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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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Human Rights
Commission

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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)