

# Contributions of Theory to Evaluation Practice:

## Examples from the Field

*Fellows Forum*

*International Evaluation Conference*

*Australian Evaluation Society*

*Sydney, September 2019*

## Meanings of Theory within Evaluation

1. Theories of Evaluation (Scriven, Shadish)
2. Program Theory [Logic] (Chen, Funnell)
3. Social Science Theory [Funded Knowledge, Evidence-Based] (Donaldson and Lipsey, Rog)

Focus on *Roles for Social Science Theories to Practice*

# Definitions of Theory

- A theory is a group of linked ideas intended to explain something.
- A coherent group of tested propositions commonly regarded as correct, that can be used a principles of explanation and prediction.

Theories work in many ways: [1] contribution to the search for laws, [2] using definitions to develop testable propositions, [3] describing the causal processes that mediate relationships.

# Example 1: Theory to Guide Evaluation

## Evaluation Study

### *Evaluation of School STEM Program*

#### Theory

*Innovation: something that is perceived as new from the point of view of the adopter. Factors affecting take-up include:*

*\*Relative Advantage*

*\*Observability*

*\*Trialability*

*\*Complexity (Rogers)*

# Spare Example 1. Theory to Guide Evaluation

## *Theory in Action*

### Innovation and Change Principles

#### *Design Stage*

*Use of change theory to organise data management and findings in effective formats.*

## Example 2. Theory to Guide Evaluation

### *Evaluation of Burglar Beware Program*

#### Theory

#### Displacement theory for situational crime

\*Removing the opportunity for crime or seeking to prevent a crime by changing the situation in which it occurs does not actually prevent crime but merely moves it around.

(Hesseling, 1994)

## Example 2: Theory to Guide Evaluation

### *Theory in Action*

### Displacement theory for situational crime

Data Collection and Analysis Stage

*Calculated displacement of home burglary*

*\*to address potential weakness in program*

*\*to strengthen recommendations on success of program  
in high crime areas*

## Example 3: Theory to Guide Evaluation

### *Evaluation of Leading Curtin: Head of School Development Program*

#### Theory

#### *Competing Values Management Theory*

*\*Human Relations*

*\*Open Systems*

*\*Rational Goals*

*\*Internal Processes (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983)*



# Example 3: Theory to Guide Evaluation

## *Theory in Action*

### *Competing Values Management Theory*

Data analysis stage

*Used theory to benchmark university Leadership and Management Development Framework*

*\*to provide external validity*

*\*to strengthen recommendations to retain program structure*

# Example 4. Theory to Guide Evaluation

## Evaluation Study

*Evaluation of Introductory Academic Program In universities, sponsored by AusAiD*

Theory

Hierarchy of Social Needs (Maslow)

*\*Physiological \*Safety \*Belonging \*Esteem \*Self-Fulfilment*

# Example 4: Theory to Guide Evaluation

## *Theory in Action*

### Hierarchy of Social Needs (Maslow)

#### Reporting Stage

#### *Use of Maslow's theory*

*\*to reinforce and bolster findings*

*\*to strengthen recommendations to change IAP policy*

# Implications for Evaluation Practice

*\*Evaluator decision-making about incorporation of social theory into practice*

*\*Effects of the use of theory on quality of evaluation*

*\*Lessons for evaluation practice/training etc (Rog)*

*Rog, DJ (2015). Infusing theory into practice and practice into theory. American Journal of Evaluation, 36, (2), 223-238.*

*Donaldson, SI and Lipsey, MW (2007). Roles for theory in evaluation practice: In Shaw, I et al. The handbook of evaluation: policies, programs and practices. London UK. Pp 56-75.*