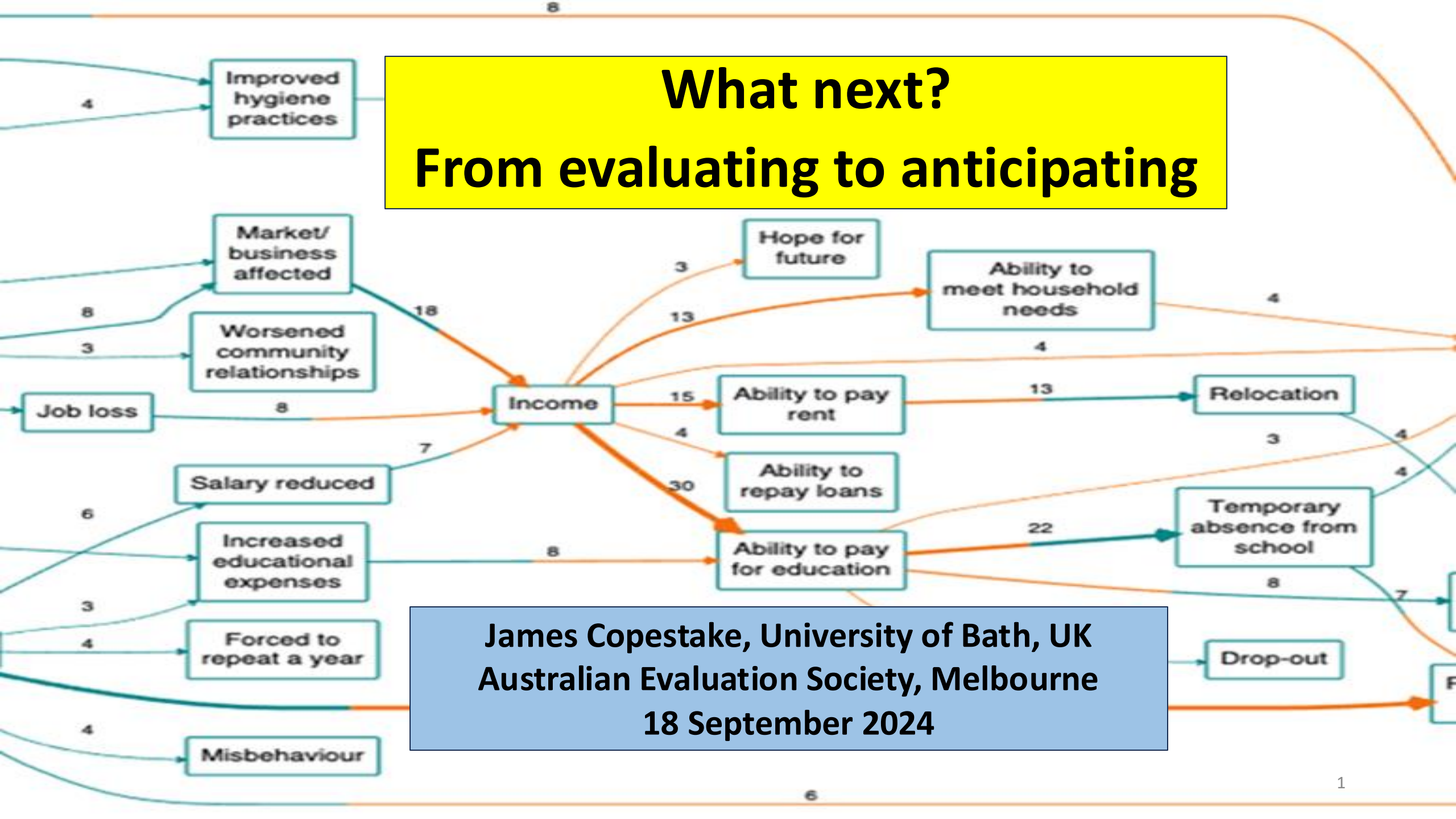


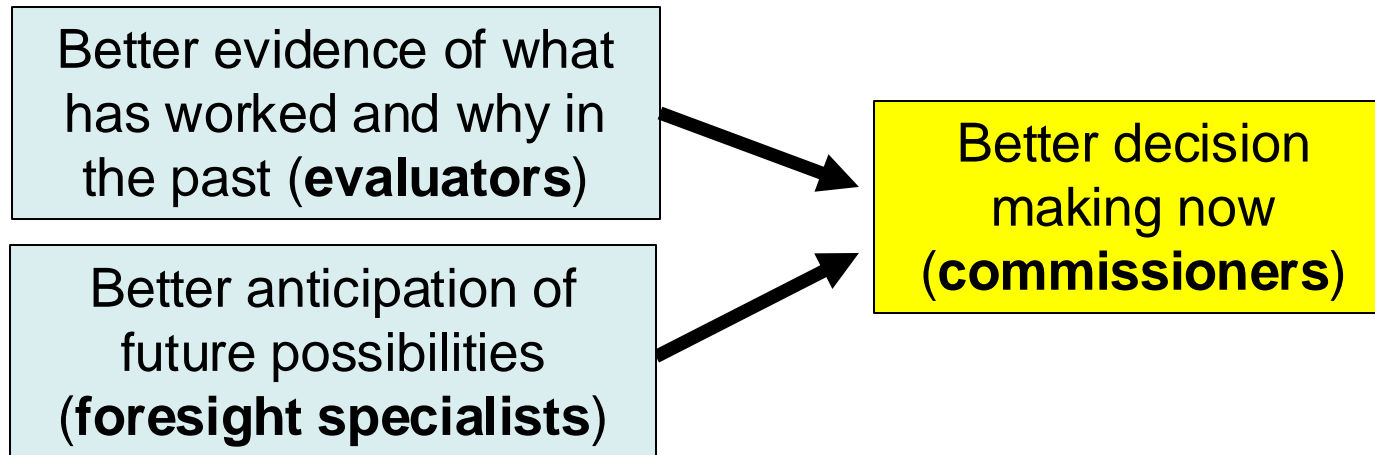
What next? From evaluating to anticipating



James Copestake, University of Bath, UK
Australian Evaluation Society, Melbourne
18 September 2024

Motivation – can evaluative practice be more forward looking?

One view of the current professional division of labour



Or should these roles be more closely integrated?

Anticipation = the form we give to the future in the present

Or is futurology for fools?



“The inability to predict outliers implies the inability to predict the course of history... What is surprising is not the magnitude of our forecast errors, but our absence of awareness of it.”

N N Taleb (2007) *Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable.*

“Thinking usefully about the future of the planet is too important to be left to states, corporations and technologists... The difficulty of the task is an argument for investing more in tackling it, not less.”

M J Albert (2024) *Navigating the global polycrisis: mapping the futures of capitalism and the earth.*

Other evaluators' views

Patton, Picciotto, van den Berg...

Aspirations for a more “**transformational**” role for evaluators

Carden...

Back to the future: are we trapped in our past?
Evaluation and Program Planning, 2023.

“... fundamentally, theories of change are about the future”

Schwandt & Gates...

Evaluating and valuing in social research, 2021.

Evolution from “conventional” and “expanded conventional” to “**emerging alternative**” approaches.

Gardner, Davies, Kelly...

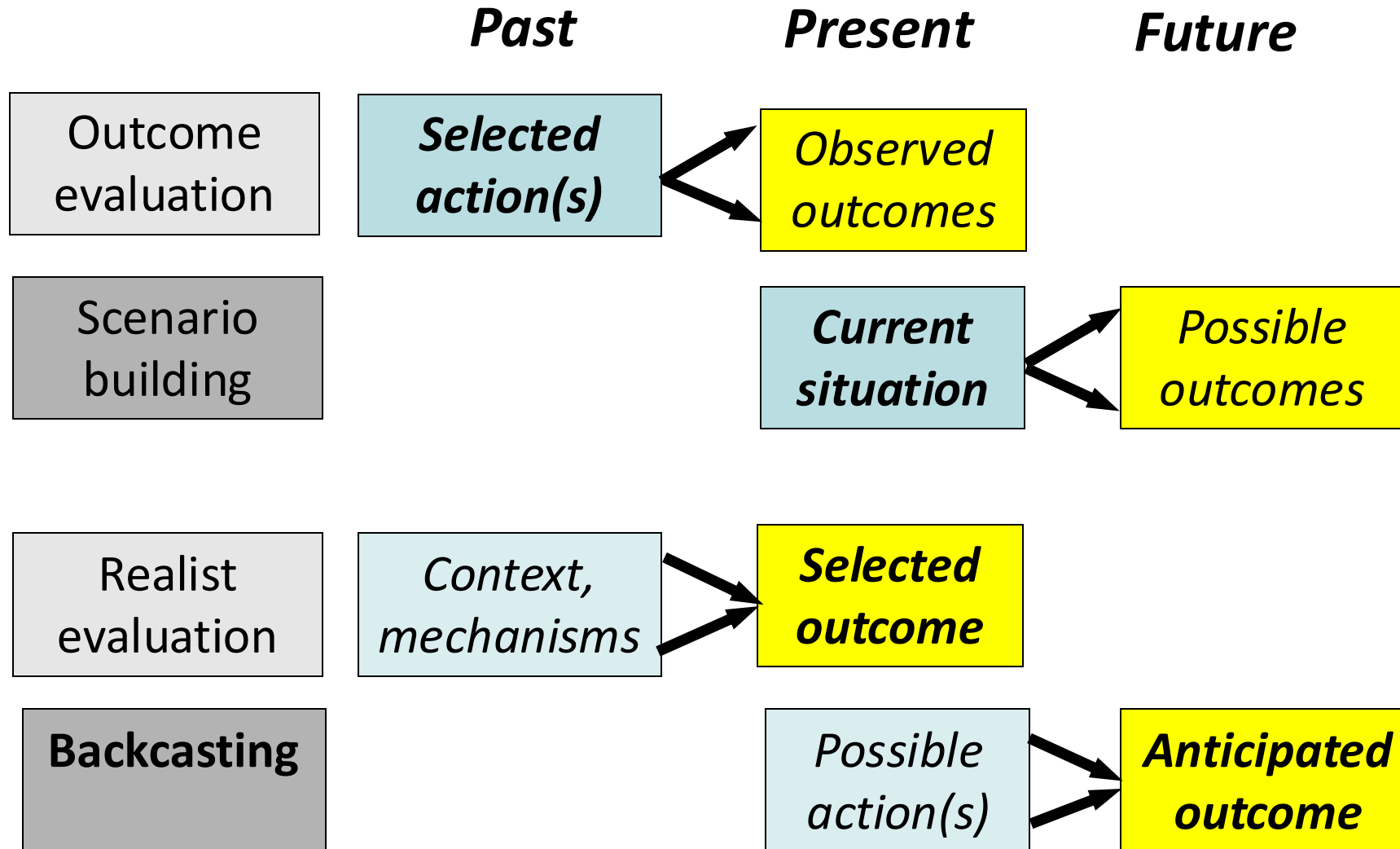
Bridging foresight and evaluation: a bridge worth building. New Directions for Evaluation, Special issue, 2024

Includes a paper by Rick Davies reviewing use to date of **ParEvo**

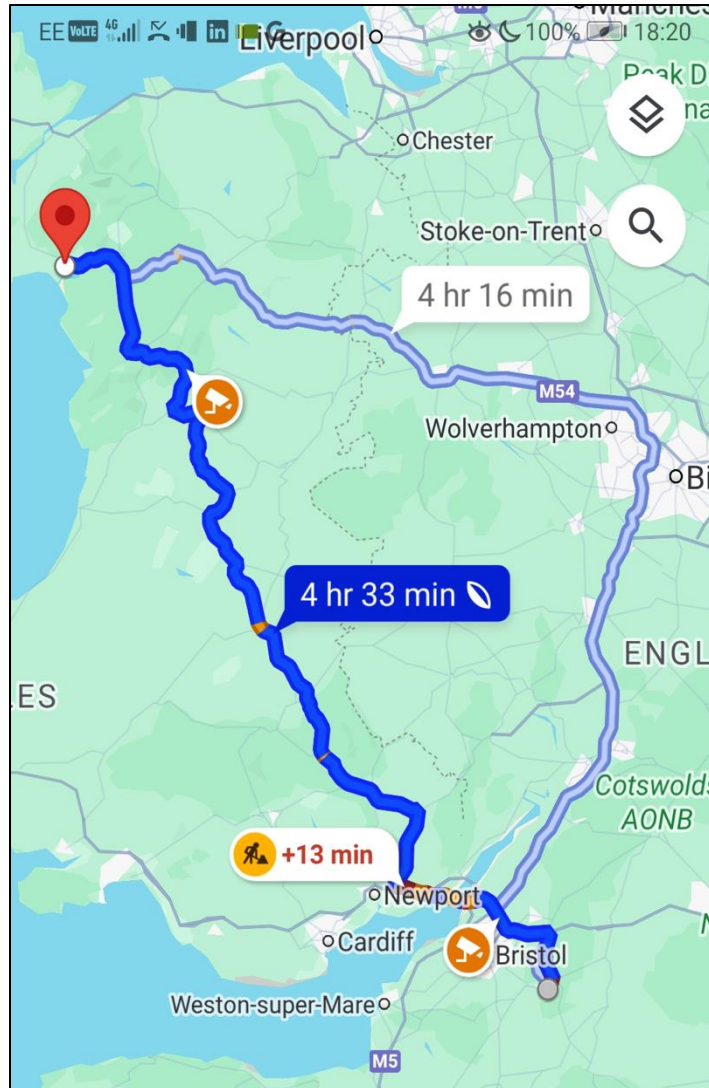
Purpose of my presentation

1. To promote useful forward-looking evaluative practice.
2. To explore (with examples) what this could look like.
3. To suggest this should include
 - more use of **causal mapping**
 - more **backcasting**
 - hence go beyond better evaluation of foresight tools and anticipatory actions.

Forms of analysis through time



e.g. Backcasting with Google maps



Choose future destination

Find and evaluate possible routes

Drive chosen route

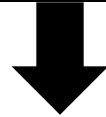
Arrive at destination

Our brain deploys its spatial cognition capability to imagine and evaluate possible change ahead in time. Explicit causal mapping helps us to do this better by using space and geography as an extended metaphor to develop ideas about time, change and history.

Presentation outline

Introduction

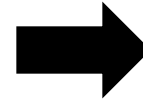
- Motivation and context ✓
- My background



A simple model

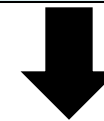
For thinking about evaluative practice

- problem framing
- causal analysis
- evaluative judgements
- decision making



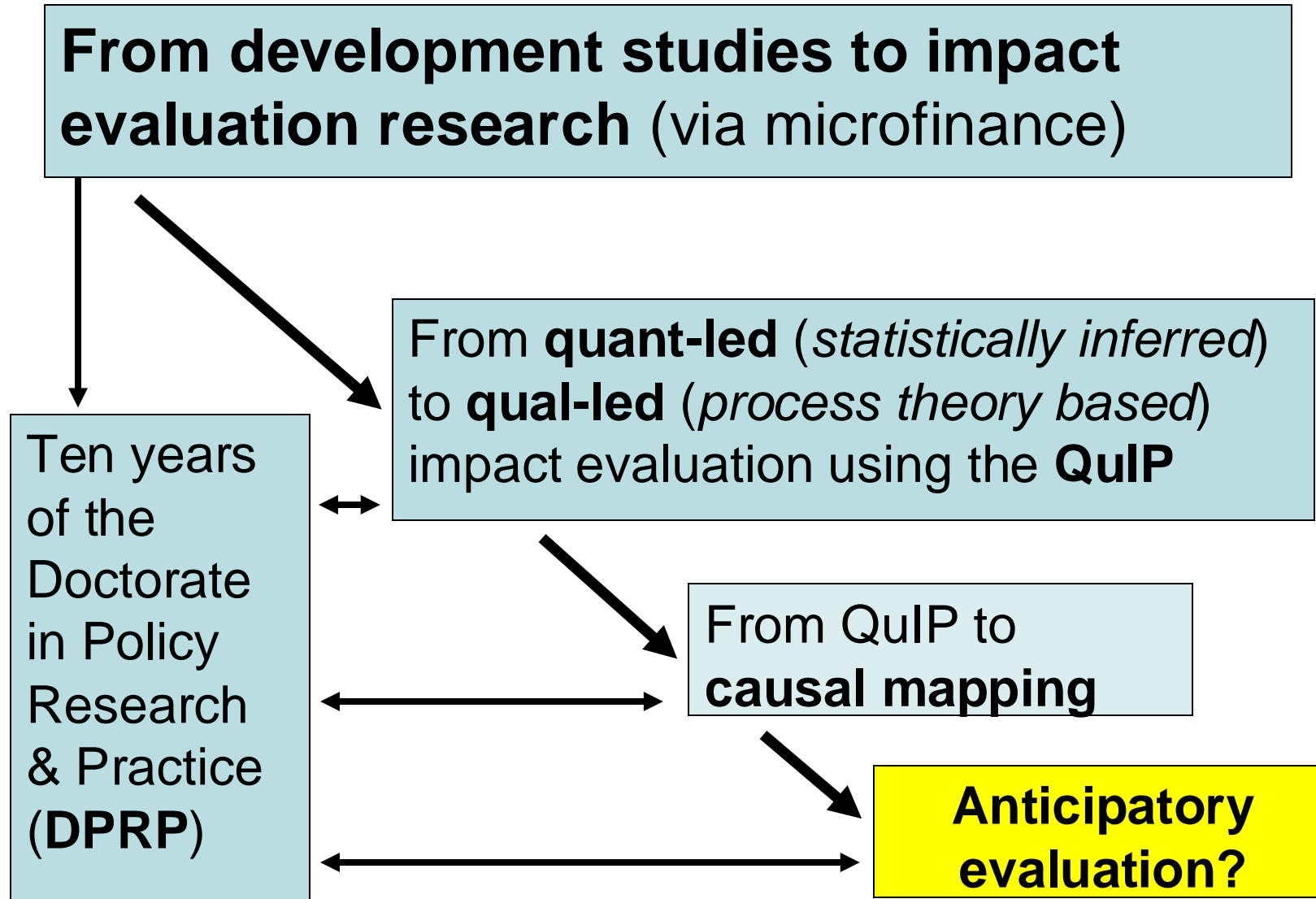
Illustrative cases

1. Doctoral research
2. *Impact investing [skip]*
3. Reform of social policy
4. Rethinking development studies

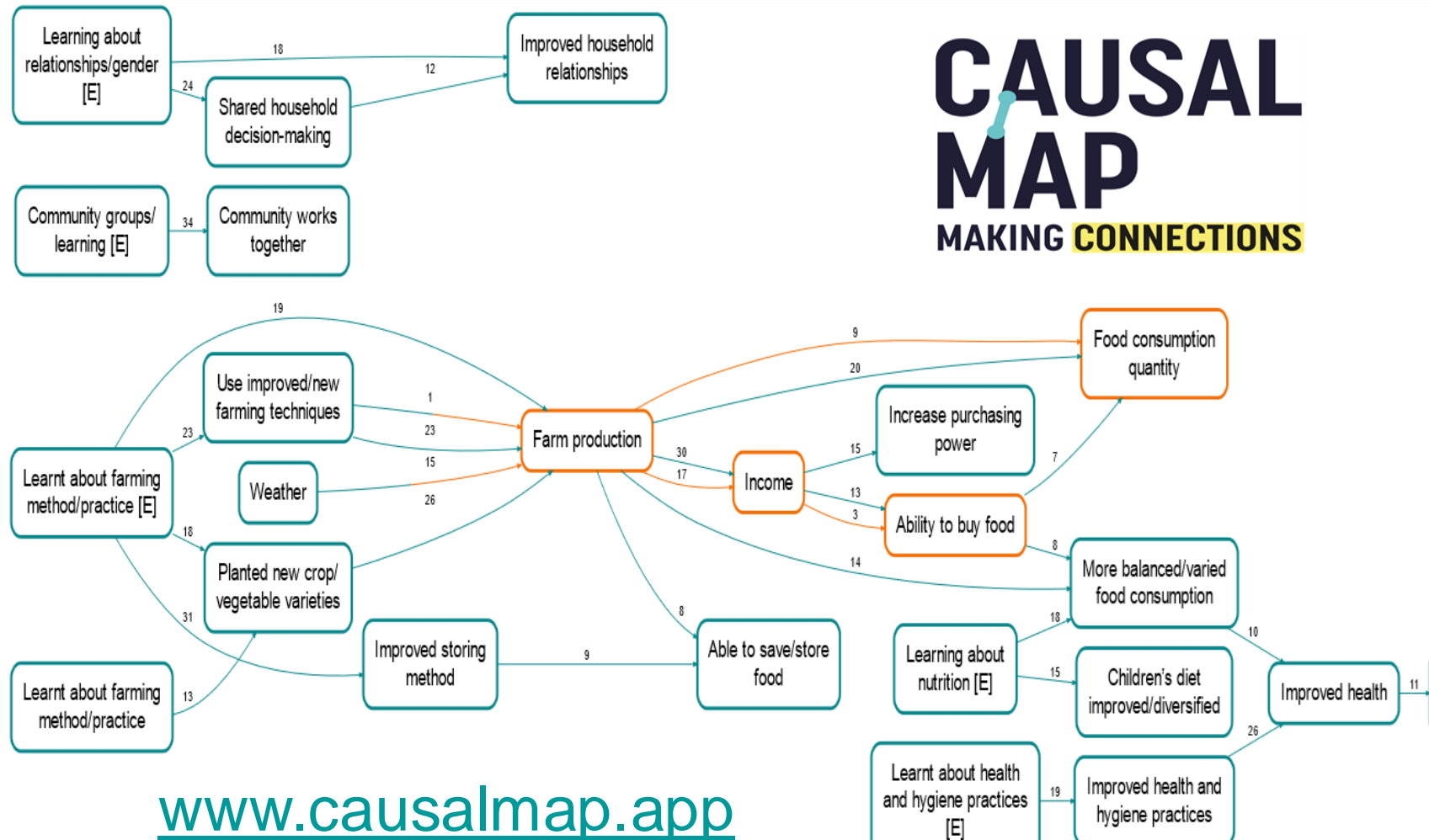


Conclusions

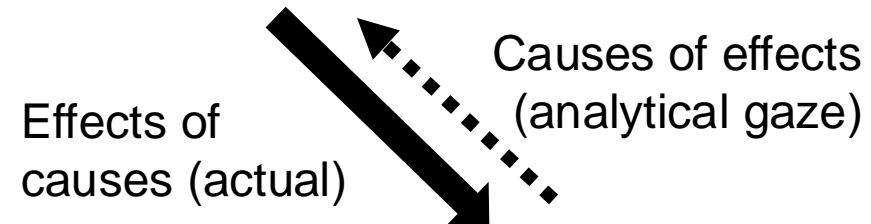
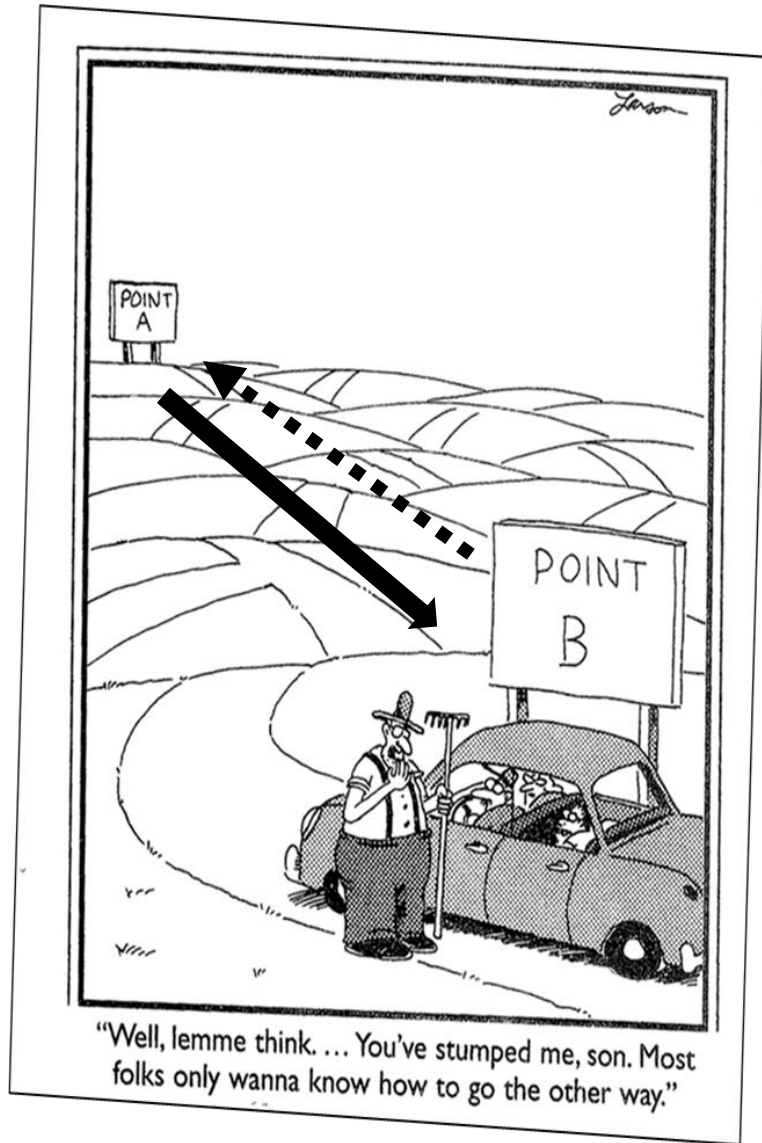
My background



Causal mapping: declaration of interest

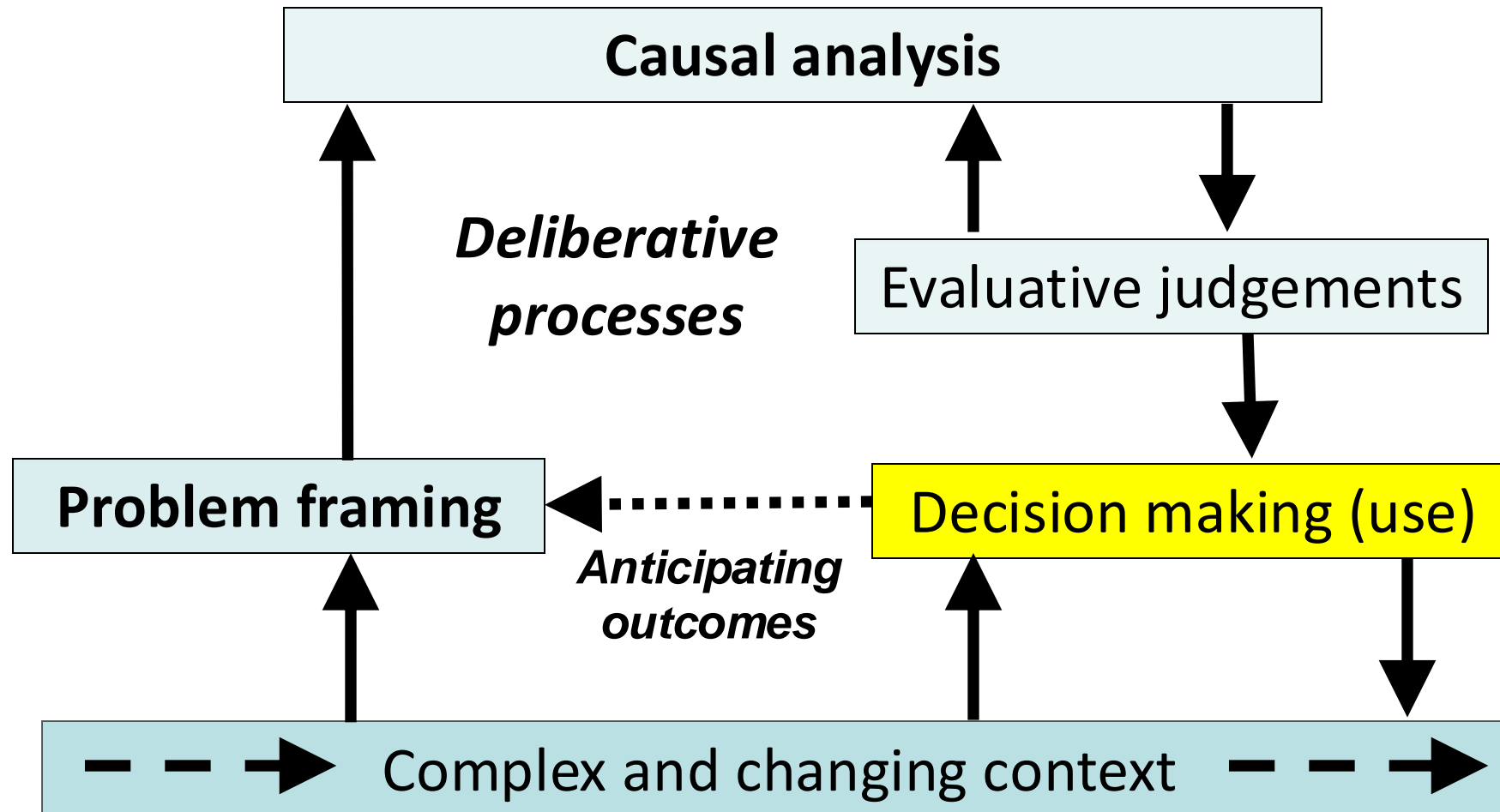


Visualisation and attribution



Powell, S., Copestake, J., Remnant, F. (2024) **Causal mapping for evaluators.** *Evaluation*, 30(1):100-119

A model of evaluative practice



e.g. Wayfinding with Google maps

	Description	Deliberative processes
Problem framing	Fixed and relatively certain outcome (planned destination).	Who gets to choose? Why do we want to go there? What is the time frame?
Causal analysis	Mostly stable causal processes – roads, cars, journey times...	Relatively precise and reliable tools to assist. Endogenous response of other drivers is a problem!
Evaluative judgement	Clear criteria – time, fuel efficiency, nice scenery...	Consult with passengers. Scope for mid-journey adjustments.
Decision making	Driver implements.	Backseat drivers!

e.g. Pathologies of evaluative practice

	Description	Deliberative process
Problem framing	Backward looking.	Neo-liberal procurement norms blunt collaboration.
Causal analysis	Bias towards quantified attribution.	Competition via methodological sophistry.
Evaluative judgement	Formulaic rubrics and procedures.	Evaluators marginalised and evidence ignored.
Decision making	Box-ticking legitimisation.	Instrumental participation (manufacture of consent).

Problem framing anticipating outcomes

Examples

Wayfinding with Google Maps.

Planning a doctorate.

Energy transitions to net-zero.

Environmental protection.

Universal Basic Income.

The MDGs and SDGs.

Prefiguration in critical theory and development studies.

Rearmament ahead of war.

Peace agreements after war.

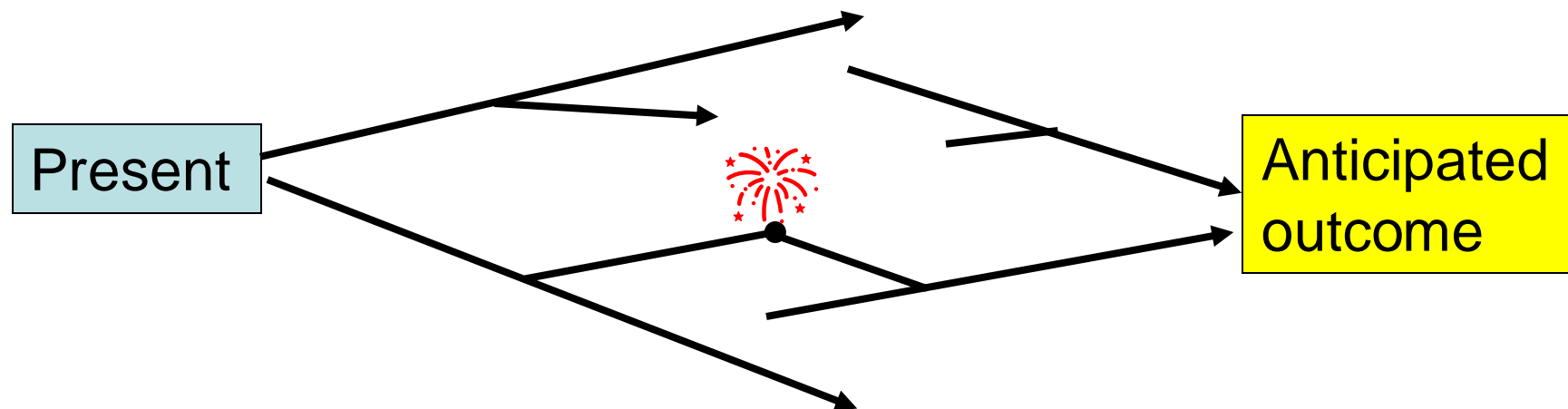
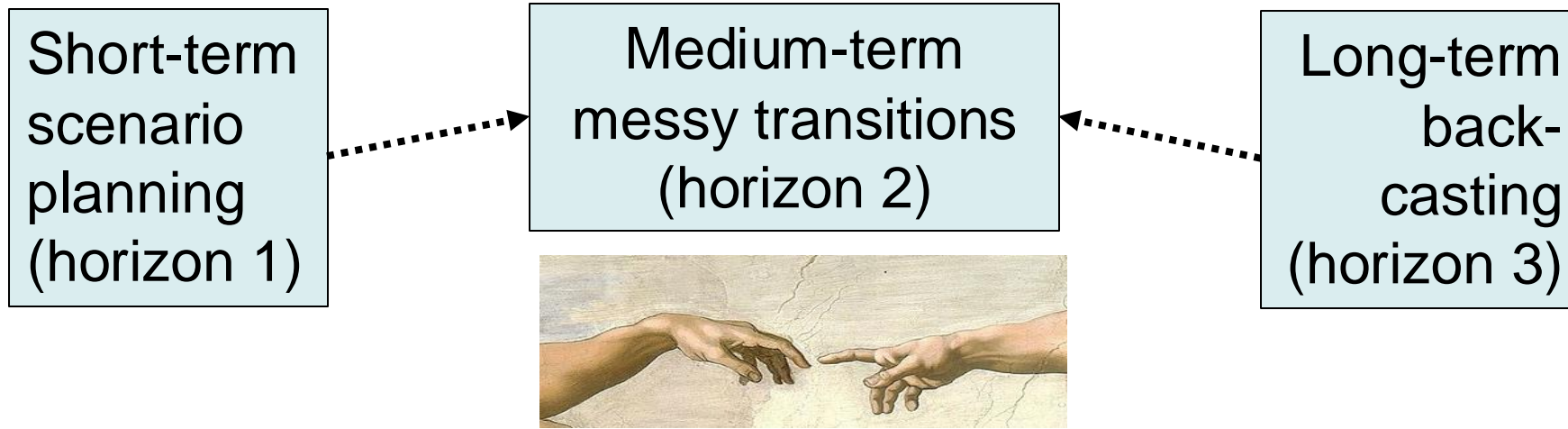
Why do this?

- To motivate, inspire and be more transformational
- To be more imaginative - antidote to path dependence and blinkered thinking.
- To gain analytical focus – antidote to the scatter gun approach of exploring multiple scenarios.

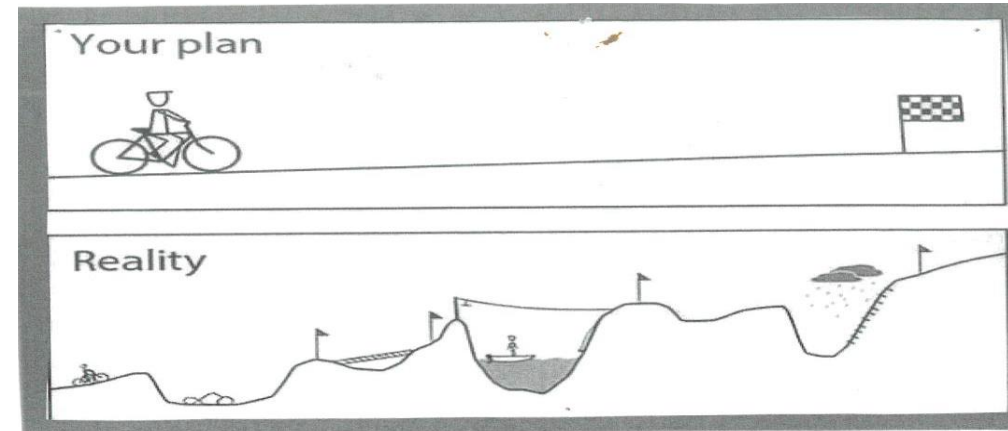
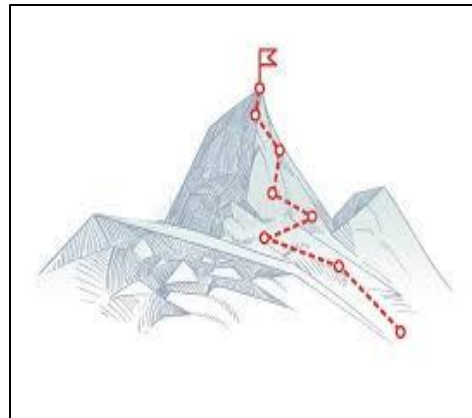
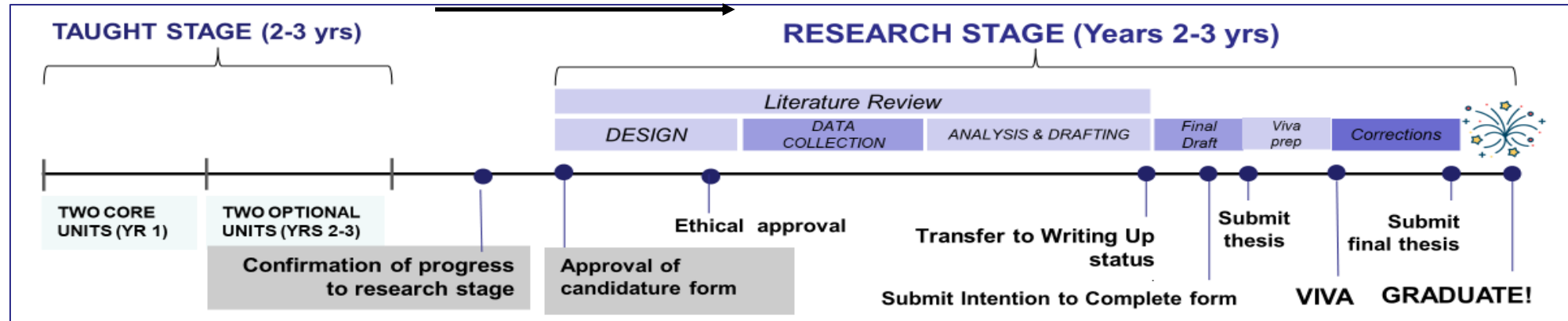
Beware!

Visionary imagining as a distraction from pragmatic problem solving.

Causal mapping in two directions to identify medium term options



Case 1. Doctoral research - visualised



Cf Catherine Manathunga et al. (2021) **Time mapping: charting transcultural and First Nations histories and geographies in doctoral education.** *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 42(2):215-33

Doctoral research – evaluative practices

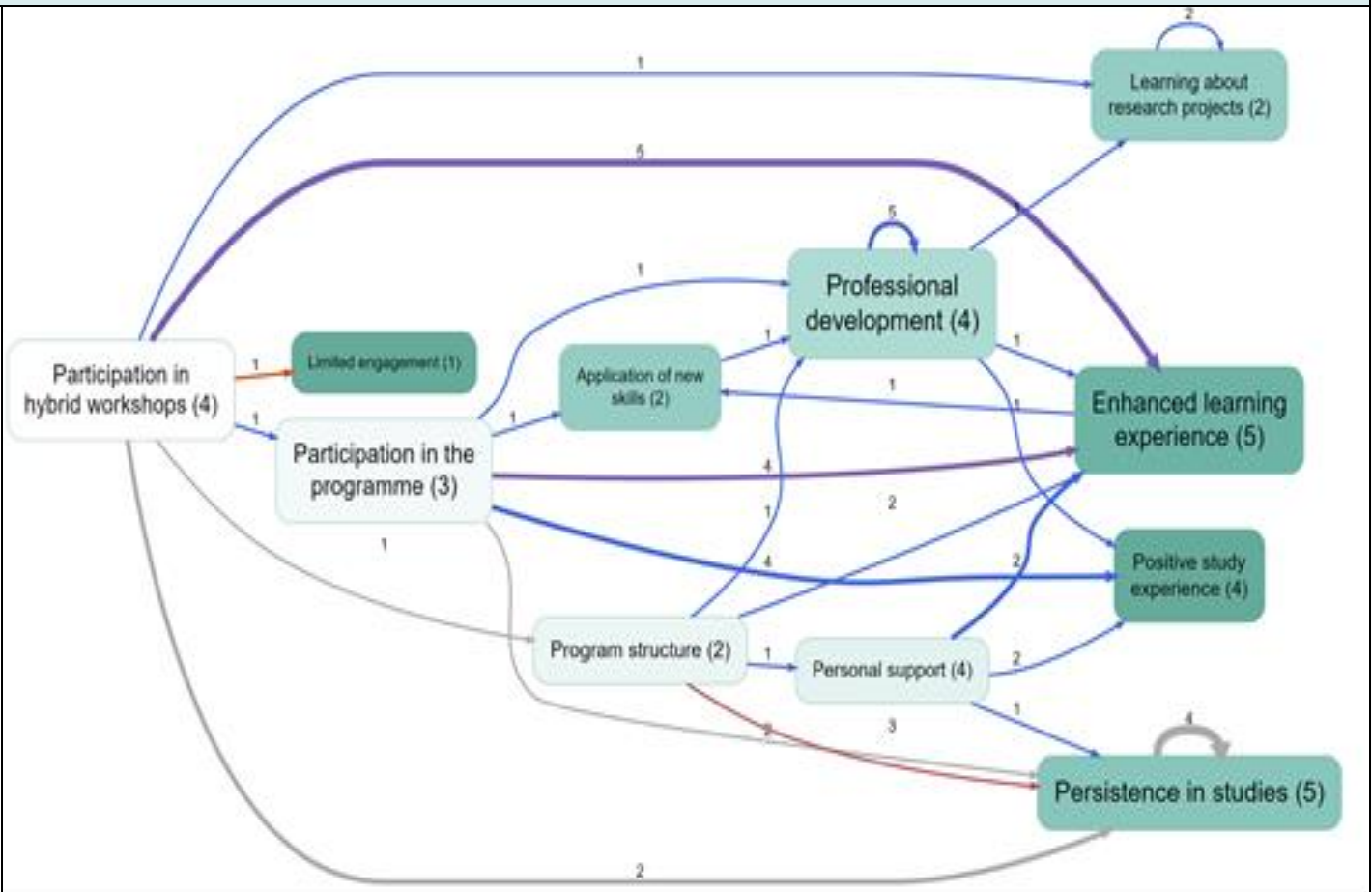
Induction

1. What do you ultimately want to achieve?
2. What is likely to hinder your progress?
3. What can we do to reduce these constraints?

Backcasting with a thesis plan checklist

1. Field of study
2. Research community
3. Research question
4. Analytical framework
5. Methodology
6. Thesis structure

Causal mapping of messy processes



Analysis

Anticipatory problem framing	Some rules and norms constrain thesis form and scope. Some scope for reverse engineering . But the destination is highly personal to each student Intuitive/abductive jump to a workable plan is a major stepping stone.
Causal analysis	Logical formal progression steps (linear). Messier process of building a coherent argument (non-linear).
Evaluative judgements	Student's own scoping decisions, subject to supervisory feedback Ethical approval of fieldwork
Decision making	Examiners ultimately pass or fail, but student and peer assessment of value, merit and worth also matter.
Process observations	Relentless reflexivity and self-evaluation; supervisory guidance; peer support. Messy, iterative, adaptive.

[Case 2. Impact investment]

Promise

To transform the financial industry by mainstreaming investment that incorporates credible **prospective** assessment of environmental and social impact.

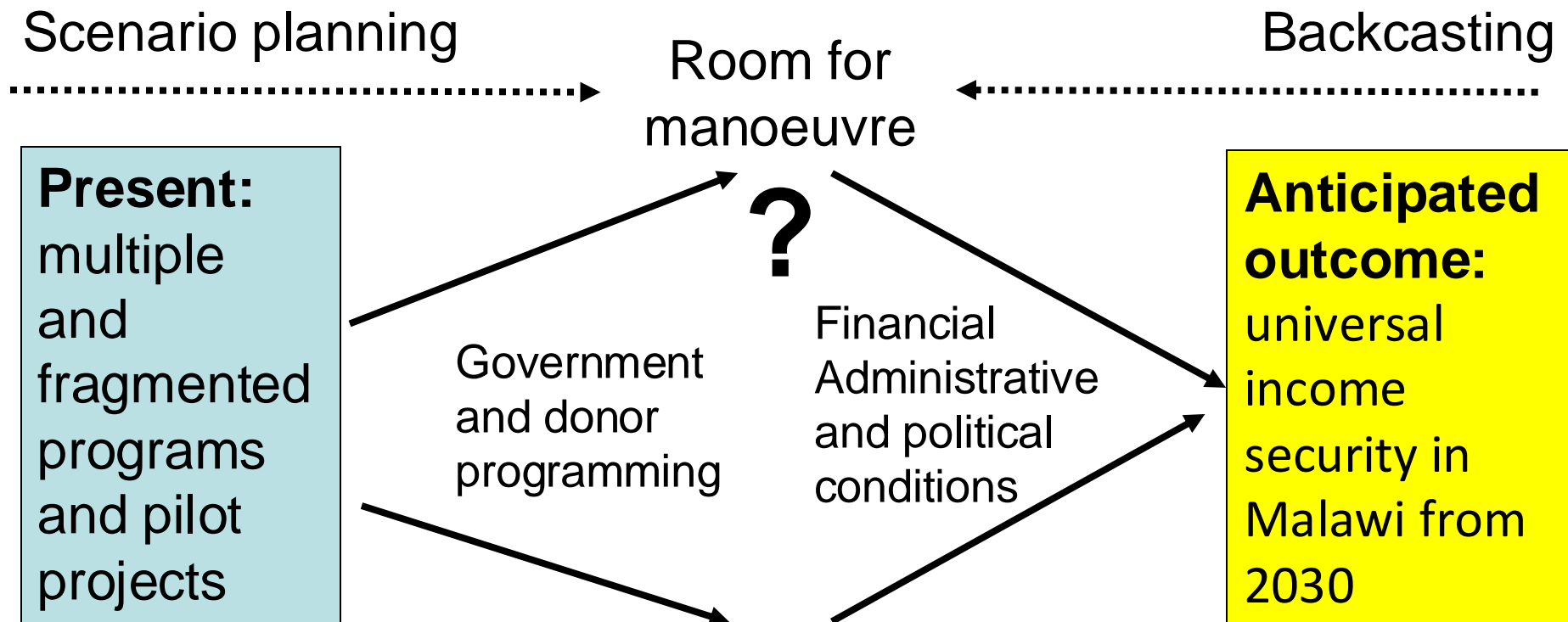
Pitfalls

Technical complexity and weak incentives to evaluate wider impact, result in a **impact wash**: self-delusional, tokenistic, and/or a deliberate smokescreen for business as usual.

“The concept of ‘externalities’ will be relegated to history, with finance theory accounting for risk, return and impact equally well. Ultimately, financial markets will be central in supporting solutions to critical threats facing the world” *Global Impact Investment Network (2018:4)*

Case 3. Social policy reform in Malawi

A test case for the global development regime: Why is it that policies leading to faster, deeper and more sustained poverty reduction has *not* happened there?



Analysis

Anticipatory problem framing	What would it take to eliminate extreme poverty in Malawi? Start with the simplistic sum, then explore constraints to achieving it.
Causal analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Many policy design options, informed by heavy investment in mixed evaluation heavy pilot projects to assess 'what works'.2. Scaling up options are subject to complex political economy constraints. Potential to use causal mapping to analyse multiple stakeholder perspectives.
Evaluative judgements	Incremental policy shift vs targeted 'big push' initiatives. Epistemic injustice – external agents dominate policy debate. Scope decolonising the policy space?
Decision making	Strategic planning and annual expenditure rounds of government and donors. Compete, collaborate or coordinate?

The simplistic sum as an anticipated outcome

	2016	2019	
Population (P)	17.4	18.9	Million
Head count poverty (H)	51.5	50.7	Percent
Poverty gap or depth (D)	17	17	Percent
National poverty line (Z)	188.6	165.9	Thousand MK per person
Simplistic sum (SS)	287.3	270.2	Billion MK at current prices
SS/GDP	5.1	3.3	Percent (MK data)
SS/non-poor income	6.7	3.9	
Simplistic sum (SS)	0.400	0.369	(US\$ billion, current prices)
SS/GDP	5.6	3.3	Percent (US\$ data)
SS/Govt revenue	49.7	26.9	
SS/Official aid	32.2	31.6	

SS = H*D*P*Z where H is the poverty headcount ratio, D is the poverty depth percentage, P is the total population, Z is the annual poverty line

Case 4. Rethinking development studies

DS = an arena for debate over development (progress and regress)

Three threads

(a) **normative** (how things *should be*)

(b) **historical** (how things *actually are*)

(c) **practical** (how things *could be changed*)

Discourse operates at multiple levels and within multiple time frames.

To illustrate (crudely) contrast modernization and decolonial mental models of development as follows. Note also the chasm between them.

	Modernization	Decolonial
Normative	Shared prosperity	Human emancipation
Historical	Scientific progress, economic growth and wealth creation	Reproduction of inequality and injustice
Practice	Facilitate voluntary diffusion of wealth and ideas	Political struggle between the privileged and the oppressed

Anticipatory evaluative practice

Development studies itself needs to be decolonised, given its historical association with Western dominated ideas, interests and activities. This includes promoting **epistemic justice** through the struggle for resources and voice of oppressed and marginalised people.

An anticipatory approach to this starts by **prefiguring** what a decolonised development studies should look like.

It then works back to the messy political economy analysis of possible causal processes for promoting it – including the ongoing struggle to decolonise the discipline.

Normative principles for post-colonial development studies

1. To embrace plurality in conceptualization of development
2. To embrace plurality in research methods
3. To employ research processes that minimize harm
4. To seek socially just and emancipatory research outcomes
5. To promote equitable opportunities for autonomous research



Wellington held out some beads and other trinkets, but the islanders had sent their fiercest lawyers—some of whom were chanting, “Sue him! Sue him!”

Conclusions

There is scope for more forward-looking evaluative practice. Thinking about **anticipated outcomes** can strengthen the influence of evaluation on public action. ✓

Making **imaginative** or **abductive leaps** to anticipated outcomes are key to forward-looking problem framing. ✓

Backcasting can help to focus analysis, inspire more radical action, and complement scenario planning. Its feasibility increases with consensus over the need for radical change. ✓

Inclusive deliberation is integral to more forward-looking evaluative practice. **Causal mapping**, as a form of **visualisation** can facilitate this. ✓