Integrating Implementation into Evaluation

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Integrating Implementation

A classic distinction in evaluation is between:

- ***Intervention or policy failure***: where the assumptions and theories that underpin an intervention proved false

and

- ***Implementation failure***: where there was nothing wrong with the policy's theory or assumptions but *how* the intervention was implemented and in what contexts may have been inappropriate

Integrating Implementation

- In the real world the distinction between policy and implementation is not clearcut – both may contribute to success and failure at the same time

- Take for example policy intervention aimed at greater innovation and competitivity that relies on increased investment in Research and Development…. Most agree this is necessary but not enough…

- Implementation becomes more important as policy interventions become more complex, delivered through multiple agents and multiple pathways and requiring multi-agency coordination

Integrating Implementation

- The challenge is not to evaluate implementation *instead* of evaluating policy assumptions - rather the challenge is to *integrate* both of these evaluation objects

- A good test of a 'Theory of change': does it cover both intervention and implementation logics?

- Understanding implementation mechanisms is important for policy learning, policy improvement and policy design

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- This is consistent with the consensus some 40 years ago in political science about the impossibility of separating policy making from policy implementation a consensus reinforced by the evolution of 'multi-level governance' as a model for the EU

- The distinction is between a top-down model that assumes that decisions or legislation is sufficient to ensure an effect; and a bottom-up model that emphasises the importance of 'local' actors and contexts in mediating whatever were the decisions of policy makers

Mapping the Implementation Space		
Implementation Actors	*Implementation Role*	*Evaluation Focus*
Policy makers, e.g. Council of Ministers, MS Central Governments, Legislatures – European & national/regional Parliaments	Prioritisation, Strategy making, Rule setting;, Funding distribution; Value articulation, Leadership & Commitment	Mandates, authority & legitimacy; Coalition- building; Accountability, Incentives & Enforcement capacities; Coherence and consistency
Administrations e.g., Managing Authorities, Monitoring Committees; Regional and local governments…..	Plan-making; Contracting & contract management; Networking/Convening; Consensus building; Information dissemination; Stakeholder dialogue	Administrative capacities and resourcing; Staff skills, human resources and management; Plan & target delivery; Project selection & Contract-making; Reputation, e.g. perceived efficiency
Stakeholders, Beneficiaries and Intermediaries – Enterprises & Trade Associations; Universities, institutes & Laboratories; Civil Society Organisations; Banks & intermediaries; Municipalities and Public bodies; Citizens	Enable strategic convergence; Link sectors, e.g. bridge SMEs, markets and Higher Education; Establish sustainable institutions; Communicate interests and priorities	Socio-economic context; Converging objectives; Networking, Governance and Institution creation; Value consensus/dissent; Diffusion of innovation; Horizontal/Thematic policy links

Integrating Implementation

- A comprehensive evaluation of implementation covers all three levels – policy making; administration; and stakeholders/beneficiaries though in practice evaluating policy making is more the remit of policy analysts...

- In practice an evaluation of implementation in a Structural Fund setting will usually centre around what public authorities consider is within their 'span of control' to improve programme effectiveness

- This is partly limited by the discretion and autonomy of actors; and relative complexity of contexts for programme delivery...

- In reality MAs have influence as well as control.....

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- Stakeholders and beneficiaries have discretion & autonomy – they pursue their own interests which won't always coincide with policy priorities

- However, persuasion adaptation & mutual learning occurs in many development programmes…

The *three main scenarios for implementation evaluation* relate to different degrees of control exerted by public authorities ….

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Scenario 1: Stakeholders & beneficiaries have little autonomy and discretion & contracting authorities have greatest control. Reasonable to focus on rule enforcement, procedural conformity, allocating funds and meeting targets

Examples –

• Training programme for marginalised, recoverable loans for SMEs….

Consistent with evaluation approach favoured in Implementation Science which emphasises 'fidelity' – as in delivery of standardised education or health services in the same way everywhere

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Scenario 2: Stakeholders & beneficiaries have greater autonomy & discretion, but public authorities can still exert influence through incentives, appeals to common interests, clear analysis of needs and ambitions of recipients

Examples –

- A firm is already planning to invest in new digitalised equipment or enter new export markets – beneficiary is predisposed to adapt their behaviour

Consistent with evaluations of 'public education'; 'behaviour change' or communications campaigns

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Scenario 3: Stakeholders and beneficiaries have considerable autonomy and discretion; public authorities have few opportunities to exert influence but can enable partnership & network arrangements; innovative governance and 'learning opportunities'; and institution-building

Examples –

- Government wants to capitalise on previous investments in new science facilities by encouraging closer-to-market medium size firms and branches of international enterprises to partner for product and process innovation

Consistent with evaluations of research innovation and technology transition programmes

Integrating Implementation

- In addition to degrees of autonomy and discretion, *context* is also important both in the terms of diversity of setting; and complexity of the implementation context

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- *First*, in terms of diversity, implementation evaluations have to take into account different settings where implementation happens, e.g., more or less developed regions, adequacy of infrastructures, more or less capable partners, other policies that may compete or reinforce….

- *Second*, in terms of complexity of an implementation context, evaluations have to accommodate some very complex relationships between multiple 'actors' and causal factors; many alternative causal pathways; and interdependence of different causal factors

This also has methodological implications, especially at the evaluation design stage….

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At level of *evaluation design* these choices include :

- Under what conditions is it important to conduct an implementation evaluation and when is it not so important

- Unit of analysis – a single programme, an intervention, a cross-cutting sample of interventions...

- How far to integrate an implementation strand with other strands of an evaluation such as an ex-ante or results or impact evaluation....

- The timing of implementation evaluations given the likelihood of institutional 'memory loss'......

Integrating Implementation

Recapitulation

- Success/Failure often follow from the way policy interventions are implemented as well as the assumptions underpinning policies

- This follows from the discretion and autonomy of many actors and stakeholders and beneficiaries engaged in Structural Funds

- Implementation evaluation is often underemphasised or addresses only a small part of the overall 'implementation space' usually around contractualisation

- Integrating implementation into evaluation portfolios can improve understanding of programme results *and* identify specific improvement opportunities