Evidence-based policy

The complementary roles of evaluation and impact assessment

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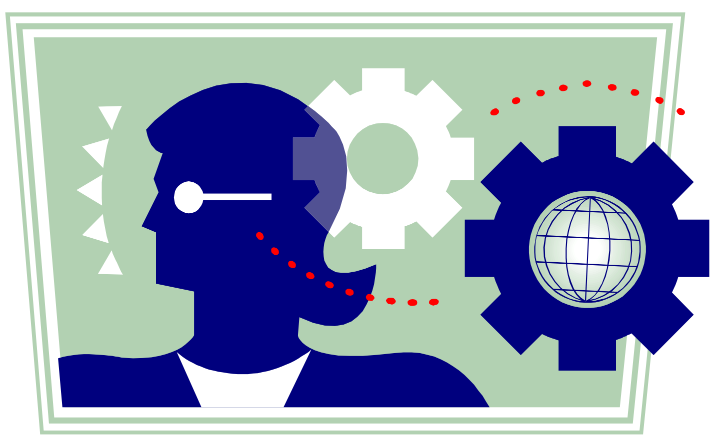
Overview

- Why bother with evidence-based policy?
- Underlying assumptions about use
- Maximising use:
  - Information needs assessment – who, what, when, why?
  - Creating useful knowledge – gems from the evaluator's methodological toolkit
- Synergies between evaluation and impact assessment

Evidence-based policy: Why bother?

- Why let "facts" and "evidence" get in the way of good old opinion-based policy?



Evidence-based policy stands in contrast to opinion-based policy, which relies on:

- Selective use of evidence (e.g. on single studies irrespective of quality)
- Untested views of individuals or groups
- Ideological standpoints
- Prejudices
- Speculative conjecture

Underlying assumptions about use

- Assumed use:
  - ∗ Guidance for action

Guidance for action – what we assume/hope will happen (but unfortunately it's the least common type of use)

- Other (more common) uses:
  - ∗ Reinforcement of prior beliefs

Reinforcement of prior beliefs – bolsters confidence of those who already knew all this and are wanting to push for change

  - ∗ Mobilisation of support

Mobilisation of support – convince waverers, contend with opponents (used a lot on political settings)

  - ∗ Enlightenment

Enlightenment – increase in understanding; punctures old myths, brings new issues to the fore => people change their thinking (changed priorities, dismiss concerns, think along different tracks).

"The ultimate in enlightenment" is when new and surprising findings are absorbed into common wisdom à taken for granted and become common sense

Useful reading on use: Carol Weiss (1997). Evaluation (2nd ed.)

Maximising use

- Information needs assessment
  - ∗ **<u>Who</u>** needs to know **<u>what</u>**, **<u>when</u>**, and in order to make **<u>what decision(s)</u>**?
    - ♦ Decision makers' needs depend a lot on their position:
    - ♦ Policy makers
    - ♦ Programme providers
    - ♦ Consumers
- Maximising the utility of findings with evaluation logic and methodology

Maximising utility of findings

- Identifying all the most relevant and important criteria
  - Not just outcomes/impacts, but also costs, process
- Explicit merit determination
  - Being explicit about quality or value
- Weighting criteria for importance
  - Qualitative weights are often the best
- Synthesis of findings on multiple criteria
  - Weights, bars and 'soft hurdles'

Six importance determination methods

- Having stakeholders "vote" on importance
- Drawing on the knowledge of selected stakeholders + evaluation team judgment
- Using evidence from the literature
- Using content specialist judgment
- Using evidence from a needs assessment
- Using program theory and evidence of causal linkages

Evaluation and "values"

- Evaluation is the systematic determination of the <u>quality</u>, <u>value</u>, or <u>importance</u> of something
- e-VALU-ation has two components

Descriptive Facts (what's so)	**+**	**Values**	**=**	**Evaluative Conclusions** (so what)

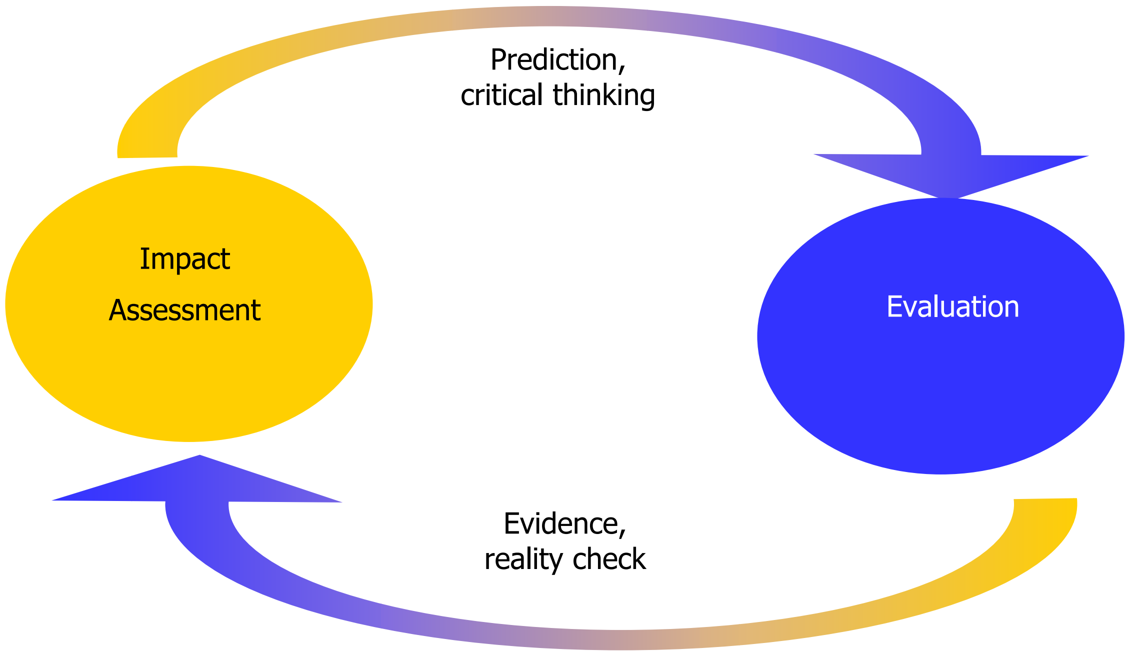
  - <u>Values</u> are what get us from "What's so?" to "So what?"

Evaluation logic and methodology

- "a set of principles (logic) and procedures (methodology) that guides the evaluation team in the task of blending descriptive data with relevant values to draw explicitly evaluative conclusions"
- Useful reading on evaluation logic and methodology:

E. Jane Davidson (2004), Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation. Sage.

Evaluation and impact assessment



Peter Drucker talks about how he has trained and tested his mind – predict what's going to happen, write it down, and then go back to it and see if you are right.

If these two disciplines operate independently, there is a danger we both rest on our laurels:

•IA can keep on predicting but never check if it was right

•Evaluation can check things after the fact but can't maximise its utility to the policy making process