Introduction

-I wish to thank the organizers for inviting me. I am representing Canada and speaking to you from unceded land of the Algonquin People here in Ottawa Canada.

-The views expressed herein are my own.

-The OECD and France Stratégie studies show that the evaluation function is active in government and that there are opportunities for further advancement, especially in the utilization of findings.

-In my commentary today I will use the three issues of institutionalization, quality and use to comment on the two studies. Based on the findings from the studies, these three elements can be seen as representing pushes (i.e., formal requirements, regulations, obligations) and pulls (i.e., incentives, motivators, etc.,) in conducting evaluations and developing findings to advance policy and ultimately, improve the lives of citizens.

Institutionalization

-The OECD volume documents that significant investment has been made in establishing strong institutional structures in many countries.

-From my view, such structures can be seen as pushes as they are often requirements, rather than incentives. In some settings, evaluative assessments could be seen as an activity that has to be done instead of an opportunity for learning how to have more effective programs, including how to better serve target populations and addressing policy challenges.

-The equilibrium between requirements in systematic approaches and the implementation of them is influenced by culture.
Quality
- Both the OECD policy volume and France Stratégie study point to the importance of data as a cornerstone in undertaking high quality evaluations.

- Mr. Jacobzone spoke about digital data and a data revolution. This has certain pushes and pulls. Pushes include requirements, whether they be legislated or based in policy, to collect and maintain accurate and reliable program data. In contrast, pulls include interest on behalf of not only evaluators but those in policy, program and service areas to pursue analyses which address questions, such as what works, for whom and in what context?

- The OECD volume highlights the importance of data and also, data linkages as that is one of the best ways to gather necessary data to undertake impact evaluation analyses, for example, through the use of advance econometrics.

- France Stratégie’s study of impact evaluation provides a view from a particular approach to evaluation, namely the use of statistical methods to assess the effects of a policy vis-a-vis its objectives. Importantly, impact evaluation requires good quality data characterized as accurate, verifiable, reliable.

- It is worth noting that quasi-experimental methods can be as powerful as randomized control trials which can present particular ethical challenges. Again, such methods require good quality data at a sufficiently granular level to conduct analyses on the differential impacts experienced by sub-populations (i.e., youth, Indigenous peoples, etc.). Where professional competencies are established including skills required to conduct such analyses, such as the case in Canada, capability is less of a challenge.

- Mr. Aussilloux and Mr. Baïz’s research shows that impact evaluation has been gaining momentum over the last 20 years. From my view, this period coincides with the increasing investment in structured data in the latter 2000s. So, it may not be a coincidence that as data quality improved, more
impact analyses were undertaken. Better data now will certainly facilitate analysis of COVID response measures.

- Data issues are very much related to that of quality across all countries. If the data are not available, especially at the level of detail required for applying advanced methodologies, it is difficult to have rigorous results.

- Moreover, to address questions such as what works and for whom, data on sub-populations beyond gender comparisons need to be at sufficiently granular. In Canada and elsewhere, there is significant interest in undertaking what is referred to Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) examinations. This also applies to measuring progress against the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

- Making data available -- in a secure way that respects privacy concerns -- to academics and other experts means that several entities are examining the same data to address similar policy questions. When results within government and outside of government point to similar findings, this has the potential to create momentum on an issue; and as such creates a pull.

Use

- As both studies recognize, there is an ongoing challenge with the underutilization of evaluation findings in the policy development cycle. Despite being publicly available in most countries, evaluation findings are not well known, understood and included in policy development discussions.

- Utilization of evaluation evidence can be seen as a pull. In other words, in order for results to be understood and applied there has to be interest in absorbing such knowledge.

- As Mr. Jacobzone notes a number of factors are at play in the area of utilization, culture being a major one and often challenging to advance.

- France Stratégie acknowledges that despite growing demand for impact evaluations, overall use remains low. While there has been progress in
using more advanced methodologies and some institutional structures, in general, greater use of impact evaluation has not necessarily led to greater utilization of findings.

- My questions on this is, how does evaluation attract or pull interest towards its evidence and related performance narratives? Is it as both studies suggest, defining competencies of evaluators? Are evaluators the closest connection with the policy development cycle? Formal mechanisms recognized by the France Stratégie study exist; however, they do not seem to provide genuine pull factors, but rather push ones – through formal requirements -- with associated limitations.

- We need to shift focus from the supply side (methodologies, training, skills, competencies, etc.) to the demand side (i.e., promotion of findings, user needs, interests, etc.)

  o Evaluation evidence is but one input to the policy development cycle, there are others active in this space. It bears repeating that the competition for the attention of Parliamentarians, public servants, subject-matter experts, private foundations, etc. has been and continues to increase.
  o Transition to more strategic than technical skills. In Canada competencies at higher levels focus on negotiation, communication, etc.
  o Communications need to focus on results, rather than how those results were arrived at (i.e., methodology, techniques, etc.).

- The OECD policy volume raises the issue of values and ethics and it is possible that evaluation professionals are hesitant to take on a stronger influencing role perhaps because this may be seen a conflict of values: specifically, being independent. This is a possible tension that remains unexplored.
Conclusion

- In conclusion, both the OECD policy volume and France Stratégie study illuminate factors that are pushing and pulling within the evaluation field as it informs effective performance, the budget or policy cycle.

- I have framed institutional factors as acting as pushes as they tend to be characterized by requirements or obligations.

- As for quality, it can be seen as both a push (i.e., needs to be done) and a pull (i.e., can tell us so much), as the collection data is often required but as those data become seen as valuable assets the push can become a pull.

- Finally, evaluation utilization has to be a pull factor, drawing various stakeholders into the findings to understand them and apply the knowledge to practical problems and that will be a game changer in this space.

- Merci à tous.