



From Evaluation Use to Influence: Assessing the Impact of Policy Evaluations

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Overview

As part of the series of webinars on good practices for evaluation use, the **UNEG Working Group on Evaluation Use** organized a webinar to share academic insights on evaluation use for policy-making. The webinar challenged the traditional notion of evaluation use and advocated for a shift in focus towards evaluation influence. Scholars from outside the United Nations discussed the conceptualization and measurement of evaluation use, the conditions that foster meaningful use, and presented studies assessing evaluation influence across different policy areas.

Speakers

- **Valérie Pattyn**, Associate Professor, Institute of Public Administration, Leiden University
- **Pirmin Bundi**, Associate Professor, IDHEAP, University of Lausanne



CONCEPTUALIZING, MEASURING AND DRIVING EVALUATION USE

Forms and drivers of evaluation use

- Evaluation use can take different forms: **instrumental use** (directly informing decisions), **conceptual use** (enhancing understanding), **symbolic use** (legitimizing pre-existing decisions or fulfilling compliance), and **process use** (learning through participation in evaluation).
- Diverse factors affect evaluation use: **supply factors** (evaluation and evaluator characteristics); **demand factors** (attributes of evaluation users); **supply-demand interactions** (engagement between evaluators and users); and **contextual factors** (evaluation timing and political context).
- According to research, the **most critical factors for evaluation use** are users' interest in the findings, the timeliness of the evaluation, and its ability to generate new knowledge.
- Although widely accepted, research suggests that **evaluation quality does not necessarily drive evaluation use**, and perceived evaluation quality may matter more than objective methodological rigour.

Concept of evaluation use

- As evaluations can have intended and unintended impacts that may only materialize in the long term, it is **more useful to conceptualize evaluation use as "evaluation influence"** to capture their broader effects.
- There are different **dimensions of evaluation influence**: Evaluations may shape decision-making (policy), institutional frameworks (polity), and decision-making processes (politics).
- Evaluation impact may vary across dimensions of influence (policy, polity, and politics) and policy areas (health, migration, international cooperation, etc.) with preliminary research indicating that **the salience of the evaluated policy area is associated with the level of evaluation use** reported by stakeholders.

What works in promoting evaluation use

- **Strengthening evaluation designs**: Ensure evaluation topics are relevant and of interest to stakeholders, with findings delivered in a timely manner.
- **Effectively communicating evaluation results**: Present evaluation findings clearly, transparently, and credibly, ensuring they are trustworthy.
- **Cultivating an evaluation culture**: Strengthen evaluation culture by institutionalizing evaluation, offering regular evaluation training, encouraging experimentation, and facilitating discussions on both successes and failures.

The webinar concluded with a [Q&A session](#) exploring the use of artificial intelligence for assessing evaluation use, the impact of early stakeholder engagement on evaluation use, and the role of institutionalization and independence in fostering evaluation use. It also highlighted how policy complexity and politicization shape evaluation and the need to assess conceptual and symbolic use beyond instrumental use. Overall, it called for innovative measurement approaches and more research on evaluation use, especially in developing countries.