Evaluating Interventions

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Some opening thoughts

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