EACEA Project IMPALA
International Conference

IMPACT EVALUATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION.
A Contribution to Sustainable Quality Development of the Knowledge Society

Palau Robert, Barcelona, Spain, 16-17 June 2016

evalag (Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg), M7 9a-10, 68161 Mannheim, Germany – http://www.evalag.de
(Preliminary) Résumé of the Conference and General: 
A Quick SWOT Analysis of Impact Evaluation of QM in HEIs

- Methodological SWOTs
- IMPALA SWOTs
Methodological SWOTs: General

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No experiment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No control group</td>
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**Before-after comparison**

(observations & change assessments by participants; analysis of documents and data; counterfactual self-estimation; **causal social mechanisms**; methodological principles: devising the causal network; understanding the context; counterfactual and factual causal analysis; mixed methods approach)

**Ex-post analysis**

(dto.)
Methodological SWOTs: General (E&K Soc)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proper implementation of chosen methodology</td>
<td>Independent impact evaluation from HE politics, HEI leadership, QA agencies, … (impartiality)</td>
<td>HEI performance probably too complex for reliable impact assessments (?)</td>
<td>Dito.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enables/ supports evidence-based QM</td>
<td>Dito.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enables/ supports evidence-based HE policy</td>
<td>Dito.</td>
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Methodological SWOTs: Before-after Comparison

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No memorisation</td>
<td>Causal mechanisms; analytical models</td>
<td>Attribution problem (which effects are</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>problems of</td>
<td></td>
<td>caused by QA and not by other causes)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>involved persons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No other time-lag</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>problems</td>
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<td>No relegation to ex-</td>
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<tr>
<td>post available data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluctuating</td>
<td>Deep longitudinal analyses</td>
<td>Expenses (time, money)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>stakeholder groups</td>
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## Methodological SWOTs: Ex-post Analysis

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<th>S</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Always applicable, without special methodological preparation and effort</strong></td>
<td>Memorisation problems of involved persons</td>
<td>Attribution problem (which effects are caused by QA and not by other causes)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other time-lag problems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relegation to ex-post available data</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fluctuating stakeholder groups</strong></td>
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## Methodological SWOTs: Change Assessments by Participants / Analysis of Documents and Data (before-after & ex-post)

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<tr>
<td>Standardised (online)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Survey instruments must be qualitatively adapted to social, organisational, cognitive context of persons surveyed</td>
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<tr>
<td>surveys with target groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>– complete acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive in-depth/</td>
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<td>Dito.</td>
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<td>structured Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>with target groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Original view into practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e.g., in status seminars,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>final presentations)</td>
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Methodological SWOTs: Counterfactual Self-Estimation (before-after & ex-post)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countertfactual available</td>
<td>Restriction to own intentional states</td>
<td>Memorisation problems</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Deficits in self-analysis of intentional states</td>
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## Methodological SWOTs: Causal Social Mechanisms

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<tr>
<td>Explanation by mechanisms instead of law-like relations or statistical correlations (causal effects of QM measures)</td>
<td>Solve attribution problem by mechanism hypotheses</td>
<td>Identification of cause-effect mechanisms (high complexity)</td>
<td>Expenses (time, money)</td>
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Causal social mechanisms

• “That we explain not by evoking universal laws, or by identifying statistically relevant factors, but by specifying [causal] mechanisms that show how phenomena are brought about” (Hedström, 2005, p. 24).

• “Social mechanisms are complexes of interacting individuals, [bodies and institutions] usually classified into specific social categories that generate causal relationships between aggregate-level variables. A mechanism will be said to be from the variable X to the variable Y if it is a mechanism through which X influences Y” (Steel, 2004, p. 59).

• In a nutshell, a causal social mechanism is “the [social] pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring, 2007, p. 178).
Causal social mechanisms model

with reference to Coleman’s boat (cf. Coleman 1994, p. 8)

Preferences

Actions

1: situational mechanism
2: action-formation m.
3: transformational m.
4: statistical correlation only

e.g., other QA processes; any HEI internal & HEI-external influences (e.g., HEI policy)
Basic model of mechanisms underlying “QA meets HEIs” inspired by (Astbury & Leeuw 2010) (A_i: situational mechanism; B_i: action-formation m.; C_i: transformational m.; D_i: statistical correlation only; i = 1, 2, 3)
## IMPALA SWOTs

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<tr>
<td>Applicable to any HEI performance area</td>
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<td>Applicable to any stakeholder group</td>
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<td>Diverse case studies</td>
<td>Diversity of case studies</td>
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<td>Impact perception and assessment of different HEI members</td>
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<td>Students, teachers, QA staff considered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some nice, informative &amp; promising case studies</td>
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<td>Contribution to competence development in impact analysis and meta-evaluation in QA agencies and HEIs</td>
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## IMPALA SWOTs

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<td></td>
<td>Small time window</td>
<td>Extend time window</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Restriction of questionnaires to certain items</td>
<td>Extend questionnaires</td>
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<td>Clarification of relation (E)QA criteria &amp; and intended/desired effects</td>
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<td><strong>Adequate timing of (E)QA interventions</strong></td>
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<td>Expenses (time, money)</td>
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## IMPALA SWOTs

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<td></td>
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<td>Low numbers (but due to specific QM activities)</td>
<td>Apply approach to larger samples (e.g., large study programs with many engaged/informed people)</td>
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<td>Possible biases because of multiple social roles of participants (QA agencies; HEI QA managers; students)</td>
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<td>No metric data (only nominal and ordinal scales)</td>
<td>Generate metric data (intervall scales)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing target group interviews</td>
<td>Target group interviews</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Missing target group workshops</td>
<td>Target group workshops</td>
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Résumé of SWOTs

• Impact evaluation seems **indispensable** (education societies, knowledge economies, evidence-based governance and QM, …)

• **No pure methodology** possible (such as control group, before-after, ex-post): mixed methods

• Mix of (closed questions; online) **questionnaires and structured interviews required**/desirable: mixed methods

• **No easy solutions** to Weaknesses and Strengths

• Hard to achieve **metric data** (interval scaled)

• Hard (may be even impossible) to do more than **case studies** (complexity/dynamics of HE system & HEIs; different HEIs hardly comparable)