



« Comment les offices mesurent-ils les effets de leurs actions? »

Evaluation du système d'information de dix offices fédéraux

- Administration fédérale des contributions
- Administration fédérale des douanes
- Office fédéral des transports
- Office fédéral de l'aviation civile
- Office fédéral de l'assurance militaire
- Office fédéral de la culture
- Office fédéral de la police
- Office fédéral des eaux et de la géologie
- Office vétérinaire fédéral
- Forces aériennes

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How do federal offices measure the effects of their actions? Evaluation of the information system in ten federal offices

Key facts

Should impact analysis be reinforced? This question is at the heart of the current debate surrounding a results-oriented culture. Impact analysis serves the purpose of accounting for the activities of the federal offices and of establishing the consequences of the measures taken. It also supplies criteria for judging the effectiveness of programmes and provides recommendations for improving them. Evaluations are not the only instrument which allow impacts to be analysed. Evaluations complement controlling, monitoring, performance audits, benchmarking and quality control, but represent the most comprehensive of all these procedures. At the level of the Confederation, there are no set **standards or uniform procedures**. The Netherlands, for example, has adopted a procedure by which the Ministry of Finance sets out analysis standards and criteria which each government department must apply.

In July 2002, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) decided to carry out a project aimed at revealing just how the federal offices analyse the effects of their activities. The project fell within the scope of moves to implement new article 170 of the Federal Constitution, which stipulates that all state measures must be evaluated. The intention being to conduct a situation appraisal of preparations within the federal offices. Ten offices were selected on the basis of criteria relating to implementing policies with high financial implications, to the relative absence of legislative evaluation clauses and to the absence of existing analyses providing information on the situation. The results give a picture of the situation in the offices at the end of 2003.

The analysis comes up with contrasting results. While the offices selected are without doubt very divergent and are more or less naturally inclined to conduct analyses on the effectiveness of their activities. However, big differences were noted and the practices are very varied. Some have acquired experience over many years, whereas others are at a less advanced stage. There is also **considerable organisational diversity** with some offices having a centralised structure and a concept for the entire office, whereas others leave it up to the departments and divisions. Some of the offices even have controls directly at the departmental level.

There is no common quality standard for carrying out analyses on the effects of the measures taken, sometimes not even within the office as a whole. Controlling is the instrument of preference of the offices and enables information on a project's progress to be supplied on a regular basis, as well as on achieving the objectives which have been set. Controlling is mainly based on the use of internal resources, but the current trend is to try to increasingly integrate measuring external effects.

In-depth analyses are conducted on a more sporadic basis. **It is rarely possible to identify the priorities in terms of the analyses to be conducted.** There is often a lack of indicators which would allow for systematic measurement of the effects of the measures taken. Data access is essential and constitutes a prerequisite for carrying out in-depth analyses. However, the offices sometimes have **difficulty in accessing data**, especially if this is held by the cantons. The complementarity of the different instruments is not always exploited, there is a problem concerning definition of the instruments. Standards differ from one office to the next. However, the SFAO notes with interest the **progress being made** in several services together with an awareness of the advantages of this type of analysis in the management of the office. Nonetheless, one can only imagine the effects these changes will have in view of the current streamlining measures.

The Federal Veterinary Office has several instruments, sets priorities relating to analyses and uses the results obtained from them. Conversely, the Federal Office of Police and the Federal Office for Civil Aviation, have to date had little experience in analysing the effects of measures taken. One can legitimately ask whether systematic controls on the part of the Federal Office for Civil Aviation would have enabled attention to be drawn to the shortcomings that existed, thereby avoiding some of the serious problems encountered over the last few years.

The Federal Office for Military Insurance, which will be attached to the Swiss National Accident Insurance Organisation this year, makes do with the analyses from controlling and rarely carries out in-depth analyses. The Federal Office of Culture still has little experience of impact analysis but some of its sections have themselves taken the initiative and are carrying out studies with the aim of integrating impact analysis from the beginning of a project. The Federal Tax Administration undertakes little to promote impact analysis. In general, it reacts to parliamentary initiatives or to external events. The Federal Customs Administration recently introduced service level agreements and defined a series of indicators to measure performance. The Swiss Air Force systematically uses benchmarking with other armed forces to measure the performance of its combat aircraft. Even if reforms in the armed forces have encouraged the Swiss Air Force to increasingly document results, the latter are scarcely ever published. The Federal Office of Transport carries out analyses of the potential effects of some of its projects but has relatively little experience of retrospective evaluations. In 2003 it developed a new evaluative concept applicable to the office as a whole. The Federal Office for Water and Geology mainly carries out technical analyses and has the advantage of being able to rely on external institutes.

The case of the Federal Veterinary Office shows that the existence of an integrated structure in an office allows information to be better coordinated and allows better planning of the analyses to be carried out. The example of the Federal Office of Culture indicates that sections are quite capable of taking the initiative to introduce impact analysis. The offices which refer to an impact model have a more coherent approach insofar as they have defined their main products or services and objectives in advance, as well as the way to check goal achievement and the impact of the measures. The question of the extent of resources to invest in analyses remains crucial: some offices fear not being able to carry out all the analyses

they would like; others prefer devoting resources to purely operational aspects. The great degree of diversity depending on the office concerned stems from the fact that they have very diverse tasks to carry out. This also explains why there is a need for the offices to maintain considerable **autonomy** in measuring the effects of their activities because this is a factor in implementing Art. 170 of the Federal Constitution. But this diversity is also the result of differences in assessing the necessity of evaluations and the different levels of experience. There is a need to introduce systematic practices and raise the level of those offices with least experience. It is a matter of optimally combining this need for autonomy and guiding impulses.

Article 170 of the Federal Constitution also requires an **integrated approach** to the information available, whether it is produced by the office itself or by other players: analysis of services provided (number, output cost), impact analysis (statistics, customer satisfaction polls, monitoring etc.), research and development, evaluations. These instruments are complementary and are not alternatives. It is up to the office to decide how it structures this information system and what resources it wishes to invest in impact analysis.

The SFAO distinguishes between different aspects of possible improvements depending on the situation of the office. The improved awareness and increased readiness of certain offices, the progress that has been made or even the reforms and on-going restructuring are opportunities to develop and reinforce the evaluation culture in the offices. The recent changes have shown that the situation is not unyielding and the offices, or at least some administrative units, have shown great interest and have carried out new tests to integrate impact analysis.

Various general possibilities for improvement have been outlined in the recommendations that the SFAO is submitting to each of the ten offices under scrutiny.

The recommendations of the SFAO have, in large part, been integrated into the report of the inter-departmental working group (IDEKOWI). The mandate of this inter-departmental group, established by the Conference of Secretaries General, was to submit proposals to implement Art. 170 in the federal administration. The Federal Council took note of this report in October 2004 and has adopted the majority of its recommendations.