

# Evaluative mindsets: Why do organisations engage in evaluation?

Kate Mckegg



Kinnect  
group

Capital Research • Judy Oakden Consultancy  
Research Evaluation Consultancy • The Knowledge Institute  
Julian King and Associates Limited

# Agenda

- A brief introduction and some background context
- A brief discussion on Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)
- Introducing a preliminary model of Evaluation Capacity
- Introducing evaluation demand / evaluative mindsets

# Evaluation Capacity Building

- The importance of organizational evaluation capacity as a contributor to effectiveness is underlined in much public management, philanthropic, organisational development and evaluation literature
- Evidence of increasing interest and engagement in ECB by evaluators in many sectors

# Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)

- Some of the key work to date:
  - Stockdill, Baizerman and Compton (2003)  
“The intentional work to continuously create and sustain organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine’
- Others include:
  - Hallie Preskill and Shanelle Boyle
  - Patricia Rogers
  - Brad Cousins and Linda Lee
  - Volkov and King

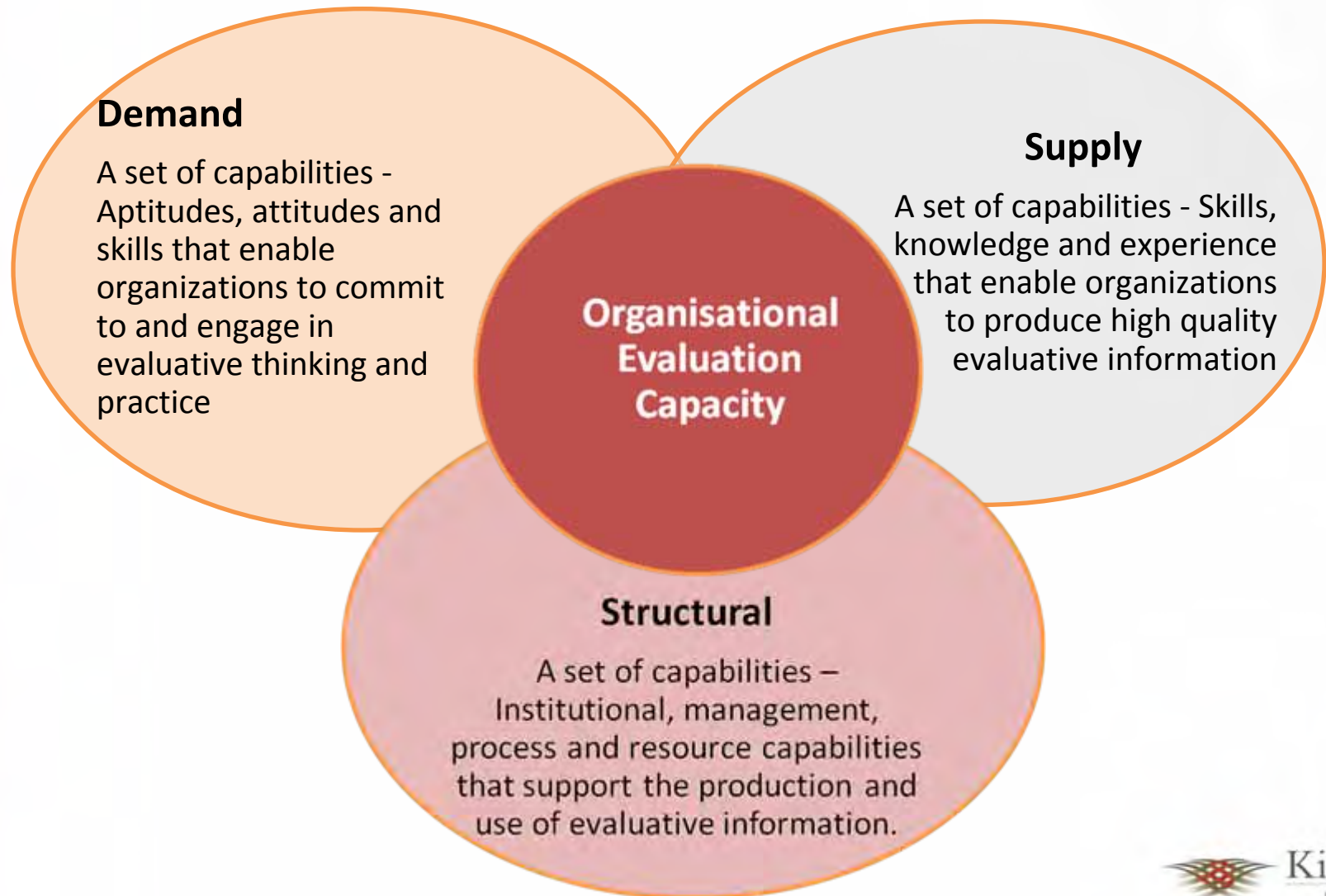
# Some concerns

- Growing literature with suggestions for ECB practice in a range of organisations
- Of concern is the considerable skepticism about the effectiveness of evaluative effort, particularly in public sector contexts

# Capacity / Capability

- Capacity
  - skills, experience and abilities to perform tasks, produce outputs etc
  - ‘...the overall ability of an organisation or system to create public value.’* (Baser and Morgan, 2008)
- Capability – organisational capacity is made up of a set of capabilities that support, sustain and nurture the capacity of organisations to create value, or in our case, to do and use evaluation (Williams, 2010)

# Linking Evaluation Capacity and Capability



# Demand

- **The capability to commit and engage in evaluation** – it's about organizational motivation or ownership, volition or choice. It has a lot to do with attitude, aptitude and perception; it's about collective drive, confidence and ambition
- Literature suggests it is the critical capability that energizes all the others

*“...as it happened, motivation had the most impact on the agency's progress” (Ann Dykman, 2002)*



# Demand - Some of the identified aptitudes, attitudes and skills

Skills and abilities	Some useful references
Leadership / taking ownership /takes responsibility for learning and implementation of lessons learned	Liphshitz& Popper. (2000);Davidson. (2001);Nelson, & Millett. (2002) Barrados and Mayne,(2003); Baser and Morgan. (2008); Preskill and Boyle (2008); Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler. (2008).
Transparency – being prepared to expose ideas and practices to tough feedback and criticism and encourage a free flow of information	
Inquiry, questioning and mindfulness – Encouraging of open mindedness, collective problem solving and reflection (about success and failure) and ongoing inquiry to achieve better understanding	
Openness to taking risks, change and experimentation	
Perseverance to pursue inquiry to increase understanding	

# However, this capability seems least understood

*“the interconnections between ownership, human motivation, commitment and capacity development are still only dimly understood...” (Baser and Morgan, 2008, p59)*

- And some have even argued that the constraints of our understanding about this capability helps explain why evaluation has been the “Cinderella of public sector reform” (Hauge, 1998).

# Where might the motivation for engaging in evaluation come from?

Some external drivers:

- External demand for accountability
- Changes in the external environment
- Broad based acceptance that evaluation is a 'good' thing to do

Some internal drivers:

- Personal beliefs and commitment by organisational leadership to learning and effectiveness
- Organisational resources and maturity
- A desire to attract more funding

# Some identified barriers to motivation / evaluative demand in the public sector

- A range of political, institutional and organisational barriers to demand:
  - Little interest in effectiveness at parliamentary level and therefore little use of performance information
  - Few incentives and rewards for Chief Executive performance based on performance information; the review process does not currently systematically use evaluative information
  - Fear of political fallout and of public criticism have been inhibiting factors
  - Culture of control and accountability that has focused attention on the management and measurement of outputs – single loop learning
  - Fuzzy performance orientation in the public sector

# Some barriers identified in the community sector

- Resource available to support an evaluation function
- Lack of skills and expertise
- Limited technology to support evaluation
- Political tensions between boards and management
- Staff resistance
- Lack of support from funders

# Some individual barriers to demand

- The literature suggests that our individual motivation to use and share knowledge is strongly influenced by the expected outcomes of using that knowledge
- Our expectations about the outcome are shaped by our previous experience
- Previous negative experiences will have a strong influence on our beliefs and values
- We are also inclined to only reluctantly seek feedback on performance, because this might imply or reveal failures, incompetence etc
- And then when we do we are biased toward interpretations consistent with prior beliefs and values
- We also have strong tendencies to self justify, even in the face of evidence that our actions or decisions were wrong.
- This cognitive dissonance 'distorts reality, keeping us from getting all the information we need and assessing issues clearly' (Tarvis & Aronson, 2007).

# Some very real tensions in being evaluative

On the one hand...	But on the other...
The change and learning orientation of the evaluation endeavour	The accountability, rationality drive of many organisations
Knowledge about the 'goodness' of things	Power and politics
The integrity of evaluation results	Preserving the 'good' of the organisation
Willingness to critique	Strong desire to preserve existing frame, to be accepted

# Evaluative mindsets

- Under-recognized aspect of change or capacity development
- Decisions to engage and commit, not taken in a vacuum – beliefs, values and assumptions shape decisions and behaviours
- Decisions are made taking account of:
  - What others might be doing
  - Wider environmental incentives / barriers
  - The choices and information available
  - Previous experience of evaluation
  - Expectations of outcome



# Some final thoughts

- Decisions about how to influence evaluative demand, as an evaluator, have been done more by ‘intuition’ based on practical experience
- A deeper understanding of these mindsets is likely to improve both our understanding and practice of ECB
- Help us understand and work with the tensions that exist in different organisations at different times

# Your thoughts?

- Something that surprised you?
- Something that troubled you?
- Something you would like to know more about?