



Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in Think Tanks

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Session 2 - Friday

- The monitoring, evaluation and learning matrix (15 minutes)
 - Exercise continued from Thursday session
- MEL for Policy Influence (25 minutes)
 - Defining policy influence
 - Why is it difficult to measure influence ?
 - Quantitative indicators are difficult for some dimensions of influence
 - Long lags in impact
 - Multiple actors and multiple causes
- Main approaches

“Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half.”

John Wanamaker (1838-1922)
Founder, Wannamaker's Department Store

What are our policy influence
goals/objectives?

What do we mean by influence?

- “Bring about a change in a specific policy, regulation or practice”
- This is what most people think of as “policy influence”
- Here is one scheme for tracking impact defined in this way

A Four Level Scheme for Measuring Policy Impact

Level 1 ideas created/mobilised. This is where the think tank produced work analysing a policy question, but it has not yet fed through to senior government officials or other policy stakeholders, often because it is at an initial stage.

Level 2 disseminated to government. These are outputs that have been formally conveyed to the requesting minister or permanent secretary (or other senior policy stakeholder) but not yet discussed in depth.

Level 3 engagement of policy makers policy impact requires hearing with senior/influential policy-makers, with evidence* that recommendations were internalized and/or that exchanged ideas have influenced policy discussions.

Level 4 changes to policy policy impact means policy decision demonstrably and substantially informed, caused or influenced by the think tank.

* Evidence will include, for instance, follow-up meetings, email exchanges, requests for materials to disseminate amongst colleagues, requests for follow-up discussions/projects, meeting minutes detailing internalisation of IGC work which are then sent to policymakers etc.

Policy Influence has more than one dimension

- There are other aspects of influence that may be more important in the long run
 - "Expand policy capacities"
 - "Broaden policy horizons"
 - "Affect decision regimes"

Reference – Carden 2009 – chapters 1-3 essential reading for every ThinkTanker

Expand policy capacities

“Research can strengthen the institutional framework supporting policymaking by enhancing the policy community’s own collective ability to assess and communicate innovative ideas, and by cultivating new talents for analyzing and applying incoming research advice.”

Broaden policy horizons

“Policy is often frustrated by a scarcity of choices. Research can improve the intellectual framework surrounding policymaking by introducing new ideas to the policy agenda, by ensuring that information comes to policymakers in a form and language they can quickly grasp and use, and by fostering helpful dialogue between researchers and decision makers.”

Affect decision regimes

“The quality of a policy can be determined as much by the procedures of deliberation and decision as by its content. Research findings can improve the policy-process framework by helping to open and rationalize the procedures of legislating, administering, and evaluating government policies and programmes. Skills and attitudes characteristic of good research—not least, a spirit of curiosity and fact-based argument—can improve the operations of government”



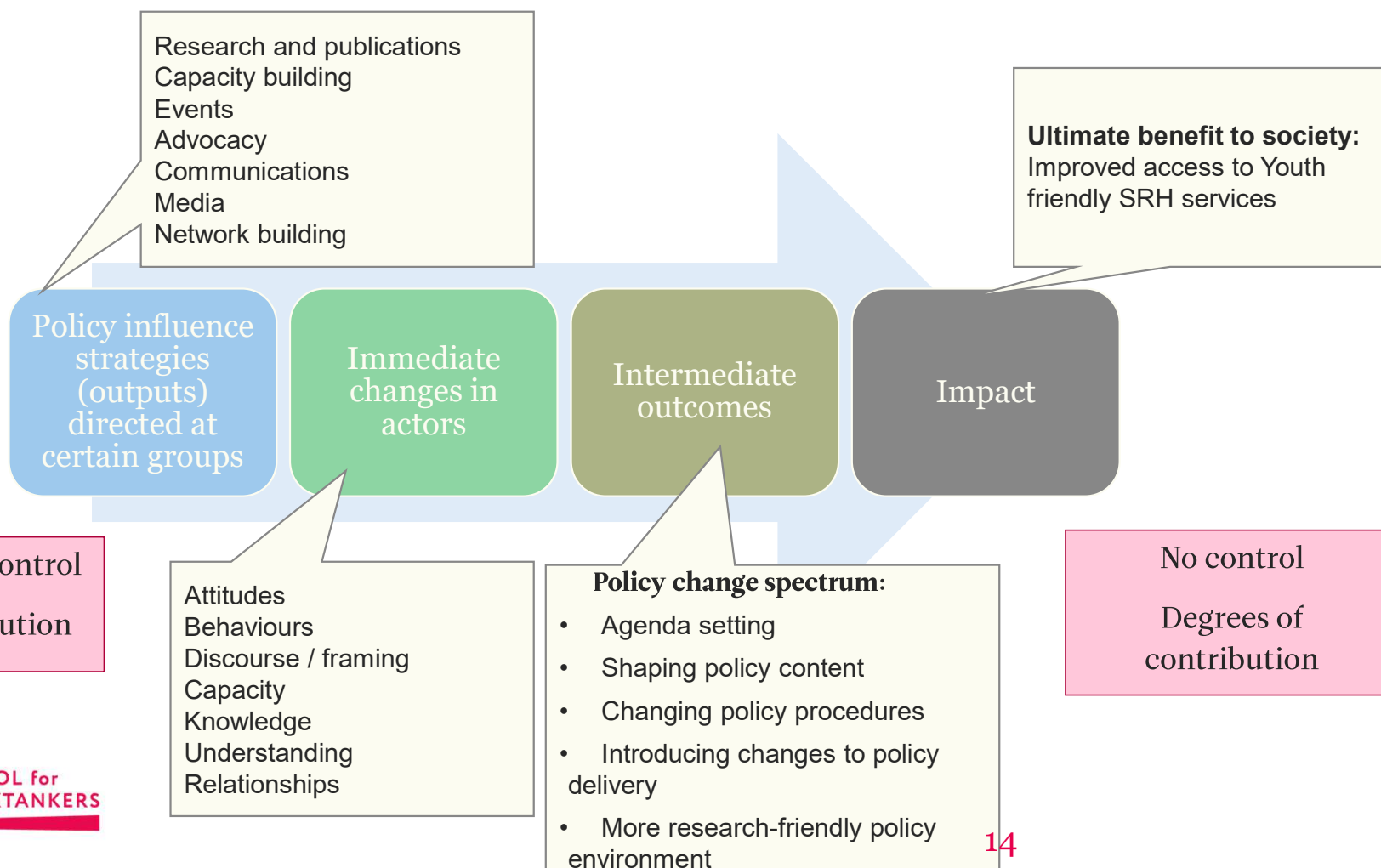
Why is MEL for Policy Influence (MEL-I) so difficult to measure?

- Brainstorm

MEL for Policy Influence (MEL-I)

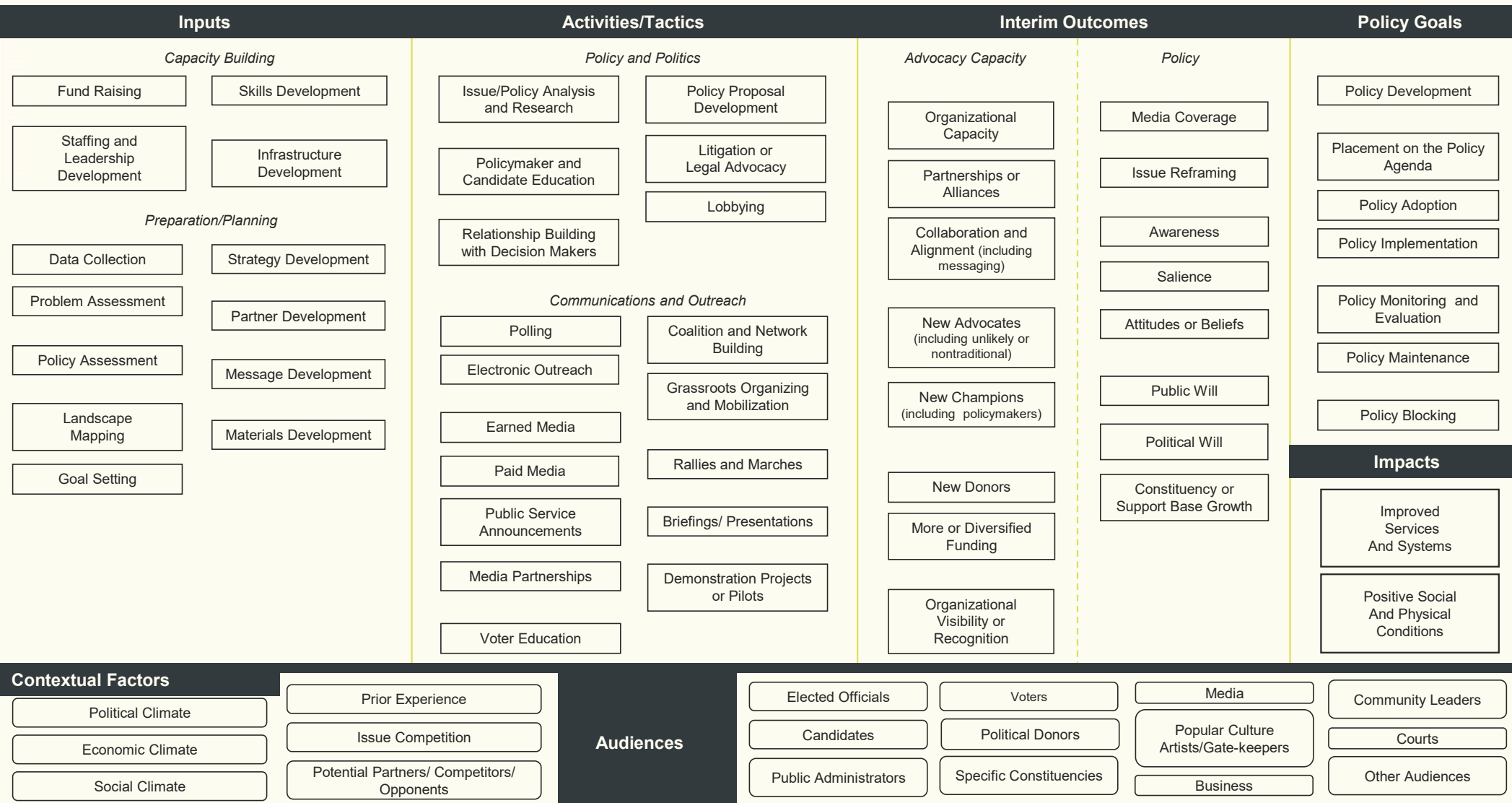
- Why is M&E for impact or policy influence difficult?
 - Impact /influence is difficult to define and multidimensional
 - Most policy changes involve multiple actors and multiple factors
 - Few think tanks can honestly claim to have been the only “cause” of a policy change
 - Lags between research and impact are long & unpredictable
 - Few funders are willing to wait years for impact to take place
 - Evidence is hard to obtain
 - Policymakers are seldom eager to admit who influenced them
 - And if a think tank claims influence this may damage the trusted relationship with the policymaker that is essential for influence
- But funders want evidence of impact ...


Policy influence strategies & outcomes



In the end, any monitoring and evaluation approach chosen must consider that think tanks are not just about influencing policies directly but also fulfil a great deal of other functions (education of elites, prepare new policymakers, create and maintain spaces, help set the agenda, disrupt consensus, etc.). It is in all these functions that their real value lies. Source: Mendizabal, 2012

FRAMEWORKS: ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE COMPOSITE LOGIC MODEL





Group work - results chain

Group work instructions

- go to the google slides for day 2 - find your group slide

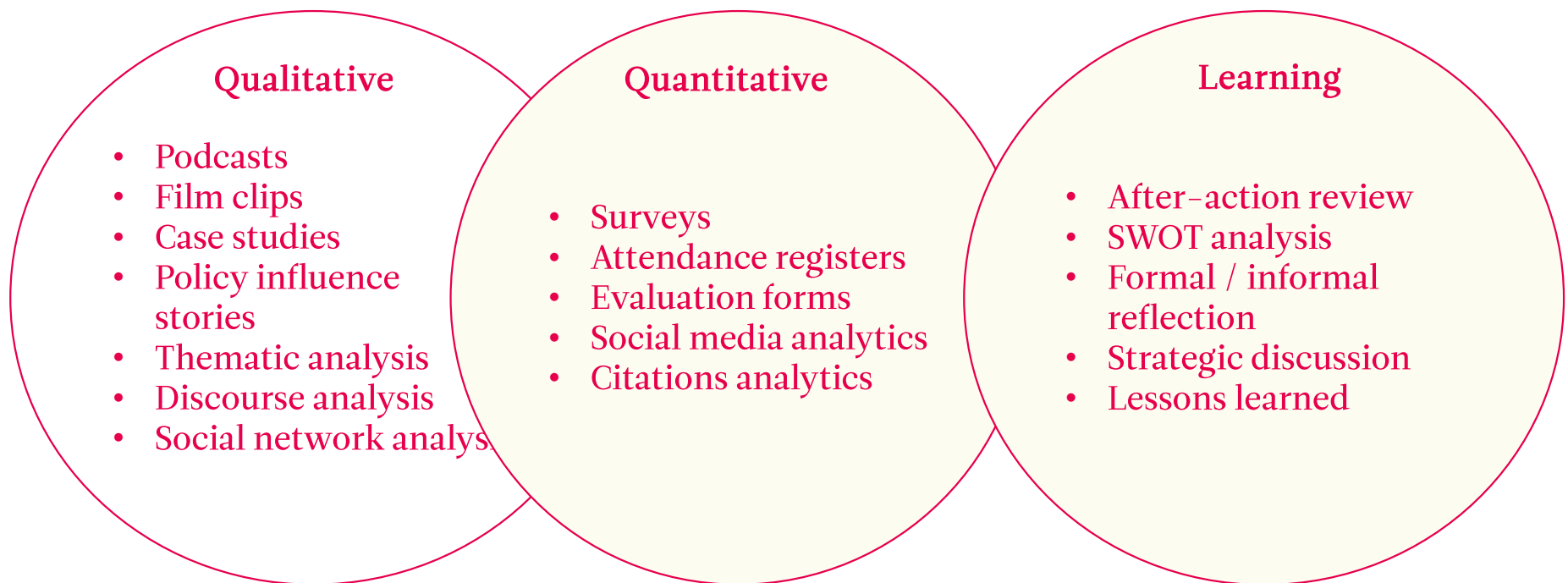
In groups, construct a results chain for policy outcome.

1. Select an activity/ tactic from the composite logic model (previous slide) that is familiar to your group
2. Look in the first column (inputs) – what inputs are needed for this tactic?
3. Look in the third column (Interim Outcomes) – select an interim outcome that would result from that activity or tactic
4. Look in the fourth column (Policy goals) – which ultimate policy goal would those activities and outcomes contribute towards?
5. Capture it in the table in the group work slide

What methods or data sources do you have to measure or describe these kinds of activities and outputs?

Brainstorm

what may be available or developed for MEL



Learn: what is working? what can we do better?

Example of a simple MEL matrix


Objective /Outcomes & outputs	Indicator	Data source	Who is responsible	How will it be used
OUTCOME				
Policy community around G20 in Africa is strengthened and sustainable	# of African Think tanks starting research streams on G20	Annual survey with participating think tanks	Program officer	To see if the program is effective in building a policy community on G20
OUTPUT				
4 African think tanks engaged in research on G20 by mid-term of project	No. of African think tanks produce research on G20	Research outputs / publication schedule/	Program officer	To see if the partner TTs are producing research as planned

Outputs / indicators

Evaluation Focus	What can be evaluated?	Aspects to evaluate	Indicators (examples)	Examples of tools
Outputs	Papers or research reports	Quality, clarity, relevance, usefulness	Quotes in legislative sessions, feedback from external evaluators, inquiries from public officials.	External Committee of Evaluation
	Policy Briefs or public policy documents	Clarity of identified problem, suitability of proposed solution, relevance and opportunity for public policy	Quote or use in a program or law, public official inquiries, organized or called meetings to discuss the problem in depth.	Interviews to targeted public officials
	Blogs/web sites	Website browsability, quality of content, feedback from relevant actors	Number and profile of visitors, number of downloaded documents	User interviews
	Publications	Quality, clarity, relevance, usefulness	Invitations to present publications, quotes in public documents, inquiries from public officials	Analysis of quotes, reader surveys
	Seminars/events	Level of assistance, quality of the debate, profile of external presenters	Number and profile of assistants and presenters	Participant and presenter surveys, after action reviews
	Press clippings	Projected image of institution/ research, correlation between plan and actual publication	Number and type of published articles, profile of publisher	Media clippings

Q&A





Evaluation of Policy Influence

for another time ...

Evaluating these aspects is challenging

- They take even longer to occur
- Attributing these changes to a specific think tank or research project is even more difficult than tracing the impact on a specific policy
- So their influence on M&E practice has been limited to date

How do you do MEL-I?

- No consensus in the evaluation community
 - Still the subject of debate and research
- There is no “magic bullet” nor is there ever likely to be one
 - You cannot run experiments to test the influence of a think tank
 - You cannot expect politicians and civil servants to admit who influenced their decisions

But funders want evidence of impact, so what should you do?

- Don't spend too much time worrying about this
 - Let the external evaluators do the worrying
- but ...
 - Think about what approaches the evaluators might use
 - Set up a monitoring system and start collecting the data they might need – right now!
 - The sooner you start collecting information, the more likely it is to be accurate and useful

Funders want evidence of impact, so what should you do?

- In the end, you will have to tell stories about influence.
- The more convincing they are, the better
- How can you make your stories convincing?
 - Base them on your “Theory of Change”
 - You do have a ToC, don’t you?
 - Use one of the mainstream approaches
 - This will make your M&E look less ad-hoc

Some “Mainstream” Approaches

- Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting
- Rapid Outcome Assessment and Episode studies
- Contribution Analysis and Process Tracing (not quite mainstream yet)
- “Realist” evaluation

LE6

One non mainstream approach that might be worth mentioning is the methodology "Links of policy influence", developed by Vanesa and I had the chance to apply in an evaluation of a Chilean think tank programme. Just to show how think tanks make efforts to measure its impact. Here is an article that explains briefly the methodology: <https://www.politicsandideas.org/?p=2121> I also attach a PPT for your reference.

Leandro Eche; 11/01/2018

Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting

- Outcome Mapping
 - Identify the people whose behaviour you think you can change, and what changes you hope to make
 - Focus is on “boundary partners”
- Advantages
 - Well established since its introduction by IDRC in 2001
 - Huge OM support system
 - literature, trainers, and an online Outcome Mapping Community

References: Better Evaluation (2013) and Wilson-Grau (2015)

Episode Studies and Rapid Outcome Assessment

- Start with a case study of a policy change and “track backward” to the factors that caused it
 - Instead of starting with research output and trying to discover what influence it had
- Argument is that episode studies give more appropriate weight to other causal factors
 - Tracking forward exaggerates influence of a piece of research
- Rapid Outcome Assessment is a framework for compiling the case studies

References: Carden (2009b) and Better Evaluation (2014b)

Contribution Analysis

- Build into your theory of change not only how you think your intervention will work, but also all the factors (and other interventions) that might have caused the policy change
- Build an explanation of the change that takes account of these “other factors”, not just your intervention(s)

References: Mayne (2006) and Befani et al (2016)

“Realist” approaches to evaluation

- “What works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?”
- Relies heavily on the behavioural mechanisms assumed to underlie the theory of change, and which explain how the outcomes were caused and the influence of context.
 - often summarized as “Context, Mechanism and Outcome” (CMO)
- The underlying question is intuitively appealing, but ...
- Perhaps the most challenging of all the methods discussed here

Reference: Community Matters (2014)



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Additional material



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