

What works:evaluation

Lessons from the Evaluation of Drug Testing in the Criminal Justice System

UKES presentation 10th/11th Dec 2002



Objectives

- The gestation of policy
- Implications for evaluation/evaluators
- Evaluation of drug testing initiatives
- The identification of appropriate methodologies
- Key lessons



Developing policy – it's not easy

- Drivers e.g. social inclusion – cutting across a range of social issues
- Co-operation of a range of stakeholders – national and local level
- Resource constraints – taxation and borrowing
- Priorities – how are they identified
- Allocation of resources – in a 'fair' way



Analysis of policy – govt's interests

- How policy works – what are the mechanisms?
- When policy works – does it work for everyone in all situations?
- How can implementation be improved?
- What is the link between these factors and available resources?



The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000

Aims

- To deter drug misuse whilst under criminal justice supervision
- To identify offenders who should be getting treatment and monitoring their progress



The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000

- Testing on charge – in police stations
- Pre-sentence testing
- Drug Abstinence Orders (2* / week testing c. 13 weeks)
- Drug Abstinence Requirement attached to community rehabilitation/punishment orders
- Drug testing condition added to prison licence



The evaluation

3 sites in 2001, 6 sites in 2002

- Outcomes – what has been the impact of drug testing on levels of offending and re-offending?
- Process and structure audit – to assess whether the operational processes and structures mediate or mitigate the effectiveness of the powers
- Cost benefit



Data collection

- Researchers at each site – observations, case tracking, interviews, focus groups, verification workshops
- Structured and unstructured interviews (initial and follow-up) with offenders
- Monitoring data
- Secondary data sources



Challenges for evaluators (1)

How to approach context

‘The relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes – between the assignment of resources, what gets done and what effects the activity has – are not infrequently complex, tenuous, unknown and difficult to know.’

Weatheritt, M. (1993)



Challenges for evaluators (2)

Specifying the roles and relative contribution of qualitative and quantitative data



Challenges for evaluators (3)

Positioning the evaluation with:

- Policy
- Research
- Participants



Identifying what to do with context e.g.

- Changing management structures
- The service context – for example the range, quality and availability of drug treatment services
- The organisational culture
- Features of the local environment – for example this could include the physical environment
- The legacy of previous policy implementations



The approach

A pluralistic methodology:

- both a realistic approach, whereby understanding context is critical to understanding how outcomes are achieved, and a quasi-experimental approach using comparison areas (econometric model);
- these approaches complement one another. The quasi-experimental element of the evaluation is attempting to eliminate context and identify whether the intervention ‘works’. The realistic approach identifies the impact of context upon outcomes.



Why?

- Timeliness of results from the realistic approach Vs the quasi-experimental approach
- It is difficult to identify policy impacts using quasi-experimental approaches alone
- Objectivity / currency of a realistic Vs quasi-experimental evaluation
- To identify how context and outcomes are related



Example of a Realistic Evaluation Mechanism

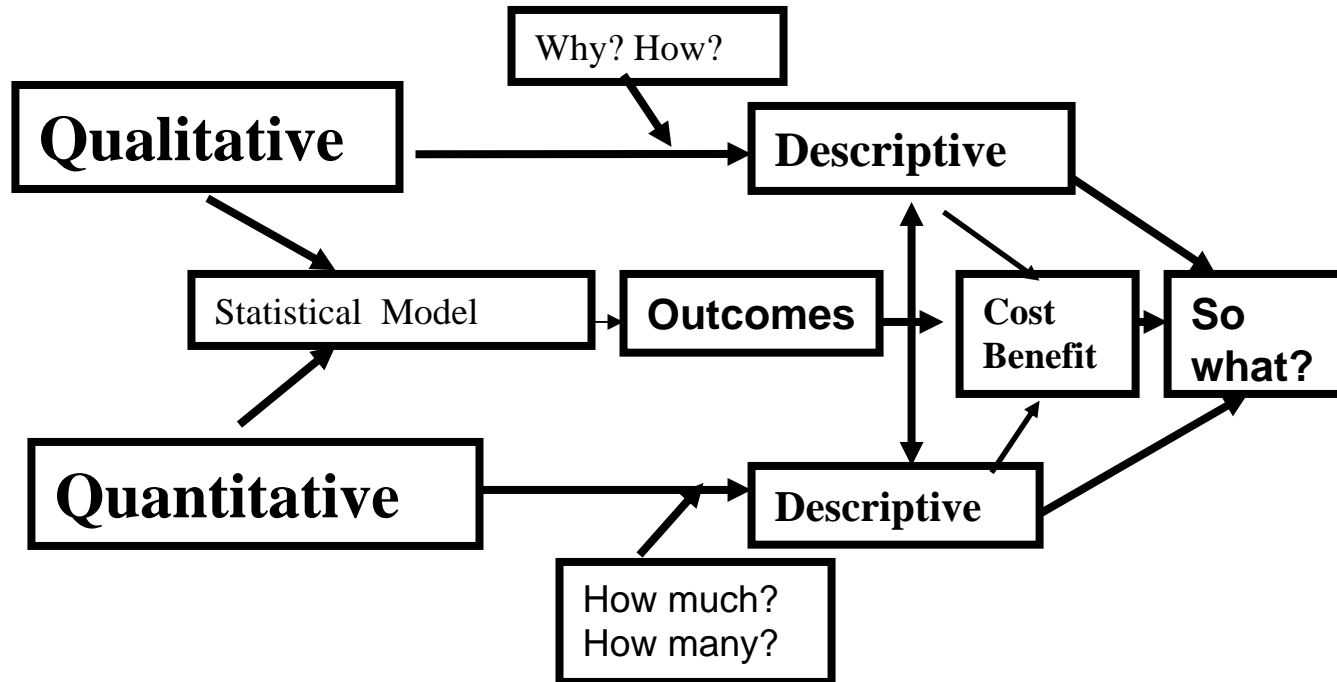
| Possible mechanism | Context | Expected outcomes |
|--|--|---|
| <p><i>'deterrence'</i> mechanism: Drug testing in police stations could reduce crime by deterring potential offenders who currently fund their habit by committing crime and now as a result of introducing drug testing will not risk being caught.</p> | <p><i>'criminal clustering'</i> context: a given rate of crime may result from a few prolific offenders or many 'minor' offenders.</p> | <p>If a few prolific offenders are deterred, this could significantly reduce the level of crime</p> <p>Crime could be reduced in certain areas where drug testing takes place though there may be some displacement to areas without drug testing</p> |

Using quantitative and qualitative data e.g.

Are all eligible offenders drug tested:

- *how many are* being missed?;
- interviews could subsequently be undertaken to identify *why* the tests were not happening; and
- *what are the implications* for the evaluation report, feedback to the sites, or the Home Office?

Bringing quantitative and qualitative data together



Positioning the evaluation

- The research activities of the evaluation team can have an impact on the behaviour and responses of individuals involved in the policy implementation so that the impact of the evaluation is not neutral
- For example, adherence to policy directives (i.e. in relation, perhaps, to the number of drug tests performed) might increase during the period that the team is present
- Explicit agreement with sites and the Home Office concerning how data is used e.g. non – compliance with legislation, ‘legal’ use of data (ethical research dimension)

Policy, research and sites

- Challenges

- Who/what are the objects of the evaluation?
- What happens if something ‘illegal’ happens?
- Data protection – case tracking
- Implications of what happens when e.g. verification workshop interventions

- Discussions with policy and research colleagues



In conclusion

- 1 year into the evaluation
- Team is developing and learning
- We have identified a number of challenges and solutions
- Need to provide added value for commissioners

