

Contribution analysis – what is it and what does it offer impact evaluation?

Erica Wimbush
University of Edinburgh Business School
& NHS Health Scotland

UKES Annual Conference, 24-25 November 2009

Outline

- Move to outcomes-based accountability (LAAs, SOAs) for local partnerships (LSPs, CPPs) – need tools for planning and performance. What do evaluators offer?
- Contribution Analysis (Mayne) – emerging approach to theory-based impact evaluation
 - Q. How does it add value to theory-based evaluation?
 - Q What are its strengths and limitations ?
 - Q. Is it appropriate for the local partnership context?

UK policy context

Theory-based approaches to evaluation – 2 phases

- Late 1990s/early 2000s – evaluations of ‘complex community initiatives’
- Late 2000s – PSR context of outcomes-based accountability and management across public sector and local partnerships – LAAs/LSPs (England); SOA/CPs (Scotland)

Theory-based Evaluation: Toolkit

Outcomes management & accountability

- Public managers seeking tools to assist outcomes planning and performance assessment – what do evaluators have to offer?

Theory-based evaluation

- Theories of Change and Realist approaches
- Intervention logic, logic modelling, results chains
- Outcome Mapping
- Most Significant Change
- Contribution Analysis

Contribution Analysis – what is it?

An approach to exploring cause and effect in real-life complex settings.

Causality is inferred using logical argumentation:

- There is a reasoned theory of change for the policy/ program
- The activities of the policy/program were implemented.
- The theory of change (or key elements) is supported and confirmed by evidence: the chain of expected results occurred. The theory of change has not been disproved.
- Other influencing factors have been assessed and are either shown not to have made a significant contribution, or their relative role in contributing to the desired outcomes has been recognized.

(John Mayne in Schwarz et al (forthcoming))

Key characteristics

- Performance measurement/accountability context
- Addresses management and contribution questions about cause-effect
- Reduces uncertainty about causal pathways
- Output = a short 'contribution story' that is strengthened as new evidence is gathered
- An iterative process

Method - Six Steps

1. Set out the cause-effect issue
2. Develop the theory of change and risks to it
3. Gather and analyse existing evidence on the theory of change, whether confirming or refuting it
4. Re-assess the contribution story
5. Seek out additional evidence
6. Revise and strengthen the contribution story

Does Contribution Analysis Add Value to 'normal' practice?

Example:

Development & Evaluation of Scotland's new Alcohol Strategy – Clare Beeston, NHS Health Scotland
clare.beeston@health.scot.nhs.uk

Step 1:

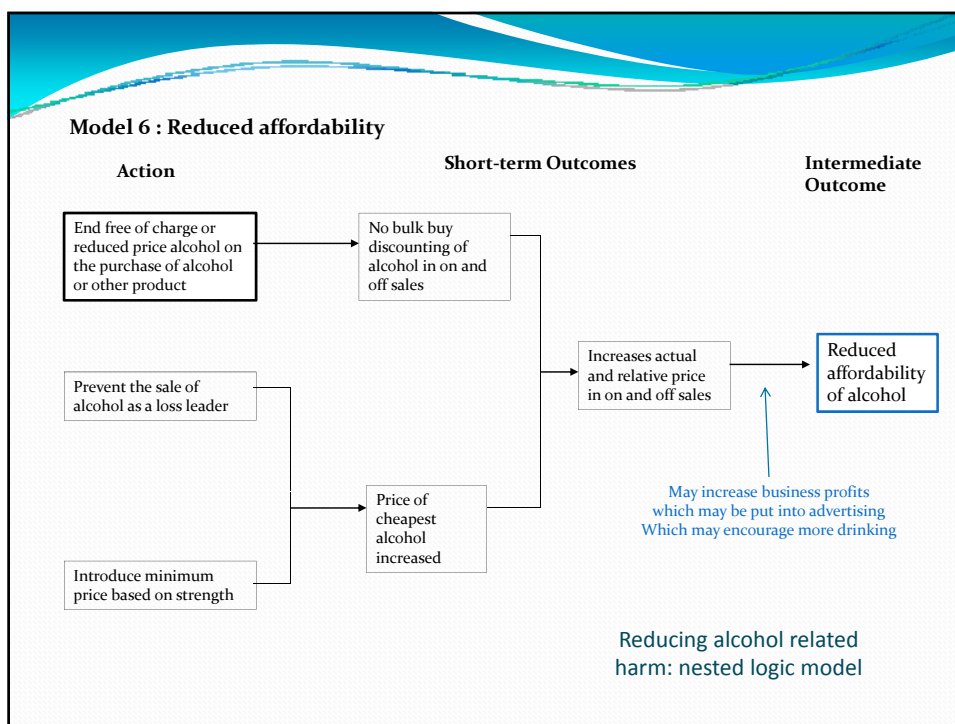
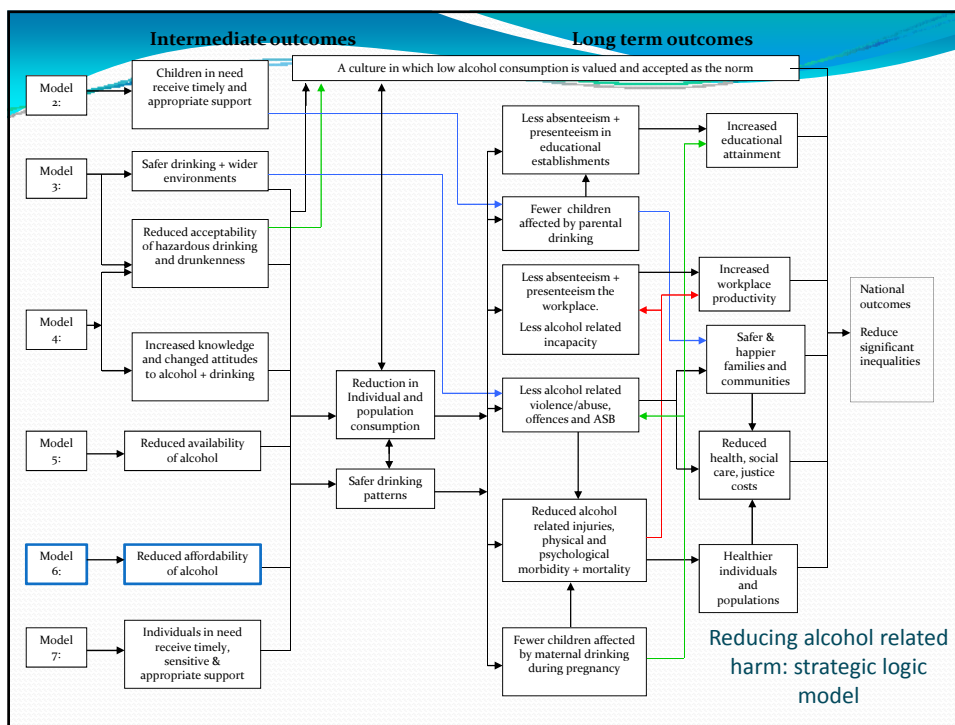
Set out the cause-effect issues to be addressed

- What is the scope of the problem?
- What is the specific cause-effect question being addressed?
- What level of confidence is needed in answering the question?
- What are the key contextual factors influencing the increase in alcohol-related harms?

Step 2: Develop the ToC and risks to it

Step 3: Gather existing evidence on the ToC

- What is the postulated theory of change? Use existing evidence to develop an initial theory of change.
- Assess the roles of the other influencing factors in the theory of change?
- What are the main risks and assumptions in the theory of change? What are the main strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the expected contributions of different players and are these understood? Are they plausible and feasible to deliver in practice?
- Set out the initial 'contribution story'



Step 2: Develop the ToC and risks to it

Step 3: Gather existing evidence on the ToC

- What is the postulated theory of change? Use existing evidence to develop an initial theory of change.
- Assess the roles of the other influencing factors in the theory of change?
- What are the main risks and assumptions in the theory of change? What are the main strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the expected contributions of different players and are these understood? Are they plausible and feasible to deliver in practice?
- Set out the initial 'contribution story'

Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution story, and challenges to it

- What additional evidence is needed to assess the credibility of the contribution story and enhance its robustness?
- Is any new evidence required to strengthen the contribution story?

Does CA add value?

- A systematic and disciplined approach
- The short contribution story – aids communications
- Iterative process of strengthening ToC and reducing uncertainty
- Brings together the often separate disciplines of planning, performance management and evaluation

Limitations

- Assessing the balance of evidence is difficult
- A short contribution story does not do justice to the amount of evidence and info collected
- Engaging stakeholders in refining and strengthening the initial draft contribution story
- Language and terminology is still evolving

Conclusions

- Attempting to determine causality in complex settings is an impossible task
- CA offers a practical navigational tool for public managers
 - To chart causal pathways to outcomes
 - To systematically apply evidence to help reduce uncertainty about the steps
 - To develop a convincing and robust account of contributions to outcomes

Next Steps

Currently being applied within the context of CPPs/SOAs in Scotland -

Is CA a useful tool for -

- Outcome planning – for identifying effective partner contributions to community outcomes (in SOA)
- Performance monitoring – for monitoring the results of partner contributions
- Reporting and improvement – for reviewing, refining and strengthening the partnership 's 'performance story' and areas for improvement

References

- Mayne, J. (2001) Addressing Attribution through Contribution Analysis: Using Performance Measures Sensibly. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 16(1): 1-24.
- Mayne, J. (2008) *Contribution Analysis: an Approach to Exploring Cause and Effect*. ILAC Brief No. 16, <http://www.cgiar-ilac.org>
- Mayne, J. (forthcoming) Addressing Cause and Effect in Simple and Complex Settings through Contribution Analysis. In: R. Schwartz, K. Forss, and M. Marra (Eds.), *Evaluating the complex*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Examples of CA

- Kotvojs (AusEvalSoc 2006) Contribution of Fiji Education Sector program (FESP) to the Ministry of Education's priority outcomes.
- Monnier & Barakat (EuropeanEvalSoc 2008) Contribution of EC support to increasing Jordan's exports to EU
- Toulemonde et al (in press) Contribution of EC support to poverty reduction in Tanzania