

# Looking at evaluation of Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) through a realist lens

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Reflections on the relevance of  
Pawson & Tilley's  
"New Rules of Realistic Evaluation"



**This presentation is a first step in my developmental thinking about complexity and measuring change in a changing world.**

**Question – Can Realistic Evaluation play a useful role in complex, multi-site, multi strategy interventions?**

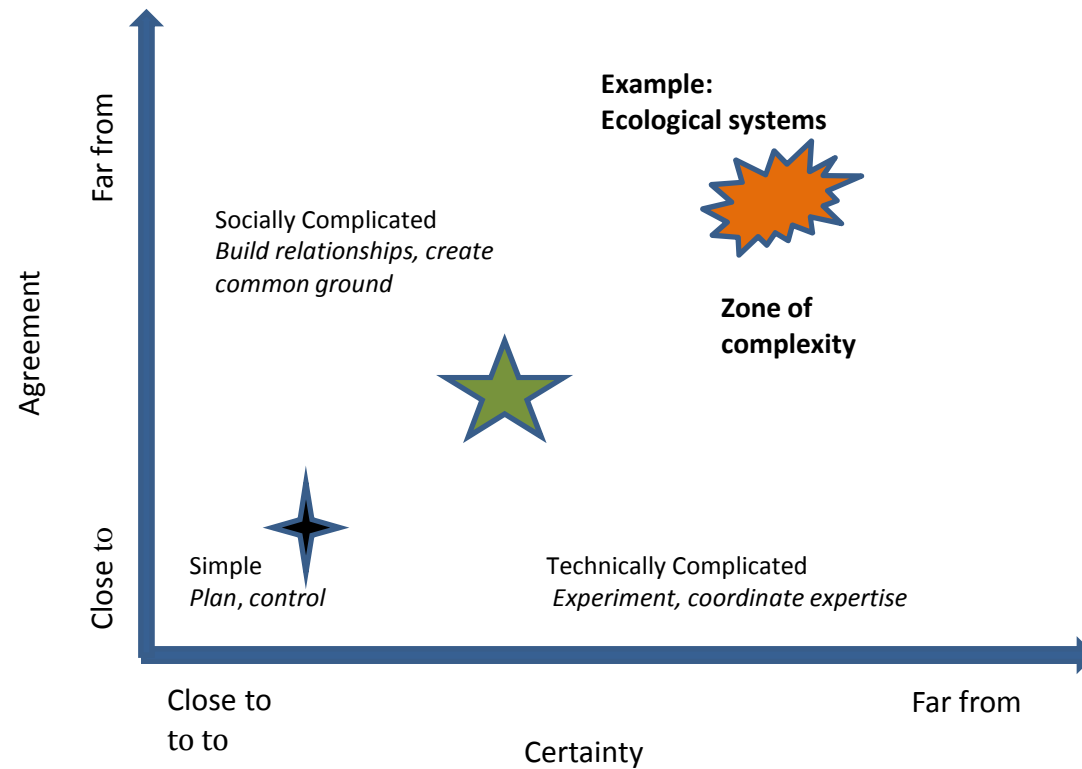
**Ultimately, over the long term I'm interesting in studying –**

**What does unpacking the multiple mechanisms of social change tells us?**

# Complexity

## Exhibit 4.5 The Zone of Complexity

Source: Developmental Evaluation, Michael Quinn Patton



# Topics

## Part 1: social norms and public policy

- What are norms and why are we interested in them?
- CYWR trials

## Part 2: measuring social norm change

- Social norms from a social identity perspective
- FRC - how it uses authority
- Evaluation

## Part 3: eight rules of realistic evaluation

# Social norm theory

Norms are a set of guidelines for how we think, feel and behave

Three kinds: social, moral and legal

A social norm is enforced by informal group social sanctions

- positive – acceptance, esteem, approval
- negative – disapproval, rebuke, avoidance, ostracism, violence

Moral norms – to do no harm, to care for the urgent needs of others, i.e. international human rights norms

Legal norms are like social and moral norms

- Formally stated by law
- Reference group is a constituted authority
- Sanctions are formal and have some teeth

# Social norms & public policy

Social norms research has informed many areas of public policy:

- Health behaviours, eg drinking, tobacco use, STDs, exercise
- Crime, violence against women, road safety, eg drink driving, speeding
- Energy use, recycling etc.

Social capital theory includes social norms:

- Bridging and bonding capital, diversely different communities
- Bonding capital may be negative
- Harmful practices result from social conventions and social norms that sustain them – individuals are abused if they depart from conventions

Understanding of dynamics of social norms and authority structures can be harnessed to promote pro-social behaviours and human rights

# Aspirational and descriptive norms

What we should do and what we actually do

Aspiration or injunctive norms specify the rules or beliefs of what constitutes moral and approved (or immoral and disapproved) behaviour

- what we should do

Descriptive norm specifies what most people do in a particular situation

– that is, what is typical and normal, what people actually do

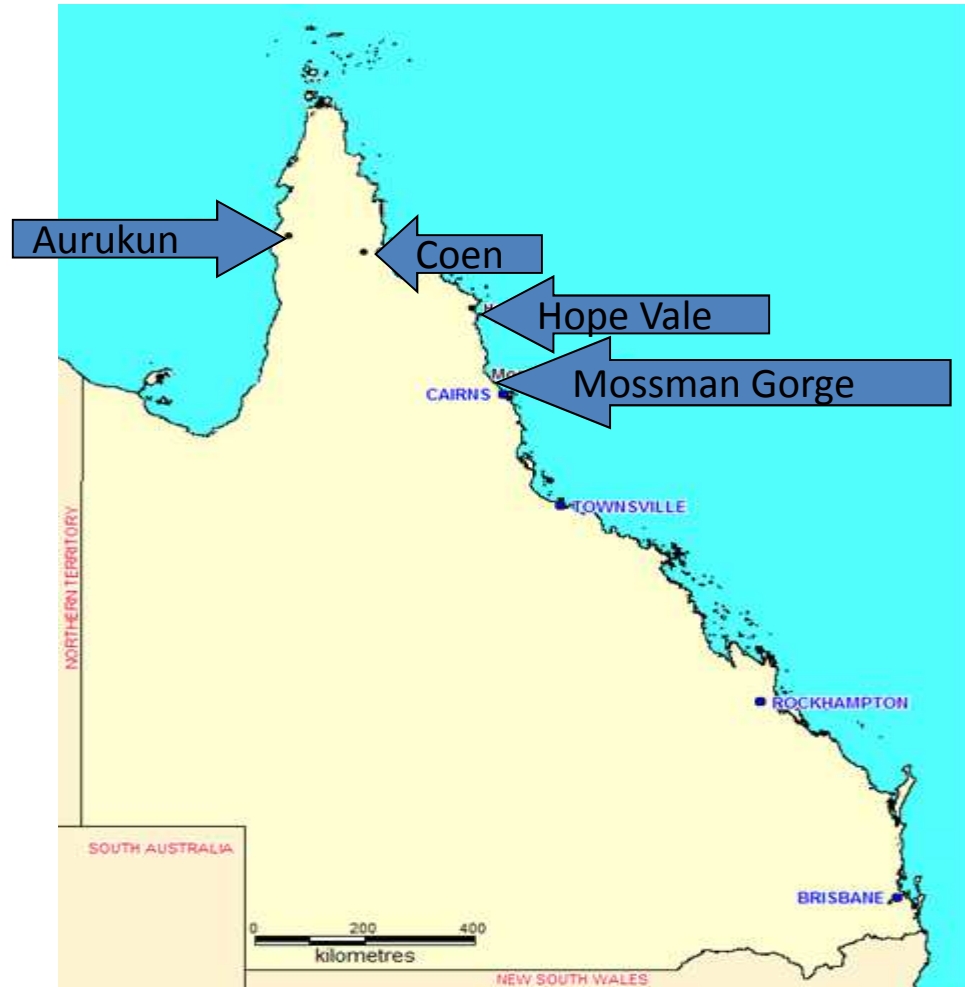
Research: What you observe wins – What you believe others will do also wins

**Where there is a problem with current behaviours, focusing on the desirable behaviour can lead to a shift in positive social behaviour**

Research finds belief in what the group will do matters to choices

People will follow usual and approved norms, goals and values of their group.

# The four reform communities





# Need for Reform?

**Unconditional welfare  
+ addiction  
+ demand sharing = social disintegration and  
abandonment of responsibility**

Profound difference between poverty and passivity

- 3rd world poverty, people seize opportunity
- Passivity means people don't respond to opportunities

Situation of no enforcement of norms concerning -  
responsibility, respect, authority, obligations, behaviour

Abusive behaviour isn't tied to consequences

People who want to enforce pro-social norms are often elders or women

# Aims of welfare reform

**For people to have the capabilities to choose lives they have reason to value**

**Amartya Sen**

Staircase of opportunity

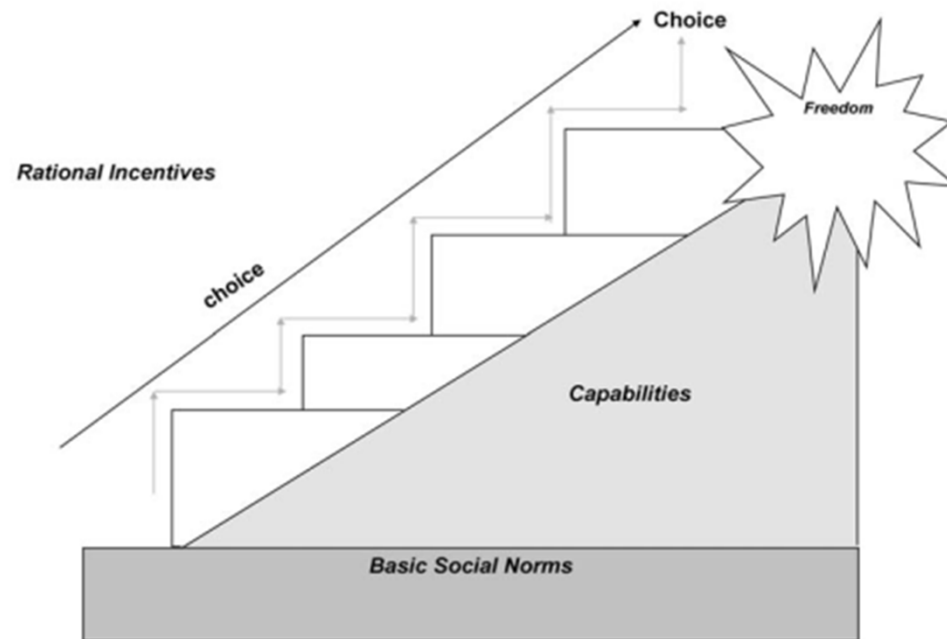
- Strong foundation of social norms + allied with strong investment in capabilities
- Stairs need to provide a rational alignment of incentives and choices
- **Norms + capabilities + opportunities = prosocial choice**

The trial has four aims:

1. Restore positive social norms
2. Re-establish local Indigenous authority
3. Move people away from welfare passivity
4. Move individuals and families from welfare housing to home ownership

# Aims of welfare reform

Staircase of opportunity



# CYWR design features

Policy development phase before 2005

Engagement and design phase 2006 and 2007

Hand out to Hand up, Vol I and II, 2007

Norms:

- Student attendance case managers – truancy
- Family Responsibilities Commission – authority
  - Qld statutory body, Commissioner and local indigenous commissioners, administrative registry
  - **Help people resume primary responsibility for wellbeing of individuals, families, community**

Capability:

- Mpower – money management skills
- Wellbeing Centres – counselling

Opportunity:

- Pride of Place – home improvement
- Mossman George Centre – jobs
- Community Action Fund – volunteering

# Part 2:

# Measurement

Concepts - social norms from a social identity perspective

- Understanding social norm change and social norm measurement from a social psychological perspective, Prof Kate Reynolds, ANU's School of Psychology
- Advice from social identity perspective about:
  - how social norms shape individual behaviour; and
  - how to measure and evaluate social norms and social norm change

# Platform for theory

- The social psychology of Kelman (1958) referenced as the intellectual platform in the design phase in “From Hand Out to Hand Up” reports.
- Kelman provides three reasons why people might change their behaviour:
  - **compliance**
  - **identification or**
  - **internalisation.**
- Social identity theory (Turner 2005) – the social self and groups
  - ‘groups and their associated social norms have most impact on shaping behaviour when they are psychologically meaningful to the person’.

## Theories of behaviour change and power

<b>Kelman – reasons for change</b>	Compliance	Identification	Internalisation
<b>Turner – processes of power</b>	Control	Authority	Persuasion
	<i>Lack of either persuasion or authority</i>	<i>Authority based on legitimate system (FRC), where individuals will do things because authorities communicate it is the right thing to do</i>	<i>Emerges from perception of shared in-group membership – we all share the same values and goals</i>

# Role of the FRC

- Indigenous authority reinstated with sanctioning power over abusive behaviour, disrespect, corruption of relationships and values
- Behaviour change is sought via conferences, directions, interventions and supports, and income management (Pawson's carrots, sermons and sticks?)
  - FRC provides an 'official' space in the community where issues can be discussed, support services co-ordinated and norms around appropriate and inappropriate behaviour negotiated and communicated
  - Modern way of building and enforcing respect for 'leaders' who must uphold and enforce Indigenous authority
  - **The 'State' is backing local people**
- Rebuilding social, cultural (moral) and legal intolerance of abusive behaviour
- Aim is for a new set of social norms and associated patterns of behaviour to emerge that **will come to regulate behaviour**
  - and it is essential to make good investments in capabilities



# FRC triggers

The FRC receives notification where:

- a person's child is absent from school 3 full or part days in a school term, without reasonable excuse;
- a person has a child of school age who is not enrolled in school without lawful excuse;
- a person is the subject of a child safety report;
- a person is convicted of an offence in the Magistrates Court; or
- a person breaches his or her tenancy agreement - for example, by using the premises for an illegal purpose, causing a nuisance or failing to remedy rent arrears.

**School attendance**

**Child protection**

**Convicted of offense**

**Housing tenancy**

# Evaluation objectives

## **Objectives:**

- Provide evidence on whether the intervention effected significant change towards the trial's four objectives?
  - rebuilding social norms
  - restoring Indigenous authority
  - increasing individual engagement in the real economy
  - transitioning people to home ownership
- Assess if the interventions were implemented effectively
- Inform future government decision making and social policy formulation

## **Key evaluation questions for CYWR**

1. Are social norms and behaviours changing?
2. Was Cape York Welfare Reform implemented as agreed by the three parties?
3. Have governance arrangements supported changes in service provision, social norms and behaviours?
4. Has service provision changed in a way that supports norm and behaviour change?

# Evaluation Framework

## Approach features

- Evaluation Framework and Program Theory (Courage Partners)
- Developed theory of change (program logic) – changing behaviour through social norms
- Project level program logic (Cape York Institute)
- Expertise of specialist evaluators
- Mixed methods

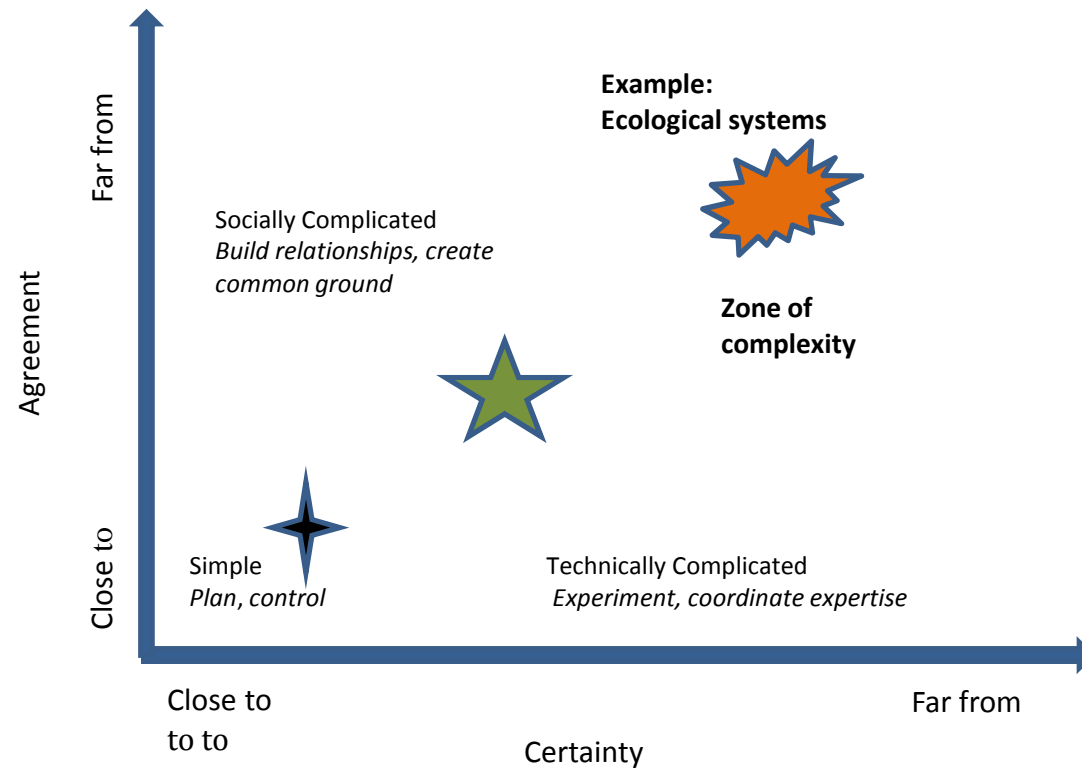
## Methods and their nature?

- Social Change Survey in communities – **participatory & theory testing & impact?**
- Case studies of individual and family change – **theory testing & impact?**
- Qualitative interviews + on-line survey service providers – **theory testing & impact?**
- Analysis quantitative indicators & administrative data – **theory testing & impact?**
- Review quarterly project performance reports – **theory building?**

# Complexity

## Exhibit 4.5 The Zone of Complexity

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# Choice, nudge, norms...?

Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking, fast and slow*:

“Although Humans are not irrational, they often need help to make more accurate judgments and better decisions, and in some cases policies and institutions can provide that help.” Page 411

“The definition of rationality as coherence is impossibly restrictive; it demands adherence to rules of logic that a finite mind is not able to implement.”

- In Nudge by Thaler and Sunstein – institutions are allowed to nudge people to make decisions that service their own long-term interests. e.g. default is joining a pension plan.
- The psychology means that the default option is naturally perceived as the normal choice.

**"Deviating from the normal choice is an act of commission, which requires more effortful deliberation, takes on more responsibility, and is more likely to evoke regret than doing nothing."** p 413

- Kahneman – people's decisions are guided by these powerful psychological forces

# Part 3:

## Why is Realistic Evaluation relevant?

*Realistic Evaluation* by Pawson & Tilley:

“Inquiry is always an amalgam of *principle and practice*...” p 55

And

“Realism has sought to position itself as a model of scientific explanation which avoids the traditional epistemological poles of positivism and relativism.

Realism’s key feature is its stress on the mechanics of explanation, and its attempt to show that the usage of such explanatory strategies can lead to a progressive body of scientific knowledge.” p 55-56

# Eight rules

Rule 1. Generative causation

**actions?**

Rule 2. Ontological depth

**constraints?**

Rule 3. Mechanisms

Rule 4. Context

**for whom?**

Rule 5. Outcomes

**What works**

**...in what circumstances?**

Rule 6. Context-mechanism-outcomes configurations

Rule 7. Teacher-learner processes

**playing it back?**

Rule 8. Open systems

**butterfly effect?**

# Rule 1: Generative causation

“Evaluators need to attend to **how** and **why** social programs have the potential to cause change.”  
p 215

“Realists do not conceive that programs ‘work,’ **rather it is the actions of stakeholders that make them work**, and the causal potential of an initiative takes the form of providing **reasons and resources** to enable program participants to change.” p 215

- Reasons – sanction, shame, respect or belief
- Resources –services, support, skills



# Rule 2: Ontological depth

Reality is **stratified**. Choice is **constrained**.

“Interventions are always embedded in a range of attitudinal, individual, institutional, and societal processes... :” p 216

- Attitudinal
- Individual
- Institutional
- Societal processes

"Program evaluations need to grasp how the changes introduced **inform** and **alter** the balance of the constrained choices of participants. " p 216

# Rule 3: Mechanisms

"Realist evaluators seek to understand 'why' a program works through an understanding of the *action of mechanisms*." p 216

- How?
- Time for action?
- Multiple mechanisms
- Displacement/replacement?
- Action – does it occur in a controlled setting?

"An action is *causal* only if its outcome is triggered by a mechanism acting in context." p p 216

Where there is a problem behaviour such as binge drinking, focusing on the aspirational norm can shift to positive social behaviour, **as people try to meet the approved norms and values** of the group

A change in 'our' group shared aspirations and goals produces change at the level of attitudes and behaviours – Prof Kate Reynolds

# Rule 4: Context

"Context refers to the *spatial and institutional* locations of social situations together, crucially, with the norms, values, and interrelationships found in them." p 216

- Spatial
- Institutional
- Comparing between and ...

comparing within?

# Rule 5: Outcomes

"Evaluators need to understand what are the outcomes of an initiative and how they are produced." p 217

"Outcomes provide the key evidence for the realist evaluator in any recommendation to mount, monitor, modify or mothball a program. "p 217

"Realist evaluators examine outcome patterns in a theory testing role. Outcomes are not inspected simply in order to see if programs work, but are analysed to discover if the conjectured mechanism/context theories are confirmed. "p 217

Peter Rossi: The iron law of evaluation and other metallic rules. Research in Social Problems and Public Policy. 4:3, 1987

- The Iron Law: The expected value of any impact assessment of any large scale social programme is zero
- The Brass Law: The more social programs are designed to change individuals, the more likely the net impact of the program will be zero

**Risk that can't measure impact or data is unclear? Treat risk through theory testing?**

# Rule 6: CMO configurations

“In order to develop transferable and cumulative lessons from research, evaluators need to orient their thinking to *context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations* (CMO configurations).” p 217

“A CMO configuration is a proposition stating what it is about a program which **works for whom in what circumstances.**” p 217

“The conjectured CMO configuration is the starting point for an evaluation, and the refined CMO configuration is the finding of an evaluation.” p 217.

- This is the nature of knowledge building

# Rule 7: Teacher-learner processes

“The research act thus involves *learning* the stakeholder’s theories, formalizing them, *teaching* them back to the informant, who is then a position to comment upon, clarify and further refine the key ideas.” p 217

- Pawson and Tilley say that this feeds into the cycle of ‘enlightenment’ between the research and policy fields, and is repeated over many evaluations
- Not clear yet what it means to teach theories back.
- How useful is playing them back in CMO form?

# Rule 8: Open systems

“Evaluators need to acknowledge that programs are implemented in changing and permeable social world,

and that program effectiveness may thus be subverted or enhanced through the unanticipated intrusion of new context and new causal powers.” P 218

# Some example hypotheses

“A CMO configuration is a proposition stating what it is about a program which works for whom in what circumstances.” p 217

Education notices:

- FRC conference allows indigenous leaders to reinforce a norm of school attendance, which affects behavior
- The FRC refers people to services if it finds a problem that needs addressing such as alcohol dependence, or parenting skills, or poor money management
- The FRC can put people on income management to either reinforce message that the group norm matters, or to help better control spending choices, which reduces drinking in the home, making it calmer, so that child sleeps more, and gets to school...



# Some example hypotheses

## Child protection notices:

- Early identification of child protection concerns is an opportunity for FRC to redirect client to services, leading to prevention of harm to child and possibly preventing removal
- Where joint carers, they can be brought together to address problems in a child-centred way, resulting in deeper search for solutions?
- Calling in men as well as female carers may draw their role to their attention, as a way to encourage men to take more responsibly for parenting, resulting in men helping get kids to school?
- Any trigger can be used to call in where concern for child. This allows both early intervention and holistic co-ordinated care
- Where neglect due to poor money management, the FRC can refer to MPower and or IM
- Service like Mpower may be a way to introduce clients to other services they might otherwise find shameful

# Some example hypotheses

## Magistrates court notices

- A FRC conference
- ...can reinforce a norm that less violence is better for children, and tells men and youth that their behaviour matters to younger kids welfare
- ...can suggest a client attend an Ending Family Violence program or seek alcohol rehab

## Housing

- A FRC conference
- ...can reinforce a norm that controlling the number of people in house resulting in less drinking and less violence is better for children

# WORK-IN-PROGRESS

This session is an example of Rule 7: the teacher-learner process

Help in learning theories so we might refine them



**The original question ...**

**What role does RE have in evaluation of complex multi-site and multi-strategy initiatives?**

Thank you