MECHANISM EXPERIMENTS AND POLICY EVALUATIONS

Description

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Jens Ludwig, Jeffrey R. Kling, Sendhil Mullainathan, Working Paper 17062
, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, 1050 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, May 2011 pdf copy available

A **mechanism experiment** is â??an experiment that does not test a policy, but one which tests a causal mechanism that underlies a policyâ?•

ABSTRACT
Randomized controlled trials are increasingly used to evaluate policies. How can we make these experiments as useful as possible for policy purposes? We argue greater use should be made of experiments that identify behavioral mechanisms that are central to clearly specified policy questions, what we call â??mechanism experiments.â?• These types of experiments can be of great policy value even if the intervention that is tested (or its setting) does not correspond exactly to any realistic policy option.

RD comment: Well worth reading. Actually entertaining.

See also a blog posting about them by David McKenzie: What are â??Mechanism Experimentsâ?• and should we be doing more of them? on Mon, 2011-06-06 01:02

Tags

1. Journal
2. mechanisms
3. policy evaluation
4. RCT

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