Insights from Evaluation

Kathryn Newcomer
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Program Evaluation: application of systematic analytical (social science) methods to address questions about program operations and results; includes:

- **Performance Measurement (Monitoring):** routine measurement of program inputs, outputs, intermediate/long-term outcomes attributed to a program

Both involve measurement + judgment!!
Using Program Evaluation

- Program Evaluation refers to both a **mindset** and the **application of analytical skills**, and is a profession.

- 3 especially foundational elements of evaluation practice are especially useful when evaluating complex intergovernmental programs:
  1. **Articulate the Theory of Change**
  2. **Frame** Appropriate Evaluation Questions
  3. **Match Design** to Evaluation Questions
#1: Articulate a Program or Policy’s Theory of Change

Key Components
- **Conceptual:** explicit theory or model of how the program/policy is expected to produce the intended outcomes
- **Empirical:** evaluation guided by the model.

Modeling the Theory of Change
- What elements constitute the “treatment”?
- What are the desired outcomes - in the longer run and in the shorter run?
- What is the expected process to produce desired outcomes?
- How are the program elements supposed to relate to one another?
- What are important bridging assumptions about how processes and elements are supposed to relate to one another?
- What are contextual (or mediating) factors outside of the control of program implementers that may affect the ability of the program or policy to produce the desired outcomes?
Basic Theory of Change

Program Elements → Mediators → Outcomes → Moderators
Generic Logic Model

Inputs:
- People
- Money
- Clients
- Case-load

Processes:
- Activities
- Initiatives
- Procedures

Outputs:
- Services
- Products

Outcomes:
- Impacts
- Effects
- Results

Intervening (Contextual) Variables
Desired outcomes may be externally established (e.g., by Congress)

Increased complexity from intergovernmental relations in implementation and enforcement of regulations (e.g., Federal, State, Local levels)

Requirements placed on nonprofit and private actors to achieve public goals (compared to direct provision of services or programs)

Unexpected behavioral responses to requirements affect outcomes

The focus is on a national scope, and measures focus on average impact (instead of diversity of local conditions and preferences)
Assumptions about Linkages -- e.g., reduced U.S. vehicle emissions will reduce GHG concentrations, which will reduce effects of anthropogenic climate change

Behavioral Responses -- e.g., agro-business will adjust internal business goals to adjust to USDA standards; recipients of SNAP will eat healthier because they can shop at farmers markets

“Unobservables” -- e.g., consumers’ preferences for different foods and life style choices

External Forces -- e.g., producer and consumer behavior affected by local economic conditions and other countries’ exports to the U.S.
The type of question - and type of desired evaluation matter for determining appropriate methods:

- **Descriptive Questions** - describe input levels, outputs, contextual variables and/or measurable outcomes
- **Normative Questions** - assess levels of compliance for outputs or outcomes with criteria in law, regulation, or equity norms
- **Impact Questions** - measures of effectiveness or “impact”
- **Explanatory Questions** - explain implementation (fidelity) and processes
There are Many Types of Evaluation

Focus of Evaluation

HOW
- Resources & Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs
- Short-term Outcomes
- Intermediate Outcomes
- Long-term Outcomes

WHY
- Desired Impact

Outcome Evaluation
- Formative (Process/Implementation) Evaluation

Impact Evaluation
Principles of Evaluation Design

1. Frame the most appropriate questions to address
2. Clear and answerable evaluation questions drive the design decisions
3. Design decisions are made to provide appropriate data and comparisons needed to address the evaluation questions
4. Decisions about measurement and design are made to bolster the methodological integrity of the results
5. During design deliberations careful consideration should be given to strengthening inferences about findings
6. Goal to report that evaluation design and reporting decisions were characterized by strong methodological integrity
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<th>Objective</th>
<th>Illustrative Questions</th>
<th>Possible Design</th>
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| #1: Describe program (or policy) activities | • How extensive and costly are the regulatory activities?  
• How do implementation efforts vary across sites, beneficiaries, regions?  
• Has the policy or program been implemented sufficiently to be evaluated? | • Performance Measurement  
• Exploratory Evaluations  
• Evaluability Assessments  
• Multiple Case Studies |
| #2: Probe targeting & implementation | • How closely are the protocols implemented with fidelity to the original program design?  
• What key contextual factors are likely to affect achievement of intended outcomes?  
• What feasibility or management challenges hinder successful implementation of the program or policy? | • Multiple Case Studies  
• Implementation or Process evaluations  
• Performance Audits  
• Compliance Audits |
| #3: Measure impact of policy or program | • What are the average effects across different implementations of the program model?  
• Has implementation of the program model produced results consistent with its design (espoused objectives)?  
• Is the implementation strategy more (or less) effective in relation to its costs? | • Experimental Designs/RCTs  
• Non-experimental Designs: Difference-in-difference, Propensity score matching, etc.  
• Cost-effectiveness & Benefit Cost Analysis  
• Systematic Reviews & Meta-Analyses |
| #4: Explain how/why policy or program produces intended and unintended effects | • How/why did the policy or program have the intended effects?  
• To what extent has implementation of the program or policy had important unanticipated negative spillover effects?  
• How likely is it that the program model will have similar effects in other locations and/or in the future? | • Impact Pathways and Process tracing  
• System dynamics  
• Configurational analysis, etc. |
There are and will continue to be practical challenges and impediments to the effective use of evaluation:

- Lack of incentives and resources
- Methodological challenges

But evaluation can be appropriately designed and used to overcome the impediments to inform decision-making about programs and policies.

More intentional and strategic use of evaluation can be used to improve public policies and programs by:

- Helping to identify contributing factors for underperforming programs and promising practice of leaders
- Improving future programs and policies

Program evaluation thinking and tools can be used productively to support evidence-informed policy and practice.
"From Learning to Action" is the theme of our American Evaluation Association Annual Conference (3500+ attendees and 120+ workshops & panels), and in line with this theme, I have worked with committee of 17 (from 7 countries) to plan our approach, and we have challenged our members to:

- think creatively about innovative ways to engage audiences at the annual conference - beyond panels and posters;
- invite evaluators or evaluation users who might not normally attend AEA, but are clearly stakeholders in our work, to participate in conference sessions; and
- submit a 60 second video on Learning from Evaluation to highlight how we can foster learning from evaluation in a variety of settings.
Thank You!

I can be reached at newcomer@gwu.edu

Please join us November 8-11, 2017 at the Wardman Marriott Hotel here in DC!