Cabinet Office

Process Evaluation

Evaluation Task Force Academy

Hello

ETF Evaluation Academy

Module 1: Introduction to Evaluation

Module 2: Developing a Theory of Change

Module 3: Scoping an Evaluation

***Module 4:* Process Evaluation**

Module 5: Impact Evaluation - Experimental Designs

Module 6: Impact Evaluation - Quasi-Experimental Designs

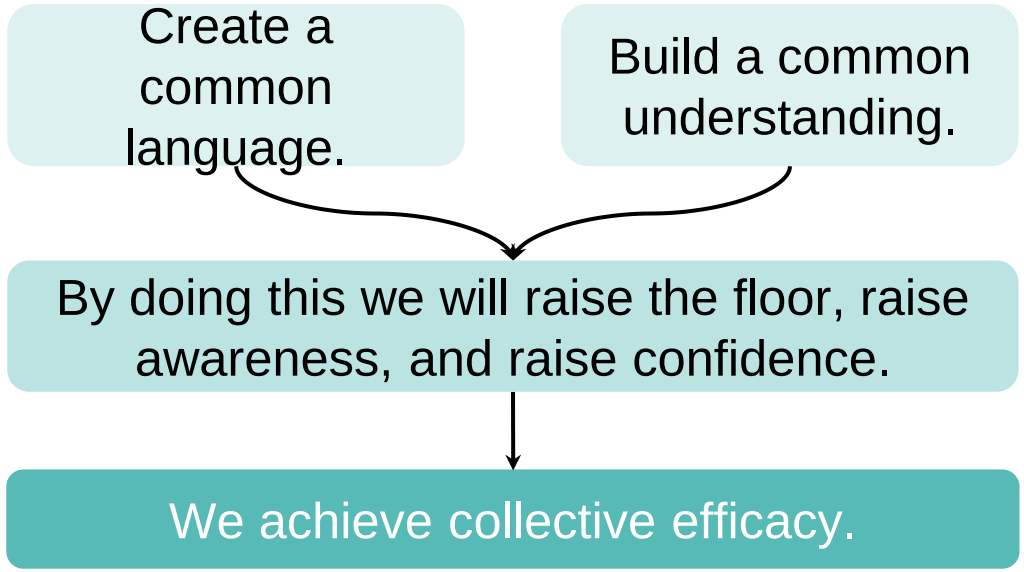
Module 7: Impact Evaluation - Theory-Based Designs

Module 8: Value for Money Evaluation

Module 9: Planning and Managing an Evaluation

Module 10: Communicating Evidence and Decision Making

The Evaluation Academy will upskill analysts across HMG departments in key evaluation methodologies and evaluation management techniques and will result in better and more evaluation across HMG.



Module 4: Overview of contents

- Learning outcomes
- Introduction to Process Evaluations (PEs)
- How PEs work with other evaluation methods
- Choosing PE methods
- Planning a PE
- Assessing the findings of a PE
- Advocacy and application of learning

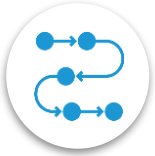
Key
Know/Comprehend: lowest level of complexity
Apply/Analyse: medium level of complexity
Evaluate/Create: highest level of complexity

Learning outcomes

- I can explain the role and value of PE
- I can identify the types of evaluation questions that a PE can or cannot answer
- I can explain how PE's can work alongside other evaluation methods
- I can explain the key things that need to be considered when preparing and running an PE, such as how to assess the fidelity and dosage of a programme
- I can contrast the most appropriate PE data collection method(s) to use based on the policy context
- I can critically assess the findings of a PE
- I can advocate for including PEs across the policy cycle

Introduction to Process Evaluations

Process questions



- ***What's* happening and *how***
- **Understanding programme outputs**

Example questions

- How is my programme currently operating? Does this match what was intended?
- Who is the programme or policy serving? Is this the intended audience?
- How do participants interact with the programme or policy? Is there any place they fall off?
- How much staff time is going into running the programme?

Pros

- ✓ Understand the range and diversity of experiences
- ✓ Tell us how prevalent or common an experience or barrier is
- ✓ More flexible and can adapt to suit changing circumstances
- ✓ Complement findings of an impact evaluation, for example by telling us why a programme worked (or didn't)

Cons

- × Can't tell us whether something worked

Process Evaluations (PEs)

PEs allow us to understand **what** is happening and **how** or **why**

PEs use quantitative and qualitative methods

Case study: Covid Job Retention Scheme

1.3 Evaluation objectives and evaluation questions

The process evaluation aims to understand how effectively the CJRS was delivered. Its objectives are to assess:

- the overall management and implementation by HMT and HMRC
- the effectiveness of scheme communications
- the ease and clarity of the application process
- the effectiveness of steps to mitigate levels of error and fraud in the scheme
- the reach of the scheme

The objectives of the impact evaluation are to assess the extent to which the scheme achieved its intended outcomes, as well as explore who was affected.

Additional objectives of the evaluation are to explore employer and employee perceptions of the scheme and to gather lessons that can be learned about the CJRS to inform future policy design and implementation.

The specific evaluation questions for the process and impact evaluations are set out in table 1.1 below. The table also includes evaluation questions with cross-cutting and policy themes which are additional areas being explored by the evaluation. The value for money objectives and evaluation questions will be detailed in the final evaluation.

Table 1.1: Evaluation questions: process evaluation, impact evaluation, and cross-cutting and policy themes

EVALUATION QUESTIONS: PROCESS EVALUATION
Was the CJRS delivered on time and how was this achieved? (Chapter 3)
Did customers understand the scheme and the eligibility criteria for applications? (Chapter 3)
Did customers' experiences of the application process facilitate their use of the scheme? (Chapter 3)
What was the estimated scale of error and fraud and how was it controlled through the design and implementation of the scheme, including compliance checks? (Chapter 4)
How effective was the scheme at reaching the intended recipients? (Chapter 5)
EVALUATION QUESTIONS: IMPACT EVALUATION

PEs have been run across Government

Scottish Borders Railway

- How was this project delivered?
- What lessons could be learned for the future?

PE and Sport Premium

- How was the premium spent?
- How is PE taught in schools?

COVID Job Retention Scheme

- How was the scheme implemented?
- How was the scheme communicated?

When to run a PE

Activity: The next slides will contain some hypothetical evaluation questions. You'll need to decide whether the questions are impact or process questions.

When to run a PE

How do people experiencing unemployment engage with employment support from DWP?

Answer - PE - impact evaluation cannot answer this question, but a quant PE could provide indicative quant metrics alongside qualitative data.

When to run a PE

Does dealing with people's addiction issues enable them to sustain employment?

Answer - Impact predominantly, though causal questions could be included in interviews and focus groups to suggest causal links (non-quantifiable) from **participants perspectives**.
If the question were ‘How does’ this would be a PE focused method.

When to run a PE

Do Local Authority services help people experiencing homelessness to find employment?

Answer - Impact. This is looking at the effect of a specific intervention on a specific outcome, though as above qual could allow us to collect some data on participants views as to whether LA services have helped them.

When to run a PE

Do doctors use checklists as intended to manage patients' treatment?

Answer - PE - this is about assessing implementation against expectations - so fidelity, which we will discuss in more detail later.

When to run a PE

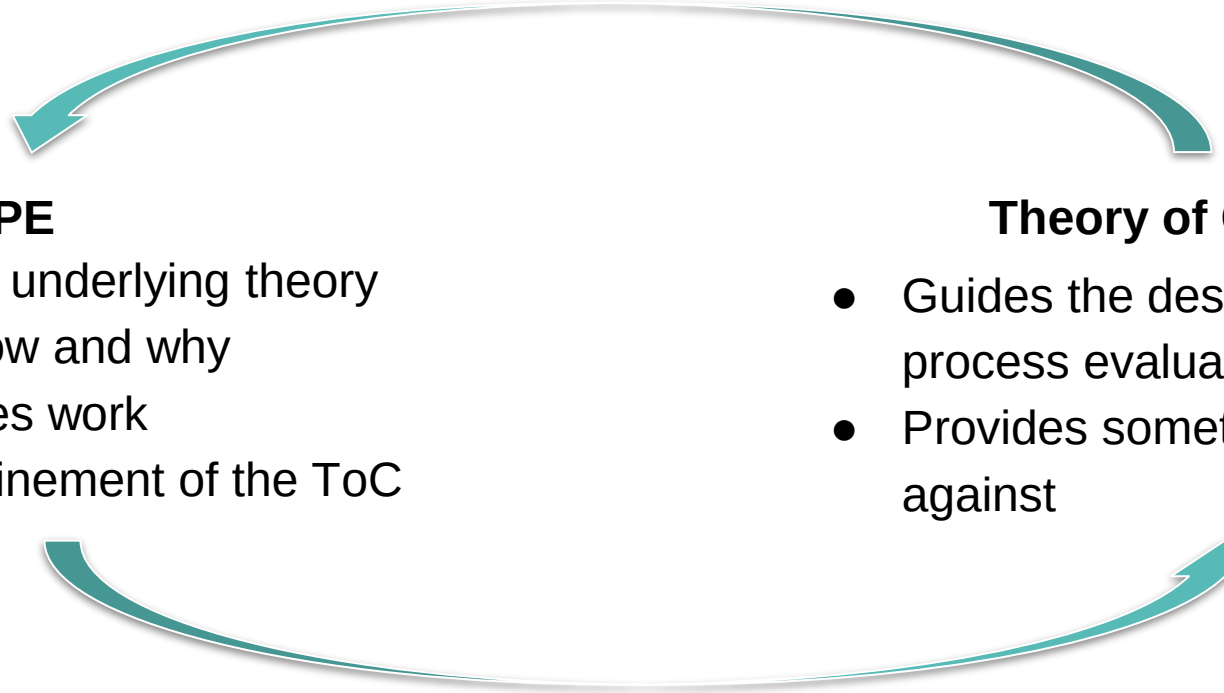
How does the use of intervention materials vary across sites?

Answer - PE - this is dealing with variation in implementation across sites, so descriptive and again linked to fidelity. This could be informed by observations and quant data.

How PEs work with other evaluation methods

Using a PE to refine a Theory of Change

PEs and ToCs work together reciprocally, they can each inform and refine the other.



PE

- Interrogate underlying theory
- Clarifies how and why programmes work
- Lead to refinement of the ToC

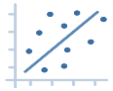
Theory of Change

- Guides the design of the process evaluation
- Provides something to check against

Using a PE to complement an Impact Evaluation

PEs support Impact Evaluations in 3 key ways:

Preparing for an impact evaluation

 Helping to **interpret results**

Supporting programme **scaling**

Case study: The Education Endowment Foundation commissions Formative Evaluations to identify if a new idea or programme might be suited to an Impact Evaluation. It also commissions PEs alongside Impact Evaluations.

Using a PE to prepare for Impact Evaluations

PEs can help teams to learn about and refine a programme. During a pilot you can:

Assess if programme delivery is **feasible**

Determine if programme shows **evidence of promise**

Identify areas of the programme that could be **strengthened** pre trial

Case study: A pilot evaluation was conducted in two parts of England of the National Underground Asset Register, a new geospatial data asset that aims to digitally map buried assets like cables and pipes, with the goal of reducing the £2.4bn annual costs currently incurred by accidental strikes on these. Because previous attempts at creating a register had failed due to scope creep, the pilot helped to assess the feasibility of creating a register and create use cases for it.

Using a PE to interpret Impact Evaluations

PEs can help us to interpret the results from an impact evaluation.

Explain why we did / didn't see any impact

Understand how / why **different groups respond** differently

Pinpoint impactful elements of the programme

Identify potential **backfires / secondary effects**

Case study: DfE conducted a process evaluation as part of an English-language training programme impact evaluation. The aim of the process evaluation was to understand whether the place based model of the Fund improved deliverability of the intervention, as well as variations in delivery across the 30 local authorities, including how areas and providers responded and adapted to COVID-19 conditions.

Using a PE to support scaling after an Impact Evaluation

PEs can help support scaling a programme post impact evaluation.

Understand how delivery works in various **contexts**

Determine if fidelity and dosage are **maintained at scale**

Identify **specific challenges** to scaling

Recommend iterations on the larger scale model

Using a PE with other evaluation methods

PEs evidence can work alongside IEs to gather required evidence, provide insights into outputs and identify (or rule out) alternative theories for how an outcome was achieved.

PEs evidence can help to understand the costs of delivery, including why a programme was more or less expensive to deliver.

How PE works with other evaluation methods

Activity:

- **Imagine that you have been asked to evaluate a programme that seeks to reduce online problem gambling among the UK population.**
- **You know there will be an Impact Evaluation that examines the effectiveness of the programme, and your job is to design the PE that goes alongside this.**

What are some of the evaluation questions you might ask?

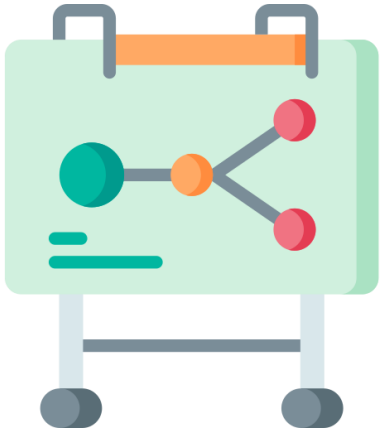
Possible answers:

- What was the experience of those who participated in the programme?
- Did the experience of the programme differ depending on participant characteristics (such as their level of problem gambling or their demographics?
- To what extent did the implementation of the programme deviate from the plan?
- Did the programme reach the target group?

Choosing PE data collection methods

Choosing PE data collection methods

The methods you choose will depend on:



Your ToC and evaluation questions

Available data

Budget

Time

Qualitative PE data collection methods

Interviews: Allow a respondent to reflect deeply to capture perspectives, aspirations, attitudes, and behaviours around a topic.

Focus groups: Allow a diverse group of respondents to explore the same topic, gathering multiple diverse perspectives where participants can relate to one another, or alternatively question one another.

Observations: Provide rich insights into how something actually works and is delivered in practice.

Case studies: An approach to presenting data and insights which can explain a range of experiences.

Quantitative PE methods

Surveys: Quantify the prevalence of particular barriers or motivations, as well as who they are an issue for.

Administrative data analysis: Provide an objective triangulation of subjective qualitative data you collect.

Choosing a PE method

Activity: Let's return to our gambling example.

Brainstorm which methods might help you to answer these questions.

- **What was the experience of those who participated in the programme?**
- **Did the experience of the programme differ by participant characteristics (such as their level of problem gambling or their demographics)?**
- **To what extent did the implementation of the programme deviate from the plan?**
- **Did the programme reach the target group?**

Remember you can use multiple methods (and additional methods you are familiar with).

Possible answers

- Interviews, case study
- Interviews, survey
- Interviews, observations
- Administrative or monitoring data

Planning a PE

Key considerations

What data is already collected? What new materials will you need to create?

What resources do you have?

Who do you want to collect insights on and from?

What methods will you use?

Key considerations

Additional steps are needed during the Scoping and Planning phase of an evaluation to prepare for investigating the fidelity and dosage of a programme.

Fidelity: To what extent did the implementation of the programme deviate from the plan

Dosage: How much of the intended intervention has been delivered and/or received?

Measuring fidelity

To what extent did implementation deviate from the plan?

1. **Create a plan for the implementation of the programme**, with expectations for who does what and when.
2. **Identify which elements of implementation are most important**.
3. **Decide how to measure fidelity.**

Remember deviations are not necessarily 'bad' - they might be sensible adaptations that delivery teams make based on real-world challenges. That said, low fidelity suggests the implementation approach needs to be changed for scaling.

Measuring dosage

How much of the intended intervention has been delivered and/or received?

1. **Agree a minimum dosage** for who has and has not been 'treated'.

2. **Check that this is information you can gather.**

Example: Imagine you are running a coaching programme with 5 sessions.

- **We might decide that someone has received the full programme if they attend 4 sessions.**
- **We will need to make sure that attendance at sessions is recorded and that we can obtain this information.**

Planning a PE

Activity: Our gambling programme is a 10-week evening support session for people who are struggling with online gambling. It's newly designed, and delivered by staff who have attended a weekend training programme.

During the 10 sessions, participants have to follow a three-step process to share their thoughts about gambling. The programme designers say it will only be effective if a participant attends all 10 sessions, but the cost of each session is very high, so your project sponsor is focused on whether the experience is the same if participants attend fewer sessions.

Based on the methods you selected at the previous stage for our gambling programme:

1. **Write down some of the things you will need to consider for your PE.**
2. **Do you want to add any additional research questions?**
3. **Write down how you might measure fidelity and dosage.**

Assessing the findings of a PE

A good PE should…

- ✓ **Justify the choice of particular research methods**, and ideally **use mixed methods** to triangulate findings
- ✓ **Include a range of experiences and perspectives**, not just positive reports
- ✓ Place findings in context and **appropriately qualify them**, especially if relying on self-reported data
- ✗ Not look for and **report confirmatory evidence**
- ✗ Not **make claims about impact**, instead focus on what happened and why

Questions to ask yourself

1. Do case studies only show positive outcomes?

2. Do interview quotes only detail positive experiences?

3. Are multiple methods used? If not, is the approach appropriately justified and caveated?

4. Are any claims made about impact?

5. How sceptical are you about the findings and recommendations?

Assessing the findings of a PE

Activity: Here are a set of claims you might read in the gambling programme PE report (assume that no Impact Evaluation was conducted). How much confidence you would have in these claims?

We interviewed 10 programme participants to understand their experience of the gambling programme, participants reported that it was useful and found it very engaging. They found it difficult to attend all ten sessions. Therefore, the ToC and programme delivery should be revised to consider what the optimal dosage of the programme is.

Answer
Good: only one source of evidence.

We interviewed 10 programme participants and they all said that they had reduced their levels of gambling after participating. Therefore, we should launch the programme at scale.

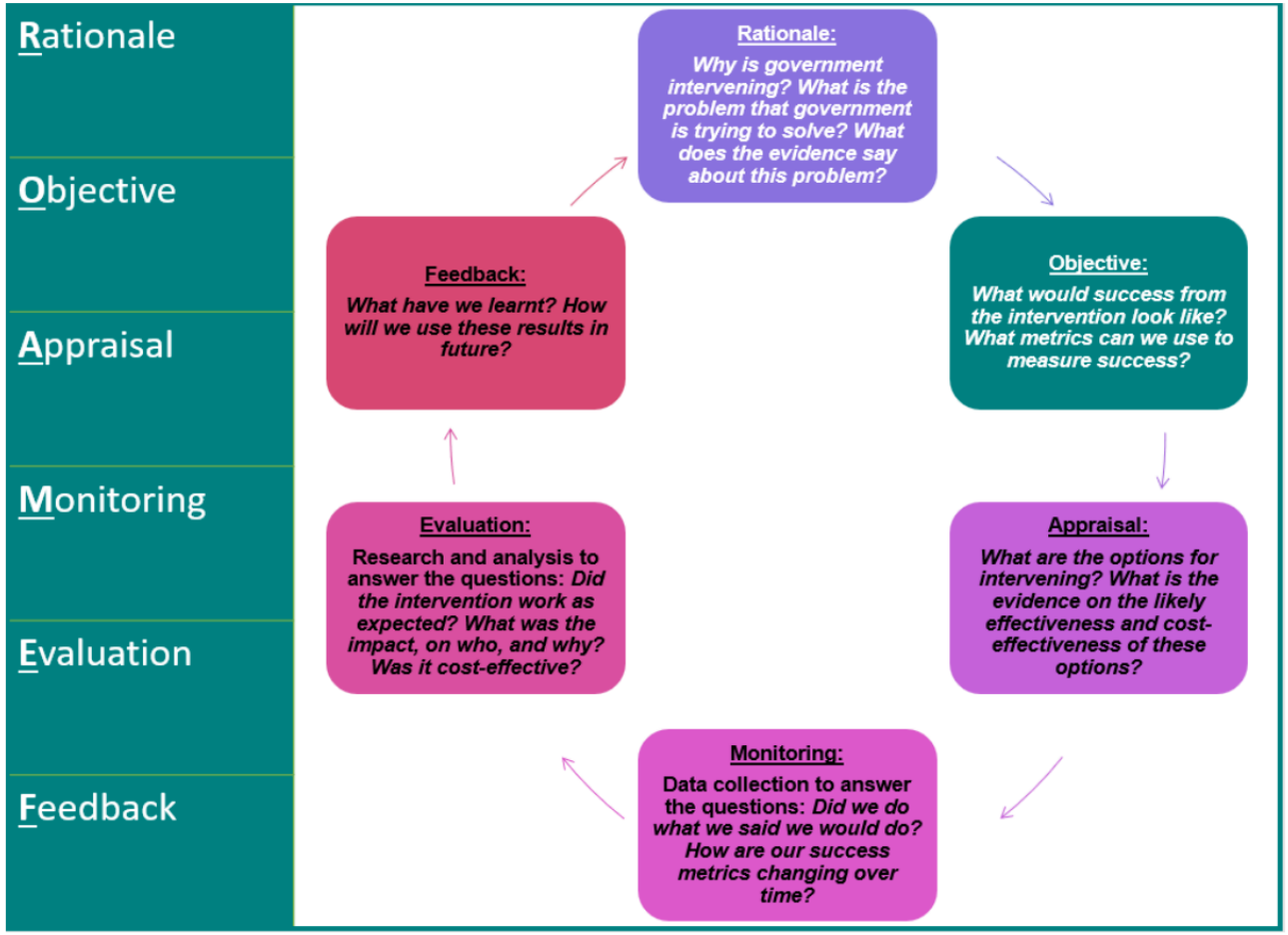
Answer
Weak: makes claim of impact from IPE data.

We interviewed 10 people to understand their experience of the gambling programme, participants reported that it was useful and found it very engaging. They reported that they found it difficult to attend all ten sessions, and our attendance data suggests that 50% of eligible participants attended the sessions. Therefore, the ToC and programme delivery should be revised to consider what the optimal dosage of the programme is.

Answer
Best: triangulates evidence.

Advocacy and application of learning

Including PE across the policy lifecycle



Activity: How does what you have learned today fit into the ROAMEF cycle?

- Think about an upcoming or current evaluation or policy you are involved in. How can you apply your learning from this module to influence that work?
- What barriers exist? How do you push through? What people or resources can support you?
- Write an intention for how you will use this in your work in the next 1-2 months.

Summary

In this module, we have learnt:

- The role Process Evaluations have and the types of questions they can or cannot answer e.g. what's happening and how? How has an intervention been delivered? Remember: Process Evaluations cannot answer whether an intervention had the desired impact or not.
- How Process Evaluations can work alongside and complement other evaluation methods by i) preparing for IEs; ii) interpreting the results of IEs; iii) supporting to scale up a programme after an IE.
- Factors affecting the choice of Process Evaluation methods and the typical qualitative (interviews, focus groups, observations and case studies) and quantitative methods (surveys, admin data) used
- The key things that need to be considered when preparing and running a PE, such as how to assess the fidelity and dosage of a programme
- To critically assess the findings of a PE and be a stronger advocate for including PEs across the policy cycle.

Further resources

Resource
EEF: Implementation and process evaluation guidance for EEF evaluations
Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel
The Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation
Magenta Book Annex A: Analytical methods for use within an evaluation
ETF: Resources for evaluating policy in government
The Green Book
Sample Fidelity Scale