

# **The evaluator as a catalyst for change**

AES Workshop, 1 July 2009

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# Workshop overview

- What factors affect utilisation/uptake of evaluation?
- How can the evaluator enhance learning journeys/change processes?

# Quick brainstorm

- If the evaluator (internal or external) is intending to be a catalyst for change, then what types of change are we seeking to bring about?
- What types of change might 'participants' – clients, stakeholders - be seeking or want facilitated?

# Factors affecting utilisation\*

- Characteristics of the evaluation that lead to better understanding and engendering changing
- Characteristics of the setting in which the findings are to be utilised

\* Owen, JM & Rogers.P (1999). *Program Evaluation: forms and approaches*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Allen & Unwin., p105-129

# Characteristics of the evaluation

- relevance
- credibility
- quality
- findings
- communication
- timeliness of reporting

# Characteristics of the setting

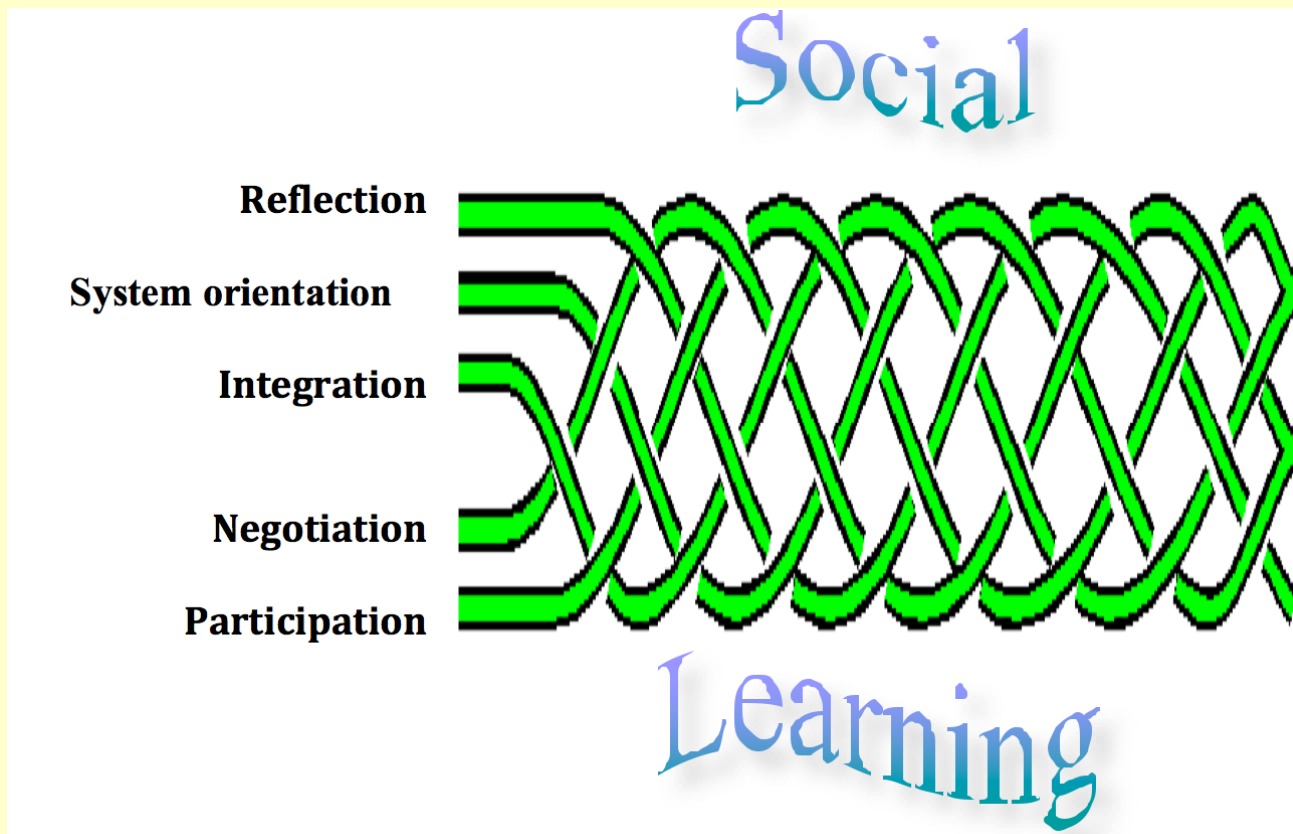
- Commitment
- information needs
- personal characteristics
- decision-making
- political climate
- financial climate

# Action research/evaluation contexts

Pragmatic theory and practice for evaluations premised on making changes in organisations and communities – evaluator as an invited facilitator with skills to catalyse:

- *Social Learning journeys* for stakeholders and evaluators e.g. tracing emergent outcomes; introducing systems thinking tools; fostering knowledge exchanges
- Engaging with, power with (not power over), illuminating and enlightening clients or stakeholders to identify their needs, gaps, situation analyses, SWOTS – broadening the beneficial key outcomes of evaluation processes
- *Anecdote circles* and MSC – collaborative sense-making as participatory evaluation processes and tools
- Negotiated decisions on best ways forward - replace the external expert's 'god view' of requisite changes

# Catalyzing Social Learning



# Case-study - TBS's Volunteer Home Visiting Program evaluation

- **Organisational context** – use of evaluation findings is an emerging area. Only now beginning to get longitudinal client outcome data
- **VHV program evaluation** –
  - Quantitative outcome evaluation of 4 VHV programs
- **Dissemination and communication mechanisms** –
  - Results presented to program managers
  - Discussion facilitated around what the results meant for their practice and wider policy

# Case-study - TBS's Volunteer Home Visiting Program evaluation

- **Reaction and receptiveness**
  - Positive, but limited in breadth of thinking around change 'we can use it as evidence to lobby for more funding'
  - Evaluation 'missed' over data management and monitoring issues (trying to do two things at once)
- **Challenges**
  - System of funding often means evaluation linked to concerns about program continuance. Difficult to expand thought to practice change and improvement
  - Mixed method would have provided more evidence but limited evaluation resources
  - Big overhauls to practice not possible as constrained by service specifications handed down by government

# Task

1. Select one evaluation where findings have been utilised and identify the characteristics that contributed to uptake.
2. Select one evaluation where findings were not utilised and identify anything you would do differently.

# Brainstorm findings – What ‘changes’ are you seeking?

- In a capacity building framework – increased awareness of goals/organisational purpose
- Clarity of program’s scope
- Service improvement
  - To practices.
    - Helpful to be part of an operational team
    - Action research
    - Need for champions
- Challenges
  - Lack of influence
  - Changing policy is difficult if you are more focused on immediate service
  - Is changing policy the role of the evaluator? What if there is no mandate? Do we know changes are being made?
- Gathering evidence to justify existence

# Success factors in evaluation utilisation

- A small or discrete group of stakeholders
- Use of mixed methods – qualitative data can provide ‘emotive weight’
- Regular feedback/meetings with stakeholders
- Providing results in more accessible formats e.g. snapshots, report cards
- Clearly identify to whom the report needs to go
- Ensure report has specific recommendations
- Clarity of purpose upfront – what are we doing the evaluation for? Stakeholders need to have a good understanding
- Evaluation should be a resource for good participation – empowerment, engagement, and capacity building
- Engagement at all levels – all parties to input into recommendations which become negotiated action plans.

# Success factors in evaluation utilisation

- Example of a training program in the public sector
  - An evaluator who is also a learning provider brings credibility
  - Timing. There was a legislative imperative, the program needed changing. Stakeholders were 'change ready'

# Barriers to evaluation utilisation

- Mismatched expectations and roles e.g. if increased funded is what stakeholders tacitly want (but is not explicit in the brief) then an external evaluator may offer other kinds of unwanted changes
- Managing expectations is important e.g. to offset unintended consequences of client participation
- Good and poor relationships may develop between the evaluator and different power blocks with competing agendas and interests within organisations: some may support or champion the recommended changes – others may resist. Important to illuminate these relationships
- Evaluators can unwittingly generate well-intended recommendations for change that are undeliverable or cause disruptions in an organisation or community e.g. disputes over allocation of scarce resources to fund one priority change over another
- Political and organisational pressures – these may be different on internal and external evaluators
- Commitment, political imperatives, timing can all be barriers and success factors depending on context.