Theory-based causal analysis: the basics of process tracing and QCA

November 7-11, 2022

Instructor: Dr. Estelle Raimondo

Contents

a) Description of contents

"There is nothing as practical as a good theory". This phrase, purportedly coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and later taken up inter alia by Carol Weiss and Ray Pawson resonates well with most evaluators and development practitioners nowadays. While having been around for more than four decades, over the last decade theory-based evaluation has received new impetus and has become part and parcel of the toolkit of program evaluators across the globe. Most notably, new methodological developments in theory-based causal analysis have surfaced and are increasingly exploited to answer key causal questions that do not lend themselves to (quasi) experimental design. While theory-based causal analysis is not-method specific—it can be embedded in a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches—the application of qualitative or quali-quantitative theory-based methods is particularly promising.

This workshop will cover the following topics: review of various causal theories and their affiliated theory-based evaluation methods; principles for selecting the right design; fundamentals of designing a theory-based causal analysis; applications of theory-based evaluation for causal analysis using two case-based approaches: (1) process tracing and (2) Qualitative Comparative Analysis. Examples from World Bank evaluations as well as other organizations will be used throughout the workshop to illustrate the content.

The workshop will require a 15 hour commitment, including 11 hour in live session and 4 hours in self-paced individual or group learning.

b) Objectives

After taking this course, participants have developed an initial sound understanding of the various options for designing theory-based causal analysis and how to apply theory-based evaluation in practice.

More specifically, participants will have a greater understanding of:

- Different purposes and uses of various theory-based causal analyses

- Various causal theories that can be used in evaluation

- Good practice in case selection for case-based causal analysis

- Good practice in building generalizability of causal claims

- Applications of theory-based causal analysis using process tracing

- Applications of theory-based causal analysis using qualitative comparative analysis

Detailed Schedule

Below you will find the exact times for synchronic/ «live» sessions and for asynchronic group or individual learning activities for each day and the main contents of those sessions.

Monday 7.11. 2022: (Total 3h30)

"Live session" from 8:00 to 10:30 (EDT) / 14:00-16:30 (CET)

- o   Session 1: Introduction
- o   Session 2: The Basics of Theory Based Causal Analysis
- o   Session 3: Group exercise on various causal frameworks
- o   Session 4: Lightning talk based on group exercise by different teams

"Homework": Session 5: Introduction to Process tracing (about 1 hour of self-paced individual learning)
- -   Overview of Process Tracing
- -   The Basics of Bayesian Logic
- -   Four Process Tracing Tests

Tuesday 8.11.2022: (Total 3h30)

"Live session" from 8:00 to 10:30 (EDT) / 14:00-16:30 (CET)

- o   Session 6 : Interactive Q&A on Process Tracing
- o   Session 7: Demonstration of Process Tracing under real-world evaluation challenges
- o   Session 8: Group exercise on Process Tracing

"Homework" (about 1 hour of additional group work): Finish Group exercise on Process Tracing

Wednesday 9.11.2022: (Total 3h30)

"Live session" from 8:00 to 10:00 (EDT) / 14:00-16:00 (CET)

- o   Session 9: Lightning presentation on Group exercise on Process Tracing
- o   Session 10: Introduction to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

"Homework": Session 11: The basics of QCA (about 1 hour of self-paced individual learning)
- -   Causal complexity and QCA
- -   Modest generalizability with QCA
- -   The basics of Boolean Minimization

Thursday 10.11.2022: (Total 3h00)

"Live session" from 8:00 to 10:00 (EDT) / 14:00-16:00 (CET)

- o   Session 12: Interactive Q&A on QCA
- o   Session 13: Group exercise on QCA

"Homework" (about 1 hour of additional group work): Finish Group exercise on QCA

Friday 11.11.2022

"Live session" from 8:00 to 10:00 (EDT) / 14:00-16:00 (CET)

- o   Session 14: Lightening presentations on QCA Group Exercise
- o   Session 15: Closing Session

Preparations tasks before the start of the workshop:

Before the workshop please take some time to do the following:

1)   View the online video entitled « A 360 on Theory-based evaluation»

2)   Take the short quizz that is associated with the video

3)   Time permitting, read through some of the references and resources that are posted on the course website, a preliminary list of background reading is available below.

Background Literature

Bamberger, M., J. Vaessen and E. Raimondo (eds.) (2015) Dealing with complexity in development evaluation: a practical approach. Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Beach, D. and R.B. Pedersen (2013) Process-tracing methods: foundations and guidelines. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

Befani, B. (2015) Pathways to Change: Evaluating Development Interventions with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA): https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/QCA_BarbaraBefani-201605.pdf

Befani B. & Stedman-Bryce G. (2017). Process Tracing and Bayesian updating for impact evaluation. *Evaluation vol 23(1)*

Bennett, A. & Checkel J. (2015) Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool. Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press

D'Errico, S. et al. (2015) Influencing Policy change in Uganda: An impact evaluation of the Uganda Poverty and Conservation Learning Group's Work : https://pubs.iied.org/G04157/

Raimondo E. (2020) Getting Practical with Causal Mechanisms: The application of Process-Tracing under real-world evaluation constraints *New Directions for Evaluation*

Rihoux B. & Ragin, C. Configurational Comparative Methods (2008) Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Related Techniques. Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Schmitt J. & Beach D. (2015) The contribution of process tracing to theory-based evaluations of complex aid instruments. *Evaluation, 21(4), 429-447.*

Stern et al. (2012) Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluation. DFID Working Paper 38: https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/dfid-working-paper-38-broadening-the-range-of-designs-and-methods-for-impact-evaluations

 ➢ See Appendix on causal theories by Barbara Befani

White H. & Phillips D. (2012) Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework. 3ie Working Paper 15: https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/working-papers/addressing-attribution-cause-and-effect-small-n-impact

Links

http://compasss.org/ : the go-to website for QCA, where you can also download open-source software for QCA: https://compasss.org/software/