evaluative procedures in the doctrinal literature."7

Some may question the above finding on the basis of the Hamlet Evaluation System and other evaluative measures introduced into South Vietnam during the 1960s. The Research Triangle Institute report points out that these were attempts to measure the combined effectiveness of military and civilian programs and did not permit differentiation between the effects of MCA and other activities.8

A report by the American Institutes for Research has the lack of MCA evaluation as the basic problem it addresses.

"THE PROBLEM

No tested procedures have been established for assessing the extent to which Military Civic Action programs achieve their stated objectives, even though these programs have received U. S. military assistance in over forty developing countries and have been extensively encouraged by the United States for over a decade."9

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A sampling of the extensive bibliographies of the two reports mentioned above, as well as some of the more recent literature, tended to confirm their views, i.e., the U. S. military has no established procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of MCA. The sampling also disclosed practically no information on the MCA programs of other nations besides that of a descriptive nature, e.g., the type of programs conducted and the physical accomplishments in terms of number of school buildings erected, miles of road constructed, water wells completed, etc. These findings supported those of the Research Triangle Institute:

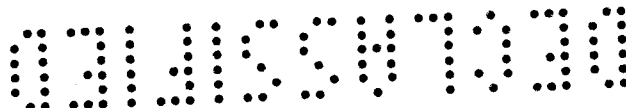
"Data on the details of indigenous civic action organization and doctrine were not in sufficient detail to permit generalizations or conclusions. There is, however, an indication that Latin American armed forces are closely following the U. S. concepts for civic action organization and operations. As in the case of the U. S. system, formal evaluation procedures and techniques appear to be non-existent."¹⁰

Succeeding paragraphs will examine both U. S. and host country MCA activities in four Latin American countries. The emphasis will be on evaluative procedures rather than physical accomplishments for the purpose of expanding the lack of information in the former area.

PANAMA

MCA organization, procedures and activities in Panama differ from the other countries visited as a consequence of the U. S. presence in the Canal Zone. One cause of these differences is that the sizeable U. S. military force in the Zone provides the capability for much more direct U. S. civic action in Panama than do the much smaller Military Groups (MILGP) in other countries. Secondly, U. S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), with Headquarters in the Canal Zone, has responsibilities with regard to MCA throughout Latin America. As a consequence, there are three broad categories of MCA activities in Panama. One is USSOUTHCOM's involvement in monitoring and supporting MCA throughout Latin America. Second is the involvement of USSOUTHCOM forces, either singly or in conjunction with those of the Panamanian National Guard, on in-country projects. Third are those activities conducted solely by the National Guard. Time limitations caused the author to focus on the latter two categories.

Overall coordination of U. S. activities in Panama is accomplished through the Panama Review Committee (PRC) composed of the U. S. Ambassador (committee chairman), Governor of the Canal Zone, and the Commander, USSOUTHCOM. In January 1974, the PRC approved the charter of an Actions Coordinating Subcommittee (ACS) which made that committee responsible for the review and coordination of community development activities conducted by the U. S. in Panama. The ACS is composed of representatives of the members of the PRC and is chaired by the Ambassador's representative (currently from USAID). The ACS charter states that the ACS will be the approval authority, within established PRC policy, for MCA which involve U. S. or Panamanian agencies other than just USSOUTHCOM and the National Guard. The charter provides policy guidance on the type of projects to be approved and project priority. It does not, however, specifically charge the ACS with any responsibility for determining the effectiveness of on-going or completed projects.



Interviews indicated that the ACS does not, in fact, perform this function. They do, apparently, conduct periodic reviews of selected projects, but these reviews are more in terms of physical accomplishments and resource expenditures rather than the effectiveness of these accomplishments.

A Civic Action Committee (CAC) has been formed within USSOUTHCOM which is chaired by the Public Affairs Officer and consists of representatives of each of the military services plus a member of the MILGP. This committee reviews and coordinates the proposed civic action activities of all USSOUTHCOM forces. Proposals requiring ACS approval are forwarded to that body. The CAC also monitors and reviews on-going projects, but, like the ACS, the concern appears to be more with physical accomplishments than with the effectiveness of those accomplishments in achieving some specific objective.

The basic criteria for project approval by both the CAC and ACS appeared to be a valid need, available resources, favorable military image, and participation by project beneficiaries. There are no established procedures for judging the success of a project from either a managerial standpoint (predicted versus actual cost, time, etc.) or from an effectiveness standpoint (did it achieve specific objectives?). This last statement is not meant to imply that projects are not reported upon in terms of resources expended, buildings constructed, people treated, etc. What is meant is that this author found scant evidence of any success or effectiveness criteria being applied. For example, a land clearing project was not laid out in terms of X many acres being cleared by Y time for Z dollars, thus permitting a managerial evaluation of project success. Nor was it laid out in such terms as increasing by X percent the foodstuffs supplied to Y number of people so as to reduce the number of cases of malnutrition by Z amount - and thus permit some sort of objective evaluation. Further, there were no discernable attempts to evaluate the effect of the project on public opinion toward the military or its effect on the overall socioeconomic development of the area. In summary, it appeared that the ACS and the CAC were most active in project approval and coordination, but, as several U. S. individuals stated, "We do not do anything in the way of evaluating project effectiveness."

The Panamanian National Guard has received extensive indoctrination and training in MCA from USSOUTHCOM units. U. S. military manuals on civic action have been translated into Spanish and furnished to the Guard. A G-5, Assistant Chief of Staff for Military - Civil Operations, has been established at Guard headquarters and each Guard company has an officer and non-commissioned officer assigned to civic action on an additional duty basis.

In the U. S. system, MCA is administered through the G-5. In Panama, civic action projects may be initiated and administered by any staff section. In such cases, the G-5 acts as a liaison office. Staffs are small, parochial and have limited authority. There is no Inspector General function.

All of the factors in the preceding paragraph tend to discourage both coordination and evaluation of MCA projects. It was not too surprising, therefore, to learn that the National Guard has no established evaluation procedures.

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The finding that neither the U. S. nor the Panamanian forces had any established evaluation procedures may seem unduly critical if it is not viewed in the light of a typical MCA project. Following is a brief description of such a project and some questions which may serve to illustrate some of the problems in evaluation and thereby some of the reasons for the lack of established procedures. While the project took place in Panama, it and the evaluation are also typical of the other countries visited.

Two indian dialects and Spanish are spoken in a Panamanian province. Literacy is low in all three languages and few inhabitants are multi-lingual. Development of the area is hampered by the ensuing difficulty in communication. Schools are also few. A church donates funds for school construction materials. The marine element of the Panamanian National Guard transports these materials along the coast and up a river. Indians of the province unload and stack the materials. USSOUTHCOM helicopters then transport the materials to building sites, with the indians assisting in loading and unloading. The schools are built with indian labor and staffed with both church and indian teachers. Questions: How do you evaluate the effectiveness of military civic action in this project? What indices are used to measure effectiveness and how do you apportion success or failure among the varied participants? How important is an effectiveness evaluation? Is it worth diverting resources from other activities?

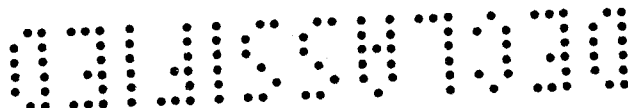
EL SALVADOR

A description of the organizational structure for MCA in El Salvador is difficult because of differences between various sources on the names, composition, and relationships of some governmental agencies. The following description is based on a recent article prepared by the El Salvadorean military for inclusion in a manual on military civic action which is presently under review by the Inter-American Defense Board.¹¹

Overall planning and supervision of MCA is conducted by the General Bureau for Military Civic Action. This agency, which was established in 1962, reports directly to the Minister of Defense. A General Plan for Military Civic Action is prepared in accordance with the priorities established by the Government's Five Year Plan and, like the latter, covers a five year period. Projects derived from the Civic Action Plan are coordinated with other agencies and implemented by directives from the General Staff of the Armed Forces. All levels of command have military civic action responsibilities, but, normally, no additional funds are provided for this purpose.

Two special committees operate under the General Bureau for Military Civic Action. Both are composed of representatives from various Ministries within the government. The Frontier Development Committee, as the name implies, carries out plans for integrating frontier areas, establishing communities, and generally improving the standard of living. The Committee for Small Community Projects reviews requests for assistance from established communities and determines feasibility and priority.

Both the article from which the above description was taken and several other sources (including the author's personal observation),



reflect an active MCA program in El Salvador. However, no evidence was found in either the literature or during the author's visit that there is any evaluation conducted of MCA effectiveness except in a very subjective fashion. This finding also applies to those projects sponsored by the USMILGP. It should be pointed out that, as in the case of Panama, many projects are of a joint nature and, as a consequence, evaluating the contributions of each participant would be difficult.

NICARAGUA

At the time of the author's visit, Nicaragua had no special committees or agencies devoted to MCA. Requests for National Guard assistance or proposed MCA projects originating within the Guard were handled through normal military channels with whatever outside coordination was deemed necessary. Activities of any substance were generally forwarded for approval to the President who is also the Chief Director of the Guard.

A change proposed by the USMILGP, which was reportedly near approval, would establish a National Civic Action Committee (NCAC). The NCAC would be headed by the Chief Director of the Guard and consist of representatives from various Guard staff sections, Guard departmental commanders, other government ministries and selected non-government organizations. The objectives of the NCAC are to improve both the coordination of civic action projects and the evaluation of project priority.

As in the previous countries visited, there were no discernible systematic procedures in effect for evaluating the effectiveness of MCA programs by either the Nicaraguan National Guard or the USMILGP. Such evaluations that were made were either subjective or were of the count noses type, i.e., number of persons resettled, patients treated, potable water systems installed, etc. Again, it must be noted that, as in the other countries visited, most projects were joint civil-military endeavors and intermeshed with other projects. These circumstances make it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the contributions of individual participants.

One experience in Nicaragua stands out in the author's memory as a caution against too much concern over a lack of evaluation. This was a brief visit to a, by U. S. standards, rough hewn wooden school in an urban slum area. The school buildings and grounds had been provided through joint civil-military efforts and were incomparably better than previous facilities. No systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the project had been made. Yet, the pride and appreciation of both faculty and students were so obvious to a visitor that it made one question what useful purpose an effectiveness evaluation would have served.

HONDURAS

Military civic action in Honduras is conducted with regular units of the armed forces and normal lines of communication. There are no special committees for MCA as in El Salvador or under consideration in Nicaragua. Each of the seven military zone commanders has his own civic action program. The General Staff of the Armed Forces becomes involved only in the larger programs. The G-5 position (Civil-Military

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Operations) on the General Staff was vacant for quite some time prior to the summer of 1973. The present incumbent is the ranking officer on the Staff. No additional funds are provided by the government for military civic action. The principal criteria for devoting military resources to civic action projects are a valid need, availability of resources and beneficiary participation.

The USMILGP in Honduras conducts some small civic action projects on their own, but the majority of effort in this area is in supporting the Honduran military. They both suggest projects and respond to requests for assistance. To facilitate these efforts, they have asked the Honduran military to develop a civic action plan which would not only lay out what is planned, but also what assistance is needed from the MILGP and other agencies.

One of the few examples of the military setting a measureable goal in a civic action program was encountered in Honduras. This was a medical treatment/vaccination program which has the goal of decreasing the incidents of childhood disease in the country by 30% in the first year of operation. They believe that their medical statistics are good and will provide a reliable indicator of whether or not the goal is achieved.

It was also explained that the Honduran military makes some effort to judge the success of road building projects by looking at the amount of cargo being transported. This indice is not considered sufficient in itself and is combined with qualitative judgements to arrive at a determination of project effectiveness.

The Honduran military is engaged in many other civic action projects than the two types discussed above. There were no discernible efforts to measure the effectiveness of these other projects. This leads to the conclusion that, with the noted exceptions, neither the USMILGP nor the Honduran military have established procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of MCA programs.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The basic finding of this case study is that formal MCA evaluation procedures and techniques are not used by either the U. S. military or host country military in any of the four countries visited. Established guidelines or criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of MCA were simply non-existent.

As indicated in the discussion of MCA in Panama, this finding may seem unduly critical without an explanation of several factors which, in the author's view, largely explain the absence of a MCA evaluation system.

First, and in the author's opinion, the most important is that there was no perceived need for formal evaluation procedures and techniques. People felt that evaluative emphasis should be on project selection and priority. If a proposed project was determined to fill a valid need and was subsequently completed, then, ipso facto, it was a successful project. If one asked why a certain project was considered a success, the almost invariable answer was that it had met a need. The Panamanian school project described earlier is an example.

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This project was considered a success because it helped meet the need for multi-lingual literates in the province who, in turn, were considered necessary in meeting the need for overall socioeconomic development of the province. Consideration of such factors as percent change in literacy rates or the socioeconomic results thereof were not necessary in arriving at the determination of success in the minds of the people involved in the project. The factors mentioned were viewed as being interesting and nice to know, but were really superfluous to the central fact that the project had met a valid need. Human nature being what it is, it is not surprising that there is little interest in formal evaluation systems when there is no perceived need for these systems.

Allied with the above is the problem of resources. Any evaluative system is going to consume resources. These may range from a few hours out of one person's time to large expenditures of man-hours, money and material. These resources would presumably be used in some other activity if they were not expended in evaluating MCA. The natural question is, then, what benefits are obtained from using these resources in evaluating MCA rather than in some other manner? Or to phrase the question slightly differently, what specific gains are going to be achieved by an evaluation system which will justify its resource cost? The justification for an evaluation system is usually given in generalized terms such as improving the effectiveness or efficiency of an operation, better allocation of resources, refinement of priorities, etc. A prevalent opinion was that these generalities were fine in theory, but,.....'show me the specific advantages to my MCA program that a formalized evaluation system is going to provide and which will warrant my expenditure of the required resources. Is there some concrete outcome, other than added paperwork, which will make it worthwhile to supplant my personal subjective evaluation with a formalized system?' The prevalency of such questions made it clear that any effort to formalize MCA evaluative procedures must not only contend with the limited resources typical of a developing nation, but it must also justify its claim on those resources.

There are a number of factors besides perceived need and resources which pose problems in establishing a MCA evaluation system. Many projects are joint efforts. It is often difficult, if not impossible, in joint efforts to relate individual agency contributions with project results. For example, the Nicaraguan National Guard has participated in a wide variety of ways in a colonization project in the eastern part of the country. Participation has included road construction, transportation of colonizers, providing school equipment, donating large electrical generators and many other activities. One might be able to assess the effectiveness of the overall colonization project, but as an officer in the Nicaraguan National Guard, how would you go about assessing the effectiveness of your organization's contributions? Most importantly, what sort of an assessment could you make that would be of value to you and thus justify the time and effort involved? The answers to such questions seem central to the establishment of a formalized MCA evaluation system, but, unfortunately they are far from apparent.

The selection of assessment indices also poses a problem in two other respects. One is in identifying indices that are both valid and whose ease of measurement are consistent with the resources one is willing to devote to the assessment. A family by family measurement

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of monthly income/expenditures would conceivably be a valid indice of the economic status of a village, but would also be a time-consuming computation. An example of how this problem might be solved is the unverified anecdote heard several times of the individual who measured the economic status of a village by the number of portable radio batteries purchased at the local store. Whether or not battery purchases were, in fact, a valid indice is not known, but the anecdote does illustrate that innovative thinking may disclose useful indices whose relationship to a project is not clear at first look. The second problem in selecting assessment indices is that MCA has nonmaterial objectives, e.g., social development, which are difficult to evaluate for several reasons. Personal attitudes and motivations are not easily measured. If measured, there is the further immense problem of identifying specific cause factors from among the myriad of influences on human behavior. And even if all of these obstacles are surmounted, there is the remaining problem of relating these findings to some standard so as to gauge the effectiveness of a particular MCA project. This latter problem is not unique to MCA. The Comptroller General of the United States has stated that it is one of the most formidable problems confronting his agency in attempting to evaluate social programs.¹²

The preceding paragraphs have discussed some of the problems in evaluating MCA. It is the author's opinion that failure to resolve these problems is the prime factor behind the finding of this case study that formalized procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of MCA are nonexistent. It is also the author's opinion that little progress will be made toward establishing formalized procedures until there is, first of all, a perceived need for such procedures.

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