

Block 1

Evaluation Purposes, Culture and Independence

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Input into Evaluation Helpdesk Seminar

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Opening session: Evaluation Purposes and Use

People often ask:

- *Why* do we undertake evaluations?
 - What is the *purpose* of all this activity?
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- Surely the money could be better spent on front-line services and real investment in communities, enterprises and infrastructure...
 - In a moment you will have a chance to suggest your own answers to the question: What are the purposes of evaluation?

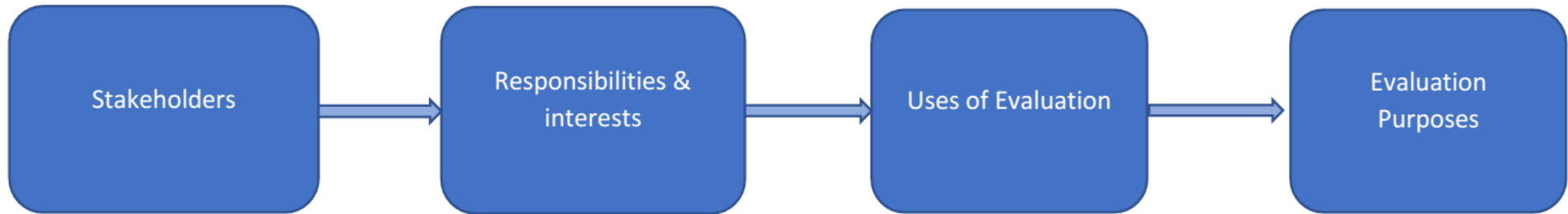
Evaluation Purposes and Use

There are many typologies of evaluation purpose – including the classic distinctions between:

- *Accountability and Learning* and
 - *Proving and Improving*
- A key starting consideration is to ask: Who are the users of evaluations?
- In every programme or policy area there are in addition to funders and sponsors many key stakeholders – national policy-makers, front-line managers, intended beneficiaries, local administrations....
 -all of whom have their own motivations and *can* and *should* ‘use’ evaluations to fulfil their responsibilities and pursue their own interests

Evaluation Purposes and Use

- The words 'can' and 'should' are chosen carefully because the underlying logic of evaluation is that we live in a world where knowledge matters
- Knowledge and understanding, evidence and analysis make possible better decisions, improvements in the way we use resources and ultimately in the possibility for improving wellbeing
- I would not claim that evaluation is the only source of knowledge and understanding to inform policy and programme action but it has become an important source



To start us all thinking about the *uses* and *purposes* of evaluation we would like you all to spend 20 minutes discussing the following questions:

Who are the main users of evaluations you are involved in?
What do you understand to be the main purposes of evaluating EU programmes that you are involved in?

Provisional Typology of Evaluation Purposes

At ex ante stage

- Planning and Resource Allocation

At Ongoing and ex post stages:

- Accounting for Results
- Better Management and Delivery
 - Learning and Improvement
- Capacity development and strengthening

Summary remarks about evaluation purposes and use

- We have established that evaluations can have many purposes
- Evaluations may indeed be driven by different stakeholders – but may also be driven by funding obligations and organisational imperatives
- There is a tendency for ‘accountability’ purposes that justify funding to crowd-out other purposes – it is seen as the necessary minimum
- But in professional evaluation circles and among enlightened policy makers and funding agencies the importance of using evaluation to inform *management and delivery*; feed into *policy learning* and future *programme design*; and to *strengthen capacities* whether in services, infrastructures, enterprises or civil society – are also prioritised

Evaluation Cultures and Organisational Arrangements

- Evaluation does not take place in isolation – its is an activity and function embedded in organisations and institutions
- How evaluation is used is only partly within an evaluators control
- Evaluation contributes best when two supporting factors are in place:
 - A supportive 'culture' of evaluation, and
 - Organisational arrangements that reinforce and operationalise that culture

What does an 'evaluation culture' look like?

An evaluation culture conforms to many of the attributes of today's ideas of 'performance-driven organisational practice'.

A supportive evaluation culture is:

- Performance & outcome focussed – rather than procedural
 - Knowledge intensive
 - Self critical and transparent
- Open to feedback both internally and externally (e.g. from staff, contractors and users/suppliers/stakeholders)
 - Has professional codes that encourage ethical behaviour
 - Avoids a 'blame culture' when things go wrong

Organisational Arrangements that Support Evaluation

An organisation's culture rests on specific organisational arrangements:

- An evaluation function or unit that has a clear mandate
- Staff of that function or unit with appropriate skills
- Lines of reporting and responsibility that link evaluation outputs with management action
- Governance and management that incorporates evaluation into key decision-making and decision-points
- Recognising independence and impartiality of evaluation

Organisational, Contractual and Behavioural Independence

Independence is a key part of any evaluation culture - usually made up of 3 elements:

- *Organisational independence*, i.e. location within an organisation that ties it in to strategic and operational decisions
- *Contractual independence*, i.e. scope & resources to contract-out core evaluation activities; and internal contracts that incorporate professional independence
- *Behavioural independence*, i.e. behavioural expectations that evaluators and those who manage evaluations will act independently and support independence and impartiality

Independence and impartiality

For an evaluation function to be credible it needs to be seen as independent, driven by professional codes and standards

There are two main ways in which independence can be operationalised

- Externalisation of core evaluation functions through external contracts for most evaluation activities
- An internal evaluation unit that is able to operate independently

In the best functioning cases there is a combination of both:

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Organisational Arrangements

Advantages and Disadvantages of (pure) Internal Evaluations:

- The *advantages* of local knowledge; easier access to internal programme data; understand organisational dynamics; and are likely to be sensitive to a range of stakeholders.
- The *disadvantages* of being seen as less credible by outsiders; being more vulnerable to internal management pressure; can become preoccupied with minutiae of data collection/or face competing demands on their time; are likely to have less extensive evaluation experience

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Organisational Arrangements

Advantages and Disadvantages of (pure) External Evaluations:

- The *advantages* of being more credible to outsiders; have broader evaluation experience of varied methodologies and settings; can concentrate on evaluation activities rather than organisational liaison.
- The *disadvantages* of limited organisational knowledge; greater difficulties accessing data; lack of authority arguing for findings; risks of insensitivity to stakeholders

A 'Mixed' Model

Given these advantages and disadvantages the 'ideal' mixed model is likely to be:

An internal unit mainly managing external contractors although able to undertake some activities on its own

These will include

- Managing the evaluation process to match organisational and stakeholder priorities
- Drawing up Terms of Reference and selecting contractors
- Defending the independence of its contractors from internal interference

Group Exercise Two

We would now like you to divide into groups and consider the following question:

To what extent do you think you work in an 'evaluation culture' which supports evaluation independence? How might this culture be further strengthened?

Thanks for your attention!