THE FUTURE OF EVALUATION: 10 PREDICTIONS

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Trend no. 1: increasing polarisation

Proliferation and institutionalisation of evaluation practices in the 90s coincided with:

- the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992): fading class divisions, prominence of centrist 'third way' parties, etc.
- all this established technocratic competence as a key source of political legitimacy.

Since the end of global financial crisis we witness:

- Increasing polarisation of societies along ideological lines
- Growing distrust in elites and (scientific) knowledge in particular
- Information wars, fake news phenomenon, etc.

Trend no. 1: implications

1

Evaluation will become increasingly irrelevant:

- At best, one more opinion (lack of 'hard data', subjective judgements)
- At worst, expensive instrument to justify decisions of 'elite'

2

Evaluation as an inclusive process of transparent decision making:

- *Ex ante* evaluations will gain prominence
- No more evaluation reports! Evaluations carried out on web platforms, providing open data, analysis algorithms, forums for public consultations, joint definition of questions and 'wiki' interpretation of findings

Trend no. 2: challenges to the role of causal inference

Evaluation is 'obsessed' with establishing causality between an intervention and the outcomes:

- Counterfactual impact evaluations
- Theory-based impact evaluation

Predictive analytics (based on data mining, AI, deep learning algorithms, etc.):

- Can already estimate what are you going to buy, likelihood that your kid is a genius, you will repay loans, crash a car, etc.
- Data driven: based on past trends and correlations

Trend no. 2: implications

3

AI takes over:

- Project applications rated by computers
- Evaluations are the results of estimates of likelihood of impacts
- Most evaluations done in-house → external evaluators unemployed

4

Evaluation as 'research programmes':

- Develop generalisable knowledge on the outcomes of interventions, i.e. theory building and testing
- One-off evaluations → coordinated series of activities to broaden understanding of whether and why the 'interventions work'.

Trend no. 3: Big data

Evaluation relies on inherently limited and expensive-to-obtain data:

- Interviews, surveys, monitoring data, and similar

Big data:

- Exponential growth – approx. 90% of data has been created during the past decade
- Volume and variety: n= (almost) all, individual level, time series
- Cheap: large initial costs of setting-up the system, but insignificant marginal costs of additional data collection

Trend no. 3: implications

5

Monitoring and evaluation in real time:

- Lighter reporting requirements
- Progress along the impact pathways can be continuously traced → no more fact finding evaluation reports!

6

Counterfactual impact evaluation as standard:

- Ex ante simulations
- Every Friday delivered with your morning coffee!

7

The role of external evaluators will change:

- Making sense of it all: transform information to knowledge
- What if we don‘t know that we don‘t know... Interviews will survive!?

Trend no. 3: implications

8

New types of evaluation questions:

- Big data allows simulations and scenario building
- E.g. Which alternative policies / instruments could deliver higher impacts?

9

The role of internal evaluation departments will change:

- Knowledge brokers: anticipation of demand, storage and retrieval of evidence
- Technical staff: design & run the data systems

Prediction no. 10

Which predictions will come true?

Depends on you!


THANK
YOU!