Mixed Method Evaluations: Opportunities and Challenges

Demetra Smith Nightingale
Institute Fellow, Urban Institute
June 2019
Overview

- Goals and objectives
- Definitions
- Potential and opportunities
- Challenges
- Future directions
# General types of evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Evaluation</th>
<th>Recognizable Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Net Impact Analysis</td>
<td>Random assignment; control group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quasi/non-experimental Net Impact Analysis</td>
<td>Multivariate statistical modeling; comparison group(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-Benefit/Cost-effectiveness Analysis</td>
<td>Cost analysis, ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance and Outcome Analysis</td>
<td>Program outcome analysis and performance measurement; participant tracking; statistical simulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation &amp; Process Analysis/Implementation Science</td>
<td>Field-based organizational analysis; program and service descriptions; observational analysis; surveys; qualitative &amp; quantitative analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definitions

• Quantitative analysis plus qualitative analysis in an impact evaluation
  • Impact analysis plus process analysis
  • Impact analysis plus implementation analysis

• But also...
  • Experimental plus non-experimental or quasi-experimental analysis of impact
  • Performance analysis
  • Embedded studies with different but complementary methods
  • Multisite, multiple time period studies
Potential and Opportunities

• Strengthens causal impact analysis
  • Create program and process measures and variables to include in impact analysis. Inform replications
  • Strengthen external validity by extrapolating from one or more studies
  • Support replicability. Define context, settings, treatment and practice details

• Informs practice and programs
  • Expand adoption of evidence-based approaches
  • Improve performance metrics. Refine measures; promote continuous performance improvement and sustainability
  • Analyze organizational dynamics (e.g., systems change, innovation diffusion)

• Improves theory refinement and building
  • Set priorities for future research and evaluations
  • Support method development (e.g., meta-analysis, Bayesian analysis, implementation science)
Challenges

• Resource limitations
  • Some very labor intensive methods (e.g., field-based implementation analysis; participant baseline and follow-up surveys)
  • Dominant components (e.g., RCTs with surveys) often crowd out other design components
  • Impact analytic models rarely can include (many) program variables

• Limited academic acceptance
  • Dominant methods and disciplines take priority
  • RCTs over QEDs, meta analysis, implementation analysis
  • Quantitative over qualitative
  • Reaction to RCT dominance

• Under-developed common standards for some methods
  • Theoretical frameworks
  • Variable specifications
  • Analytic methods
Future Directions

• Seize the opportunity the current emphasis on evidence-based policymaking presents
  • Institutionalize a culture of evaluation for public policy decision-making
    ❖ Federal evidence-based policy priorities (e.g., “Evidence” Act) encourages and mandates rigorous evaluations and evidence-building in every department
  • Facilitate the adoption of evidence-based practices
    ❖ Inform the growing demand for utilization-focused and practice-oriented evaluations
  • Establish standards beyond RCTs
    ❖ The “next generation” of federal evidence-based clearinghouses include technological and methodological standards for various methods and designs
Future Directions (cont.)

• Accelerate methodological development
  
  • *Incorporate, and continue to develop, mixed methods for both* external and internal validity (e.g., meta-analysis, Bayesian methods, integrating implementation variables)
  
  • *Improve both quantitative and qualitative mixed implementation analysis*
  
  • *Refine frameworks, models, & methods for participatory and utilization-focused studies* (e.g., research-practice partnerships, continuous program improvement)
  
  • *Share measures, variables and validated survey constructs* (e.g., baseline instruments, variable definitions, implementation analysis frameworks)
  
  • *Strengthen graduate school training* (e.g., cross-disciplinary mixed method instruction)
Information and Contact

- Demetra Nightingale  dnightingale@urban.org
- Urban Institute Website  https://www.urban.org/