

INTRODUCING PROGRAM EVALUATION MODELS

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Abstract

Programs and project evaluation models can be extremely useful in project planning and management. The aim is to set the right questions as soon as possible in order to see in time and deal with the unwanted program effects, as well as to encourage the positive elements of the project impact. In short, different evaluation models are used in order to minimize losses and maximize the benefits of the interventions upon small or large social groups. This article introduces some of the most recently used evaluation models.



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The knowledge stage in the area at international level

Presently, the knowledge stage in the area on international level is extremely advanced, in spite of the relatively short time passed since the first systematic approaches in the field have appeared.

The essential contributions come from the academic research, from the non-profit sector and from the international organizations, implementing a series of programs and projects in numerous states and communities (The European Union Commission, The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), The World Bank (WB), The International Monetary Found (IMF), The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) etc.)

Academic research

The research regarding programs and project evaluation models developed extensively in the last years. The design of the evaluation models and the selection of the right evaluation model for a certain project or program became the aim of numerous investigations. This is specific to the classical authors in the field: Michael Quinn Patton, Michel Scriven, Peter H. Rossi. They were joined by an increasing number of researcher most of them coming from the academic research field: Daniel Stufflebeam, Egon Guba, Yvonna Lincoln, Ernest R. House, Kenneth R. Howe, Hanne Foss Hansen etc.

The toolkit is vast: formative and summative evaluation, evaluation focused on beneficiaries, on experts or on different stakeholders, realistic evaluation, theory-driven evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation are just a few examples.

An evaluation model stipulates the question or the set of questions that a specific evaluation seeks to answer. It also involves a certain methodology to set up the criteria for assessment (Hansen, 2005). The literature on programme evaluation and that on organizational effectiveness offer several typologies of evaluation models. Hansen (2003, 2005) and Scriven (2003) propose some of the most recently appeared and comprehensive typologies. These mainly consists in six different categories of models that are common at some point to other authors as well such as Birkmayer and Weiss (2003). The six categories are: results models, process models, system models, economic models, actor models and programme theory models.

The **results models** are interrelated with summative evaluation and they focus especially on the results of a programme. Among the subcategories of the results models there are: *goal-attainment model* and *the effects model*. The *goal-attainment model* results are measured according to the goals that have been set. The main question is: Have the set goals been achieved? The *effects model* focuses on consequences of the evaluated program. It is about both the desired and not desired consequences. In this case, the question is: What are the effects of the program? What are the positive and negative consequences of the program?

Process models focus on the processes involved by a program. This is an explanatory model. Process evaluation is done usually concomitant with the implementation

phase of the program (in real time), or by historical analyses. The main questions are: How are the the activities implemented? Are there any delays? If so, How are they motivated?

The **system model** uses a system perspective. What matters here is: input, structure, process and outcome in terms of results. The evaluation consists in comparisons of planned and realized input, structure, process and results or in benchmarking. In this case, the main question is: How has the program functioned as a whole?

The **economic models** (Cost-efficiency model, Cost-effectiveness model, Cost-benefit model) are considered related to the system perspective. (Hansen, 2005) The question specific to *cost-efficiency model* is: How is productivity? Is it satisfactory or not? The question connected to the *cost-effectiveness model* is: How satisfactory is the effectiveness? The *cost-benefit model*, focus on utility: How satisfactory is economic utility?

Actor models (Client-oriented model, Stakeholder model, Peer review model), are based on the actors' perspective. The *client-oriented model* focuses on the clients' perspective. Are clients satisfied? The *stakeholder model* focuses on all the relevant stakeholders perspective. Are the different groups of stakeholders satisfied with the program? The *peer review model* focuses on the opinions of professionals. Does the program respond to professional standards?

The programme theory model focuses on assessing the validity of the programme theory on which the given intervention occurs. The target of the programme theory model is to continually improve program theory according to the changing context. The main questions are: What works as established? What exactly has changed as a consequence of the changing context?

In 1997 Vedung had already depicted evaluation models as being organized into three main classes, very similar to the above-mentioned categories (E. Vedung, 1997).

Definitely, there is an increasing number of models proposed by the professional literature. Beside the models already presented, the next evaluation models are relevant due both to their actuality and their possibility of being applicable to the Romanian Public Administration.

The CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 2002) - context, input, process, product- focuses on effectiveness and sustainability, metaevaluation and synthesis. Therefore, the starting question: Is the program a success or a failure? Did the program reach the target group? What are the needs that have been satisfied by th program? etc. The evaluation criteria are derived from the aim and the objectives of the program.

The constructivist model promoted by Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln in 2001, (Egon Guba & Yvonna Lincoln, 2001), is based on three fundamental assumptions: ontological, epistemological and methodological. According to this model, the main questions are: Who is going to use the evaluation?, What is the perspective/What are the perspectives of the evaluation? etc. The evaluation criteria are established by agreement by the actors involved in the program.

The qualitative model presented by Michael Q. Patton in 2003, (Michael Q. Patton, 2003) focuses on the utilization of qualitative methods (observation, individual

interview, focus-group, Delphi method) for evaluating programs, especially when it is about finding out more details about the specific program. The questions specific to this evaluation model are naturally of qualitative nature: What was the manner in which the objectives have been accomplished? Why certain objectives have been dropped?

Utilization-focused evaluation model (Michael Q. Patton, 2002) has many similar features with formative evaluation. According to this model, the evaluation process starts together with the design of the project, and ends after its implementation. The focus is on the different utilities given to evaluation by the stakeholders. According to these, more specifically according to the aim and the objectives of the evaluation, the structure of the evaluation takes shape. The main questions are: Who are the users of the evaluation?, What are their objectives? What are the pieces of information they need? etc. The evaluation criteria are established by the users of the evaluation.

International Organisations

The Commission of the European Union, The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), The World Bank (WB), The International Monetary Fund (IMF), The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) etc. use evaluation to guide their investment and intervention projects in different geographical areas and fields of activity.

The World Bank uses evaluation at large scale. With an entire department engaged in evaluation, WB makes such studies for each of the projects it finances. WB experts assess the impact following rigorous methodologies, clearly stated. On the web site of the WB there are presently 134 documents that can be accessed and that contain elements of evaluation. There are made available to the public the methodology, the data collection and their sources, and, selectively, certain evaluation studies organized according to the type of impact and to the country where it has been studied. Numerous evaluation studies are catching the eye due to their diversity of methods and of the projects under investigation. A series of handbooks are being presented, that explain the methodology and processes involved by an evaluation. Among the most significant is Judy Bakers' *Evaluating the Impact of Development Projects on Poverty: A Handbook for Practitioners, Directions in Development*, World Bank, Washington, D.C edited in 2000. In *Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies*, World Bank, Washington D.C., appears during the same year *Monitoring and Evaluation* written by Prennushi, G., G. Rubio, and K. Subbarao . An impressive series of articles written by WB experts among who we can mention James J. Heckman, Jeffrey A. Smith, Nancy Clements, Christopher Taber Grossman, Jean Baldwin Karen Fulbright-Anderson, Anne C. Kubisch and James P. Connell and many others.

The distinctive feature consists in the fact that the vast majority of studies are made on WB projects focused on the fight against poverty. Therefore, considerable stress is placed upon the economic dimension of evaluation. But, from the perspective of the evaluation models, the socio-economic profile of World Bank projects promotes the complementary use of three evaluation models: economic (which focus on the

financial input), result models and qualitative model. It is quite natural, considering the mission of the WB is fighting the poverty. There is no major difference between the models use by the World Bank and those proposed and used by the academic community.

Otherwise, there is no major distinction between the tools used by WB and those built by the academic community.

Still, the wide geo-political and cultural area of action is obvious in the methodology used by the WB and especially in the diversity of variables and tools.

Recently, the EU Commission published a guiding catalogue of indicators that should be considered in evaluation. Among these, there are: Social Cohesion (social integration, poverty or extreme poverty dimensions, the risks of poverty or social exclusion, geographical social cohesion, long term unemployment, the accessibility of services of general interest), Employment Quality (occupational health and safety arrangements, the rights of the workers, labor market organization, the balance between personal and professional life, employment opportunities, integration through employment, etc) Social Protection and Social Services (levels of social protection, accessibility etc.), Consumer Interests, Education, Social Capital, Livable Communities, Fundamental Human Rights, etc.

As well on the site of the Commission, there is a Handbook for the implementation of evaluation: www.evaled.info. This explains, step- by- step, the procedure that must be used for an evaluation study within the European Union. Still it must be particularized for each country and cannot be applied as such. The evaluation models promoted by the European Union Commission are mixed, at the intersection between economic model (which focus on the financial input), result models and qualitative model.

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)

The Non-Governmental Organizations, especially the grant makers are usually interested in evaluation. The main donors developed their own toolkit for evaluation and use their own models. For instance, Ford Foundation, USAID, Rockefeller as well as others have made public their instruments for evaluation, accompanied by numerous case-studies. One of the goals is, for sure, the accountability of their actions. It is worth mentioning though, that their evaluation toolkit is in perfect agreement with the methodology specific to the academic research and to international organizations. Certainly, the evaluation models and the research methods and techniques for social sciences need not to be reinvented. But their application is in accordance to the interests of the financing entities and to the cultural background of the researchers who conceive the instrument and effectively realize the research.

The present knowledge stage in Romania

Regarding the program evaluation models, the Romanian scientific literature is relatively scarce. There are studies regarding the evaluation models, but most often they refer to technical evaluation, strictly economic evaluation (such as the country

risk indicators) or specific to other fields (constructions, environmental protection, software etc.) and not program evaluation, or program evaluation financed or co-financed from public money: country risk evaluation models, evaluation models for the safety of the buildings, evaluation models for the polluting agents dispersion into the atmosphere, evaluation models for the cost of software testing, etc.

Trends

Worldwide, the tendency is to use more than one evaluation model at a time (Hansen, 2005:448). But they have to be carefully chosen and adjusted. Evaluation studies and reports have to answer to more and more questions regarding the process and the results of the projects; it is of interest at the same time economic effects and social impact effects. Especially in the case of the projects financed from public money the tendency is to use evaluation models that focus on results and models that focus on the beneficiaries' (citizens') perspective. To accomplish this, it is necessary the use of some evaluation models focused both on results and on the actors involved. These are complex models generated by the selection analysis and synthesis of simple evaluation models.

The evaluation models that are used in order to evaluate a certain program must fit the evaluation objectives, the project development stage. On the other hand, the evaluation methods and the research methods should be carefully chosen, in perfect agreement with the evaluation models and the evaluation objectives.

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