

Assessing the Effects of a Collaborative Research Funding Scheme: An Approach Combining Meta-Evaluation and Evaluation Synthesis

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The Swiss Innovation Agency CTI has administrated its collaborative research funding scheme since the early 1980s. Between 1989 and 2002 the scheme was evaluated 14 times. In a study combining meta-evaluation and evaluation synthesis, these evaluations were evaluated against selected evaluation standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society (<http://www.seval.ch/en/standards/index.cfm>). The meta-evaluation showed that the evaluations conducted were mostly qualitative, internal and ex post and that evaluation culture at CTI was selective. Only research institutes and firms that carried out a large number of CTI projects were evaluated regularly. Evaluations under study differed in quality, with most evaluation standards being fulfilled fairly to very well. The results of the meta-evaluation were central to the ensuing evaluation synthesis by giving information on the quality of the evaluations. The synthesis compiled the – mostly qualitative – results of the evaluations. There were strong indications that CTI funding does have a variety of effects.

Evaluation in the field of RTD (research, technology, and development) has become quite common, and more and more evaluations are conducted. However, by and large, RTD evaluations do not use techniques that are cumulative. Rather, they try in every study (or are asked to try) to provide fresh evidence for all the steps in a chain of causation from intervention to long-range social and economic impacts.¹ Techniques of meta-evaluation and evaluation synthesis are important in some domains. Strikingly, they are barely used in RTD policy. We believe that the work done in the past should be better used in current evaluations.

Meta-evaluation means evaluation of evaluations and gives us information on how an evaluation was conducted and how well it was conducted. This is important information if the results of the evaluation are to be further used in a new evaluation. Meta-evaluation can also give us information on the evaluation practice of an institution and to what extent the institution acts as an intelligence customer. Using professional evaluation standards is one suitable way to evaluate existing evaluations because professional standards define good practice in evaluation and thus encapsulate what makes a good evaluation. Of course, a value judgement is embedded in the evaluation standards.

An evaluation synthesis is a systematic procedure for organizing and aggregating findings from a series of evaluations (confusingly, this is sometimes also called meta-evaluation). It brings together existing evaluation studies, performed by different people at different places and at different times, assesses them, and uses them as a data base for answering specific questions². RTD evaluations often have strong qualitative elements and rarely contain sufficient quantitative information to allow the use of statistical (meta-analytical) procedures. However, this does not mean that some systematic review is not possible in RTD evaluation.

The study we are proposing to present shows ways how existing RTD evaluations can be assessed and how their results can be synthesised in a systematic way to inform evaluators and policy-makers.

¹ Erik Arnold, 'Evaluating research and innovation policy: a systems world needs systems evaluations,' *Research Evaluation*, April 2004

² United States General Audit Office GAO, *The Evaluation Synthesis*, 1992, p. 8