

Taking a long term view: challenges and opportunities

Parallel session

Norwegian Evaluation society

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Risk Solutions

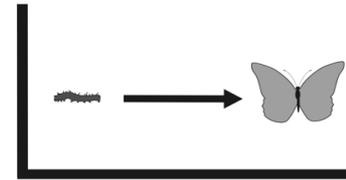
Key points

Most evaluations are short term

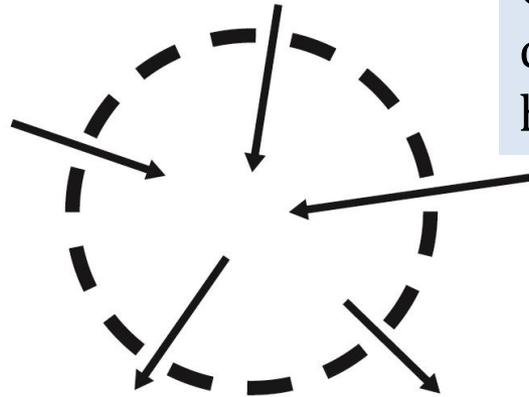
- ❖ But can provide a 'window' into past and future
- ❖ Complexity lens helps understand historical influences
- ❖ Who you interview and what you ask often as important as methodology you use –
- ❖ particularly when exploring causal relationships (and assumptions about these)
- ❖ Qual and quant methods have different things to contribute
- ❖ Some evaluation approaches give better opportunities to explore these aspects than others

Features of complexity (particularly) relevant to taking a long term view

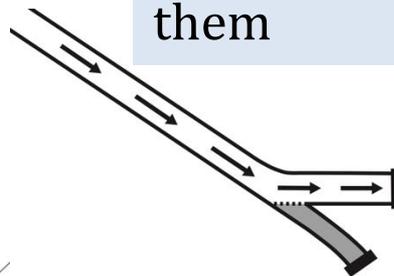
Open systems:
context includes
history.



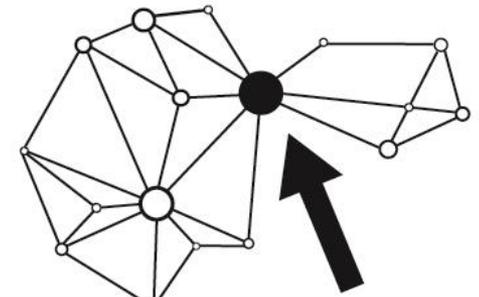
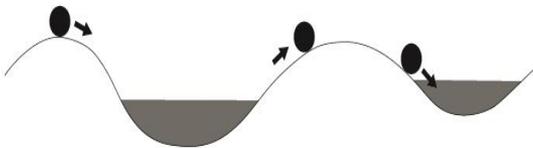
Change over time: how to current changes related to the past?



Path dependency:
current behaviour arises from the sequence actions, or decisions that preceded them



Domains of stability: have we been here before?



Multiple actors, levers and hubs:
stakeholder perspectives change system behaviour

Stakeholder perceptions and assumptions

- ✦ Assumptions – taken for granted views on what is important, what influences what, and how*
- ✦ Are often unconscious*
- ✦ Are historically formed*
- ✦ Evaluators need tools for surfacing these

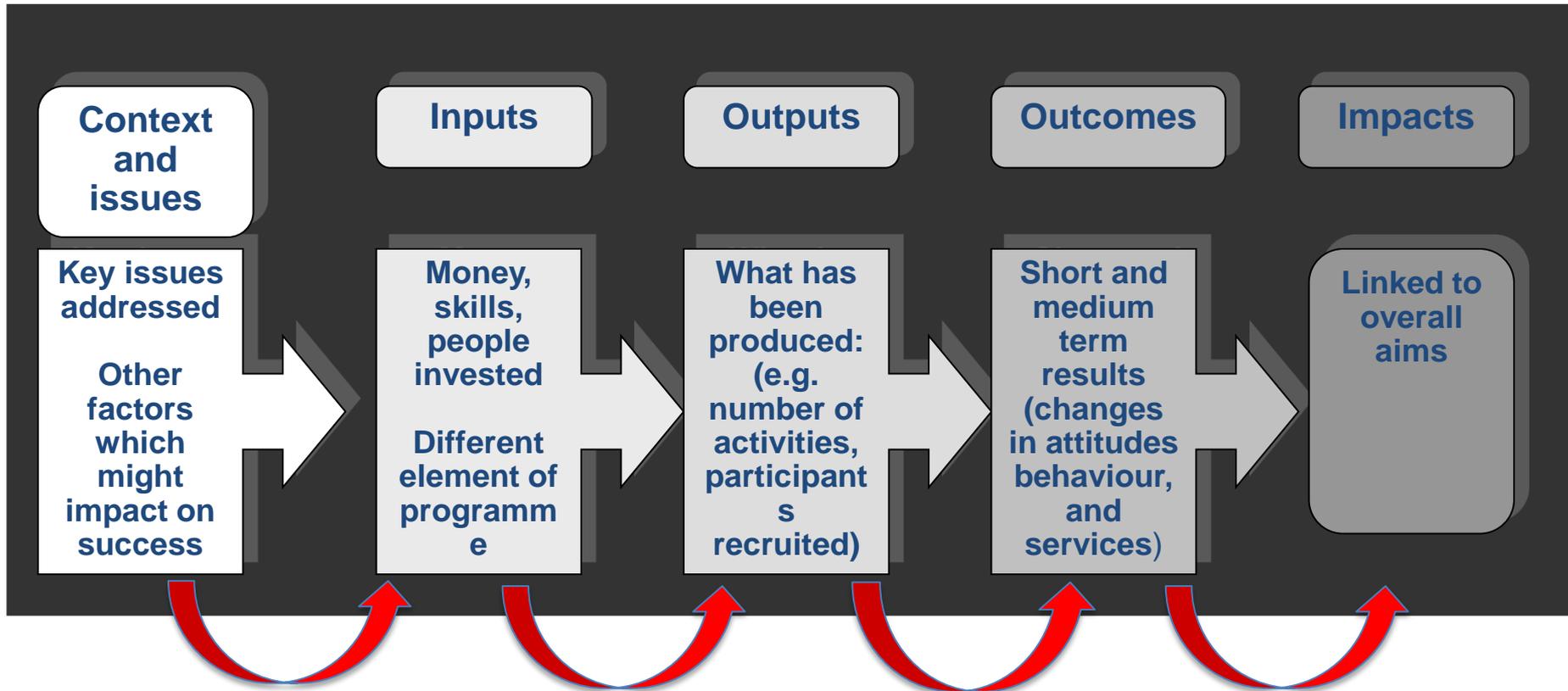
* Schein, E. H. (1985). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Evaluator tools

- ✘ Case studies – exploring the multiple factors influencing current affairs
- ✘ Qualitative interviewing
 - Asking the right questions (e.g. what has influenced decisions relating to current intervention?)
 - Finding informants with a long term view (may not still be around)
- ✘ Theory of change mapping (useful for clarifying context and assumptions – multiple maps helpful)
- ✘ System mapping and rich pictures may be helpful if include a historical perspective
- ✘ Contribution analysis, QCA and Process Tracing all provide good opportunity to ask right questions
- ✘ Time series analysis: if past data available, consistent and reliable



Components of Theory of Change



Assumptions and Rationale for interventions – help generate hypotheses to be tested about causal links between inputs, outcomes and impacts

Wider context: i.e. other (contextual or historical) factors which may be having an influence over outcome and impact data

Healthy Living Centre example

5 year long evaluation of 300 local community centres set up to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

We used theory of change, case studies including in depth interviews and observation, followed by a survey, to surface

- ✘ Prior experience of community work, local policy environment and organisations in area which influenced speed of set up and willingness of community to engage
- ✘ Key individual and organisational stakeholders prior views on causes of health inequality
- ✘ These influenced their choice of activities, outputs and outcomes

- ✘ Indications that many would return to prior situation once short term funding ended (but data not available after end of evaluation)