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Evaluation's influence on RTI policy making

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- The rise of **evidence-based** policy-making, increasing interest in assessing “what works?” (esp. RTI);
- Growing line of research about the actual or probable **consequences of evaluations**
 - Research suggests an ineffective use of evaluations, often reduced to an ex-post exercise in legitimation
 - Raises questions concerning the reasons for the low up-take of evaluations
- INNO Appraisal (2010): e.g. **limited** consequences, incremental rather than radical, quality ↑ = consequences ↑
 - Also: Evaluations intensively discussed within and outside government are more likely to lead to consequences;

Austria: Evaluation activities in RTI

- Austrian RTI policy has gained considerable ground since the 1990, so has the use of evaluations in RTI;
- Criticised in recent years for being **inefficient** in the use of evaluation results and recommendations; Examples:
 - Crest (2008): Country Report Austria
“more thought ... to the mechanisms needed to ensure that the results of evaluations do feed back into policy formulation and implementation”
 - INNO Appraisal (2010): Case Study Austria
 - Reiner and Smoliner (2012): Outputorientierte Evaluierung öffentlich geförderter FTI-Programme

- **Concepts of use** (e.g. Weiss, Patton)
 - Instrumental, symbolic, conceptual (“enlightenment”);
 - Recently: process use, imposed use, mis-use;
- **Increasing use** (Leviton and Hughes (1981), Thompson and King (1981), Cousins and Leithwood (1986), Shulha and Cousins (1997), Johnson et al. (2009):
 - Summed up: Evaluation quality, credibility, relevance, communication quality, findings, and timeliness.
 - Recently: Fostering stakeholder involvement

Increasing the **utility** of evaluations (INNO Appraisal 2010)

- Increasing the rigour/quality of an evaluation;
- Obtaining the compliance and trust of stakeholders;
- Improving the transparency of methodologies;
- Use of clear and measurable objectives;

Increasing the **usefulness** (INNO Appraisal 2010)

- The effectiveness of design, management, implementation, the evaluation itself, the achievement of objectives,
- Discuss the broader impacts of the instrument.

Overall assessment: (e.g. INNO Appraisal 2010, Reiner and Smoliner 2012)

- Relevant, timely, and high-quality programme evaluations;
- The methods used are appropriate, recommendation are perceived to be useful;

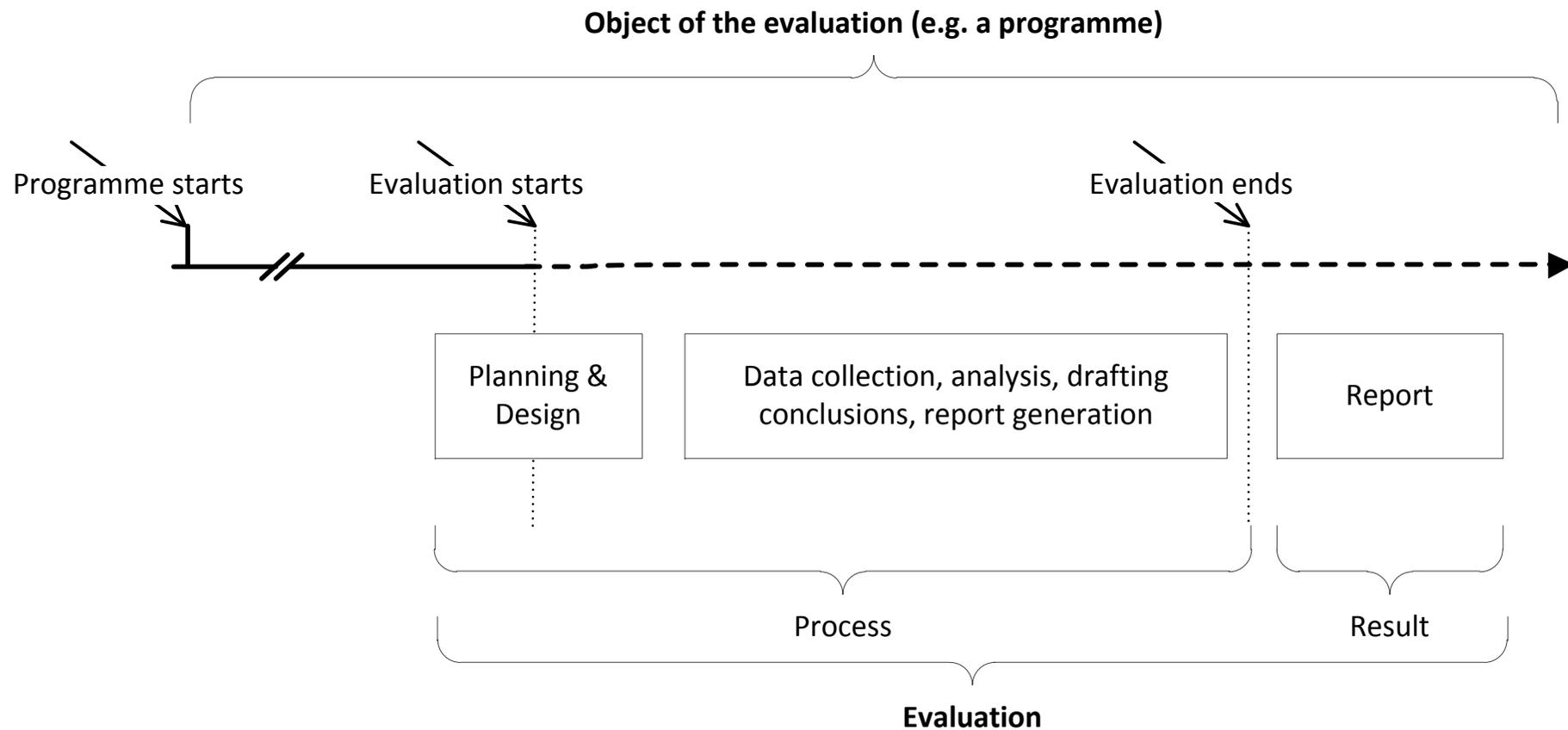
Some **issues** remain:

- Lack of specific types of evaluations (e.g. portfolio evaluations, efficiency analyses);
- Availability and quality of data;
- Different expectations and evaluation needs among programme managers, agencies and ministries;
- Lack of binding mechanisms for implementing results;

The case for influence

- The **concept of influence** can contribute to a better understanding about how and why evaluations effect change.
- (Indirect) “Influence” adds to (Direct) “Use” in instances in which an evaluation has indirect / unintended impacts
 - Factors: Time, source, intention (Kirkhart 2000)
- Henry & Mark’s (2003) and Mark & Henry’s (2004) **“taxonomy of evaluation influence”**
 - General influence processes (e.g. elaboration, persuasion, policy consideration) lead to specific changes in beliefs, motivations, actions/practices.

Two perspectives



Exploring mechanism of change

- Investigating effects that an evaluation has in the broadest possible terms, incorporating also the indirect and unintended effects;
- To understand mechanism of change and build knowledge about them;
- Understanding stakeholder interactions, their viewpoints, interests and strategies;
- To shed light into a mix of interlinked processes;

Applying the concept of influence in research: A brief summary

- The importance of certain **change mechanism** (e.g. as suggested by Henry & Mark) has been identified and recognized, but research is still needed.
 - Learning sources: Dialogue, argumentation, “enlightenment”;
 - Strongest influence on the individual, lower on the interpersonal and collective level (e.g. Burr 2009);
- **Indirect/Unintended influence** plays a considerable role
 - Correlates with the design/timing of the evaluation
 - Controversial topics attract attention (e.g. Lethonen 2005)
- **Process-based influence**: “buy-in” (Oliver 2008)
- Unsurprisingly, factors affecting “evaluation use” are also relevant for “evaluation influence” (highly overlapping)

Factors potentially affecting evaluation influence

- Institutional context:** (e.g. Mayntz and Scharpf 1995)
- Discussion culture and policy style (e.g. Lethonen 2005)
 - Evaluation history and culture
 - Roles and responsibilities in the governance framework
 - Institutional memory, continuity of policies (and procedures, people, etc.)
 - The process of “agencification” has significantly shaped the needs and wants of agencies and the government/ministries towards the utilisation of evaluation findings.

Factors potentially affecting evaluation influence, cont.

Actors

- Influence depends on the actors' goals and preferences;
- Actors' participation and involvement in the eval. process:
 - Who takes part in which phase of the process?
 - How and when do they enter the process?
- Cooperative learning and discussion
 - Ministries/agencies with different roles/interest
 - Established patterns on how to deal with evaluations
- Capacity of the evaluation to mobilise key change agents (e.g. Lethonen 2005)

Issue of indirect/unintended effects

- Unforeseeable consequences e.g. from the uncertainties of changing environments (e.g. Morell 2005)
- Inappropriate use or „Mis-use“ (e.g. Cousins 2006)
- Selected examples:
 - Little impact on the object, big impact on the policy field;
 - Mid-term report made the final report obsolete;
 - Report is used as basis for follow-up meetings;
 - Reported evidence resonates with an individual who puts it on a policy agenda
 - More stakeholder want to get their voices heard ...

- **Increasing demand** for evidence-based practices.
- Influence as **new concept** that aims to improve the understanding about how and why evaluations effect change.
 - The importance of indirect/unintended effects are highlighted;
 - Institutional context and actor behaviour have not been addressed thoroughly in the empirical literature;
 - Insights will help to improve evaluation practice;
- **More research** on the factors and mechanisms, which enhance or reduce, and shape the influence of evaluations on RTI policy making, is needed!

Thank you!

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