

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Elliot Stern
Evaluation Helpdesk Training
Brussels
April 17th-18th 2018

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Aims of these two days

- To introduce you to different ways in which we can think about evaluating results and impacts
- To increase your confidence to commission and manage results-focussed evaluations
- To suggest frameworks and checklists that can help you manage, assess and plan evaluations that focus on results

Evaluating Results and Impacts

We will be covering

- The importance of Evaluation design
- The strengths and weaknesses of different Evaluation Methods
 - The importance of asking the right Evaluation Questions
 - The main approaches to Theory-Based Evaluation

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- The aim is not to make you into an IE expert but to enable you to have sensible conversations with evaluation contractors, colleagues and other experts
 - but we cannot avoid technical content entirely....

Evaluating Results and Impacts

This includes

- Drawing up terms of reference
- Assessing proposals that cross your desks
- Managing and steer ongoing evaluations
- Assessing the strength of conclusions and recommendations reached by those conducting evaluations
- Developing new programmes and policies that are 'evidence-based', i.e., learn lessons from completed evaluations

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Mixture of formats that include

- Presentations
- Questions and answers
 - Group discussions
 - Exercises

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- Evaluation has become an integral part of public management - it provides evidence and feedback that allows managers and policy makers to steer policies and programmes and plan new ones
- Public policy at EU and member state, regional and local levels is preoccupied with results – with achieving strategic priorities whilst also meeting citizens needs and demonstrating value for money
- In Structural Funds, evaluation is both a technical/methodological practice and is embedded in the management of Operational Programmes and of national and EU policy-making

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- As evaluation has become more central to policy, there is greater interest in the quality of evaluations - in better evaluation plans, better Terms of Reference, better contracting, better management of the evaluation process, better use of evaluation results
- The CPR and other Regulations that govern Structural Funds place responsibilities on Member States and Managing Authorities to plan evaluations, ensure that evaluation capacity is in place, that independent evaluation contractors are appointed, that data is available, that evaluation results are reported, publicly available and used

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- Two classic distinctions in evaluation are between process & outcome evaluation; and between evaluation for accountability & learning
- Process evaluations typically look at implementation issues and outcome evaluations typically look at results
- Local or regional administrations only looked at results because of accountability demands of programme or policy sponsors
- If interested in evaluation at all the programme manager's focus was on process evaluations that helped improve implementation

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- Now that public policy emphasises results the focus has shifted
- In order to understand results we need to learn about processes; and evaluators have become accountable for his learning

	Learning	Accountability
Process	X	●
Outcome	●	X

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Problems with a results-orientation

- How far along the 'results-chain' given limited control and varied trajectories?



Evaluating Results and Impacts

Different definitions of 'results'

- Policy makers – often rhetorical and over-optimistic: we will transform our economy
- Public authorities – bureaucratic and administrative: the programme met its targets and produced credible indicators
- Stakeholders – how to weigh different interests: you say it was a success but what about young people
- Beneficiaries – short term and self-interested: has my enterprise benefited
- Socio-economic partners – longer-term and generic: have new value-chains been created

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Two strategies:

1. Consult widely, reach a consensus, clarify what counts as 'success'
2. Recognise multiple goals of different interests and stakeholders and build these into an evaluation

- Also useful to refer to stakeholders and beneficiaries at later stages of an evaluation to confirm uncovered understandings of 'impact'

Evaluating Results and Impacts

What should we be looking at?

- 'Impact Evaluation' (IE) is often associated with a particular methodology: the pioneers of IE who often came from statistical and experimental research traditions – so for them IE= experiments/RCTs
- We do owe the counterfactual school of evaluators a great deal: they made us think about what produces programmes results

Can we demonstrate that the programme caused the intended outcomes?

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- This concern with causal attribution - being confident that results really are produced by programme inputs, not by other things is important – so is explaining 'why' & 'how' results occur
- For example: the economy improved and unemployment would have gone down anyhow; the grant went to already successful SMEs; increases in innovation were the result of previous investments in R&D; city-centre renewal was caused by a new retail park
- IE sets a much higher standard of 'proof' that results were really caused by the programme

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- Impact evaluation is now firmly about causal attribution BUT today we acknowledge that there are various methodologies to assess the relationship between cause and effect
- We have experimental methods, *and* what are called 'Theory-Based Evaluation' now also recognised in Commission guidance and about which I will be talking more both today and tomorrow
- There are also other new and emergent evaluation approaches – statistical modelling; comparative case-studies; simulations; network analysis; agent based modelling...

Evaluating Results and Impacts

- These different approaches can be seen as 'competitive'. They are not. This is more to do with the emergence of new 'brands' and competition between ambitious academics and consultants!
- Different approaches do different things; and are useful in different circumstances
 - There are things that Theory Based Evaluation can do that Counterfactual approaches cannot – and there are things Counterfactual approaches can do that TBE cannot
- A good proposal and ToR will always ask consultants to say why a chosen approach is right for a particular evaluation

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Although we are interested in results, impacts, linking cause and effect we do this for a purpose – not simply to make causal claims!

The main purposes of evaluation remain as they always are:

- Accounting for Results
- Better Management and Delivery
- Learning and improvement
- Capacity development and sustainability

These standard purposes will be examined further when we discuss evaluation design and in particular Evaluation Questions

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Finally

- Well-designed and well-implemented 'Impact Evaluations' that aim to attribute causality and explain why and how results occurred is challenging and expensive
- Much can be done with more modest evaluations that follow the results-chain or programme theory, describe what happened and demonstrate that positive change has occurred
- Often we don't need to demonstrate causality because we know!
- The focus today and tomorrow is on those less usual evaluations when we do need to make strong causal claims
