Assessing the Effects of a Collaborative Research Funding Scheme: An Approach Combining Meta-Evaluation and Evaluation Synthesis

Dr. Barbara Good, Technopolis Group
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The scheme under evaluation

- Run by the Swiss innovation agency CTI since the early 1980s
- Funds collaborative research projects between a firm and a research organisation
- Objectives
  - Strengthening the innovation capacity and innovativeness of firms
  - Qualifying young researchers
- CTI funds up to 50% of the project costs, with funding going exclusively to the research organisation
- The rest of the project is funded by the firm, can be in kind
- Open to all disciplines but focus on software/ICT, engineering, life science, micro/nano technology
- Bottom-up, no calls
Evaluation design

1. Desk research
2. Meta-evaluation
   • The scheme was evaluated 14 times between 1989 and 2002
   • How were the evaluations conducted and how well were they executed?
3. Evaluation synthesis
   • What kind of effects (outputs, outcomes, impacts) did the earlier evaluation studies find?
4. Complementary interviews
   • To verify results
Meta-Evaluation: methodology used

• 14 evaluation studies content-analysed, evaluated against
  • ‘Descriptive’ and methodological criteria
    • Internal or external evaluation?
    • Time horizon of evaluation?
    • Data used?
    • etc.
  • Selected evaluation standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society
    • Comprehensiveness and Clarity in Reporting
    • Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment
    • Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
    • Analysing the Context
    • Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Methodology
    • Reliable sources of information
    • Etc.
Meta-Evaluation: results

- Evaluation practice at CTI
  - The only regular evaluations were evaluations of research institutes and firms that conducted many CTI-funded projects
    - in-depth look at (some) projects
    - Institutional evaluation rather than evaluation of CTI funding scheme?
  - Outputs, outcomes, goal attainment, implementation, adequacy of funding, NOT additionality or impacts
  - Evaluations mostly internal, qualitative, confidential, ex post
  - Most evaluation standards fulfilled adequately to well
    - Fulfilled best: substantiated conclusions
    - Fulfilled least well: analysing the context
Evaluation synthesis: technique used/outputs

- Cumulative ‘technique’ used:
  - Identification of effects
  - Systematisation and categorisation of effects
  - Listing of effects

- A variety of outputs, ranging from new products and processes to exhibitions at trade fairs, to PhD and master theses and other publications
  - Training effects of CTI
Evaluation synthesis: outcomes/success factors

- Outcomes accruing at firms
  - *mostly commercial effects and networking effects*
- Outcomes accruing at research institutes
  - *mostly organisational and learning effects*
- Outputs and outcomes in line with organisations’ missions
- Identification of success factors for successful CTI projects
  - *Good cooperation between project partners*
  - *Interest and commitment from the industrial partner*
  - *Clear objectives, good project planning and management*
  - *quite ‘banal’ but show the CTI where to intervene*
What can we learn from meta-evaluation/evaluation synthesis?

• We get results at different levels. Information about ...
  • *Evaluation practice at the CTI*
  • *Effectiveness of the CTI funding scheme – reliable and valid because measured repeatedly over a long period of time through various designs*

• Usefulness of evaluation standards for meta-evaluation limited – evaluation standards are often about transparency

• When can we use such a design?
  • *Long-running scheme or programme*
  • *Needs to have been evaluated repeatedly*
  • *Design limited by the limits of the existing evaluations (evaluation questions, methodology, quality)*
Thank you

My contact details:

barbara.good@technopolis-group.com