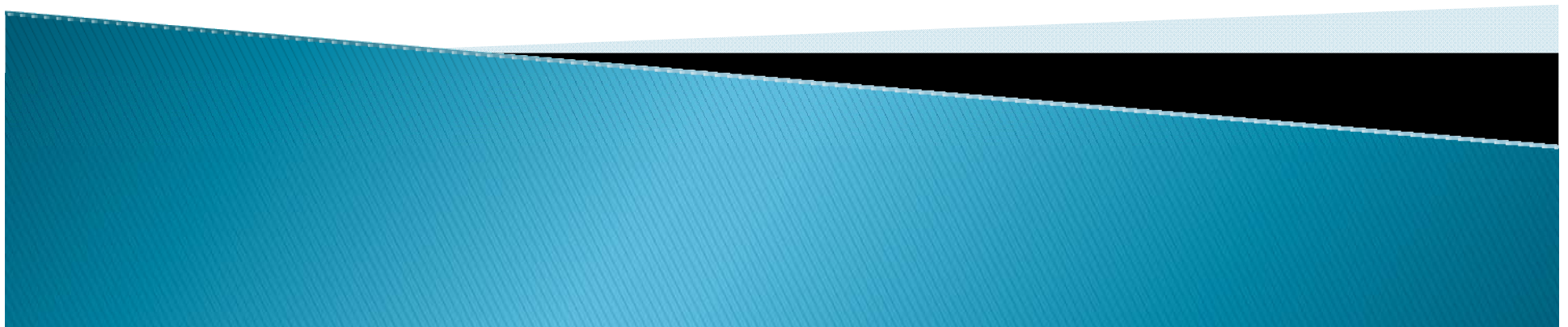


The promises and perils of Collaborative evaluation

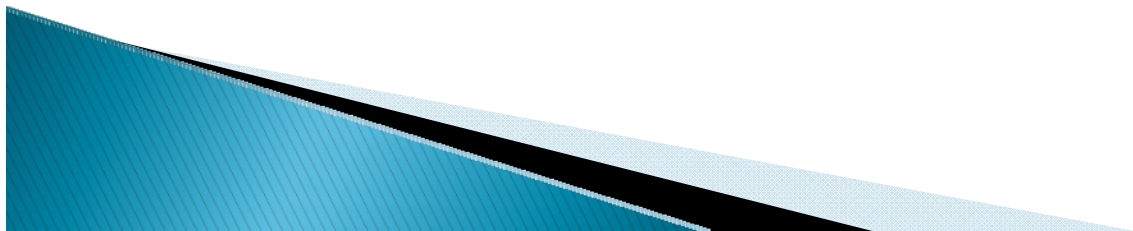
AES Lunctime seminar

17th May, 2011

Delwyn Goodrick, Phd

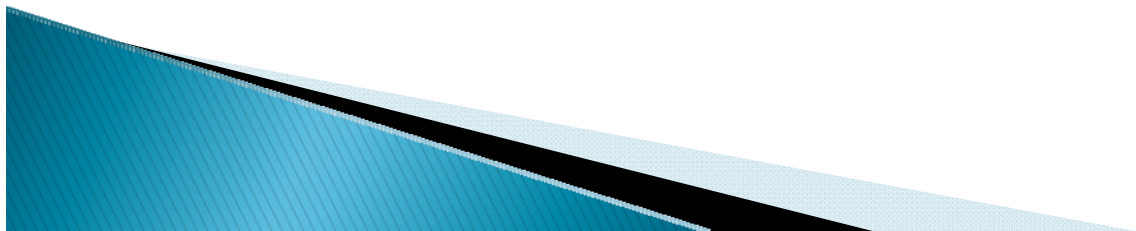


- ▶ Outline of the presentation
- ▶ Overview of collaborative approaches
- ▶ Defining collaboration
- ▶ Promises and potential benefits
- ▶ Risks and threats of collaboration
- ▶ Recommended steps to promote more effective collaboration



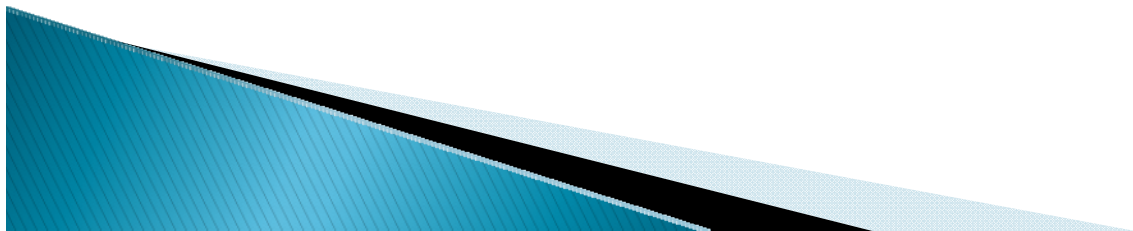
Some examples

- ▶ “Develop an evaluation framework in collaboration with the council.”
- ▶ “A collaborative approach to the evaluation will be adopted to...”
- ▶ “Collaborative evaluation processes are critical to the successful completion of the evaluation”
- ▶ But, what does collaboration *actually* mean?



And...now to a credible source(!) for a definition of collaborative evaluation

- ▶ This is a kind of evaluation in which some—or a selected group—of the staff of the evaluand (typically a program) being evaluated, or of those it services, or both, work together with the evaluator on the evaluation, and may share authorship of the evaluation report.
(Evaluation Wiki)

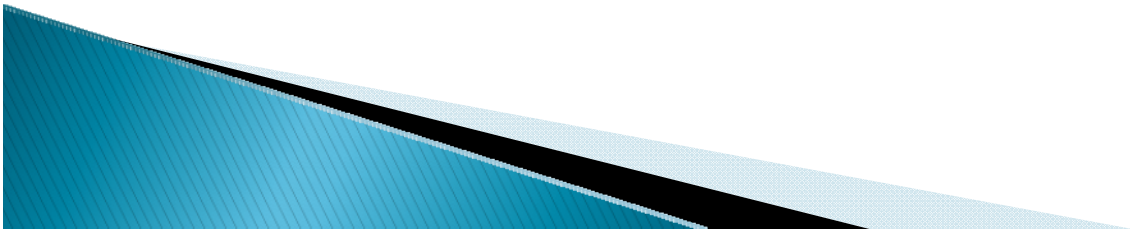


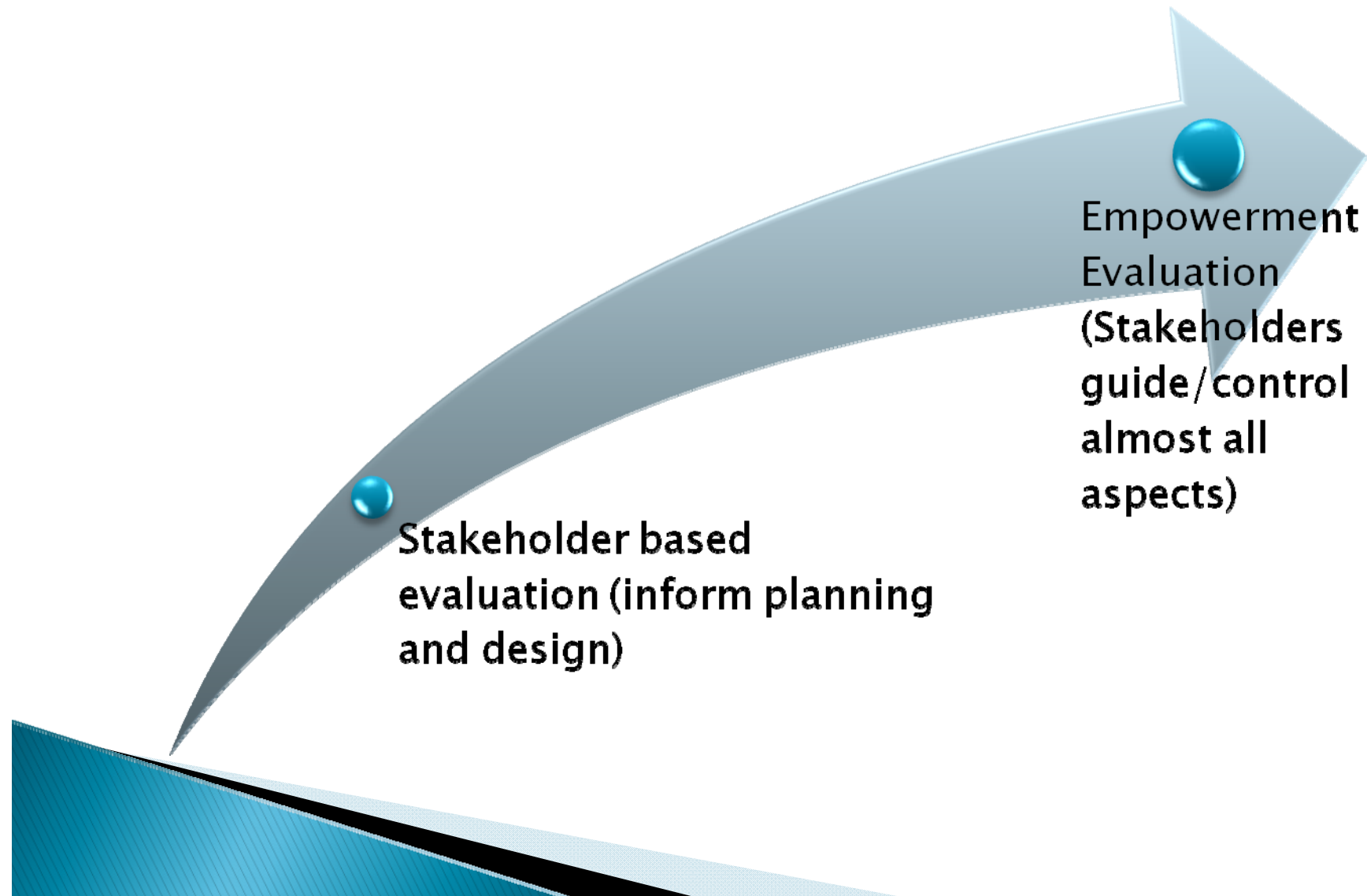
Interest in Collaborative approaches to evaluation

- ▶ Historically a strong interest in collaborative forms of evaluation
 - Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman), democratic evaluation (McTaggart, MacDonald) Action research (Wadsworth) Participatory evaluation (Cousins & Earl, Cousins)
 - More recently – Deliberative Democratic evaluation (House & Howe) and Developmental Evaluation (Patton)
- ▶ While these approaches differ , they all share a commitment to working with evaluation stakeholders



- ▶ These approaches overlap in commitment to stakeholder involvement, but differ on the degree of stakeholder and evaluator control.



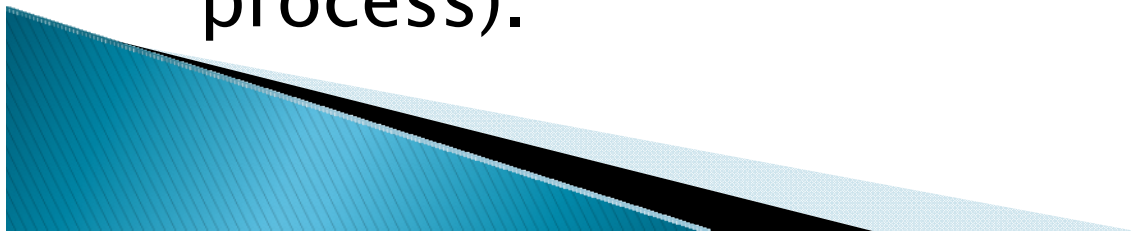


Rita O'Sullivan – Practicing evaluation: A collaborative Approach, 2004)

Labels her approach “collaborative,” as distinguished from “distanced evaluation”

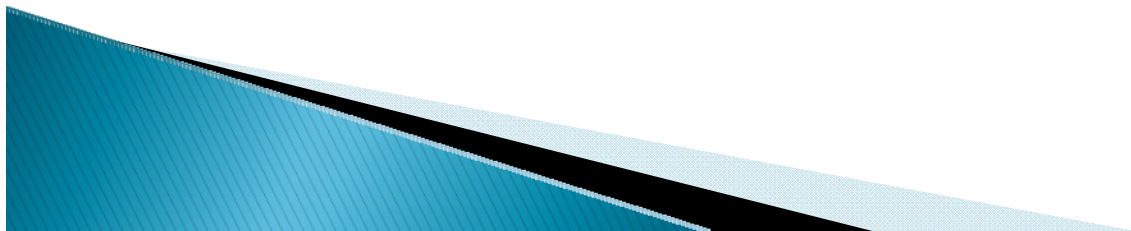
Participatory = doesn't necessarily mean stakeholders make decisions in the evaluation

Empowerment – necessitates empowerment as a focus and outcome of the evaluation process).



ANZEA competency around professional practice and project management

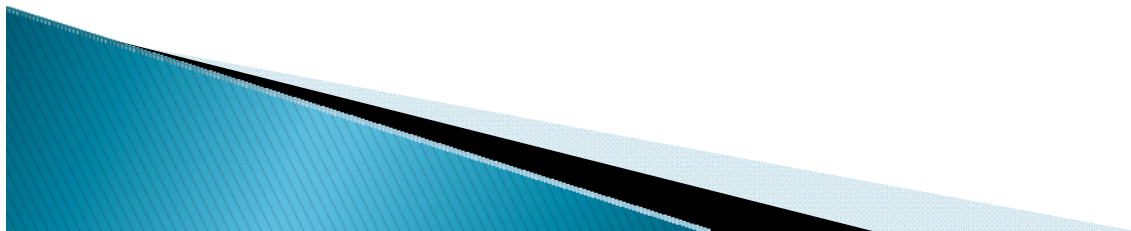
“...develop collaborative, co-operative and respectful relationships with those involved in and affected by the evaluation (stakeholders) and evaluation team members.”



Definitions

- ▶ Collaboration = exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources, and enhancing the capacity of another for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.
(Arthur Himmelman, 1994)

Collaborative evaluation – In a nutshell: ‘doing better together’



We mean different things when we use the term collaborate...

~~I saw~~ a leaflet produced by a pharmaceutical company recently, headed "Partnership." The sub-text was something to the effect that, "the relationship between you and your physician should be a partnership. Your physician's role is to diagnose, prescribe and treat ... your role is to comply with the treatment." Who would choose to enter into a partnership like that?

Source: Del's friend Heather Gridley in an article she wrote for Healthsharing Women



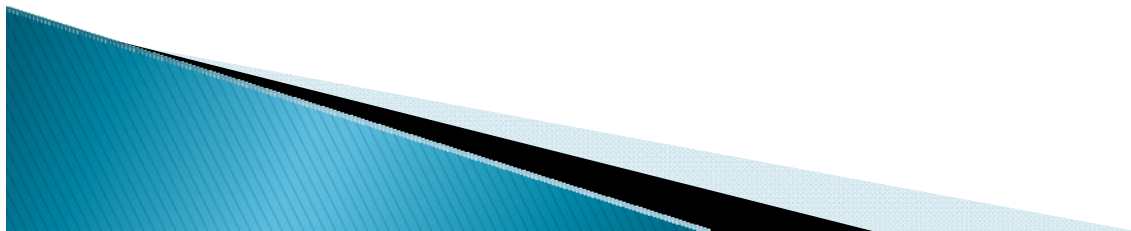
Ross Conner – A rationale for collaboration (2005)

- ▶ “It was definitely a collaborative, community-based approach. It involved a lot of different stakeholders. At the outset, we didn’t know what the program was going to be. All we knew was that it was going to be different things in different places. I started working with the program developers Day 1, so I knew the general focus of the program, but we did not know what the specific purposes would be.”



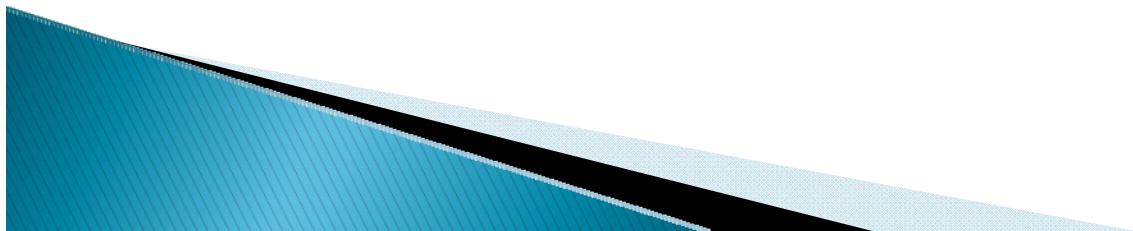
Problems with over-use of the term

- ▶ Collaborative evaluation – as used by evaluators and clients often lacks specificity about its theorised mechanisms of change.
- ▶ What does collaboration mean? How would we know a collaborative evaluation was successful?



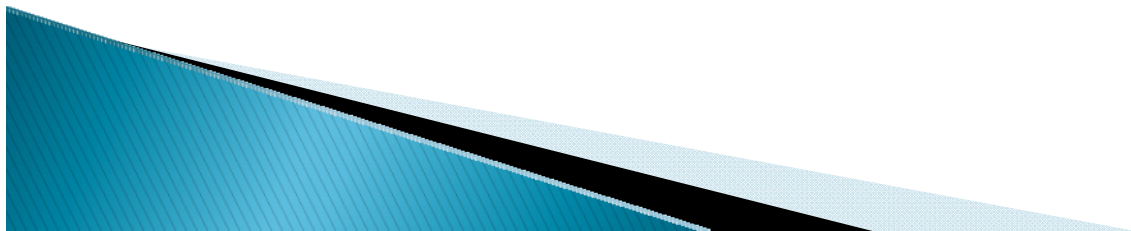
Rationale for Collaboration

- ▶ Political: may reduce or ameliorate social inequalities between stakeholders
- ▶ Epistemological: Importance of understanding context in which knowledge is produced – constructivist evaluators / Critical evaluators
- ▶ Practical: Value in generating more useful findings – process use (Patton)



What are the potential benefits of collaboration in evaluation?

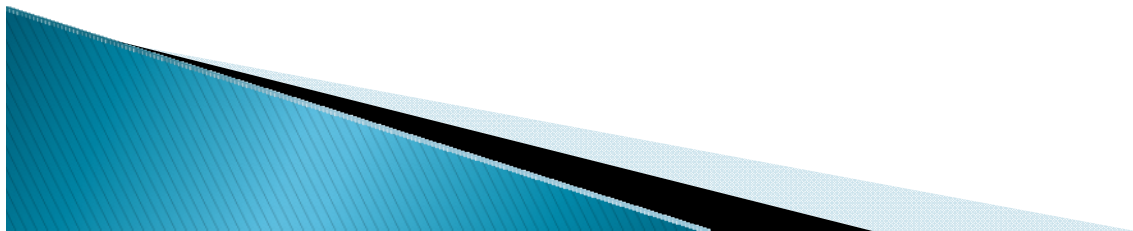
- ▶ Collaborative approaches may:
 - Enhance stakeholder ownership and their commitment to use the evaluation
 - Enable a clearer focus on audience requirements
 - Increase credibility of the evaluation process
 - Expand creative problem solving during the eval
 - Strengthen process uses (Patton) of the evaluation
 - Builds capacity in stakeholder and promotes organisational learning
 - Increase evaluators' understanding of the context/politics of the evaluand



May improve program Implementation

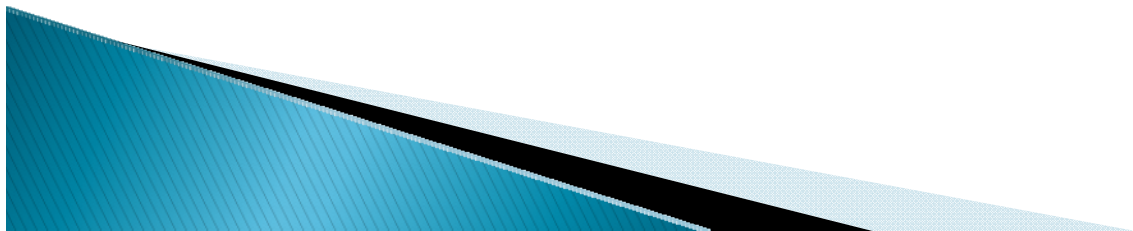
- ▶ “In collaborative evaluation, you, the practitioners, drive the evaluation process, creating useful information that you can share with colleagues to improve your collective efforts. “

http://www.neirtec.org/products/evaluation_guide/neirtec_evalguide.pdf



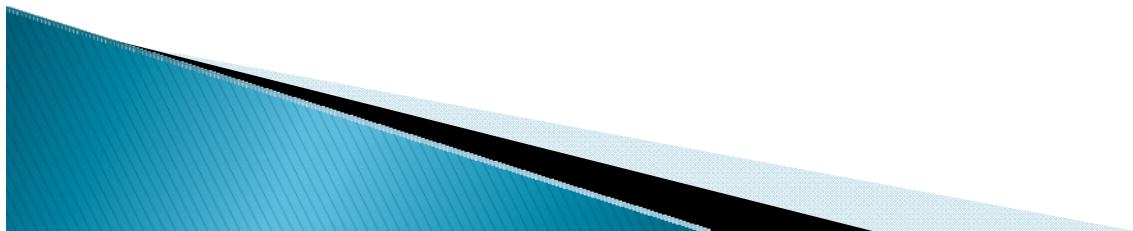
May assist the evaluator's understanding of the Evaluand

- ▶ “The evaluator is like a novice sailor with yachtsman who have sailed these institutional waters for years and know every island, reef and channel.” (Huberman & Cox, 1990, p.165)
- ▶ And perhaps they can help you navigate shark infested waters as well!

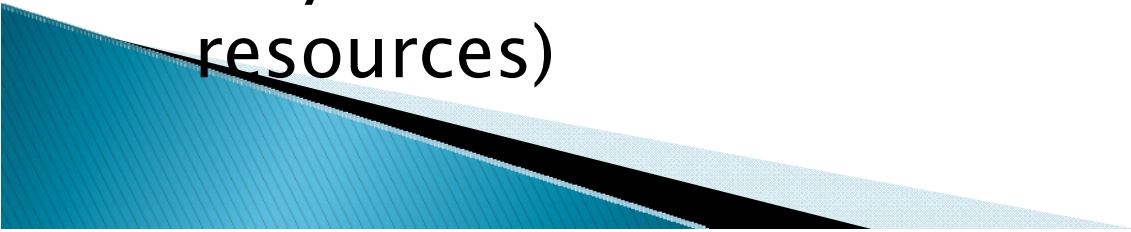


Some Emerging questions about Collaboration

1. What does collaborate actually mean? How is collaboration different from compliance, involvement, cooperation, participation?
2. Who collaborates?
3. How much do they participate and collaborate in informing decisions in the evaluation?
4. To what extent do they control the process?

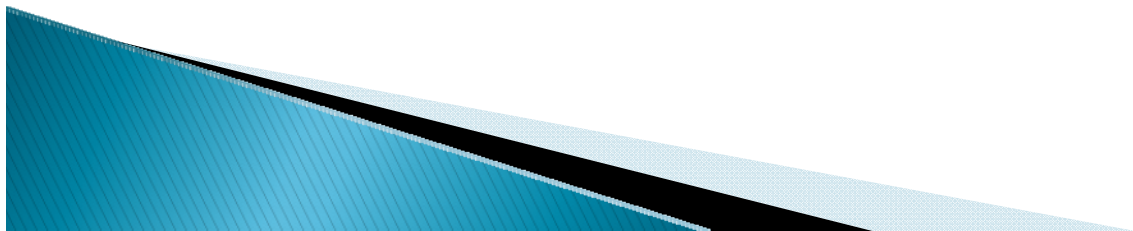


The Perils?

- ▶ Differing understanding of collaboration in the evaluation resulting in mixed messages / conflict
 - ▶ Used loosely and thus may lose meaning
 - ▶ Evaluation data collection processes may be seen as less legitimate by other stakeholders / audiences
 - ▶ May increase disparities between groups in the evaluation
 - ▶ May add time to the evaluation (\$ and resources)
- 

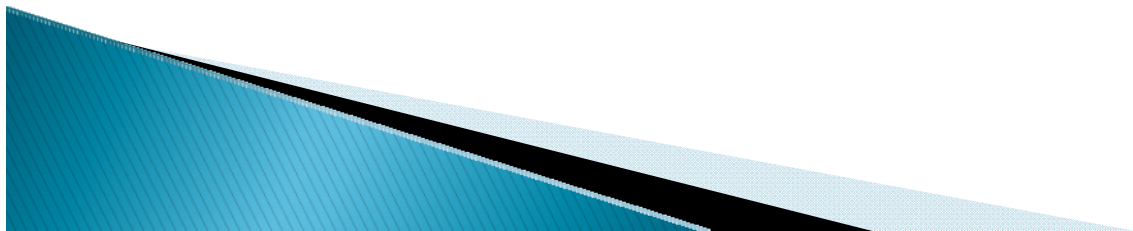
The argument against collaboration

- ▶ Most criticisms in the literature relate to potential for reduced data quality and threats to validity of evaluation inferences
- ▶ “It is in the interests of staff to make results look good, since it is their jobs that are at risk” (Scriven, 1997)



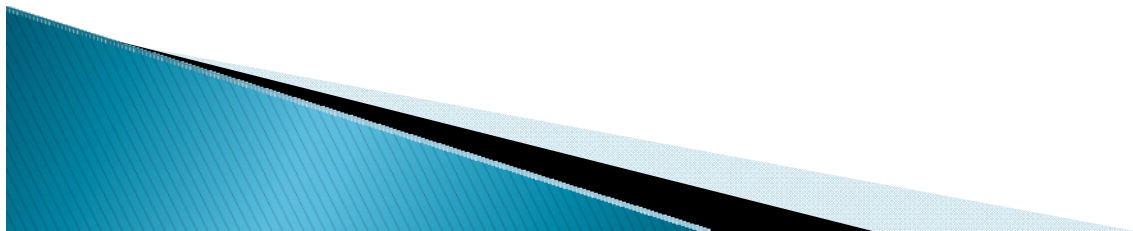
Case Examples – The Perils...

- ▶ Evaluation examples :
 - “Sure, we want to collaborate, but on our terms”
(Issue: Stakeholder controls WHO collaborates in the evaluation and how)
 - “It’s collaborative so we get to tell you how to do it.”
(Issue: technical interference/process interruption)
 - “Collaboration is good IF we get the answers we want” (Issue: Credibility and validity of inferences)



Should we advocate for collaborative approaches?

- ▶ Depends on the definition of collaboration
- ▶ Depends on clarity with stakeholders about the principles and practice of collaboration in this evaluation context
- ▶ Depends on nature of the evaluation ('full' collaboration may be more appropriate in formative eval)



Liliana Rodriguez-Campos

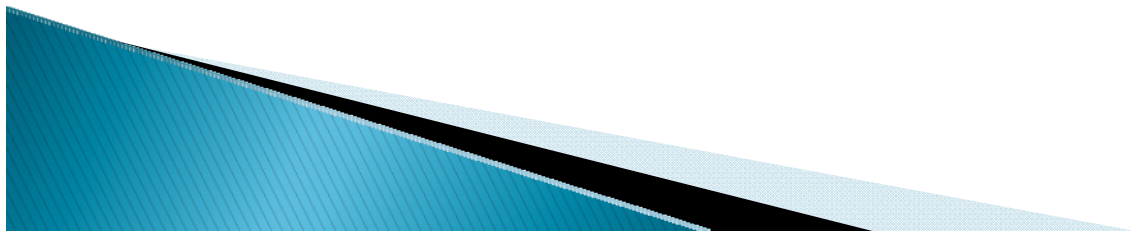
Collaborative evaluations (2005)

- ▶ a) identify the situation, (b) clarify the expectations, (c) establish a shared commitment, (d) ensure open communication, (e) encourage best practices, and (f) follow specific guidelines
- ▶ Generic principles that arguably apply to all evaluations



Recommendations for Effective Collaboration

- ▶ Clarify the meaning of collaboration. What actions does collaboration imply? Avoid using the term loosely
- ▶ Identify stakeholders past experiences with evaluation and work out what successful collaboration looks like (in early project discussions)
- ▶ Build in review time to assess how the evaluation and the processes of collaboration are going. Don't be afraid to raise concerns and issues



Conclusion– An effective evaluation Practitioner...

“I think as an evaluator ...you wear a lot of hats and have to be ready to shift. You have to know where you stand and know the expertise that you bring. Everybody brings a certain expertise. And that’s what keeps you [the evaluator] at the table. But what keeps you as part of the *family are the sensitivities, the human skills, and knowing when to push, when to hold back*. When to be devil’s advocate, when to be supportive. When to talk and when to listen.” (Ross Connor, 2005, p. 375)



Suggested Reading

- ▶ Connor, R. (2005) A conversation with Ross Connor: The Colorado Trust Community-Based Collaborative evaluation. American Journal of Evaluation, 26–369–377
- ▶ O’Sullivan, R. (2004) Practicing Evaluation: A Collaborative Approach. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- ▶ Patton, M.Q. (2011) Developmental Evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. NY: Guilford Press
- ▶ Rodriguez-Campos, L. (2005) Collaborative Evaluations: A Step-by-Step Model for the Evaluator, Fl: Llumina Press

