

Methods of Evaluation

Position paper of the *DeGEval – Gesellschaft für Evaluation*

Evaluations analyse and assess goal achievement and the effects of measures. Irrespective of its scope, funding and time frame an evaluation can support decision makers and the practice to objectively review and, if necessary, systematically improve the accuracy and effectiveness of measures, strategies and other subject matters. One question frequently asked is which methodical requirements are to be met under practical conditions in order to enable an evaluation to perform such tasks reliably, competently and professionally. The position paper at hand is meant to be a summary of central answers to this question. It is primarily aimed at individuals and institutions in charge of commissioning evaluations, accounting for them or utilizing their results as well as at the interested public.

1. What characterizes evaluation methods?

Quite frequently evaluation methods stem from empirical social research. Furthermore, however, evaluation uses additional methodical approaches such as e.g. the Delphi method, group discussions and cost-benefit analyses. These are instruments at the interface of statistical data collection (qualitative and/or quantitative) and assessment. Evaluations often make use of a mix of methods. They combine different methodical procedures (triangulation) in order to be able to appropriately take into consideration different perspectives.

2. Are there correct and wrong methods?

Unlike fundamental research, the quite frequently order-based evaluation must find an intelligent balance between high methodical standards on the one hand and a rather pragmatic, economically justifiable and often time-pressured approach on the other. Therefore there is no simple "right or wrong" as far as the selection of methods is concerned, but at best a "right or wrong" with regard to appropriateness as to the respective evaluation object. There rarely is one single method of choice though, but there often are a number of substantiated selection options instead.

Certain evaluation objectives, however, require specific methodical approaches. As far as impact analyses are concerned, (quasi) experimental designs in due consideration of comparison groups are of particular importance, if practicably possible. In case of self-selective comparison group allocations possible disruptive factors should be compensated by respective statistical methods (matching) or other appropriate research designs.

3. Which methodical competences should evaluating bodies have?

Evaluating bodies should be competent with regard to a large range of methods. Although it is true that in actual evaluations the entire range of methods is rarely required, the evaluating bodies ought to have sufficient methodical knowledge to be able to assess potentials as well as limits of procedures and approaches employed. Thus they must be capable of giving substantiated reasons for their respective use, which obviously implies knowledge of alternative procedures.

4. What are the consequences for commissioning bodies?

Appropriate methods as well as a high quality of evaluation will supply a sound foundation for the utilisation of evaluation results; however, they will also incur costs. Commissioning evaluations must therefore not merely be based on economic aspects. Issues of contents and quality ought to be given priority.

In order to support professional and relevant evaluation procedures the *DeGEval – Gesellschaft für Evaluation* has published evaluation standards, recommendations for commissioning bodies as well as information on further training and education with regard to evaluation including details on evaluation methods.

For further information see: <http://www.degeval.de>.