

Ex-ante analysis: the inception of reasoning in policy and programmes

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How are policies and programmes created? The answer to this question varies across countries and different policy subsystems, but the recipe is usually a mix of legislation, personal experience and subjective and informal consultation with co-workers (Leão and Eyal 2022). However, this concoction does not include essential ingredients such as theory, methodology, and evidence, which are necessary to increase the probability that inputs and processes lead to good products, efficient results and effective impacts.

Good policies should combine analysis (*ex-ante*) and evaluation (*ex-post*) to ensure that: the crucial problems they intend to solve are properly addressed; solutions are precisely designed; the target audience will in fact benefit from them; and finally that it is verifiable and demonstrable that the effects followed directly from the policies being evaluated. The best way to ensure the adoption of good policies is to combine theory (policy architecture), organisation (programme engineering) and action (implementation work).

Policies are institutionalised conceptions based on a theory of change that serves as a roadmap. *Programmes* are the organisation of change through the programming of inputs and processes to generate products and outcomes that contribute to the intended impacts of a policy, as summarised in the programme theory (Lassance 2020). Major development challenges such as hunger, extreme poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, prejudice, and violence are complex issues whose solutions depend not only on goodwill and commitment, but on concrete strategies that can be more effectively implemented when public policies are supported by scientific analyses, well-structured monitoring systems and proper evaluation research.

However, if there is a consensus about the importance of theoretical thinking, research skills, data collection, and data analysis for the design of public policies, why is it so difficult to find evidence-based policies, well-designed and integrated programmes, and well-monitored actions for evaluation? Some possible reasons include:

- Organisations are overwhelmed and prioritise management over carrying out analysis, monitoring and evaluation research.
- There are difficulties in collecting and processing data. It might be the case that relevant information is not produced or is wasted; or it is produced but is not the information that is actually needed; or it might be the right information, but it is not properly processed into data; or it is properly processed into data but is misinterpreted; or it might even be the case

that though it is well interpreted, it is not disclosed—especially if this information may result in risks to programmes and their political leaders or managers.

- Monitoring and evaluation teams are small (or non-existent), improvised, poorly equipped, and badly trained for the job. Most public servants have never had professional and adequate training to develop skills in policy formulation, programme design, monitoring, and evaluation. Although their areas of expertise include education, health and public safety policies, and infrastructure works, they have no choice but to improvise when it comes to proposing alternatives, building coalitions, supporting decision-making, managing initiatives, collecting information, and interpreting and communicating evidence.

Ex-ante analysis is not a solution to all these issues, but it can contribute to the creation of collective learning opportunities, disseminating a specialised approach and lexicon to think theoretically and methodologically about complex problems to facilitate dialogue in the construction of feasible solutions.

For this reason, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Development (IPCid), a virtual centre of the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), a think tank of the Government of Brazil, will support the country's technical cooperation efforts through on-line and face to face courses and the publication of manuals and guides in different languages, such as Lassance (2022), in addition to custom advisory services to help countries build teams specialised in *ex-ante* analysis. The goal is to prepare civil servants and civil society organisations to conceive policies of great public value and design programmes incorporating features that allow for proper monitoring and evaluation.

In this sense, policy analysis is a mechanism—as Wildavsky (1964, 11) wrote—to help people “make decisions that are in some sense meaningful in a complicated world”.

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