Evaluating the impact of advocacy initiatives

Lessons from the use of a relatively new methodology
Presentation overview

- Overview of the evaluation methodology
- Evaluation steps
- Overview of Alert’s advocacy initiative and evaluation findings
- Methodology strengths and weaknesses
- Tips
Evaluation methodology

• “Combined Contribution Analysis (CA)-Process Tracing (PT) approach” (B. Befani and J. Mayne; 2014)
• CA is “an approach for assessing causal questions and inferring causality in real-life programme evaluations”
• Having identified a specific outcome, CA requires the development of a narrative, or story, which is then assessed against all available evidence in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about the contribution of a given intervention to that outcome.
• CA starts with a theory of change (or a description of an intervention logic); it looks at the implementers’ perspective, it then focuses on what happened in reality, and uses the evidence to support or refute the TOC’s assumed links.
Evaluation methodology (2)

• PT is a case-based approach to causal inference, which focuses on the use of clues within a case (causal-process observations) to adjudicate between alternative possible explanations.
• The starting point for PT is not the TOC, but rather a series of attribution claims (or hypothesis) about an how an observed outcome came about.
• PT relies on the application of four tests, which aim at assessing the validity (or likelihood) of a given attribution claim. By testing the evidence, PT thus allows for a more rigorous identification of proof to support whether a specific intervention is indeed responsible for the observed outcome.
The evaluation required five steps:

1. Set out the attribution problem to be addressed
2. Develop a theory of change (TOC) and contribution claims (or hypotheses)
3. Gather the existing evidence on TOC – Subject of the first-phase of the evaluation (desk-based)
4. Assemble and assess the contribution story, or performance story, and challenges to it – This is the CA component of the evaluation
5. Apply PT tests to the contribution claims – The PT component relied on two tests: ‘hoop’ (disconfirmatory) and ‘smoking-gun’ (confirmatory)
Alert’s advocacy initiative

• High-level advocacy to influence the World Bank’s IDA 17 replenishment process (2012-2013)
• Alert’s main advocacy message was to change how IDA worked in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCSs), with the overall aim of strengthening the capacity of the WBG to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable peace.
• Advocacy targets included IDA decision-makers, relevant WB staffers and UK government officials.
• Efforts included formal and informal meetings, participation in joint NGO initiatives, the publication of a briefing and ‘accompaniment’ of WB and UK reps.
• Advocacy in regards to IDA 17 lasted one year, but it was part of broader efforts vis-à-vis the WB, dating back to before 2008.
• Evaluation focused only on Alert’s recommendations on the Results Monitoring System (RMS).
Evaluation findings

• CA component provided an evidence-based description (or narrative) of:
  • Alert’s intervention – what it did, with whom and at what time.
  • The general actions of other relevant actors (the WB itself and NGOs such as Oxfam) – what they did, with whom and at what time.
  • The outcome
• Conclusions from the CA are drawn based on the Alert’s TOC – i.e. did the contribution story match (or confirm) the logic of the intervention?
• Sources of information included a review of relevant documents produced by ALL actors, a timeline of events and publications, and interviews with relevant Alert staff.
Evaluation findings (2)

- PT component focused on 4 contributions claims (or hypotheses) – developed at the same time as the TOC.
- The starting point was that each claim could be as likely as the others. The claims were then put through 2 (of 4) tests:
  - ‘Hoop’ – It assesses, given the hypothesis, whether the evidence is necessary in order to accept that the intervention led to the outcome (e.g. Did Alert have access and means?)
  - ‘Smoking Gun’ – Relates to evidence that is unlikely under any alternative to the casual mechanism under consideration (e.g. cases of ‘signatures’).
- Sources of information included the contribution story and interviews with key informants (from all relevant actors).
Evaluation findings (3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim (hypothesis)</th>
<th>Prior to evaluation</th>
<th>After evaluation</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations by Alert helped to inform new indicators adopted (main claim)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Passed H, failed SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB decision-makers were already collectively taking active steps towards the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integration of the new indicators on FCS (parallel claim 1)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Passed H and SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations by other prominent NGOs/ think tanks supported integration of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new indicators (parallel claim 2)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Failed H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The combination of recommendations by Alert with other NGOs led to the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integration of new indicators (parallel claim 3)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Failed H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology strengths

- The CA component was an useful way to assemble a verifiable narrative. Advocacy efforts are generally multi-faceted, and are rarely reflected upon as a whole. This protocols allows exactly for that.
- The testing of different contribution claims was useful to reflect on existing links and identify new ones. One of the unique aspects of this methodology is how it focuses not on criteria, but on (relatively complex) hypotheses.
- The protocol can produce useful findings just on the basis of documentary evidence (as long as this is sufficiently solid).
- Allows for strong guidance in relation to interview protocols.
Methodology weaknesses

• The protocol is a bit ‘hit or miss’ insofar as it focuses on contribution claims that are not sufficiently defined. This was certainly the case with the main claim, and it meant that the finding related to it was weaker.
• TOCs also need to be clear, not just in terms of intervention-outcome, but also in terms of the sequencing of outcomes. Applying the protocol should ideally also leave time for reviewing the TOC prior to the definition of the claims.
• The insights and lessons learned resulting from using the methodology are very specific to the chosen contribution claims. Generalizations from findings might be difficult.
• PT component is not participative.
Tips and lessons learned

• Contribution claims need to be well defined and closely vetted.
• Sequencing is important – in particular TOC should be reviewed after CA component and before developing contribution claims for PT component, to ensure that claims are as specific and clear as possible.
• It is important to ‘close the loop’ – Protocol is most useful for learning when findings are related back to the original TOC, so that this can be reviewed and revised.
• Most useful for evaluation interventions at a programmatic, multi-year level.
• An adequate level of documentation is necessary.
• CA and PT protocols could be split. CA could be done internally; PT could be run different times.