Evaluation in Today’s Political, Social and Technological Climate

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“Evidence-based Policy, ”
“Data-Driven Decision-making”- the New Normal?
What is the impact of the “evidence-based policy” imperative, as well as the current political, social and technological climate on evaluation practice in the public and non-profit sectors?
What are Challenges for Evaluators in Providing Evidence to Inform Policymaking?

- What constitutes sufficient evidence?
- How transferable is evidence?
- When and where do we underestimate the role played by the “impactees?”
- Where is the capacity to support both the demand and supply of evidence?
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #1

- We need to collect data to test if programs work or do not work.

  Versus

- We need to learn which program mechanisms work for whom, where and under what circumstances.
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #2

- Policy should be made at the top and based on evidence.

  Versus

- Policy is “made” through implementation processes at multiple levels by multiple actors with different types of data available to them.
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #3

- Program impact can be measured precisely.
  Versus
- Measuring program impact is difficult as programs and intended impactees change and evolve.
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #4

- Random Control Trials (RCTs) are the gold standard for research and evaluation design.

  Versus

- Research designs must be matched to answer the question raised; RCTs are appropriate for certain impact questions.
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #5

- Proven program models can be replicated in multiple locations as long as they are implemented with fidelity to the original design.
  Versus
- Program mechanisms may be replicated in multiple locations as long as they are adapted to meet local conditions.
Contrasting Views on Evidence-Based Policy #6

- Benefit-cost analysis should be used to compare social programs.

Versus

- Benefit-cost analysis is difficult to use to compare social programs given the challenge of costing out benefits, especially those accruing over time.
Why isn’t There Agreement About the Quality of Evidence?

- Differing professional standards and “rules” or criteria for evidence, e.g., lawyers, engineers, economists
- Disagreements about methodologies within professional groups, e.g., RCTs
- The constancy of change in problems and the characteristics of the targeted “impactees”
We Overstate the Ease of Flow of Evidence

It plays a wide (enough) causal role

Study conclusion: It plays a causal role there
Policy prediction: It will play a causal role here

We Underestimate the Role of Volition Among Impactees and their Decision-making
We Underestimate the Evolving Sources of Complexity Affecting the Production of Relevant Evidence

- Change in the nature of problems to be addressed by government and the philanthropic sector
- Change in the context in which programs and policies are implemented
- Changing priorities of political leaders - and under Trump?
We Overstate The Current Evaluation Capacity among Decision-Makers
Evaluation Capacity = Both Demand and Supply

- How clear is the understanding between providers and requestors on what sort of data (evidence) is needed?
- Are there sufficient resources to respond to demands for specific sorts of evidence?
- How can evaluators instruct users about how to assess the quality and appropriateness of evidence?
Transmission Process

- Just as there are many producers, there are many potential users of the evidence provided, e.g., different policy designer and implementers in complex service delivery networks.

- Understanding and strengthening the linkage between the producers of evaluative data and the many potential users of that information requires time and resources.
Evaluators Need to Help Information Users Frame Pertinent Questions and then Match the Questions with the Appropriate Evaluation Approach

Questions Relevant to Users → Evaluation Design
## Match Evaluation Approach to Questions

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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Illustrative Questions</th>
<th>Possible Design</th>
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| **#1: Describe program activities** | • How extensive and costly are the program activities?  
• How do implementation efforts vary across sites, beneficiaries, regions?  
• Has the program been implemented sufficiently to be evaluated? | • Monitoring  
• Exploratory Evaluations  
• Evaluability Assessments  
• Multiple Case Studies |
| **#2: Probe targeting & implementation** | • How closely are the protocols implemented with fidelity to the original design?  
• What key contextual factors are likely to affect achievement of intended outcomes?  
• How do contextual constraints affect the implementation of a intervention?  
• How does a new intervention interact with other potential solutions to recognized problems? | • Multiple Case Studies  
• Implementation or Process evaluations  
• Performance Audits  
• Compliance Audits  
• Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation |
| **#3: Measure the impact of policies & programs** | • What are the average effects across different implementations of the intervention?  
• Has implementation of the program or policy produced results consistent with its design (espoused purpose)?  
• 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 programs & policies produce (un)intended effects** | • How/why did the program have the intended effects?  
• To what extent has implementation of the program had important unanticipated negative spillover effects?  
• How likely is it that the program will have similar effects in other communities or in the future? | • Impact Pathways and Process tracing  
• System dynamics  
• Configurational analysis, |
There is an ongoing tension between producing evidence to demonstrate accountability versus to promote learning.
Please join us in November, 2017 in Washington, D.C.!

"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 participants 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!

Questions?

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