Evaluating the Complex: Attribution, Contribution and Beyond.

Description

Tweet

Kim Forss, Mita Marra and Robert Schwartz, editors. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick. May 2011. Available via Amazon

â??Problem-solving by policy initiative has come to stay. Overarching policy intiatives are now standard modus operandi for governmental and non-governmental organisations. But complex policy initiatives are not only reserved for the big challenges of our times, but are used for matters such as school achievement, regional development, urban planning, public health and safety. As policy and the ensuing implementation tends to be more complex than simple project and programme management, the task of evaluation has also become more complex.â?•

â??The book begins with a theoretical and conceptual explanation of complexity and how that affects evaluation. The authors make the distinction between, on the hand, the common-sense understanding of complexity as something that is generally messy, involves many actors and has unclear boundaries and overlapping roles; and on the hand, complexity as a specific term from systems sciences, which implies non-linear relationships between phenomena. It is particularly in the latter sense that an understanding of complexity has a bearing on evaluation design in respect of how evaluators approach the question of impact.â?•

â??The book presents nine case studies that cover a wide variety of policy initiatives, in public health (smoking prevention), homelessness, child labour, regional development, international development cooperation, the HIV/AIDs pandemic, and international development cooperation. The use of case studies sheds light on the conceptual ideas at work in organisations addressing some of the worldâ??s largest and most varied problems.â?•

â??The evaluation processes described here commonly seek a balance between order and chaos. The interaction of four elements â?? simplicity, inventiveness, flexibility, and specificity â?? allows complex platterns to emerge. The case studies illustrate this framework and provide a number of examples of practical management of complexity in light of contingency theories of the evaluation process itself. These theories in turn match the complexity of the evaluated policies, strategies and programmes. The case studies do not pretend to illustrate perfect evaluation processes, the focus is on learning and on seeking patterns that have proved satisfactory and where the evaluation findings have been robust an trustworthy.â?•

â??The contingency theory approach of the book underscores a point also made in the Foreword by Professor Elliot Stern: â??In a world characterised by interdependence, emergent proerties, unpredictable change, and indeterminate outcomes, how could evaluation be immune?â?• The answer lies in the choice of methods as much as in the overall strategy and approach of evaluation.â?•

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. case study
2. complexity
3. contingency
4. New books
5. policy
6. systems

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