When participatory approaches don’t go to plan

Friday September 18, 2026

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Why are we here?



What do we mean by participatory approaches?

> Participatory evaluation is an approach that involves the stakeholders of a programme or policy in the evaluation process.
>
> This involvement can occur at any stage of the evaluation process, from the evaluation design to the data collection and analysis and the reporting of the study.

- Better Evaluation

> Participatory evaluation approaches actively involve stakeholders in every stage of evaluation processes.
>
> Unlike other methods, participatory evaluation approaches shift the power dynamics by giving stakeholders a central role in defining the evaluation objectives, designing data collection methods, analysing results, and formulating recommendations.

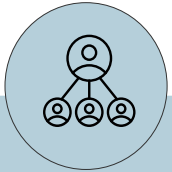
- UNDP, Independent Evaluation Office

Example 1: multi-faceted community-based program



The context

- Local government, community-based program
- Collaborative design of the evaluation plan
- One successful outcome workshop, two that didn't go ahead as originally planned



Why?

- Change in program leadership
- Buy-in from project leads and stakeholders
- Participation fatigue
- Time constraints



Key lesson?

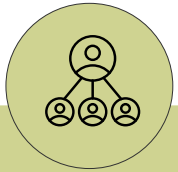
- Consider changes in surrounding program/ organisational context and revisit approach
- Value the participatory inputs you do get – no matter what?

Example 2: "Co-designing" a program logic model



The context

- Developing a program logic model and evaluation plan
- Two program logic workshops attended by a range of state government groups, TAFE and key industry reps
- Lack of engagement and genuine collaboration



Why?

- Misalignment of stakeholder expectations
- Lack of clarity about depth and contribution of engagement
- Changing evaluator team members



Key lessons?

- Taking time to actively reflect together with client
- Set clear expectations about participation and influence

Example 3: findings workshop



The context

- Collaborative design and the delivery of evaluation
- Test findings at workshop
- Limited questions and engagement
- Senior leadership did not attend



Why?

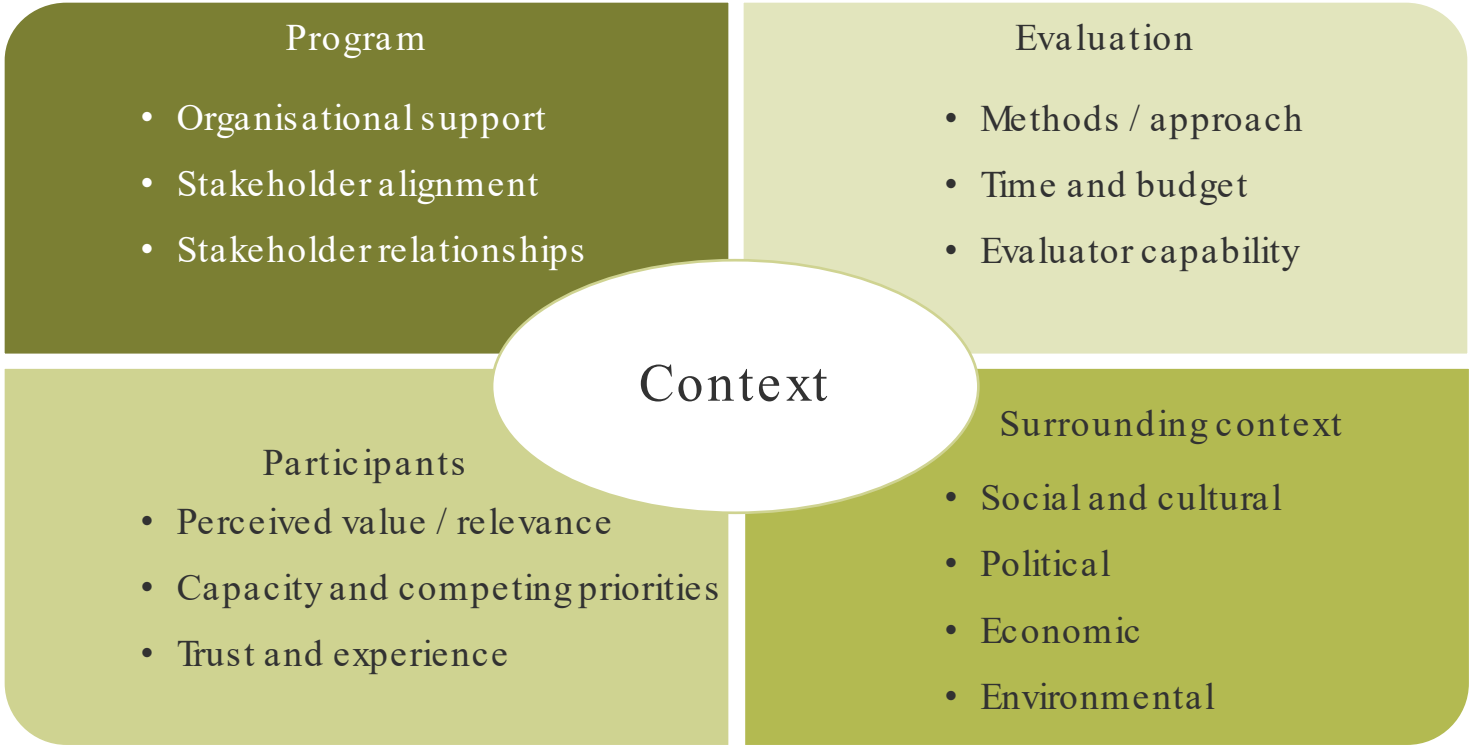
- Changes in team, attendee relationships and connections
- External organisation pressures at the time
- ‘cold room’



Key lessons

- Ask more questions about the group and how best to engage them
- Accept that not everyone will engage in the way we would like and/or expect
- Still value regardless

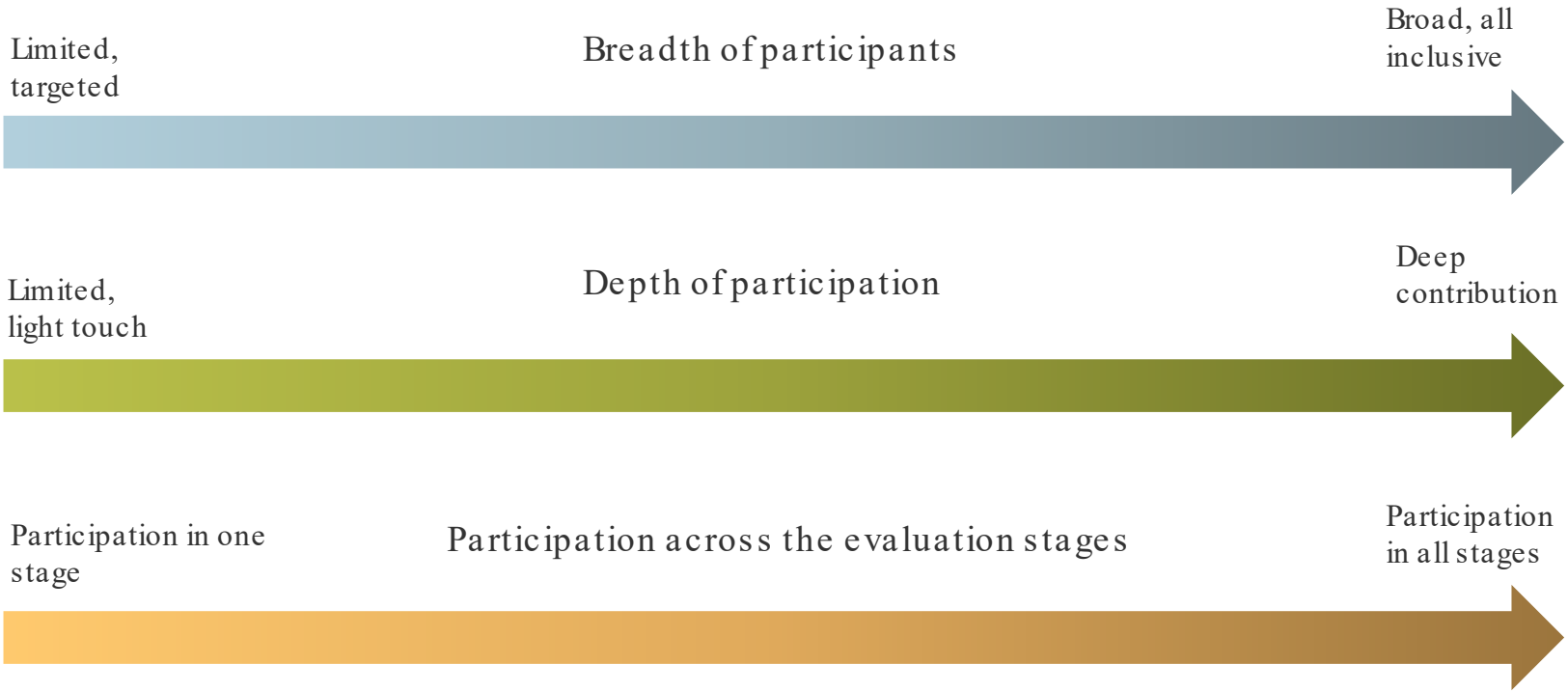
Factors that influence success



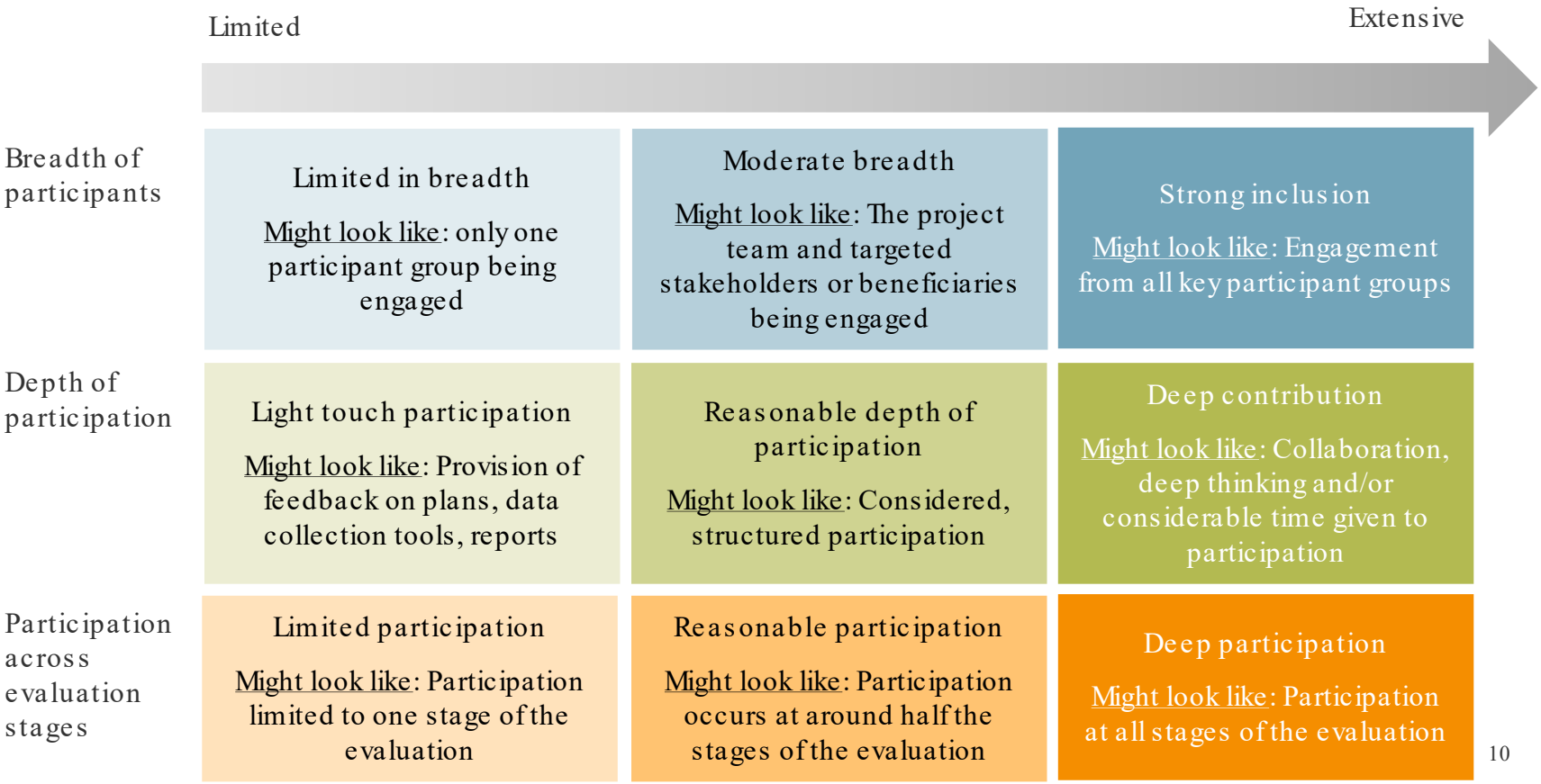
Intentional reflection

1. INTEREST: Has the client/team indicated an interest in using participatory approaches?
2. AVAILABILITY: How likely are key stakeholders and/or beneficiaries to have time and interest in participating in the evaluation?
3. ALIGNMENT: To what extent does a participatory approach align with the program intent? What about the evaluation timeline?
4. CONTEXT: What's happening in the organisation, community and/or environment that might impact participation?
5. BENEFIT: What is the reason participation is seen to be beneficial? Could it compromise objectivity?

A spectrum of participatory evaluation



Towards a spectrum of participation



Questions? More information?



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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.