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Evaluating  
Interventions

Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

March 19th 2009

**Centre for the  
Study of  
Group  
Processes**

# Evaluating Interventions

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We are grateful to Prof Diane Houston (former Research and Strategy Advisor at the Women and Equality Unit) for comments on this work

# Some opening thoughts

- Elements of evaluation
- Commonly applied evaluation goals
- What is an intervention?
- Evaluation frames for interventions
- Importance of a theoretical framework

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# Why Evaluate?

- Justify
- Amplify
- Influence
- Account
- It's a living
  
- Why not?

**Understand, explain and predict**

# Common Evaluation Goals

- Values  
(We want to do the ‘right thing’ ... Public consultation, focus groups, market research, PR, spin.....)
- Utility  
(Do the right people [‘user groups’/‘stakeholders’] care about x?)
- Feasibility and Pragmatics  
(can x be done? At what cost?)
- Policy function  
(polemical, strategic, tactical implications)

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# Elements of Evaluation

- Information gathering by
  - Describing
  - Exploring
  - Discovering
- To establish responsibility (accountability, etc.)
  - *Who* is doing something
  - *How* something has been done
  - *What* has been done
- To establish causality (drivers, levers etc.)
  - Single impacts
  - Sequential impacts
  - Multiple impacts
  - Conditional impacts
- To inform planning (practice, policy)

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# What is an 'Intervention'?

- Doing something
  - (e.g. a media campaign)
- With a specific set of people
- In a specific location or context
- Over a particular period of time

## Versus

- Doing something else
- With the same or a different set of people
- At the same or a different time



# Some Essential Evaluation Frames for Interventions

- Define the Policy Function  
(polemical, strategic, tactical levels)
- Specify Relevant Potential Outcomes  
(what happens if x is done, or not done?)
- Establish Measurement Criteria  
(can we detect x and its effects?)
- Defensibility, Specificity and Limitations  
(which parts of x can we evaluate robustly, and how generally? What can we *not* learn?)
- Consider Iterativeness  
(single or multi-stage problems)

Kurt Lewin famously stated that

“there is nothing so practical  
as a good theory”

# A Good Theoretical Framework Should Be Based on

- *Prior* empirical, and/or clear theoretical support for the premises of an intervention  
(e.g. 'degree of segregation is related to levels of prejudice')
- Explicit principles for intervening  
(e.g., intergroup contact theory to design a prejudice reduction programme)
- Measurable evidence  
(e.g., statistically reliable indicators or manifest [sometimes qualitative] effects that can be verified by independent observers)
- Replicable causal inference  
(e.g., longitudinal and/or experimental design, use of baseline or null-effects comparisons, discrete impacts on focal but not on irrelevant outcomes)