

Examining Organizational Behavior Theory and Its Implications for Energy Efficiency Program Evaluation

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Overview

Commercial market actors customers invest in energy efficiency for different reasons that residential customers. However, energy efficiency program evaluators often rely on the same behavior change theories to measure the effectiveness of programs targeted at residential and commercial customers. While these theories are invaluable in many cases, they often frame the end user as an individual person or decision maker—neglecting to examine the unique decision-making practices, psychology, and social structures of organizations and markets whose energy efficiency behaviors are increasingly vital to the success of efficiency programs.

Authors in energy efficiency have added to the literature on organizational behavior with overarching literature reviews. This poster takes a deep dive into theories of organizational image and legitimacy to explore concerns for program attribution and causality when targeting organizations. This poster goes into depth to examine the processes of organizational “legitimization” among multinational manufacturers and retailers who are entering the efficiency space. Legitimization is the appraisal of actions in terms of common values to enhance the value of an organization within social structures. The process of legitimization is the series of decisions and practices that organizations adopt to justify its right to exist. Here, we look at the process of legitimization in the context of multinational corporate adoption of energy efficiency technology production and distribution.

Evaluation Implications

Increasingly in energy efficiency interventions, program administrators are looking for alternative models to drive market adoption of emerging technologies. In this pursuit, many program implementers are looking mid and upstream. However, very few studies have effectively determined the attribution and causality of program interventions mid and upstream. In many cases, image-based and green-washing corporate initiatives are a central concern in program attribution. In this poster, we detail how social science theorists have detailed the market, structural and organizational process of legitimization and discuss its role as a based decision-making model that is adaptive, reactive and continuously evolving. We outline how the “legitimization” process poses challenges to traditional models through defining legitimization processes, which speak to a number of behavior change theories such as resource-based models, business market norms, competitive differentiation, and the process norm creation for both markets and market actors. This poster outlines considerations for evaluators in assessing the impact of programs in this process of legitimization and details new researchable issues for upstream and midstream program interventions when considering how to measure program attribution and causality.