

**IMPACT EVALUATION FOR PRACTITIONERS:
MAKING IT EASIER AND BETTER**

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THE PRACTITIONER AND EVALUATION: the PREVENTIVE PROCESS

- ◆ **Collecting crime data from police, surveys, observations etc**
- ◆ **Crime pattern analysis to reveal location and nature of crime problems**
- ◆ **Setting strategic objectives - choice of crime problem to target**
- ◆ **Devising preventive measures - clear specification of action and its immediate objectives**
- ◆ **Implementation and monitoring of implementation**
- ◆ **Evaluation of impact on objectives; adjustment and replication of action as necessary**

WHERE EVALUATION COMES IN: THE PRACTITIONER AS

- ◆ **User of existing 'what works' evaluations in guiding own strategy**
- ◆ **User of crime prevention theory based partly on evaluations**
- ◆ **Self-evaluator of own preventive action**
- ◆ **Commissioner of evaluations of own preventive action**
- ◆ **Monitor of implementation and evaluation by funded agencies**

THE VALUE OF EVALUATION

- ◆ **Individual: - In good performance and good management for practitioner and**

policy-maker

- In having robust results - opportunities for showcasing work, continuity of funding etc

- In avoiding reinventing expensive wheel - or flat tyre



Collective: - In providing body of knowledge of 'what works, in what context, at what cost, and how to do it'

- In avoiding reliance on 'pop' theories which superficially seem to meet the gap between demand and supply of preventive ideas

- In feeding research and theory to produce principles of prevention, and research methodologies

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**PERENNIAL PROBLEMS - WHY AREN'T THERE MORE GOOD
EVALUATIONS?**

Mounting own/commissioned evaluation:



Too costly

- ◆ Too much effort to mount - data collection, complexity etc
- ◆ Shortage of expert advice - capacity problem

Results of own evaluation

- ◆ Can be too uncertain or ambiguous
- ◆ Too slow for policy cycle

Results of other evaluations

- ◆ Very few available - vicious circle
- ◆ Difficult to locate and retrieve
- ◆ Difficult to apply to own context
- ◆ Often poor technical quality - or quality unknown
- ◆ Little quantification or costing of prevention
- ◆ Out of date - limited shelf life

Culture

- ◆ Can't wait to implement
- ◆ Boring compared with actually DOING the intervention
- ◆ Bad news threatening to practitioners - no learning from failures
- ◆ 'Commercial' secrecy
- ◆ User satisfaction with inadequate standards at all levels
- ◆ Academic focus on avoidance of false positive - risk of 'nothing works'

Overall, trading off conflicting constraints means a nasty choice between

- ◆ **Quick, dirty, simple and cheap, covering many interventions**
versus
- ◆ **More reliable and sophisticated... but rare, expensive, applicable to single context and out of date**

GETTING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

- ◆ **Change from current situation, where massive effort, cost and risk starting up a good-quality evaluation, and difficulty finding good-quality results from others**
to
- ◆ **Future situation where starting evaluation, and retrieval of existing knowledge are easier - virtuous circle**

HOW?

INFRASTRUCTURE OF EVALUATION

SELF-EVALUATION

- ◆ Guidance - Key questions [...] and common alternative explanations
 - CD-ROM, interactive, hypertext EXPERT SYSTEM, not telephone directory
 - Professional support network
 - Development of methodology



Data - Outcome
measures - Routinely
collected
- Retrievable
- Incident-level
- **Georeferenced**
- **Continuity preserved**
- **But relevant and up to
date**

- **Input of resources**

- **Targeting strategies - why this crime, this
location?**

- **Output data** - **Management Information
System**
- **Georeferenced**



**Increased self-evaluation alleviates the 'shortage of experts'
problem and is cheaper - BUT - risk of big errors of inference**

INFRASTRUCTURE OF EVALUATION

SELF-EVALUATION GUIDANCE

- KEY QUESTIONS IN NATURAL LANGUAGE

- ◆ Following implementation of preventive action, was there a real change in crime or other outcome measures?
- ◆ What proportion of that change can be attributed to the preventive action?
 - Were there coincidental background changes and confounding events?
 - Was action implemented on the crest of a local crime wave?
 - How did the preventive action actually achieve any fall in crime - by what mechanisms?
 - What mediating variables may have accounted for, or suppressed, the measurable expected effects of the preventive action?
- ◆ What were the side-effects of the action (or effects on other objectives) - increased fear, displacement?
- ◆ How cost-effective was the action?
- ◆ Can these answers be generalised to other circumstances? What contextual factors influenced impact?



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INFRASTRUCTURE OF EVALUATION

COMMISSIONED EVALUATION / DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

- ◆ **Balance between false positive and false negative errors**
 - Considering in advance the evaluation's power to detect an effect
 - Using confidence intervals rather than fixed cutoffs of significance

- ◆ **Developing techniques for analysis**
 - Statistical modeling of outcome measure
 - Quantitative
 - Costings
 - Model and crime data ready in advance of intervention
 - no wait for baseline
 - Prospective, planned meta-analysis of many schemes using uniform data on input, output and outcome
 - Basic research on short term local fluctuations in crime to help evaluators distinguish these from short-term changes due to intervention

- ◆ **Sharing of decisions between evaluators and commissioners -**

timescale, sophistication, generalisability, risk of errors

◆ Developing techniques for communication of results

- quantitative**
- graphic**
- expected and observed values of outcome measure**

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INFRASTRUCTURE OF EVALUATION

USERS OF EVALUATION NEED:

- ◆ **Body of 'what works...' knowledge that is:**
 - **Retrievable - conceptual framework giving access on multiple features clearly describing action and context**
 - **Of known reliability - eg rated a bronze, silver or gold standard evaluation by ICPC - international currency, international criteria**
 - **And/or enough detail on evaluation to make own judgement**
 - **Enough knowledge of evaluation principles to make this judgement**
 - **Sources of expert advice**

- ◆ **Knowledge of principles of prevention and the preventive process**
 - **to implement the SPIRIT of the preventive scheme, its mechanisms and processes, not merely reproducing its external form irrespective of local context**

 - **to cope if no evaluations available in relevant area**



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INFRASTRUCTURE OF EVALUATION

THE CULTURE OF EVALUATION

- ◆ **Valuing evaluation as a COMMON GOOD**
 - Sufficient to invest effort and resources, to care about quality as evaluator, commissioner or user, and to wait for results
- ◆ **Valuing negative results**
- ◆ **Holding realistic expectations of what evaluation can deliver, by when, at what cost**
- ◆ **Don't blame the evaluator for the delay and cost, blame the lack of investment in evaluability**
- ◆ **Need systems for routinely capturing input, output, process, outcome data. The actual evaluation exercise should be the cherry on the cake**

THE FUTURE

Imagine a land with no roads. To move from A to B, you have to incur enormous start-up costs, laying a road or investing in a costly and slow tank. Then imagine instead, a land with a ready-made network of highways. To move from A to B, all you have to do is to buy and use a car. That's infrastructure. Evaluation needs it.