OECD Webinar Understanding cross country practices for policy evaluation, 23 June 2020

Notes
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Comments following presentations of Stéphane Jacobzone, OECD, Vincent Aussilloux and Adam Baiz, France Stratégie and comments by Christine Minas, Treasury Board Secretariat, Canada.

- Great empirical work presented in the studies of OECD and France Stratégie. Thanks a lot!
- Nevertheless, M. Gilles de Margerie, Commissioner General, France Stratégie, was calling for a more systematic and more effective use of evaluations in the policy making context. It appears, we are not suffering from a lack of knowledge or concepts, rather we experience an “under-utilization” of evaluations, as my colleague Christine Menas has underlined.
- I would like to briefly address three potential reasons for this observation, which could be discussed.
- First assumption: We are mismeasuring our lives (see: John Stiglitz). As policy makers and their advisors seem to prefer quantitative methods, it...
might be impossible, we are lacking understanding of what happens in real life. Therefore, evaluations of policies shall be complemented by qualitative methods and by involving actively those concerned.

- Second, the presentations have addressed a lack of data. However, I wonder if we really don’t have enough data. The reason behind the observations of both of the studies could also be, that we lack the capacity to identify, collect and utilize appropriate data, when public policies are evaluated.

- Finally, the calls for a culture of systematic evaluation might indicate as well a lack of political demand or at least interest. Are evaluators offering meaningful information to politicians? Could evaluators do better, offering information, which is more relevant and meaningful for politicians?

- I would assume, yes, we could do better. For example …
  - we could leave the obsession of representativeness behind. We do not need to hide our advice behind undeniable conclusions based on representative data. Legitimately, politicians want to have a choice according to their value-based preferences. We should not try to substitute politics by mathematics. We should aim to provide policy makers with strong evidence and deep understanding of real life.
  - we could learn to tell our story. Evaluation reports of several hundred pages length, don’t tell a story. These reports provide an overload of expert information, but they don’t tell a concise and comprehensible story. Thus, if we really want to create demand, we could invest e.g. in story-telling.
  - we also could be more aware, for what type of utilization evaluations are relevant. While we are analysing the past (in ex post evaluations), in fact, we are preparing to influence the future. Thus, we should develop our capacities to address “future” issues, e.g. by investing in foresight. This way, we might acquire capabilities to take the strong interdependencies between looking back and forth into account.

- With these thoughts in mind, I wonder what my colleagues would tell M. le President, Emanuel Macron, regarding evaluations if they got stuck with him in an elevator– for a minute only.