

Policy learning in competitive research funding: a case study

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Context and objective

- Rise of competitive funding
- Similar mix of funding instruments across countries
- Indication of policy convergence/ diffusion/ transfer
- Most studies address effects and impacts
- Need to address the knowledge and practices funders use to design and implement funding instruments
- This paper discusses these issues from a policy learning perspective



Policy learning: a brief summary of the theoretical framework

- The literature on policy learning overlaps with work on policy transfer, diffusion and convergence among other closely related topics.
- Featuring various views about what learning is, who learns and how, and what is learned.
- Focusing on how policymakers and administrators learn - or draw lessons from their own experiences with policy or experiences of others.
- May's (1992) typology of policy learning
 - » Instrumental policy learning: “entails new understandings about the viability of policy instruments and implementation designs.”
 - » Social policy learning: “entails new or reaffirmed social construction of a policy
- In this paper, we focus on instrumental policy learning



Methodology

- Qualitative case study of a competitive funding instrument
- Document analysis:
 - » funding calls
 - » evaluation report
 - » funder's annual reports
- Semi-structured interviews:
 - » programme officers
 - » beneficiaries



The case: Flexit

- Funding instrument of the Swedish Foundation for the Humanities and Social Sciences launched in 2009
- Target: researchers in humanities and social sciences (HSS)
- Objective: to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and researcher mobility for HSS
- Set up: 3 year funding based on placement with non-academic organisation
 - » 75% of time is spent on a research project designed by the researcher but focused on an issue outlined by the host organisation.
 - » 25% of time is spent working as an employee of the host organisation



Account of learning: instrument design changes

Design element	Past	Current
Objective	Emphasis on “exit”	Emphasis on “building bridges”
Target	Junior HSS researchers (no more than 5 years post PhD graduation)	Early and mid-career HSS researchers
Partners	Companies	Companies Public agencies Non-governmental organisations
Placement	3 years in host organisation	2 years in host organisation + final year in university

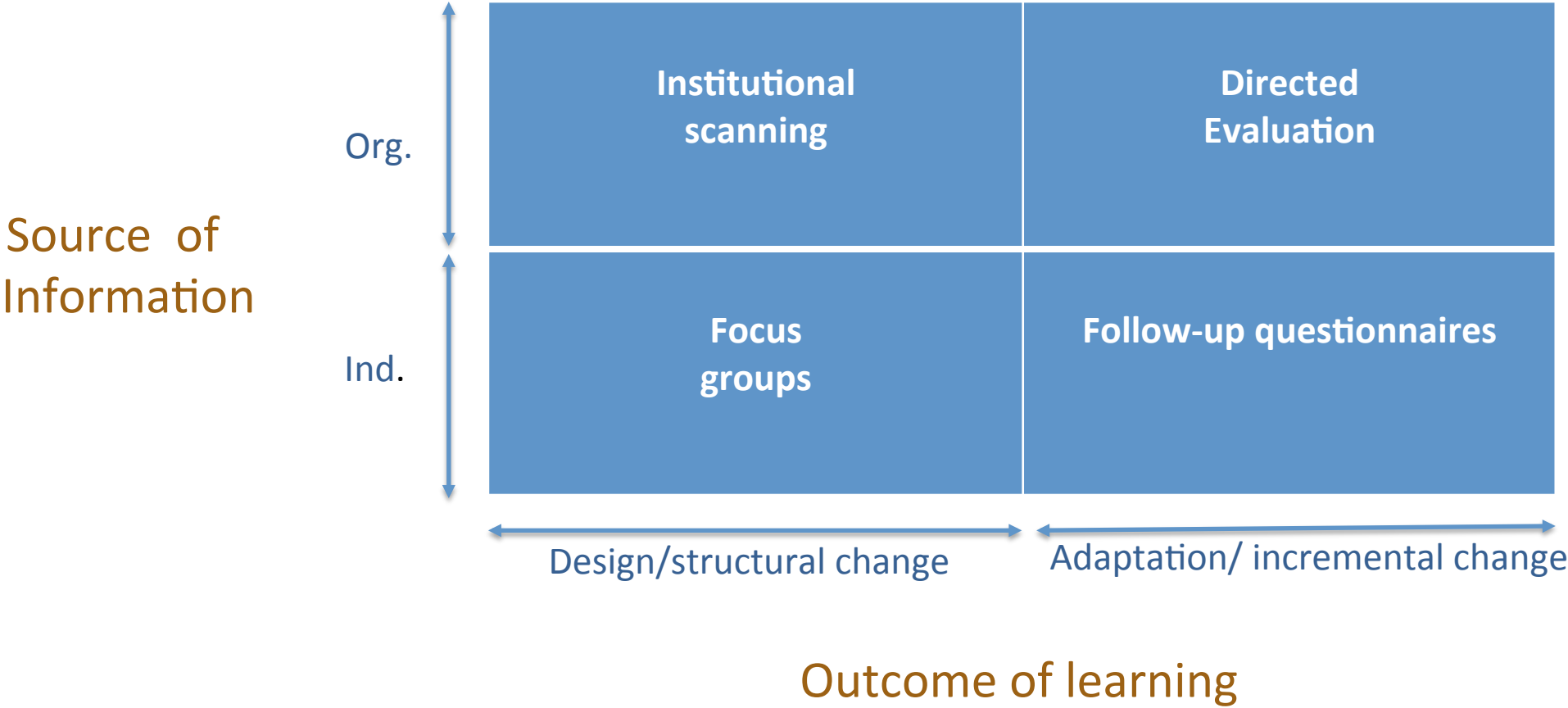


Learning tools

- Institutional scanning
 - » External: AHRC's knowledge transfer partnerships, Strategiska Stiftelsen mobility awards, KK stiftelsens Gränsgångare
 - » Internal: previous RJ instrument ABM
- Directed programme evaluation
- Follow-up questionnaires every 6 months
- Bi-annual workshops – focus groups



Tentative framework



Final remarks - next steps

- Additional data collection:
 - » reviewing a sample of the follow-up questionnaires
 - » Follow-up interviews with the program officers
 - » interviewing the funder agency board members
- Comparison to:
 - » similar funding instruments: multiple points of contact between funders and beneficiaries
 - » different funding instruments





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