

The Australasian Evaluation Society

invites you to participate in an afternoon discussion on

'The use of Theories of Change models'

Friday 5th March 2010 (12.00 – 1.30)

*Where: Murdoch University: Flexible Learning and Teaching Room – 4th floor,
North Wing Library (Signs will be provided from main entrance of the library)*

There is a plethora of literature that promotes the value of using Theories of Change models for effective program design and development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks. However a weakness of program theory approaches is that they are often lead to over simplification of the change processes. The important key assumptions upon which a programs' success rest are often not expressed, tested nor evaluated. The risk is that evidence provided through simplistic monitoring and evaluation frameworks do not capture causal attribution and reduces the likelihood that the important factors relating to the long term goal will be addressed.

Realistic Evaluation also aims to illuminate program theory, however Avril Blamey and Mhairi Mackenzie (2007) suggest that 'realistic evaluators have a more explicit intent in *uncovering* program theory' and are more concerned with 'identifying promising hypothesized causal triggers'. Realistic evaluation focuses on determining the *actual* reasons behind a particular behaviour change rather than on articulating program components or building consensus. 'In this sense the approach delivers more precise and substantive programme learning but deals less well with highly complex, multi-site interventions with multiple outcomes'.

Avril Blamey and Mhairi Mackenzie (2007) consider that Theories of Change and Realistic Evaluation are compatible and will run best in different parts of the evaluation course. This might involve using Theories of Change for the purpose of programme planning, improvement and the development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks at a macro level. Whereas Realistic Evaluation approaches could be used for investing micro level aspects of selected programs for the purpose of improving knowledge about the causal triggers.

The discussion is open to all participants and will;

- Reflect on participants experiences with using different theories of change, program logic models and/or realistic evaluation
- Explore the potential strengths and weaknesses of these approaches
- Consider the benefits of Realistic Evaluation to as suggested by Avril Blamey and Mhairi Mackenzie (2007)
- Discuss possible ways this could improve evaluation practice
- Discuss future AES events and other potential topics for AES members discussion

Please RSVP carina.calzoni@westnet.com.au

Reference: Blamey A. and Mackenzie M. (2007) 'Theories of Change and Realistic Evaluation: Peas in a Pod or Apples and Oranges', *Evaluation* Vol 13 (4)

Article can be found at <http://evi.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/4/439>