How can evaluation help strengthen accountability and learning in the European space? A focus on accountability as a progressive force

Murray Saunders
EES Board
IOCE

here@lancaster
Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University

Conventional accountability focused evaluation: report independently to decision makers charged with making sure that resources are spent on what they are supposed to be spent on.

Encourages rhetoric, ritualism, fear, justificatory practice, low diagnostic value

For what purpose?

Accountability evaluation as a progressive force: a process of identifying the basis on which a programme, policy or intervention might be conceived and undertaken with *propriety, efficacy and to positive effect*.

These effects are judged in terms of their contribution to equity (reductions in poverty, and in gender, physical and mental capacity and ethnic bias)

A positive focus on accountability: why important?

The urge to 'sense make' in complex environments: the need to provide accounts of complex policy interventions

Social and political imperatives : providing estimations of transparency, equitable resource allocation, legitimacy and equity

Methodological debate: providing resources that address difficulties and uncertainties in addressing 'effects' i.e. the basis on which we can say "that is working")

The concern with establishing effects is the 'bottom line' in accountability

Accountability as part of good governance?

We can understand evaluation for accountability as part of the process in which institutions, structures of authority allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy.

Transparent decision making

Oorganisational development, participation and decision making

Evaluation contributing to local or regional decision making

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Accountability: evaluation as a 'critical friend'

Policies (**cohesion, integration and reducing disparity in social and economic development across member states:** *examining and accounting for the logic of policy intention*)

Instruments (**structural funds resourcing interventions that determine growth:** *assessing the theory in action of funded and targeted development*)

Mechanisms (**specific programmes, interventions, projects e.g. in transport, human resources, public management:** *assessing the theory of change embedded in specific programmes*)

Effects (*identifying changes in practice* (**economic, social, educational, health) brought about by the aggregated determination of mechanisms, instruments and policies**)

Levelling up the accountability focus

Level 1: Propriety: protocols and due and proper process (was money spent properly, plans adhered to, timelines addressed, consultations occurred and needs addressed)

Level 2: Quality: in outputs e.g. roads, buildings, infrastructural development (fitness for purpose)

Level 3: Efficacy: use of the outputs (increase focus on how new infrastructure is used, how it is adapted and modified)

Level 4: Positive change: Emergence of new practices enabled by outputs in social and economic domains

Level 5: Sustainable impact: at macro or long term strategic objectives of cohesion and integration (aggregated and differentiated long term effects)

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The accountability focus along the trajectory of structural fund investment

The trajectory of focus in structural and cohesion fund evaluation

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| Managing control | Focus on outputs | Focus on sustainable changes in behaviors of target groups | Long term aims of cohesion and integration |

Accountability Contexts	Practice emphasis	Use practice cluster
National/international Sector wide evaluative practice	Regulation and control	Use practice focusing on the distribution of resources and distinguishing between performance in time and place
Programmatic Evaluative practice associated with specific interventions	Propriety, Policy efficacy, development	Use practice focusing on the provision of resources for decisions on successful policy instruments and mechanisms
Institutional Evaluative practice within organisations	Quality of service provision, vfm,	Use practices involving internal assurance, section reviews and institutional process checks
Internal accountability	Internal accountability	Use practices of problem identification, ethical practice, identifying good practice and developing better practice

Overview: accountability as a positive force in evaluative practice

- ***Accountability to whom*** (civil society, decision makers, users, policy 'recipients')

- ***Internal accountability*** (ethical practice, logical consistency, design efficacy, focus on use, equity and gender responsive)

- ***Transparency and fairness of policies and programmes*** (co-construction of indicators of performance, ownership of the imperative for accountability)

- ***Direction of impetus*** (bottom up and top down, always one way?)

- ***Accountable to values of equity and positive change*** (adherence to sets of values and commitments)