Multiple Pathways to Policy Impact: Testing an Uptake Theory with QCA

Description

Tweet

by Barbara Befani, IDS Centre for Development Impact, PRACTICE PAPER. Number 05 October 2013. Available as pdf

Abstract: Policy impact is a complex process influenced by multiple factors. An intermediate step in this process is policy uptake, or the adoption of measures by policymakers that reflect research findings and recommendations. The path to policy uptake often involves activism, lobbying and advocacy work by civil society organisations, so an earlier intermediate step could be termed â??advocacy uptakeâ??; which would be the use of research findings and recommendations by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their efforts to influence government policy. This CDI Practice Paper by Barbara Befani proposes a â??broad-brushâ?? theory of policy uptake (more precisely of â??advocacy uptakeâ??) and then tests it using two methods: (1) a type of statistical analysis and (2) a variant of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The pros and cons of both families of methods are discussed in this paper, which shows that QCA offers the power of generalisation whilst also capturing some of the complexity of middle-range explanation. A limited number of pathways to uptake are identified, which are at the same time moderately sophisticated (considering combinations of causal factors rather than additions) and cover a medium number of cases (40), allowing a moderate degree of generalisation. â?? See more at: http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/multiple-pathways-to-policy-impact-testing-an-uptake-theory-with-qca#sthash.HEg4Smra.dpuf

Rick Davies comment: What I like about this paper is the way it shows, quite simply, how measurements of the contribution of different possible causal conditions in terms of averages, and correlations between these, can be uniformative and even misleading. In contrast, a QCA analysis of the different configurations of causal conditions can be much more enlightening and easier to relate to what are often complex realities in the ground.

I have taken the liberty of re-analysing the fictional data set provided in the annex, using a Decision Tree software (within RapidMiner). This is a means of triangulating the results of QCA analyses. It uses the same kind of data set and produces results which are comparable in structure, but the method of analysis is different. Shown below is a Decision Tree representing seven configurations of conditions that can be found in Befaniâ??s data set of 40 cases. It makes use of 4 of the five conditions described in the paper. These are shown as nodes in the tree diagram.

Befani 2013 10(click on image to enlarge and get a clearer image!)

The 0 and 1 values on the various branches indicate whether the condition immediately above is present or not. The first configuration on the left says that if there is no ACCESS then research UPTAKE (12 cases at the red leaf) does not take place. This is a statement of a *sufficient* cause. The branch on the right, represents a configuration of three conditions, which says that where ACCESS to research is present, and recommendations are consistent with measures previously (PREV) recommended by the organisation, and where the research findings are disseminated within the organisation by a local â??champion (CHAMP) then research UPTAKE (8 cases at the blue leaf) does

take place.

Overall the findings shown in the Decision Tree model are consistent with the QCA analyses in terms of the number of configurations (seven) and the configurations that are associated with the largest number of cases (i.e. their coverage). However there were small differences in descriptions of two sets of cases where there was no uptake (red leaves). In the third branch (configuration) from the left above, the QCA analysis indicated that it was the presence of INTERNAL CONFLICT (different approaches to the same policy problem within the organisation) that played a role, rather than the presence of a (perhaps ineffectual) CHAMPION. In the third branch (configuration) from the right the QCA analysis proposed a fourth necessary condition (QUALITY), in addtion to the three shown in the Decision Tree. Here the Decision Tree seems the more parsimonious solution. However, in both sets of cases where differences in findings have occured it would make most sense to then proceed with within-case investigations of the causal processes at work.

PS: Here is the dataset, in case anyone wants to play with it

Category

1. Journal article

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