

# **Evaluation Influence within Population Health Partnerships: the importance of context**

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# Overview

- To define evaluation influence.
- To use the literature to:
  - Identify the relevance of evaluation influence.
  - Identify the gaps in our current knowledge and understanding.
  - Present a conceptual model of evaluation influence within population health partnerships.
- To present preliminary findings from a survey of 187 population health partnership members from across New Zealand.

# Evaluation influence

- Kirkhart (2000) adopted the term to capture the multidirectional, incremental, unintentional and unidirectional influences of evaluation.
- Mark & Henry (2004) define evaluation influence as:
  - *The multiple pathways and mechanisms through which evaluation can hope to influence attitudes and action, due to exposure to evaluation findings or to participation in evaluation.*
- Kirkhart, K. E. (2000). Reconceptualizing Evaluation Use: An Integrated Theory of Influence. *New Directions for Evaluation*, no.88, Winter 2000, Jossey-Bass, San-Francisco.
- Mark, M. M., & Henry, G. T. (2004). The Mechanisms and Outcomes of Evaluation Influence. *Evaluation*, 10: 35-48

# Relevance of evaluation influence

- Why is evaluation influence important for evaluators?
  - Evaluation has had a long interest in its utility.
  - Large amount of literature on the topic.
  - Some evaluation theories seek to specifically enhance use.
  - Utility is a key standard for the ethical conduct of evaluation.
- Why is evaluation influence important for evaluands?
  - Use evaluation to inform their practice.
  - Maximise their investment in evaluation.

# Why population health partnerships?

- Evaluators are increasingly conducting evaluations within complex organisational systems.
- These partnerships are increasingly looking to evaluation to facilitate a 'learning environment', 'learning culture', etc.
- Securing partnership synergy within this context is challenging, as is the integration of learning based activities.
- Previous experience of conducting evaluation within this context.

# What do we know about evaluation influence?

- Current evaluation literature largely based on use.
- Factors that appear to be important for evaluation influence include:
  - Stakeholder participation and collaboration.
  - High quality evaluation inputs, activities and outputs.
  - Evaluator role.
  - Evaluator competence.
  - Stakeholders' existing beliefs about the programme and commitment to the evaluation.

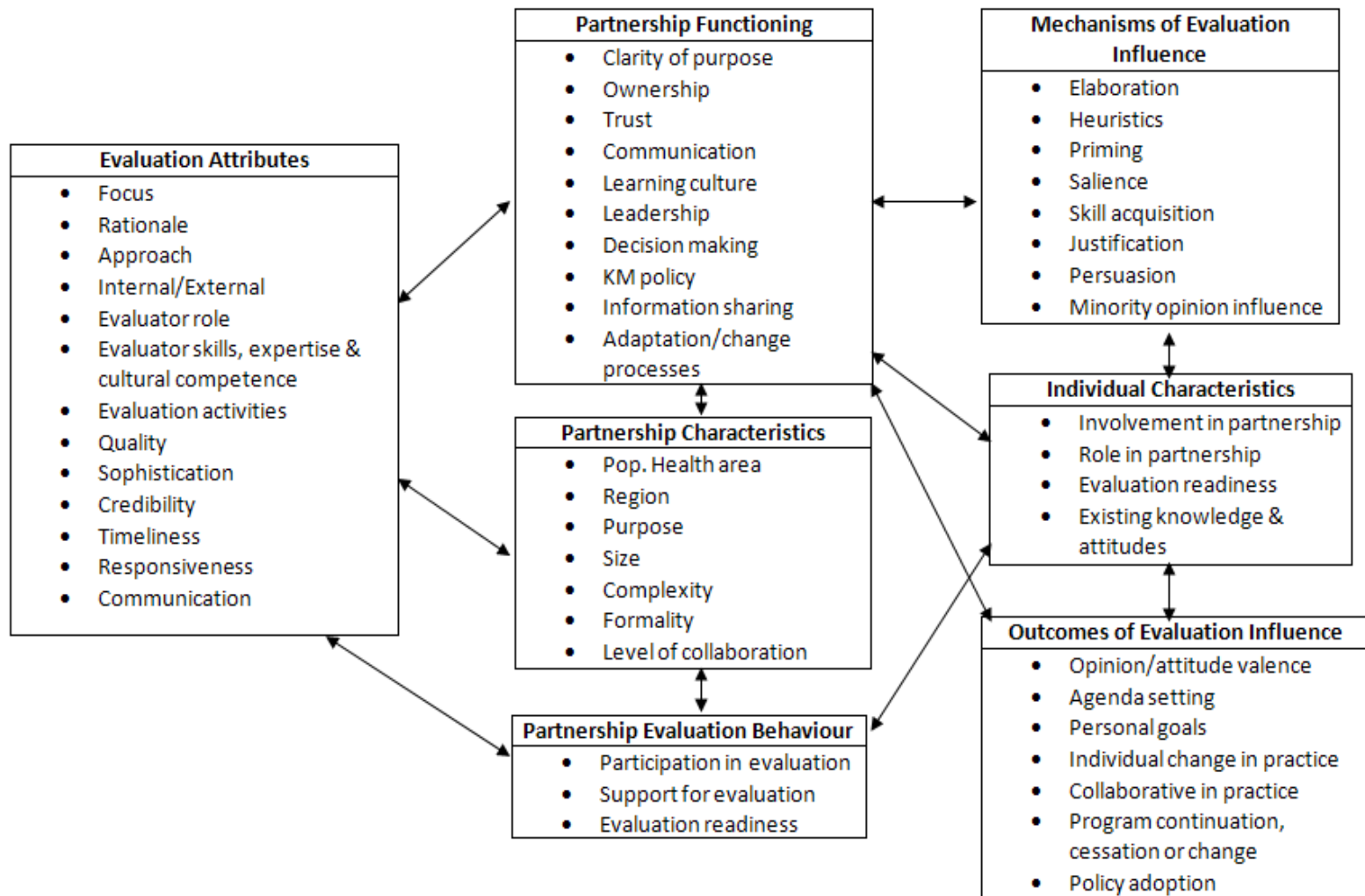
# Evaluation influence within population health partnerships

- Partnership functioning factors that appear to be important include:
  - Ownership of the partnership.
  - Partnerships culture and specifically trust and communication.
  - Leadership support for evaluation.
  - Systems and structures to support learning and change.
  - Existing contextual factors e.g. Traditional policies and management techniques, accountability requirements.

## Current gaps

- The themes discussed in the literature have not been well substantiated.
- The relationships between the variables discussed in the literature have yet to be explored.
- Evidence is typically based on:
  - Evaluator perceptions of use.
  - Descriptive case studies and simulation studies.
  - Educational settings.





Other Contextual Factors		
- Resources dedicated to evaluation	- Support for evaluation	- Time for evaluation
- Accountability requirements	- Traditional policies & management	- Competitive markets

# Testing the Model

- An online survey:
  - To identify any relationships between evaluation attributes, partnership functioning, other contextual factors and evaluation influence.
- Sample:
  - Current members of population health partnerships working in New Zealand.
- Survey design:
  - Evaluation attributes
  - Partnership characteristics and functioning
  - Perceptions of evaluation influence
  - Individual characteristics

# Survey participants

- 187 people.
- The majority of survey respondents were:
  - Female (71%),
  - Aged between 45 and 49 (19%).
  - NZ European (66%), Maori (18%) or Pacific Islanders (3%).
- Most people were working with partnerships from the Auckland region (25%).

# The partnerships

- The majority of partnerships:
  - Involved between 2 to 5 (50%) organisations.
  - Involved high levels of collaboration (55%).
  - Provided programs or services (65%) and shared information between partners (57%).
  - Supported a diverse range of population health initiatives.
  - Worked across regions, communities and with specific groups including Maori, young people and children.

# Evaluation

- Roughly half of the partnerships were currently undertaking evaluation or had been evaluated within the past 6 months (n=95).
- Most evaluations were:
  - Undertaken to identify the impact of the partnership's work (86.5%) and to improve the work of the partnership (60%).
  - Underpinned by a theoretical framework (62%).
  - Lead by an external contractor (62%), perceived to have the appropriate level of expertise and cultural competence.

# Evaluation use

- The top 5 uses of evaluation were:
  - To justify program existence or continuation (75%).
  - To make changes to existing programs (73%).
  - To conduct strategic planning (65%).
  - To report to a board (or equivalent) (63%; n=52).

# Evaluation influence

- The evaluation was perceived to have:
  - Encouraged individual's to think more about the partnership and/or service (87%).
  - Identified aspects of the partnership and/or service as being more important than others (86%).
  - Increased people's motivation to support the partnership (74%).
  - Resulted in learning more about the partnership and/or service (90%).
- However, involvement in evaluation was less likely to:
  - Change people's views of the partnership and/or service (57%).
  - Change the way that people worked (57%).

# Initial statistical analysis

- Non-parametric tests: Kruskal-Wallis and Mann Whitney U.
- Means were compared for:
  - Individual level influences e.g. Changes in attitudes or opinions, obtaining new knowledge or skills, changes to individual practice.
  - Interpersonal level influences e.g. Justification, accountability, staff or fiscal decisions, generating new funding.
  - Collective level influences e.g. Agenda setting, strategic planning.



# Findings: Individual level influences

- Factors that had a significant effect for individual levels of evaluation influence included:
  - Having an evaluation theory\*\*
  - Undertaking evaluation to develop capacity and/or support learning\*
  - High individual participation\*\*
  - High individual evaluation readiness\*\*
  - Partnership support for the evaluation\*
- \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

# Influences beyond the individual level

- Factors that had a significant effect at an interpersonal and collective levels included:
  - Having an external evaluator\*
  - Participation from partnership leader\*

– \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

# Perceived barriers to evaluation influence

- Evaluation attributes:
  - Poor evaluation quality and timeliness
  - Lack of partnership participation
- Partnership functioning:
  - Lack of systems to make changes
  - Decision-making processes
  - Unclear partnership purpose
- Contextual factors:
  - Lack of resources for evaluation
  - Lack of time to engage in evaluation
  - Lack of partnership support

# Perceived enablers to evaluation influence

- Evaluation attributes:
  - Evaluation credibility and communication
  - Evaluator skills and competence
- Partnership functioning:
  - Information sharing
  - Commitment to partnership
  - Trust between partners
- Contextual factors:
  - Resources dedicated to evaluation
  - Time to engage in evaluation
  - Support from partnership members

# Summary

- The survey findings:
  - Provide support for existing literature on evaluation influence.
  - Provide support for some of the propositions made in the model.
  - Highlight the importance of understanding contextual factors when implementing evaluation within a partnership context.
  - Highlight the important role of evaluation attributes.
- Aspects of the model still need to be explored.
- The relationships between the variables need to be explored in depth.

# Challenges and limitations

- Research design
  - When should evaluation influence be measured?
  - How should evaluation influence be measured?
  - Can the mechanisms and outcomes of evaluation influence be articulated?

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