

# Maximising evaluation influence in an international development donor agency

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This article examines how current theories of evaluation use and evaluation influence can assist an international development donor agency, namely the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), to maximise the outcomes and track the consequences of evaluations of its country programs. It considers those theories most relevant to AusAID's evaluation interests and contexts, that is: instrumental use; conceptual (or enlightenment) use; process use; and evaluation influence. It finds that evaluation influence has much to offer in terms of linking evaluation outcomes to the achievement of program outcomes. By considering the mechanisms that can mediate evaluation influence, the framework underpinning evaluation influence theory builds on many of the central tenets identified in evaluation use theories and encourages the consideration of an evaluation as an intervention in itself. The principal benefit of doing so is to understand when, and why, some use of evaluation occurs and when and why it does not.

Evaluation influence theory holds the potential for AusAID to maximise its evaluation efforts and strengthen its country programs. The systematic consideration of which mechanisms can influence the intermediate and long-term outcomes that lead to social betterment is the key to realising this potential. Empirical research into these mechanisms could both assist and be assisted by AusAID embracing an approach of valuing evaluations as an intervention in themselves.

## Introduction

Evaluation efforts represent a substantial investment of resources on the part of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and maximising their outcomes is of significant interest and importance. The considerable potential evaluations hold for informing policy and improving the delivery of programs to alleviate poverty is, however, not automatically translated into reality.

What constitutes 'use' of an evaluation and how to facilitate it have been topics of discussion among evaluation theorists for a considerable amount of time. Along the way, the discussion has led to resurgent conversations and animated debates, such as the one between Weiss and Patton (Weiss 1988). There is, however, little evidence of specific consideration of evaluation use and influence theories by international aid agencies<sup>2</sup>, which seem to be more

preoccupied with methodological considerations; for example, promoting the use of evidence-based practice. This article explores how evaluation use and influence theories can assist AusAID turn evaluation potential into reality for its country programs.

### **AusAID: evaluation interests and contexts**

In considering the benefits that can accrue from theories of evaluation use and evaluation influence, it is important first to gain an appreciation of AusAID's evaluation interests and the contexts in which evaluations occur. This section briefly explores these two areas.

#### **Evaluation interests: aid effectiveness and accountability**

Recent years have seen an increasing international debate about the need for the evaluation of aid programs as well as advances in evaluation methodologies. With growing community interest in aid effectiveness, donor agencies are increasingly seeking credible evaluations of the long-term impact of aid initiatives, using rigorous social science methods (Davidson & Rogers 2009). One of AusAID's primary evaluation interests is in proving, and improving, aid effectiveness.

#### **Aid effectiveness**

The aid effectiveness agenda, set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) (OECD 2010), aims to improve the quality of the delivery, management and use of development assistance in order to maximise its development impacts. The Paris Declaration principles are ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability. Accra Agenda themes include the use of partner country systems, technical assistance, aid predictability and the division of labour. The scope of an AusAID evaluation will likely touch on one or more of these principles or themes. However, the usefulness of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda as an overarching framework for evaluating effectiveness is limited by their focus on donor behaviour and business practices. There are several challenges in measuring development effectiveness; although, discussion of these is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>3</sup> Suffice to say, the approach adopted by AusAID is to comment, to the extent that it is possible, on:

- how the aid program performs against issues known to impact on effectiveness
- issues of quality of aid implementation
- performance data on aid activities underway
- information on results of aid activities

- information and results at the country level (to which AusAID may have contributed to some extent)
- assessments of performance at the country and sectoral level
- in-depth assessments of effectiveness at the country level and across different countries in particular sectors. (Davidson & Rogers 2009, p. 13)

There are a number of reporting systems that enable AusAID to comment on the factors outlined above and evaluation efforts are integral to these reporting systems. AusAID states that evaluations are an important part of learning and accountability about aid effectiveness, with 'good' evaluations considering the following elements of aid activity: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; impact; sustainability of benefits and systems; and promotion of gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Accountability**

AusAID's other primary evaluation interest is fulfilling its legislative requirements to account to the Australian Parliament for the administration of the development assistance budget. AusAID is also responsible for providing official statistics on Australia's overseas aid program. Evaluations play an important role in ensuring the agency fulfils these accountability obligations. Furthermore, evaluations also assist the agency justify opportunity costs of a chosen aid intervention in an environment of limited public expenditure and competing priorities.

#### **Evaluation contexts: operating environment and organisational setting**

Evaluation efforts need to keep up with, and be cognisant of, the operating environment for aid delivery as well as AusAID's organisational attributes.

#### **Operating environment**

The operating environment for aid delivery is a dynamic one and works as an open system that is constantly changing to meet new challenges and to take on emerging theories of best practice in delivery of aid. The complexity of this operating environment is illustrated by: increasingly large numbers of donors; weak administrative systems in partner countries; numerous models of resource transfer; influences on development other than aid; and devolved (in-country) responsibility for management of Australia's aid program (Davidson & Rogers 2009).

In theory, the delivery of aid is supported by multi-year country or regional strategies that define *what* priority sectors Australia's aid will be targeted to, *why* those priority sectors have been chosen and *how* aid objectives will be achieved. These strategies are key to supporting Australia's aid effectiveness, by:

- providing a framework to guide policy dialogue, aid activities, partnerships and other elements that contribute directly to achieving development objectives
- providing the basis for assessing the effectiveness of Australian aid, through setting out what Australian aid is intending to achieve (its objectives), and how progress towards those objectives will be measured and managed
- aligning to the priorities and needs of the partner country, harmonising with the activities of other donors in the country, and encouraging mutual accountability between donor and partner country governments.
- promoting a focus on managing for results.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that the lack of robustness of these country strategies, their lack of centrality to program management, and their unmeasurable and/or unrealistic objectives have been identified as serious issues for AusAID (ANAO 2009).

Evaluation efforts in AusAID are complex and multi-dimensional, and undertaken at several levels by different stakeholders for a variety of purposes. Activity level (project and program) evaluations are typically undertaken internally by the program implementers with periodic independent reviews commissioned by AusAID (usually for the purpose of checking progress towards outcomes). Country strategy evaluations are also commissioned and usually undertaken by a team of independent evaluators, AusAID staff and partner government representatives jointly assessing the contribution that Australia's aid program is making in the context of the partner country's own development agenda. Then, ex-post evaluations are commissioned by AusAID and usually involve an independent review of a program undertaken several years after completion, to assess the impact of program outcomes. Evaluations looking at specific issues adversely impacting development (for example, HIV/AIDS, violence against women) are also undertaken periodically.

All evaluations have in common a diverse range of stakeholders whose involvement in the evaluation is critical yet disparate. These stakeholders range from program beneficiaries and implementing agencies to partner government representatives and AusAID program managers. All evaluations contend with both the Australian and partner country political and policy environments.

### Organisational setting

Drawing on the six organisational factors identified by Cousins and Leithwood, and Hudson-Mobbs (cited in Owen 2006, p. 116) to affect utilisation, the following statements present a summary of AusAID's *organisational setting*, relevant to its evaluation efforts:

- 1 AusAID has a strong stated *commitment* to undertaking evaluations. Its Performance Management and Evaluation Policy (PMEP) outlines a comprehensive approach that requires new aid activities to be subjected to peer and independent appraisal, and sees aid results assessed from three different perspectives: annual program performance; aid activity performance; and evaluations.
- 2 AusAID actively seeks *new knowledge* using alternative and varied *sources of information*. AusAID has a 'Quality Reporting System' (QRS) that aims to measure the quality of activities, and make available reliable, valid and robust information to assist ongoing improvements of program management, and to meet external accountability.
- 3 The *individual attitudes* towards evaluation efforts and the *influence and experience* of individuals within AusAID are hugely disparate. Theorists such as Owen (2006) and Patton (1997) note that desire for, and commitment to, program improvement is a driving factor that in turn increases use. AusAID program managers, to a large extent, have this desire and commitment. However, the impact of the decision-making context of AusAID cannot be underestimated.
- 4 AusAID's *decision-making context* is multi-layered. Both retrospective decision-making and prospective decision-making occur in the context of evaluations, though decisions are predominantly prospective in nature. There are motivating factors (for example, delivering against political priorities), other than rational decision-making for program betterment, that are at play. This is not intended as a criticism to berate program managers, but a reflection of the operating environment that is needed to deliver programs and meet political expectations. Theorists such as Weiss argue that evaluators need to be cognisant of organisational dynamics and influences other than the rational model of decision-making (Weiss 1988). This would appear to be the case for AusAID. The identification and documentation of the type of decision(s) that will be made based on evaluation findings is sporadic.
- 5 Both Australian and partner country *political and policy environments* are significantly influential. The predominant feature of the current political/policy environment is the significant and rapid expansion of Australia's aid program.<sup>6</sup>
- 6 The *financial* climate of the agency is known in the sense that information regarding available resources is readily available to AusAID personnel (if not outside the agency).

An additional and influential factor to those identified above, is AusAID's human resource situation. The Australian National Audit Office's report (ANAO 2009) found that AusAID has a long-running problem with high staff turnover and mobility, which is reducing program effectiveness. It also hinders knowledge accumulation, which in turn creates a serious impediment to maximising the outcomes of evaluation efforts.

### **Theories of evaluation use and influence: what can they offer AusAID?**

The theories most relevant to AusAID's evaluation interests and contexts are instrumental use, conceptual use, process use and evaluation influence.<sup>7</sup> This section examines these theories critically and the extent to which they can assist AusAID maximise the outcomes of its evaluation efforts.

#### **Instrumental use**

Instrumental use is defined by the principle that the extent to which an evaluation is deemed to have been used is directly proportionate to whether the evaluation affected the program under review. In other words, if an evaluation's findings are not drawn on to make decisions about the program under review, it is considered to have been of little use. This primary criterion for judging evaluation was embraced by Michael Patton who developed a comprehensive, and perhaps the most well-known, approach about how to carry out evaluations in order to maximise instrumental use. Utilisation-focused evaluation is 'an evaluative process, strategy and framework for making decisions about the content, focus and methods of an evaluation' (Patton 2002a, p. 173). For Patton, utilisation-focused evaluation supports what he sees as an evaluator's obligation to ensure use takes place. This obligation is not fulfilled by producing a methodologically perfect evaluation which speaks to, and of, an absolute truth, but rather through a process that recognises the primacy of the people who are going to use the evaluation results. Patton's familiar catch-phrase 'intended use by intended users' is at the heart of utilisation-focused evaluation and central to his psychology of use that underpins this, whereby:

... intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings; they are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved; by actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is training users in use, preparing the groundwork for use, and reinforcing the intended utility of the evaluation every step along the way. (Patton 2002b, p. 1)

This instrumental notion of evaluation use is prevalent in AusAID. The agency's monitoring and evaluation policies actively encourage program managers to undertake evaluations to provide independent, credible information on which to base future decisions regarding the program under review. These decisions most often affect the funding and scope of activities but can also lead to cessation of a program. AusAID has processes and guidelines in place to support instrumental use, such as evaluation planning, stakeholder engagement, debriefing conduct, reporting requirements focusing on mutual decision-making regarding recommendations, and peer review of evaluations. Instrumental use theory, in particular utilisation-focused evaluation, gives the agency specific tools from which to strengthen its existing processes and guidelines. However, too strong an emphasis on instrumental use within AusAID could lead to a situation where implemented recommendations equate to 'evaluation use', which precludes acknowledgement of the individual, programmatic and organisational learning that comes about with undertaking evaluations (Weiss 1998). It also raises the question of what happens when 'too many other considerations intrude on program decisions and operations for evaluation results to carry the day' (Weiss 1998, p. 25). Other theories of evaluation use provide useful insights into the advantages of recognising the non-instrumental ends of evaluation results.

#### **Conceptual use**

Conceptual use, or enlightenment, refers to instances where an evaluation can lead to changes in perception or understanding of a program in the absence of decision-making related to the program. This kind of use supports those involved with a program to change their understanding of a program, gain new ideas and learn about the strengths and weaknesses of a program, even if applying the findings of an evaluation directly at the time of its conclusion is not possible (Weiss 1998). Owen (2006) talks of three phases of enlightenment: reception (of relevant information by policymakers); cognition (read, digest and understand the information); and reference (the policymaker's frame of reference is altered in some way). He posits enlightenment as a precursor to other forms of use. This is a helpful way to consider conceptual use and suggests that conceptual and instrumental use are not mutually exclusive. Weiss (1998) contends that conceptual understandings can be used in instrumental ways if organisational conditions become receptive. Shadish, Cook and Leviton (1991) argue that engaging with evaluation users for the purpose of promoting instrumental use also aids conceptual use (although they acknowledge that evaluations that fulfil instrumental use will sacrifice conceptual use to some extent).

In practice, a focus on conceptual use promotes a strong educative role for evaluators (Owen 2006). AusAID's 'Monitoring and Evaluation Panel' arrangement<sup>8</sup> picks up on the role of evaluators as educators and recognises the positive influence that can be gained through 'learning', not just 'doing', as a result of evaluation efforts. Weiss (1999) takes a pragmatic view about evaluation efforts impacting on policy and programs and advocates an approach that sees persuasive evidence of a particular strategy or program accumulated over time. This approach is both problematic and appealing in the AusAID context. As an organisation, AusAID has intrinsic weaknesses that would challenge the effectiveness of this approach, not least of which is high staff turnover, leading to the loss of cumulative evaluation knowledge. On the other hand, given the high staff turnover within the agency, a focus on conceptual use could result in significant learning for managers new to a program under review. This, in turn, could increase their ability to manage the program effectively in order to achieve the intended developmental results.

Though unlikely to be accepted as a legitimate use in its own right in AusAID (given the propensity for instrumental use and the pressure for evaluations to demonstrate value for money against effectiveness and accountability interests) it is nevertheless valuable to acknowledge the benefits of enlightenment in leading to improvements in program knowledge.

### Process use

While conceptual use enlightens stakeholders about a program, process use refers to the broader changes that can be brought about by engagement in an evaluation process. Patton's definition of process use summarises these changes:

Process use refers to, and is indicated by, individual changes in thinking and behaviour, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process. Evidence of process use is represented by statements such as this one after an evaluation: 'The impact on our program came not just from the findings but also from going through the thinking process that the evaluation required'. (Patton 1997, p. 90)

Specifically, cognitive and behavioural changes are expected as a direct result of involvement in the evaluation process (Preskill & Caracelli 1997, p. 13). Theories of process use assist with understanding ways in which individuals learn about the program, evaluation practice and each other from their involvement in an evaluation. However, for process use to succeed in this endeavour there must be an element of

intentionality, that is, an active desire for the evaluation process to build capacity (King 2007). The purposeful application of evaluation process to teach evaluative inquiry (Patton 1997) has distinct advantages in the context of AusAID's country strategies. It can result in individual, program and organisational learning as well as increasing AusAID's overall evaluation capacity, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Common to the methods put forward by theorists (for example, Patton 1997 and King 2007) to realise intentional process use, is the centrality of participatory and collaborative methods. Evaluators themselves have also acknowledged the importance of working closely with stakeholders throughout an evaluation's design and implementation in order to facilitate greater use<sup>9</sup> (Preskill & Caracelli 1997). However, the purposeful involvement of stakeholders in evaluations is not without its difficulties. King and Ehlert (2008) identify four

### FIGURE 1: THE PURPOSEFUL APPLICATION OF A NEW EVALUATION APPROACH

In 2005, AusAID introduced a new evaluation approach to support the annual assessment of its bilateral program with Fiji. The evaluation approach was adapted from a performance measurement approach called 'contribution analysis' which was developed by John Mayne (2001). There was a purposeful intention to cultivate shared evaluation learning from participation in the evaluation effort. This saw significant time and dedicated resources for AusAID staff, sector programs and Government of Fiji (GoF) counterparts to build a common understanding of, and commitment to, the new evaluative approach.

A strong collaborative approach was used during the evaluation itself with extensive participation from all stakeholders, and a focus on shared learning from the experience. Qualitative evidence points to increased confidence of AusAID staff to engage in meaningful conversations about evaluation with the sectoral programs; strengthened relationships with counterparts in the GoF (particularly the central planning unit); and increased opportunities to discuss constructively the GoF's own evaluation efforts of its national development plans; all as a result of participation in the evaluation. It has also been argued that the joint commitment to evaluation that was nurtured directly, contributed to a greater focus on, and resources for, monitoring and evaluation efforts of the sectoral programs (Kotvojs & Shrimpton 2007).

lessons, which are pertinent to AusAID, from experiences of involving stakeholders in evaluations:

First, ... it may be easier not to involve multiple stakeholders than to involve them. Second, once multiple stakeholders are actively involved, the evaluator and client must be willing to handle the complexities of logistical arrangements and the potential conflicts that may arise. Third, it takes skill to establish meaningful interactive processes and structures that can involve multiple stakeholders over time. Finally, evaluators must recognize that involving multiple stakeholders may require additional resources. (King & Ehlert 2008, p. 194)

Patton (2007) has argued that process use is best conceived of as a sensitising concept rather than an operational concept. He argues that by the very nature of its abstraction, it is difficult to come to agreement on how to operationalise or measure it. In this sense, process use would serve the agency well by informing the principles that guide evaluations. Specific inclusion of the learning benefits that arise from evaluation participation in the principles would seem to be a good fit.

### Evaluation influence

Evaluation influence has been presented as both an extension to theories of evaluation use, and a way to address their perceived inadequacies. In particular, the centrality of results-based 'use' is argued to limit the understanding and recognition of non-results-based applications, production of unintended effects and gradual emergence of impact (Kirkhart 2000). Henry and Mark (2003, 2004) criticise the literature on use for its focus on the precursors of use (for example, credibility of the evaluation, stakeholder involvement) and general forms of possible use (such as the ones described above) at the expense of exploring the intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal change processes through which evaluation findings and processes influence attitudes, motivations and actions, which in turn translate into steps towards social betterment.

Evaluation influence theory incorporates many of the central tenets identified in evaluation use theories, but places specific emphasis on the change processes that occur during an evaluation as a result of influence, which is defined as: 'the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means' (Kirkhart 2000, p. 7). Evaluation influence theory also considers how to link evaluation outcomes to the achievement of program outcomes.

Evaluation influence as originally put forward by Kirkhart (2000) rejoins previous discussions about appropriate terminology to describe the impact of evaluation. In this regard, evaluation influence is both a step backward, and a leap forward. Evaluation influence theory has been described

as a model that unites prior discussion on use, by 'creating a framework with which to examine effects that are multidimensional, incremental, unintentional, and non-instrumental, alongside those that are unidirectional, episodic, intended and instrumental' (Kirkhart 2000, p. 7). The diagram in Figure 2 is a depiction of Kirkhart's framework, which combines the two types of sources of influence (process and result) in a single model with interrelated subcategories within each source.

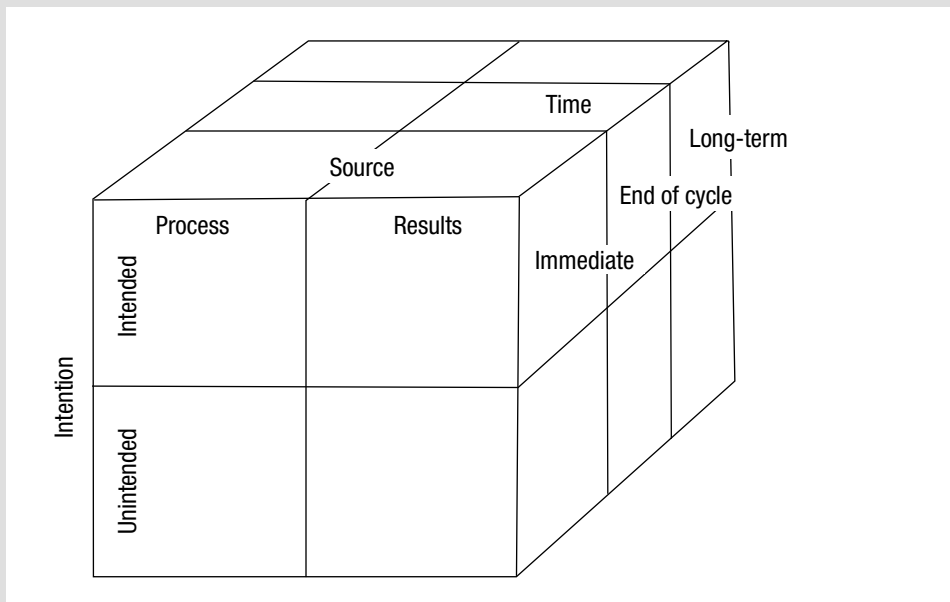
Kirkhart's integrated theory of influence allows for all permutations to describe evaluation impacts; for example, long-term, unintentional, process influence as well as short-term, intentional, results use.

Evaluation influence incorporates many of the central tenets identified in evaluation use theories discussed earlier, but places specific emphasis on the change processes that occur during an evaluation as a result of influence. To understand this aspect of evaluation influence theory better, we look to Henry and Mark (2003, 2004). These authors build on Kirkhart's integrated model of evaluation influence by detailing: 1) the mechanisms through which evaluation may achieve influence, and 2) the outcomes that would indicate that influence had occurred. Henry and Mark (2003, p. 297) 'classify change processes and outcomes that evaluation can influence in terms of three levels: individual, interpersonal, and collective'. The mechanisms through which evaluation produces influences are depicted in Table 1 below. The influence processes in Table 1 are interlinked and based on the premise that evaluations, and their findings, can trigger one process that stimulates another (or more) that mediates the consequences of the evaluation (Henry & Mark 2004).

Henry and Mark (2004) contend that by attending to the above mechanisms, evaluators are better placed to plan for and recognise the multiple processes that flow from one to another and ultimately lead to the realisation of consequences of an evaluation. There exists a duality to the processes included in Table 1, with each one able to take on the role of an outcome of evaluation and/or an underlying mechanism leading to an outcome (Henry & Mark 2004). Henry and Mark (2004, p. 44) situate instrumental and conceptual uses in Table 1 by noting that 'instrumental use corresponds to the behavioural row ... and conceptual use to the cognitive and affective row'. Meanwhile, process use cannot correspond to the row or processes in Table 1, as it is 'defined by whether influence is triggered ... by evaluation activities rather than by evaluation outputs (that is, findings)' (Henry & Mark 2004, p. 44). This perception of process use accords with Patton's argument, noted above, that process use is a sensitising, rather than operational, concept.

Henry and Mark (2004, p. 45) situate the mechanisms outlined in Table 1 in their nascent framework of evaluation influence<sup>10</sup>, which is

**FIGURE 2: KIRKHART'S INTEGRATED THEORY OF INFLUENCE**



*Source* of influence refers to the active agent of change or the starting point of a generative process of change.

*Intention* refers to the extent to which there is purposeful direction to exert a particular kind of influence through the evaluation.

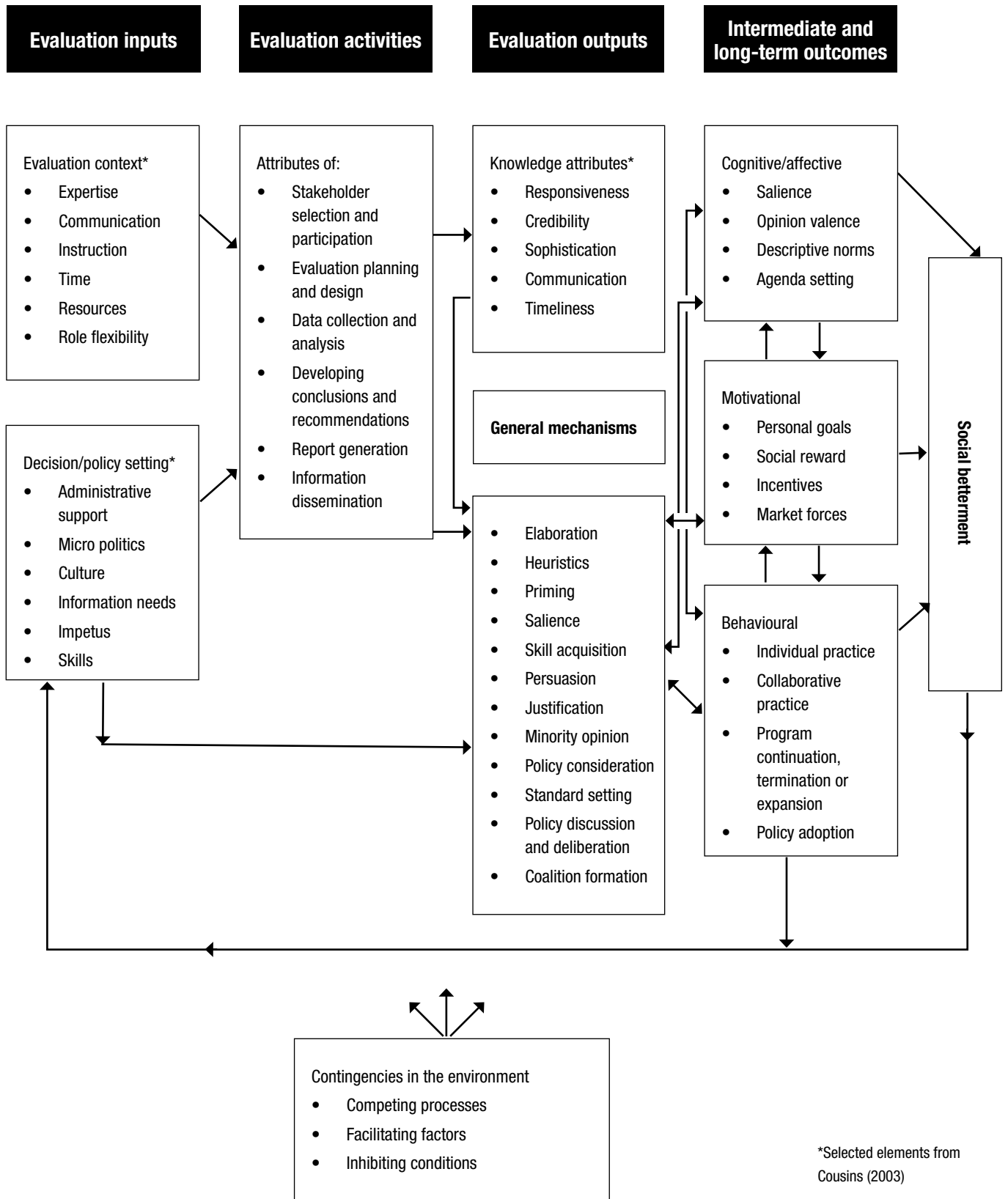
*Time* refers to the chronological or developmental periods in which evaluation influence emerges, exists or continues.

(Adapted from Kirkhart 2000)

**TABLE 1: A MODEL OF MECHANISMS THAT MAY MEDIATE EVALUATION INFLUENCE**

Type of process/outcome	Level of analysis		
	Individual	Interpersonal	Collective
General influence	Elaboration Heuristics Priming Skill acquisition	Justification Persuasion Change agent Minority-opinion influence	Ritualism Legislative hearings Coalition formation Drafting legislation Standard setting Policy consideration
Cognitive and affective	Salience Opinion/attitude valence	Local descriptive norms	Agenda setting Policy-oriented learning
Motivational	Personal goals and aspirations	Injunctive norms Social reward Exchange	Structural incentives Market forces
Behavioral	New skill performance Individual change in practice	Collaborative change in practice	Program continuation, cessation or change Policy change Diffusion

FIGURE 3: FRAMEWORK OF EVALUATION INFLUENCE



depicted in Figure 3. The key here is that the influence processes are: ‘expected to mediate the effects of evaluation activities on evaluation outcomes’.

Of the benefits Henry and Mark (2004) see accruing from this framework, those of most relevance to the AusAID context include:

- articulating the bi-directional pathways that exist between the underlying mechanisms and outcomes
- acknowledging ‘contingencies in the environment, both facilitating and inhibiting factors and other processes that compete with evaluation influence processes’ (p. 47)
- including ‘social betterment, the ultimate desired outcome by which evaluation’s consequences ultimately should be judged’ (p. 47)
- guiding the development of better influence plans for evaluation practice
- providing a basis for more thoughtful discussion about the responsibilities of the evaluator for evaluation influence.

In addition are the benefits that can be reaped from valuing and treating evaluations as interventions in themselves (detailed in the following section). Evaluation influence theory goes a step further than most evaluation use theories by encouraging the consideration of an evaluation as an intervention in itself in order to link evaluation outcomes to the achievement of program outcomes (Henry & Mark 2003).

### **Evaluation influence: the way forward for maximising evaluation outcomes?**

This section considers further the evaluation influence framework and mechanisms put forward by Henry and Mark (2003, 2004), arguing that valuing and treating evaluations as interventions in themselves could reap significant benefits for AusAID.

Each theory of use has its benefits, but ultimately an evaluation commissioner needs to draw on elements from all theories in order to meet the various stakeholder and political demands that come with commissioning an evaluation and making use of it and its findings. Evaluation influence theory can help the commissioner achieve this by providing an integrated framework that captures all types of ‘use’ and sets out the language for commissioners to work with evaluators to map out possible pathways of evaluation influence (which can then be used to determine when and why use has occurred, or not).

It is reasonable to assume that AusAID program managers, like evaluators themselves, see the primary role of evaluations as the provision of information for decision-making and improving programs (Preskill & Caracelli 1997). However, do we really know why some evaluation efforts result

in positive change and others do not? For the most part, there is little empirical evidence exploring the conducive and inhibiting factors for maximising the outcomes of evaluations in AusAID. This is where evaluation influence theory can help. By examining the pathways of evaluation influence, logic models of influence can be developed and tested (Henry & Mark 2003). This is one of several benefits of conceiving an evaluation to be an intervention in itself, analogous with a program. Other benefits of treating an evaluation as an intervention in itself include that it:

- moves away from the pressure to have an evaluation that presents recommendations that *must* be implemented or *must* be ignored, depending on one’s perception and self-interest
- emphasises the planning aspect of evaluation (which has been noted by several theorists to be crucial to the effective conduct and impact of evaluation efforts)
- creates awareness of the multiple outcomes of evaluation within AusAID and emphasises the positive aspects of evaluations that can assist with developing meaningful, effective relationships with partner governments and program implementers
- has the potential to involve stakeholders more in evaluation efforts
- is helpful in identifying ways in which evaluation commissioners can maximise use themselves.

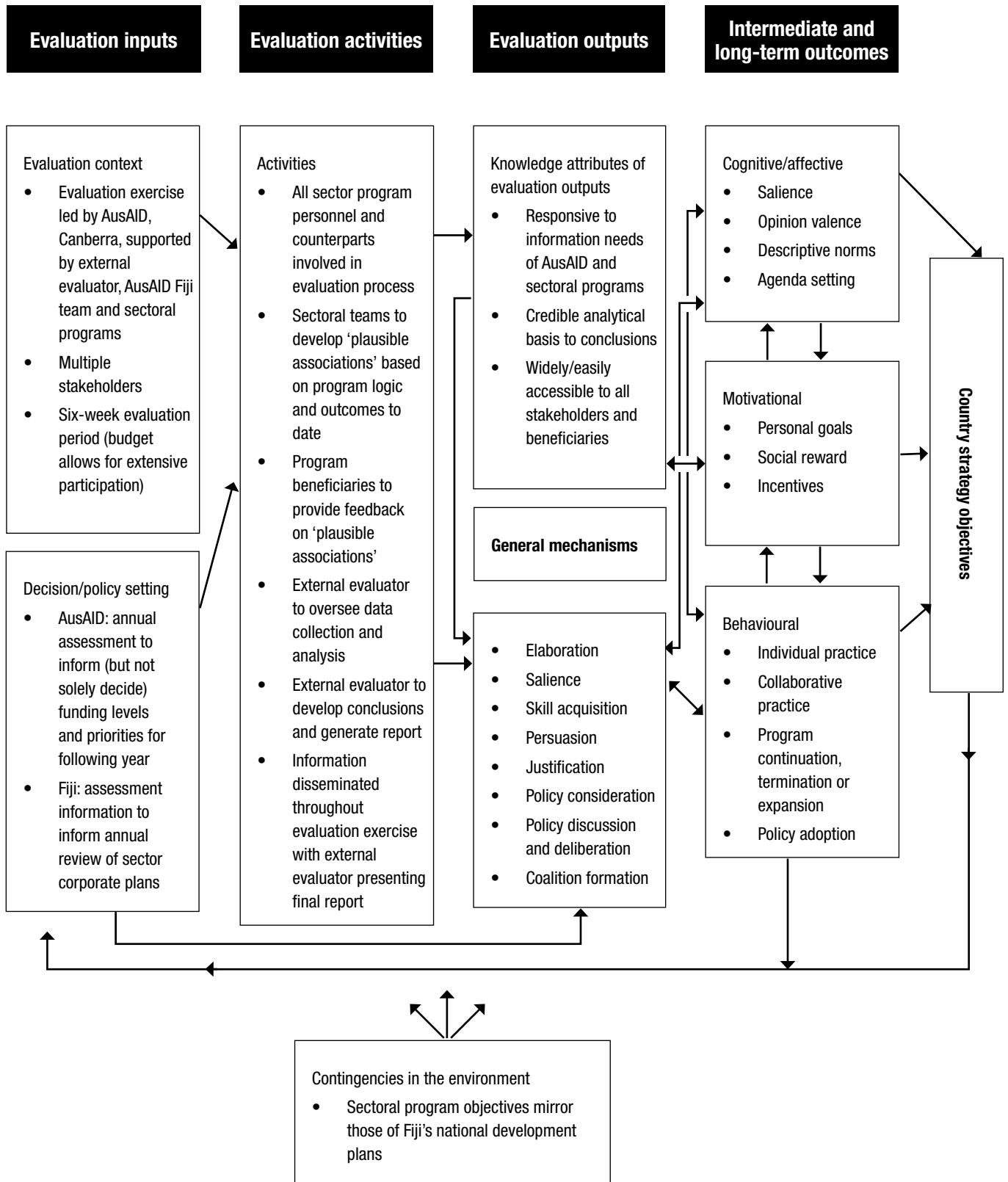
The framework of evaluation influence outlined in Figure 4 can be used to develop evaluation-specific influence logic models that:

... connect evaluation activities and outputs with evaluation outcomes, identifying potential linkages between immediate, intermediate, and long-range outcomes that are indicators or precursors of the specific long-range social goals that motivate evaluation’ (Henry & Mark 2003, p. 296).

Returning to the contribution analysis example in Figure 1, an abridged example of an evaluation-specific influence logic model that could be used to guide an evaluation is shown in Figure 4.

As noted above, one significant benefit of doing this is that we can consider when, and why, some ‘use’ of evaluation occurs and when and why it does not (Henry & Mark 2003). However, identifying and understanding the mechanisms that may mediate evaluation influence is critical to realising this benefit—as is the capacity to make judgements about which mechanisms have mediated evaluation influence. This could conceivably be undertaken by nurturing joint understanding and agreement between stakeholders of the likely influential mechanisms. In the case of the contribution analysis example above, the capacity to make a judgement

FIGURE 4: EVALUATION INFLUENCE LOGIC MODEL FOR CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS EXERCISE



regarding which mechanisms have succeeded in mediating evaluation influence could be built into the evaluation process itself. As the evaluation effort is an annual process of determining the contribution Australian assistance has made to Fiji's national development effort, there is a natural opportunity to integrate a 'feedback loop' from one year to the next. In practice, this could involve systematic consideration of the general mechanisms immediately following the conclusion of evaluation outputs, and systematic consideration of the general mechanisms and intermediate and long-term outcomes at the beginning of each new evaluation effort the following year. Over time, evidence could be accumulated to elucidate the mechanisms that have been successful in mediating evaluation influence, and why. Likewise those mechanisms that do not appear to have an impact as either a trigger or outcome could be explored. Additional mechanisms could also be identified from this systematic consideration.

Such information could also support needed empirical research into evaluation influence. Although the concept of evaluation influence has become increasingly noticeable in conceptual literature over the past decade (Henry & Mark 2003, 2004; Kirkhart 2000; Morabito 2002), there is little empirical evidence of its validity and/or success. But then, this is not uncommon in evaluation literature, where it can take some time for theory and empirical evidence to converge. For example, direct investigations of process use took several years to appear in research following Patton's inclusion of process use in his 1997 edition of *Utilization-focused Evaluation* (Amo & Cousins 2007).

## Conclusion

In examining evaluation use and influence theories relevant to AusAID, this article has found that evaluation influence theory holds significant potential for this organisation to maximise its evaluation efforts and strengthen its country strategies. The systematic consideration of which mechanisms can influence the intermediate and long-term outcomes that lead to social betterment (as represented by the development outcomes stated in the country strategy) is the key to realising this potential. Henry and Mark's integrated framework serves as a useful model for combining consideration of different types of use with the underlying mechanisms that lead to evaluation outcomes. Empirical research into these mechanisms could both aid and be aided by AusAID embracing an approach of valuing evaluations as interventions in themselves.

## Notes

- 1 The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of AusAID.
- 2 Carden and Earl's (2007) exploration of process use in Canada's International Development Research Centre is a notable exception.
- 3 For an overview of some of the challenges Australia's aid program faces in measuring effectiveness, see Davidson and Rogers (2009).
- 4 See <<http://ausaid.gov.au/ode/default.cfm>>.
- 5 See <<http://ausaid.gov.au/ode/default.cfm>> for further information on Australia's country strategies.
- 6 The Australian Government has committed to increase its Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the current level of .34 per cent of Gross National Income to 0.5 per cent by 2015–2016.
- 7 Other theories, most notably symbolic use and imposed use, have been purposefully omitted from this discussion. The limited ability of these theories to affect any change in the programs reviewed (Owen 2006) is the primary reason for the omission.
- 8 AusAID's Monitoring and Evaluation Panel comprises experienced evaluators external to the agency whose role is to support, educate and assist program managers undertake effective evaluations.
- 9 Preskill & Caracelli (1997) report that 80 per cent of evaluators surveyed rated involving stakeholders in the evaluation process as extremely or greatly important in facilitating evaluation use.
- 10 Henry and Mark (2004) present the framework as a starting point that would both generate and be informed by future theoretical and empirical work.

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