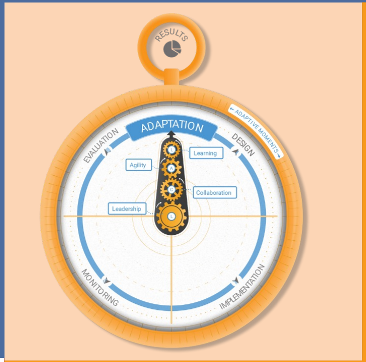
Adaptive evaluation



Guidance

Approaches | Methods | Tools

UNFPA
Independent Evaluation Office

Why this guidance?

By Marco Segone, Director, Independent Evaluation Office (IEO)

The setting

UNFPA operates in an increasingly turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous environment. Business as usual does not work anymore. To accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results, UNFPA has decided to develop and systematize adaptive management.

Why does this matter?

UNFPA wants to accelerate progress, and experience shows that acceleration requires learning to adapt. The Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025 commits to operationalizing the adaptive management model. Evaluating adaptively is a crucial part of adaptive management.

What is this Guidance?

This guidance is a practical resource to equip you with the right knowledge and mindset to develop your skills in adaptive evaluation. This guidance complements the A-Compass, the Adaptive Management Model in UNFPA, and helps implement the UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025, and Evaluation Policy 2024.

UNFPA has decided to take on adaptive management. The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 acknowledges the need to move towards learning and adaptive management and commits to operationalizing the adaptive management model. This decision means taking a systematic and structured approach to adaptation throughout the programme cycle, **including evaluation**. To move in that direction. UNFPA has developed the A-Compass, an Adaptive Management Model.

UNFPA staff will require new capacities and shifts in thinking (mental models) to make adaptive management and the A-Compass work, and this includes evaluation. **Adaptive management needs adaptive evaluation**. The guidance is a resource to support this move towards new ways of evaluating adaptively and apply the ways of working around the adaptive model to evaluation.

This is a first version of the guidance. Most of the methods included here have not been applied in UNFPA evaluations. Once piloted and adjusted to UNFPA reality the guidance will be updated and expanded with experiences at country, regional and headquarters levels. The guidance and its applications feeds into the A-Movement through the A-Academy and the A-Journeys.

I thank Jordi del Bas and Josep M. Coll, senior evaluation and organizational development experts for developing this guidance and the wider resource pack, under the direction of Valeria Carou-Jones, Evaluation Adviser at IEO.

Adaptive Evaluation in UNFPA is…

A holistic evaluative approach based on reflective inquiry and timely action that uses information about the present, the past and the future forecasting simultaneously to inform decisions (adjustments, improvements and new developments). These decisions allow the organization to reactively adapt and proactively anticipate changes and generate new opportunities to achieve the desired results.

If you want to know more about…

…Adaptive Management in UNFPA, check the A-Compass, the adaptive management model in UNFPA

…the A-Movement, check pages 37 onwards of the A-Compass

…evaluation at UNFPA, check UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025, and Evaluation Policy 2024

In this guidance you will find…

What to do and how to do it

Approaches, methods and techniques

This guidance offers a first set of approaches, methods and tools to start applying adaptive evaluation (we will call them methods). For each method the guidance tells you what problem it solves, what it is, why it matters, and shows you how to apply them. For each method we have curated materials and resources so you can deepen your understanding of the method if you want to start applying them. The goal is that you identify solutions to your current evaluation challenges and start exploring ways to be more adaptive.

The mindset

Set of attitudes, believes and values to make it work

Research and practice shows that approaches, methods and tools are often ineffective if they are not applied with the right mindset. This applies to adaptive evaluation as well. Methods help, but without the appropriate attitude and values they become a mechanistic set of steps that do not lead to the intended result. This guide focuses on mindset as much as it does on the processes around methods. We have curated methods to help you work on the values and attitudes that make adaptive evaluation work in practice.

This guidance helps to put in practice…

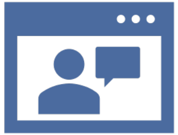
This guidance features methods and tools that will help you activate the four drivers of adaptive management when designing and conducting evaluations. The four drivers are: leadership, collaboration, agility and learning. The guidance will help you respond to the self-reflective questions on evaluation for the four drivers (see on pages 22 to 27 of the A-Compass), such as: Do staff involved in evaluations have a proactive attitude in the design and conduct of evaluations? (**Leadership**); Are our evaluations designed and conducted in a way that enables and fosters the engagement of multiple perspectives and feedback delivery in a trusted and safe environment for all involved? (**Collaboration**); Are our evaluations flexible and responsive enough to ensure useful insights for decision makers in fast-changing contexts? (**Agility**); Do our evaluations translate into timely insights that help us adapt better (faster and through well-informed programme designs)? (**Learning**)

This guidance features approaches, methods and tools that help implement the 2024 Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Strategy. The guidance is a direct contribution to achieve results such as:

- Improved culture of evidence-based decision-making, organizational learning and accountability, from **the use** of evaluation findings and recommendations.
- Improved approaches and methodologies allowing more focused, targeted, **responsive** and **adaptive evaluations**.
- The evaluation function delivers increasingly **responsive**, **flexible**, diversified, and **innovative** evaluation processes and products.

This guidance is part of a broader resource pack that includes…

Adaptive evaluation sessions



Resources for six adaptive evaluation sessions are available here which include slide decks, resource materials and recordings of training sessions. The training sessions were delivered from November 2022 to March 2023, and include specific approaches, methods, and techniques based on regional and country needs. For any support in accessing the materials, reach out to evaluation.office@unfpa.org.

Guidance on adaptive evaluation

This guidance brings together in a single resource all the methods presented in the adaptive evaluation sessions.

The guide offers a selection of feasible adaptive methods, curated based on the sessions' content. The guidance seeks to inspire you with possible solutions to your challenges when evaluating more adaptively. The ultimate goal is that you start testing these methods, combining them and exploring applications to suit your needs.

Learning by doing & coaching

This is the third phase of the capacity development for adaptive evaluation initiative within the framework of the developmental evaluation of RBM. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) provided support to offices testing the methods while promoting a hands-on community of practice on adaptive approaches (linked to the A-movement: A-journeys, A-Labs). The IEO coached early adopters so that they can lead others into adaptive evaluation.

The final goal is to contribute to the A-Movement by helping develop an adaptive evaluation network, cascading training from experienced practitioners (trained and coached by the initiative) to staff interested in adaptive evaluation.

What's your challenge?

1. Methods to foster evaluation use
- User engagement
- Timely feedback loops
- Emergence in evaluations

2. Methods for learning and adaptation in real time
- Real-time evaluation
- Developmental evaluation
- Adaptive inquiry frameworks

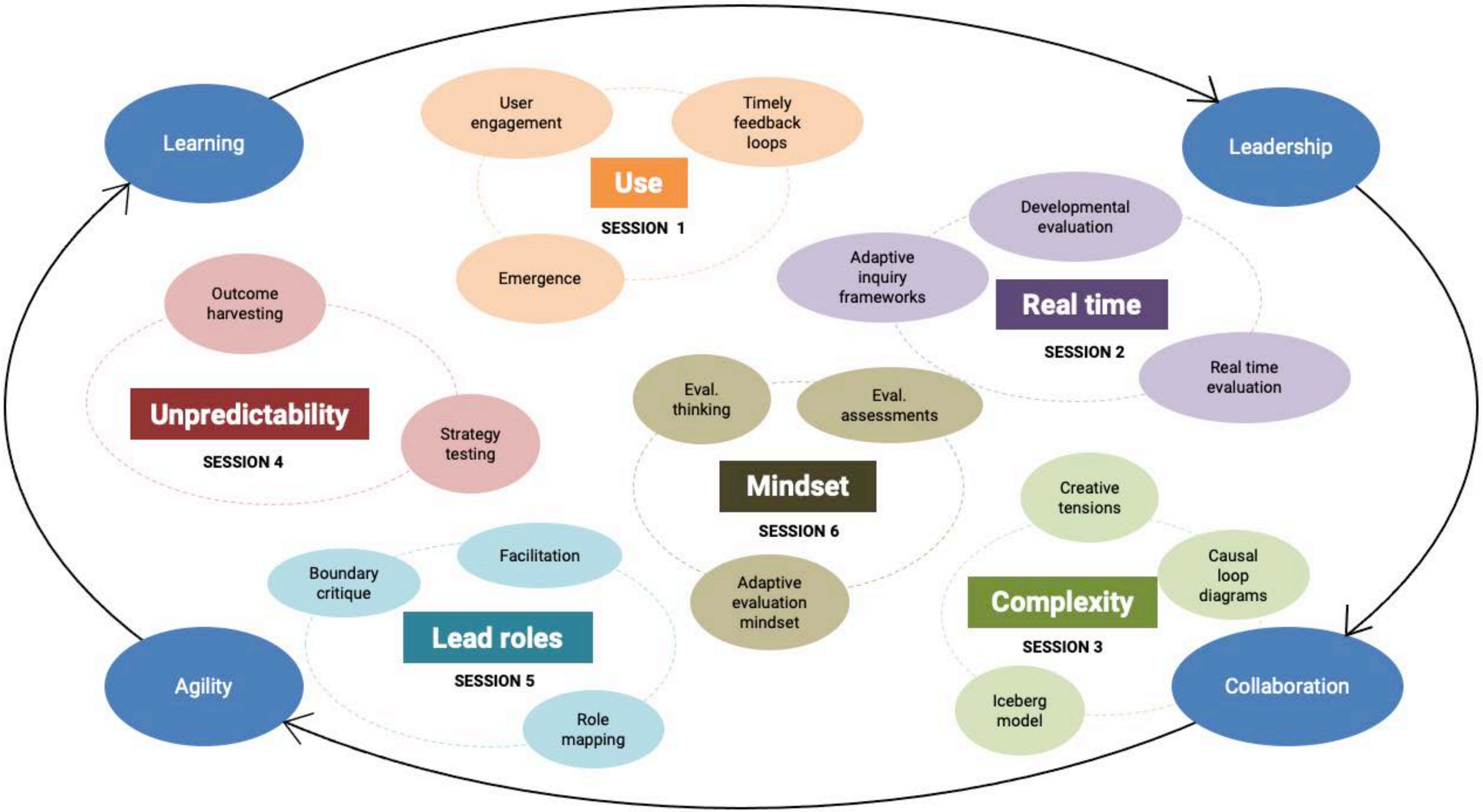
3. Methods to capture complexity
- Creative tensions
- Causal loop diagrams
- The iceberg model

4. Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments
- Outcome harvesting
- Strategy testing

5. Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation
- Leading on emergence
- Boundary critique
- Facilitating evaluation

6. The adaptive evaluation mindset
- The adaptive evaluator's mindset
- Evaluative thinking
- Evaluability assessments

Constellations of Adaptive Evaluation approaches, methods and tools



The adaptive evaluation constellations

For simplicity, we will call approaches, methods, mindsets and tools ‘methods’.

Do not think of these as separate boxes. They are all interrelated. Combine them. Explore.

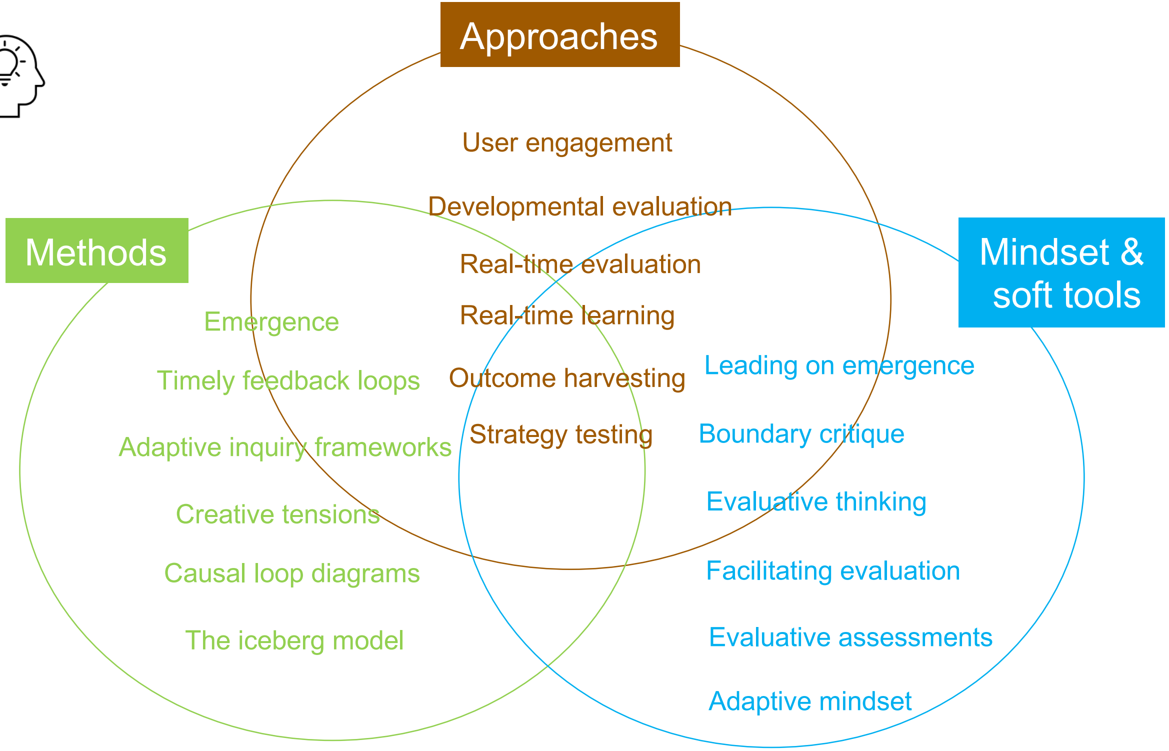
For example, developmental evaluation uses timely feedback loops, which go hand in hand with adaptive inquiry frameworks.

User engagement approaches can be applied in all other approaches and methods and the mindset tools.

You can use these methods in ‘traditional’ evaluations as well

For example, causal loop diagrams and the iceberg model can be used to analyze findings and identify recommendations in traditional evaluations.

You can also use adaptive evaluation mindset and soft tools in all types of evaluation approaches and even beyond. For example, evaluative thinking and system-awareness, engagement and emergence (SEE) can help you become a more adaptive manager during planning and implementation as well.



Your challenge or problem.

The method, approach or tool that can help you

Examples of how to apply adaptive evaluation constellations

Answers to your challenges and problems

Users and stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in our evaluations, and when they are, we do not have a systematic approach. Ultimately, this means that the results of the evaluations are not being used as much as they could be. Our challenge is to better engage users.

User engagement

Evaluation results and data come too late to inform decision-making processes, and users cannot use evaluation results to make decisions and adapt quickly. Also, as an organization, we do not learn much from evaluations.

Timely feedback loops

Things change and evolve very quickly, even in evaluations. We plan the questions, the methods, the key informants, the data collection moments, but what we plan is soon no longer relevant because conditions have changed. Occasionally we adapt the evaluation design to things that emerge, but we do not do so systematically.

Emergence in evaluations

Evaluations are not agile enough to generate learning to adapt quickly. We need to know if the intervention is working or not when it happens and make decisions immediately. We can not wait until the end or the mid-term of the intervention. This is all the more true as UNFPA's humanitarian portfolio grows in size.

Real-time evaluation

Sometimes summative and formative evaluations are not what we need. We need evaluations that help us develop new innovative initiatives, evaluations with a strong focus on learning and adaptation based on evidence.

Developmental evaluation

In complex and rapidly changing contexts, evaluation frameworks (evaluation matrices) are already outdated by the time we answer the original questions. ‘Traditional’ evaluation matrices are not flexible and agile enough to accommodate the results of feedback loops.

Adaptive inquiry frameworks

Examples of how to apply adaptive evaluation constellations

Your challenge or problem.

The method, approach or tool that can help you

Answers to your challenges and problems

We are stuck with the same structural problems and challenges over and over again, and we do not know how to find ways to address and overcome these problems.

Creative tensions

We know the different elements (factors and variables) that explain the behavior of the programme that we monitor and evaluate, but we do not know how to capture their interrelationships and functional dynamics in a systemic manner.

Causal loop diagrams

We know how to collect factual data and identify key problems as we monitor and evaluate a programme, but we do not know enough how to critically identify the root-causes that explain them.

The iceberg model

We work in a complex environment where the paths to achieving goals are unpredictable and the context is constantly changing. Our monitoring and evaluation does not provide a complete picture of what we have accomplished, how, and why. We focus too much on measuring only against planned goals and leave out an important part of what we have achieved.

Outcome harvesting

Our programme takes place in a complex and unpredictable environment, and we are dealing with complex, fluid, and unpredictable problems. This requires shifts in programme strategy, but we are not revising the original theory of change. We are asking ourselves how we can adjust it while being transparent and accountable.

Strategy testing

We are aware that we are working in highly and rapidly changing environments but we are not able to capture change in a timely manner. Our monitoring and evaluation systems in place are too reactive, not allowing the programme to identify and anticipate unpredictable or unexpected changes.

Leading on emergence

Your challenge or problem.

The method, approach or tool that can help you

Examples of how to apply adaptive evaluation constellations

Answers to your challenges and problems

We really want to include vulnerable stakeholders and leave no one behind in the evaluation, but we still do not know how to critically reflect on what and who should be included, given the limited resources we have for conducting the evaluation,

Boundary critique

We have user engagement methods and tools in place, but when it comes to engage users in interactive sessions, we still lack the interpersonal skills to motivate them and make them feel ownership of the evaluation.

Facilitating evaluation

We have already started applying new adaptive evaluation methods and tools, but staff are still more used to the 'traditional' methods and they are not taking a proactive role towards experimenting with them. We need to shift the culture.

The adaptive evaluator's mindset

We use adaptive evaluation methods, but that is not enough. Our current thinking does not promote adaptive evaluation and management. We need to know more about how to promote ways of thinking that enable learning and adaptation.

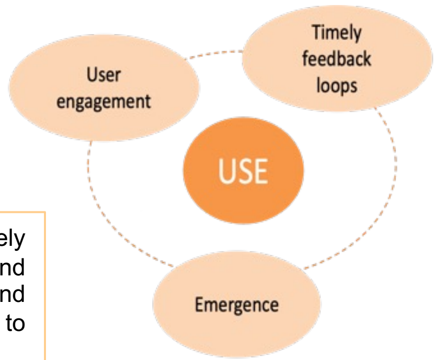
Evaluative thinking

We commission evaluations and discover too late that it was not the right time to do an evaluation. Our challenge is to figure out when an intervention can be evaluated in a reliable and credible way. We see that otherwise it is difficult to learn from the evaluation.

Evaluability assessments

1. Methods to foster evaluation use

Methods to foster evaluation use



User engagement, timely feedback loops and emergence influence and reinforce one another to enhance use.

WHAT

These methods are at the core of utilization-focused evaluation, which understands that evaluations should be planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance.

User engagement is about identifying, organizing and engaging primary intended users of an evaluation. **Timely feedback loops** ensure that findings inspire and inform decision-making when the input is needed. **Emergence** makes it possible to adapt to changes to ensure use when the (evaluation) context changes (things emerge) in a way that makes a difference for the evaluation.

WHY

In complex contexts/interventions we need to manage adaptively. And in **adaptive management, evaluation use is essential**. There can be no adaptive management if evaluation results are not used for decision-making.

In more general terms, evaluations are not optimally used. This applies to evaluations in both complex and stable contexts/interventions. No one wants to fund an evaluation that is not useful.

Use in summative evaluations is important. **Use** in adaptive evaluations is a must

User engagement

!

My problem is…

That we want to engage users, but we do not know how to go about it

That we engage users, but we do not have a systematic approach to do it

WHAT

User engagement is about identifying, organizing and engaging primary intended users of an evaluation.

User engagement optimizes the personal factor. It is about engaging people and creating relationships based on mutual trust.

It is about *thinking use*: for every issue that surfaces, every decision and every choice among alternatives, ask yourself: ”How will this affect use in the current situation?”

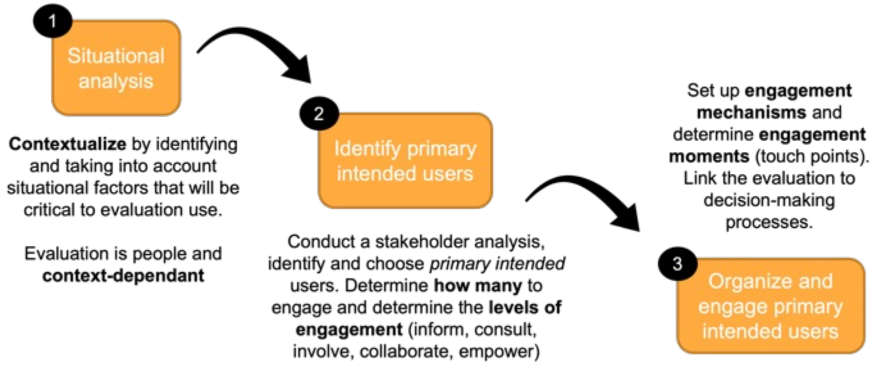
WHY

Because an evaluation is more likely to be used if intended users trust the evaluators, are involved in ways they find meaningful, feel ownership of the evaluation, find the evaluation questions relevant, and care about the findings.

Because user engagement is a precondition for many other adaptive evaluation methods to be implemented successfully. User engagement is what allows you to conduct feedback loops, to incorporate emergence, to conduct sound developmental evaluations, and to make sure you learn and adapt to what matters.

USER ENGAGEMENT

HOW



Situational Analysis

Identify situational factors that can be critical to evaluation use. You can follow three steps:

1. Map stakeholders, identifying likely intended users.

2. Identify **assets and barriers** to use.

3. Conduct a **risk assessment**: look at what could go wrong and how to anticipate possible challenges

(Check flashcards#2 & 3 in adaptive evaluation session 1 for tools to help you with these steps)

Identify primary intended users

1. Conduct a **stakeholder analysis** and choose primary intended users

2. Determine **how many** primary intended users to engage

3. Determine the **levels of engagement** (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower)

(Check flashcards#1,4&5 in adaptive evaluation session 1 for tools to help you with these steps)

Organize and engage primary intended users

1. Determine **user engagement mechanism (e.g.,** User group(s) as working group(s), action Group(s), or task force teams.

2. Think through **engagement moments** (touchpoints) throughout the process, such as:

- Formal Workshop Kick-off stakeholder engagement (scoping phase – agree on shared purpose and scope)
- Design meeting/workshop (evaluation questions, methodology)
- Timely feedback loop workshop / meetings
- Adaptive moment meetings/workshops
- Co-developing recommendations and identifying ways forward in developmental evaluations

RESOURCES

Methods to foster evaluation use – User engagement

See all resources on methods to foster evaluation use.

Check this slide deck on methods to foster evaluation use.

Item two of the presentation is on user engagement.

Check Flashcards #1,2,3,4 & 5.

Adaptive evaluation session 1 | Methods to foster evaluation use

This video session includes user engagement, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Resources to learn more about this method

Michael Quinn Patton and Charmagne E. Campbell-Patton (2022). *Utilization-focused Evaluation*, 5th Edition. Sage.

Check the section of utilization-focus evaluation at the BetterEvaluation site powered by the Global Evaluation Initiative.

For an overview of the situation of evaluation use in the UN System you can read the report: Evaluation Use in the UN System: Conclusions from the Data. United Nations Evaluation Group, 2016.

Timely feedback loops

!

My problem is…

That evaluation findings and data come too late to feed into decision-making processes

That my organization does not learn much from evaluations

WHAT

Timely feedback loops (TFL) are points in time in an evaluation where data and preliminary findings are presented and discussed with decision-makers. The goal is to ensure that evaluation data and findings inspire and inform the decision-making processes at the time the input is needed.

TFL also make sure that inquiry frameworks - such as evaluation matrices - remain relevant throughout the evaluation by linking the decision-making process (what matters to intended users) with the evaluation.

Timely feedback loops are used in utilization-focused evaluations such as developmental evaluations but can also be used in formative and even in summative evaluations.

WHY

Because we cannot afford findings and data coming too late to feed into decision-making processes. We cannot afford either not to learn from evaluations as an organization.

Because TFLs make evaluations more adaptive to user needs, and as a result, help organizations adapt better. Intended users can use evaluation findings to inform decisions to adapt.

Because TFLs help not only provide relevant information at timely moments - making them useful - but also help delivering timely solutions in fast-changing environments - making them agile - when something unexpected occurs and we need to adapt.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Map the stakeholders (business units) that may have a stake in the questions you are collecting data about. Engage with them from the onset, identify their needs for input and interact with them regularly to be updated on changes in their needs.

2. Keep your evaluation inquiry framework up to date. Feedback loops are usually linked to an (adaptive) inquiry framework, which is your starting point.

3. Create the space for timely feedback loops to occur logistically, operationally, and contractually - when you hire external consultants. The possibility to have timely feedback loops should be built into the design of evaluations.

STEPS. How to conduct a timely feedback loop:

1. Identify the business units or actors that have a stake in the answers to the leading questions you are collecting data for.

2. Be attentive of changes (sensing) throughout the evaluation – evaluation manager is key to that end. Engage with relevant stakeholders and sense which evaluation questions (in the inquiry framework) could provide answers that are needed now.

3. Identify the need for a feedback loop (demanded by stakeholders or suggested by you)

4. Prepare feedback sessions. Send preparatory materials (feedback notes, evidence summaries) to participants in advance so that they come prepared.

5. Evaluators present data and findings and then facilitate the discussion. The main elements are that data / findings are presented and discussed and if relevant and possible, decisions for action are proposed. We suggest a meeting structure based on the framework of questions for adaptive moments (see below)

Often this method is …

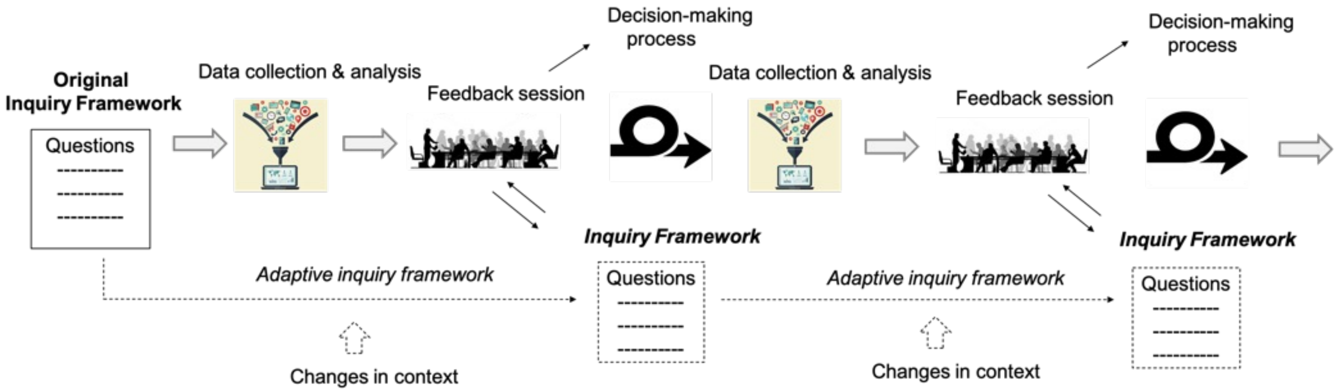
Used together with Adaptive Inquiry Frameworks.

Applied in Developmental Evaluations.

But you can use it also in summative and formative evaluations.

HOW

Sketch of a feedback loop sequence



Timely feedback loop session – suggested structure

WHAT?

Guiding questions

What are your impressions after seeing the data/findings?

What do data tell us about evaluation questions X,Y,Z ?

What patters emerge?

Presentation of findings

The evaluation team presents

SO WHAT?

Guiding questions

What sense can we make of the data?

What are the implications for you (users)?

What else do you (users) need to know to inform your decisions/actions? (any gaps)?

What else do we need to know to answer other related priority evaluation question(s)?

Discussion of implications

The evaluation team facilitates the discussion

NOW WHAT?

Guiding questions

What actions could be taken and by whom?

How will we adapt the inquiry framework to keep it relevant after this feedback session? (adjusting, adding or removing questions?)

Who else should be informed about these findings, how and when?

Proposals for action

Primary intended users lead, the evaluation team supports – by facilitating or by providing information.

RESOURCES

Methods to foster evaluation use – Timely feedback loops

See all resources on methods to foster evaluation use.

Check this slide deck on methods to foster evaluation use. Item three of the presentation is timely feedback loops.

Check Flashcard#6, Guidance on how to conduct a timely feedback loop.

Adaptive evaluation session 1 | Methods to foster evaluation use

This video session includes timely feedback loops as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

A-Compass

Tool#11 of the A-Compass also includes a summary of timely feedback loops. You can find toolkit on page 35 of the A-Compass.

Resources to learn more about this method

The Developmental Evaluation of Results-based Management at UNFPA used feedback loops throughout the exercise for timely provision of feedback. To see how this was designed and applied check the details in the Account Report, available on UNFPA IEO website: https://www.unfpa.org/node/21093

For a deeper look into the role of evaluation feedback (including timely feedback loops) in adaptive management see sections on *adaptation* and *uncertainty* in chapter 5 of Michael Quinn Patton's book: Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford Press.

Timely feedback loops are an element of utilization-focus evaluations. The overarching principle of utilization-focus evaluations is focus on intended users, by and with intended users, in every aspect of, and every stage of an evaluation. To learn more about it you may explore the **utilization-focus evaluation website** or check the **BetterEvaluation** site.

Emergence in evaluations

!

My problem is…

That the context change very rapidly while we conduct evaluations, and the evaluation design becomes less relevant.

That we adapt evaluation designs to things that emerge during the evaluation, but we do not do it using a systematic approach.

WHAT

Emergence occurs when new things that can affect the utility of the evaluation unexpectedly appear (emerge) during the evaluation. These may be contextual or organizational changes or the result of new interactions with stakeholders. Because such changes can affect the use of the evaluation, we need to adapt the evaluation so that it remains utilization focused.

Examples include changes in the broader context such as political or economic changes, changes in organizational leadership, changes in partner organizations, crises affecting implementing partners, and changes in the evaluation context such as changes in user priorities, turnover among intended users, changes in schedules, or reallocation of resources. Similarly, evaluations may need to adapt to emerging opportunities to influence the use of evaluation results during dissemination (through timely feedback loops). Also, respond to unexpected risks, such as the inability to collect primary data due to civil unrest in a country or environmental crises.

As a result of emergence, we may need to adjust evaluation methods, data sources, evaluation questions, number and frequency of feedback loops, type, frequency, and content of deliverables, timing, budget, and number and type of intended primary users.
The more turbulent, dynamic, and complex the intervention context, the more likely you are to need to adapt the evaluation due to emergence.

WHY

We adapt to emergence to ensure evaluation use. Not accounting for emergence would mean not adapting the evaluation to context changes that affect use.

Evaluations must adapt to these changes to remain relevant, meaningful, and timely under changing conditions (new context).

In other words: If we prioritize evaluation use, we cannot afford not to pay attention to emergence.

As Michael Quinn Patton and Charmagne E. Campbell-Patton put it, “Relevance is contextual. Use is contextual. It may be easier to continue doing what was already planned, but when what was already planned is no longer relevant, it will not be useful” (from the book Utilization-focused Evaluation, 5th Edition. Sage, 2022)

HOW

Incorporating emergence into evaluations is about how we ensure that evaluations adapt to contextual changes, and ultimately about how we can make evaluations adaptive.

Dealing with emergence is the application of adaptive management to evaluations. It means managing evaluations adaptively. There are three sides to this: the right mindset, appropriate methods, and supportive infrastructure.

Mindset - Attitude
(Be *active-reactive-interactive-adaptive*)

Working methods
(Apply *adaptive moments*)

Supportive infrastructure
(Contracting, budgeting, culture)

Mindset - Attitude

Be active

In identifying users
In facilitating purpose clarity
In developing questions

Be reactive

In listening to users
In responding to what they learn

Be interactive

In establishing rapport, trust, mutual respect and in engaging with different perspectives

Be adaptive

In altering (adjusting) evaluation questions and design in light of changing conditions and of increased understanding of the situation

Two resources can help you with this:

Facilitation in evaluations

Check chapter 5 of this Guidance

The four drivers of adaptation

Check UNFPA's A-Compass

HOW

Working methods

An appropriate method for dealing with emergence in evaluations would be to apply **adaptive moments**. An adaptive moment is a brief period in which we act reflectively. We identify signals, pause and reflect, and take action to adapt .

Check UNFPA's [A-Compass] to learn more about adaptive moments and how to apply them

During the evaluation, new things may emerge that we can take as signals for the beginning of an adaptive moment

- Changing conditions
- Emerging opportunities
- Emerging risks

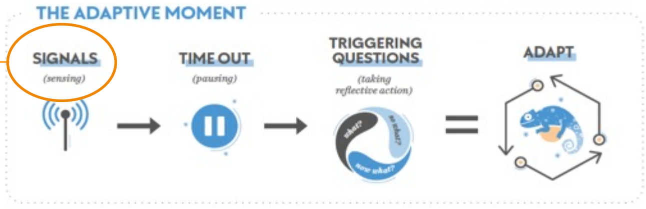


Figure 5. How does the adaptive moment work?

Supporting infrastructure

Mindset-attitudes and ways of working need a supportive infrastructure to enable a culture of adaptation in evaluation that embraces emergence.

Adaptive contracting

Contractual documents should **recognize the likely need for adaptations** and specify a process to do so that is valid and quick.

Contingency budgeting

Evaluation budgets for work in complex dynamic systems could include a % of **open-ended contingency funds** and a transparent way of allocating and using these funds with agile accountability

Organizational Culture supportive of evaluation use

Stay focused on intended use by intended users **by adapting** as needed and appropriate. **Avoid rigidity and act with agility** in support of the evaluation's relevance, timeliness, and use.

RESOURCES

Methods to foster evaluation use – Emergence in evaluation

See all resources on methods to foster evaluation use.

Check this slide deck on methods to foster evaluation use. Item four of the presentation is emergence.

Check Flashcard#7, How to be active-reactive-interactive-adaptive: Facilitation responsibilities.

Adaptive evaluation session 1 | Methods to foster evaluation use

This video session includes emergence as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

A-Compass

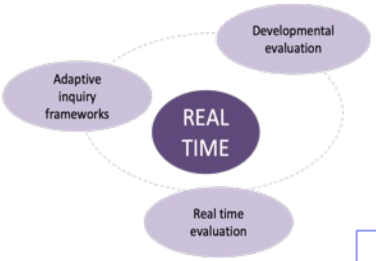
Chapter 5 of the A-Compass introduced adaptive moments and explains what they are and how to apply them.

Resources to learn more about this method

The developmental evaluation of results-based management at UNFPA incorporated emergence and adapted it throughout the exercise. The Adaptive Evaluation session 1 slide set includes several examples. To see how the evaluation was designed and applied, read the details in the Account Report available on the UNFPA IEO website: https://www.unfpa.org/node/21093

Emergence is an element of utilization-focused evaluation. The overarching principle of utilization-focus evaluations is to focus on the intended users, by and with the intended users, in every aspect of, and every stage of an evaluation. To learn more, you can visit the **utilization-focus evaluation website** or the **BetterEvaluation** website. For an in-depth exploration, consult this book: Patton M. Q., Campbell-Patton C. E. (2022). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

2. Methods for learning and adaptation in real time



Methods for learning and adaptation in real time

Learning and adapting in real time becomes inevitable. UNFPA operates in a turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous (TUNA) context.

WHY

Because it's often not enough to pause at the end of a programme and look back to see what worked and what did not, how it worked and why. 'Traditional' approaches are often not adaptable, flexible, and timely enough to meet immediate learning needs. In a rapidly changing and evolving environment, evaluations need to be agile and generate learning so that programmes can adapt more quickly and flexibly without losing the rigour of the evaluation. Real-time learning and adaptation methods fill this gap.

In traditional monitoring, systems provide relevant data, but there is often no time for in-depth analysis and reflection embedded in the systems. Real-time learning and adaptation methods help bridge the gap between monitoring and evaluation in contexts where there is a need to understand and learn from the intervention as it evolves to support adaptive management.

WHAT

There are many evaluation approaches that enable rapid adaptation and learning in real time. These are evaluative approaches that produce rapid feedback and learning in complex and evolving contexts. In this chapter, we have selected three. Developmental evaluation and real-time evaluation are evaluation approaches. Adaptive Inquiry Frameworks is a method used in developmental evaluation that can be readily used in real-time approaches that focus on adaptive learning (learning in real time).

ALNAP, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, acknowledges that things have moved very quickly during the pandemic. According to ALNAP, we are moving from real-time evaluation to new real-time learning (RTL) approaches, an overarching category that encompasses real-time evaluations, real-time assessments, real-time reviews, adaptive management reviews, and after-action reviews. In this chapter, we provide some resources that you can use to explore real-time learning beyond the three approaches and methods discussed here.

Real-time evaluation

!

My problem is…

That traditional approaches are often not adaptable, flexible, and timely enough to meet our immediate learning needs.

That evaluations are not agile enough to generate learning so that our programmes can be adapted more quickly without losing rigour.

WHAT

Real-time evaluation (RTE) emerged in the humanitarian sector. There is no single definition for this approach. Different organizations put the emphasis on different aspects when defining it.

According to ALNAP, a real-time evaluation is a support measure for learning in action and has the objective to provide feedback in a participatory way in real time (i.e., during the evaluation fieldwork) to those executing and managing the humanitarian response. To UNHCR it is a rapid peer review carried out early on in a humanitarian response to gauge effectiveness in order to adjust implementation and take corrective action in 'real-time', when this can still make a difference.

There are two basic distinctive ideas in real-time evaluation. The first is that in RTE you evaluate as the intervention unfolds (real-time), that is, you assess it as it happens. The second is real-time feedback. You provide the feedback as soon as you have the data/findings.

Professor Patricia Rogers has researched on this approach (2020) and concludes that definitions have included one or more of the following five features: real-time (or more current) data collection, real-time (or rapid) reporting back of evaluation datal, multiple timings of evaluative activity, support for different types of learning - single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop, and engaging different users together in dialogue for sensemaking and action planning.

WHY

Real-time evaluation has been practised and documented for the last twenty years, mainly in humanitarian projects. However, as Professor Patricia Rogers noted in 2020, there is a growing interest in learning from these experiences in other sectors, particularly the development sector.

Real-time evaluation is important because practitioners and organisations recognise that traditional evaluation methods cannot meet the demands of rapidly changing implementation or brand new interventions where interventions are designed as they are implemented. In this context, it has become important to leverage insights and support learning in real time.

For UNFPA, this is particularly important as the importance and scale of humanitarian interventions in the UNFPA portfolio is rapidly increasing.

HOW

There are many ways to design and conduct an RTE. We present some resources on the next page. Here we summarize the most important aspects to consider:

Aspects to consider designing and conducting a real-time evaluation

Determine the scope	Specific initiatives (e.g., response to a humanitarian crisis), projects, programs.
Determine the timing	For RTE is during implementation, not at the end or after completion.
Determine the duration	Can be short, or iterative or over a longer period.
Determine the purpose	Usually to support ongoing improvements (by local implementers). Also, to draw lessons for the future. RTEs are not usually appropriate for narrow accountability (compliance) purposes. However, they can be part of a comprehensive approach to accountability for ongoing improvements.
Determine who conducts it	Either an internal team (with organizational separation) or an external team (with knowledge about the contents)
Determine evaluation / learning questions	Questions are usually based on evaluation criteria. They may also be based on learning needs. Humanitarian evaluation criteria are often used (appropriateness and relevance, effectiveness, connectedness, sustainability, coverage, coordination, coherence, proportionality).
Determine how data will be collected	The focus is usually onsite visits and interviews. You can also use remote technologies, Big Data, and remote sensing that can provide data quickly (link to real-time monitoring)
Determine how findings will be reported	The focus is on rapid feedback to intended users. Use of dashboards and face-to-face meetings.
Determine how the use of findings will be supported	Engagement in sensemaking and active support in utilisation. This includes engagement in (co-)developing recommendations to respond to evaluation findings.

RESOURCES

Methods for learning and adaptation in real time – Real-time evaluation

See all resources on methods for learning and adaptation in real time.

Check this slide deck on methods for learning and adaptation in real time. Item two of the presentation addressed the what, why and how of real-time evaluations.

Adaptive evaluation session 2 | Methods for learning and adaptation in real-time

This video session includes real-time evaluation (RTE) as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Who has experience with this method in the UN system and beyond?

Many organisations in the UN system use real-time evaluations, e.g., IASC, FAO, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. Also, DANIDA and GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, among others. For a full list, see page 14 of the BetterEvaluation working paper on real-time evaluation.

Guidance on how to conduct real-time evaluations?

The latest guidance from ALNAP, the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide (2016).

For those interested in a deeper dive into the evolution of real-time evaluation methodology, we also include the first ALNAP Guide to Real-Time Evaluations of Humanitarian Action (2009).

UNICEF's Guidance and Procedural Note on Managing Real-Time Evaluations Plus (RTE Plus) (2019)

Resources to learn more about this approach

Rogers, P. (2020). Real-time evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation for adaptive management Working Paper Series, Number 4. This paper is part of the BetterEvaluation M&Efor Adaptive Management working paper series, which focuses on using monitoring and evaluation to support adaptive management.

A very interesting ALNAP report that is part of the M&E during Covid-19 series is titled: From Real-Time Evaluation to Real-Time Learning. Exploring New Approaches in the COVID-19 Response (2021). This report will give you a complete overview of the variety of real-time evaluation learning approaches that are emerging on the evaluation scene, including real-time evaluations, real-time assessments, real-time reviews, adaptive management reviews, and after-action reviews.

On February 2022, ALNAP and UNEG hosted a Partnership Evaluation Practitioner Exchange (EPE) on real-time learning (RTL) approaches implemented during COVID-19. The event featured highlights from ALNAP's recent paper on RTL during COVID-19. Speakers from FAO, UNICEF, World Vision, and others shared how they designed and implemented real-time evaluations and learning exercises during the pandemic. Click here to view the entire session.

Developmental evaluation

!

My problem is…

That we want evaluations to help us develop new things (new interventions, new systems, new approaches)

WHAT

This evaluation approach was developed by Michael Quinn Patton and published in a widely acclaimed book entitled Developmental evaluation: applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use.

According to Dr. Patton, developmental evaluation (DE) informs and supports innovative and adaptive development in complex dynamic environments. It is an evaluation approach that can help social innovators develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. DE brings the processes of asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and collecting and reporting evaluative data to innovation and adaptation. The goal is to support project, programme, product, and/or organizational development with timely feedback.

Originally, developmental evaluation focused on social innovation. Since then, it has been applied more broadly. Simply put, it is a type of evaluation that informs and supports the development of a new initiative.

Some of the key characteristics of developmental evaluation are its focus on development (as opposed to improvement, accountability, or summative judgment), it takes place in a complex, dynamic environment, feedback is rapid (as soon as possible), and that the evaluator works collaboratively with implementers and can be part of the intervention team. Evaluators shed light on innovation and adaptation processes, track their implications and results, and facilitate ongoing data-based decision making in the developmental process in real time.

Developmental evaluations become part of the intervention and are often an intervention in themselves.

WHY

We need developmental evaluations because they cover a fundamental niche.

Depending on the reasons why we evaluate and the stage of consolidation of the intervention, evaluations may be summative, formative or developmental. Summative evaluations focus on accountability and achievement and are applied to consolidated interventions. Formative evaluations focus on improvements during implementation in interventions that are not yet consolidated. Developmental evaluation focus on assisting the development of new initiatives in complex contexts. This is why they have a prominent focus on learning and adapting based on evidence.

HOW

How to conduct a developmental evaluation

Developmental evaluations follow a principles-based approach. There is no standardised step-by-step methodology, but you can find several sources that show you how others do it. Some organisations have developed their own guides to developmental evaluation, such as the McConnell Foundation, USAID, and the Developmental Evaluation Institute. UNFPA IEO has developed the first ever Quality Assessment toll for developmental evaluations.

Developmental evaluations are characterised by methodological flexibility and pluralism. Depending on the evaluation question and the nature of inquiry, you can combine methods as you see fit.

Applying the eight principles of developmental evaluation is a must, beginning at the design stage and throughout the conduct of the evaluation.

As Michael Quinn Patton puts it, these eight principles must be applied in some way and to some extent if the evaluation is to be considered genuinely and fully developmental. This is the ***fidelity challenge***. It is highly advisable to consider whether and how the eight principles are present and being applied at the evaluation design stage.

Developmental evaluation principles

1. Developmental purpose
2. Evaluation rigor
3. Utilization focus
4. Innovation niche
5. Complexity perspective
6. Systems thinking
7. Co-creation
8. Timely feedback

How do you if it is really a developmental evaluation?

There is a lot of hype around developmental evaluations. It is important to make sure that this is what you need and that the conditions are in place to apply a developmental approach.

Apply the "Fidelity Challenge" and the "Developmental Evaluation Diagnostic Checklist" before you begin a developmental evaluation.

RESOURCES

Methods for learning and adaptation in real time – Development evaluation

See all resources on methods for learning and adaptation in real time.

Check this slide deck on methods for learning and adaptation in real time. Item three of the presentation addresses the what, why and how of developmental evaluation.

Check Flashcard#1, Fidelity Challenge in Developmental Evaluation.

Check Flashcard#2, The five types of Developmental Evaluation.

Adaptive evaluation session 2 | Methods for learning and adaptation in real-time

This video session includes developmental evaluation (DE) as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Who has experience with this approach in UNFPA?

UNFPA IEO. The Developmental Evaluation of Results-based Management at UNFPA . Click on the link to access all published material on this evaluation (2019). This was the first corporate-level developmental evaluation conducted in the UN System

The EECA Regional Office conducted a developmental evaluation to assist in the co-creation of the Regional Program 2022-2025 and incorporate learning into the RIAP 2018 - 2021 (Regional Interventions and Action Plan). EECARO Regional Programme 2018-2021. Final Report (2021).

Resources to learn more about this approach in the UN System

A growing number of UN agencies are applying the developmental evaluation approach. Two recent examples are the evaluations of the Covid-19 responses in UNICEF and in WFP.

Resources to learn more about this approach

Patton, M. Q. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford press.

Patton, M. Q. (2021). Emergent developmental evaluation developments. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, *17*(41), 23-34.

Guides and Manuals: the Primer from the McDonnell Foundation (2006), the Practitioner's Guide from the McDonnell Foundation (2010), the Practical Guide to Implementing Developmental Evaluation by USAID (2019), the Remote Developmental Evaluation Guide also from USAID (2021), and the resource library of the Developmental Evaluation Institute.

Adaptive inquiry frameworks

!

My problem is…

That evaluation frameworks (evaluation matrices) are already obsolete by the time we answer the original questions.

That we need a more flexible and agile evaluation inquiry framework that allows for the incorporation of timely feedback loops.

WHAT

An adaptive inquiry framework (AIF) is a flexible framework that allows for adjustments throughout the evaluation process. The goal is to ensure that evaluation questions reflect user needs in a rapidly evolving and changing context.

AIFs track and document the changes and adjustments made to the evaluation's analytic framework (the evaluation matrix) to ensure transparency and rigor while ensuring utility.

They are a tool typically associated with utilization-focused evaluations, including developmental evaluations that focus on innovation and the development of new initiatives.

It is often used in conjunction with timely feedback loops in developmental evaluations, although it is appropriate for adaptive evaluations in general. It can also be used in summative and formative evaluations.

WHY

Adaptive inquiry frameworks help avoid evaluation questions being outdated by the time we answer them. Evaluations are inquiries, and in dynamic contexts such inquiries evolve with changes in the context. AIFs are important because they help ensure the relevance and usefulness of the evaluation. They ensure that questions remain pertinent, meaningful, and timely under changing conditions and focus on what matters the most to primary intended users.

Timely feedback loops often lead to changes in inquiry frameworks. Some questions are answered, even if only partially, new relevant aspects emerge, or the focus of some questions shifts. To keep the inquiry relevant to users, evaluation questions need to be adjusted. AIF enable this while ensuring transparency by tracking and logging shifts, recording changes in priorities, and making it possible to track how and why the focus of the inquiry has changed over time.

AIF link decision making to evaluation and learning frameworks in ways that ensure they adapt to remain relevant and useful without losing rigour.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Use an inquiry framework (Evaluation matrix) that allows for adaptations (see figure on next page)

2. Adaptive frameworks are usually part of utilization-focused evaluations. So, make sure the framework is co-created with users: joint conceptualization, development of inquiry questions, prioritization of what to monitor and track.

STEPS. How to use an Adaptive Inquiry Framework

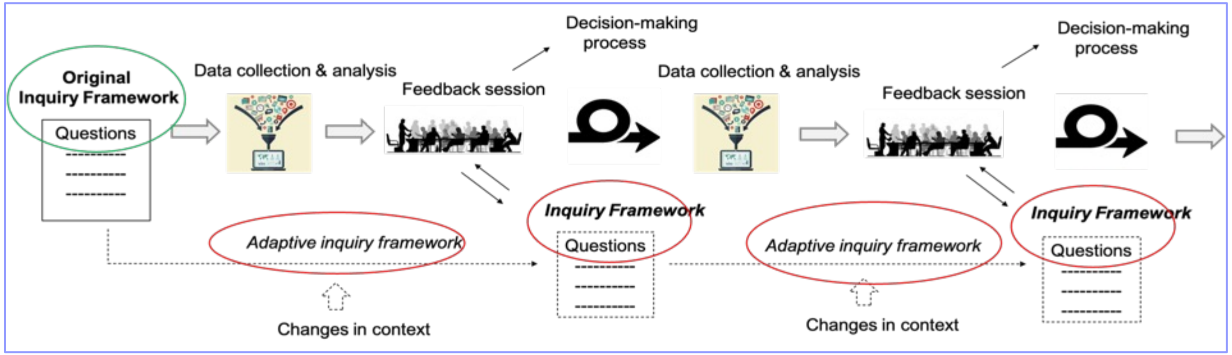
1. Place the original questions in the original inquiry framework.

2. Open an evaluation question log for each question (see the figure on evaluation question logs on the next page).

3. Update the status of each question in the log as the context evolves and changes occur (as shown in the figure below)

4. Update the inquiry framework as changes occur, to make sure that reflects an updated picture of the situation of all questions at a given point in time.

As shown in the figure, original inquiry framework (evaluation matrix) is adjusted when the context changes substantially and timely feedback loops occur. Evaluation questions reflect the priority information needs of the primary intended users at a given point in time.



HOW

Evaluation question **logs**

Evaluation question: ______________________

Users: ______________________

Sources of information: ______________________

Data collection and analysis methods: ______________________

Type of question: ☐ Original ☐ Drooped ☐ Shifting ☐ emerging

Question tracking

Description of the evolution of the question. When it was originated, whether it has suffered any changes, why and when. Explain what promoted questions to be included during the evaluation (emerging) or disconsidered (dropped), specifying who was included in the discussion and who made and validated the decision.

Often this method is …

Used together with Timely feedback loops

Applied in Developmental Evaluations and Strategy Testing

But you can use it also in summative and formative evaluations.

Types of questions in AIF

Original	The question remains the same throughout the evaluation. The original question is addressed in the analysis and clearly reflected in the evaluation report.
Dropped	The original question that lost its relevance and it is not addressed in the analysis or it was initially addressed but then discontinued. These type of questions are usually not addressed in the evaluation report.
Shifting	The question is slightly adjusted during the evaluation. For example, the scope of the question may be reduced or the groups to which it refers modified. This type of questions are addressed in the analysis and in the evaluation report
Emerging	The evaluation question is added during data collection and/or data analysis – usually during a feedback loop. These questions were not included in the original inquiry framework. They are added because they reflect emerging priorities or changes in the context, are of high relevance for the purpose of the evaluation and address the information needs of the evaluation users. This type of questions are addressed in the analysis and in the evaluation report .

RESOURCES

Methods for learning and adaptation in real time – Adaptive inquiry frameworks

See all resources on methods for learning and adaptation in real time.

Check this slide deck on methods for learning and adaptation in real time. The last item of the presentation addressed the what, why and how of Adaptive Inquiry Framework.

Adaptive evaluation session 2 | Methods for learning and adaptation in real-time

This video session includes adaptive inquiry frameworks as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Who has experience with this method in UNFPA?

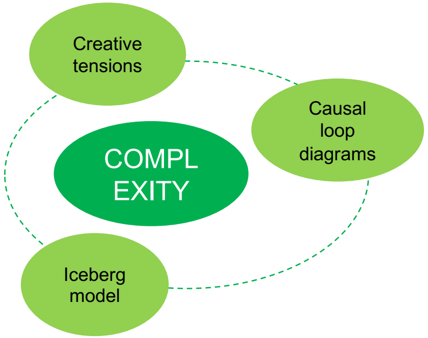
UNFPA IEO. Adaptive inquiry frameworks were using during the Formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative. See Annex 5 – Evaluation Matrices in Volume III

Resources to learn more about this approach

Patton, M. Q. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford press.

Chapter 8 of the book is devoted to inquiry frameworks in developmental evaluation.

3. Methods to capture complexity



Creative tensions (identifying and addressing structural challenges), causal loop diagrams (identifying and understanding interrelationships) and the iceberg model (finding root causes) are methods that help us understand, capture and making sense of complexity.

Methods to capture complexity

WHAT

Most programs and interventions carried out by UN agencies are implemented in complex contexts or environments. Understanding and capturing complexity entails adapting to new changes that emerge as we implement and evaluate our programs. In a complex context it is more and more difficult to predict or forecast what will happen based on past patterns of behavior. What will happen, to a large extent, depends on the ongoing interactions among stakeholders and changing conditions of the context in which we operate.

A complex context or system has the following features: it involves a large number of interacting elements; the interactions are nonlinear (minor changes can produce disproportionately major consequences); is dynamic (the whole is greater than the parts), and solutions can't be imposed (rather, they emerge from the circumstances).

WHY

As we implement and evaluate in complex contexts/interventions, we need methods that help us understand and evaluate this complexity.
Systems thinking provides a wealth of methods to understand and evaluate this complexity, such as the three methods presented hereby.
Furthermore, the UN in recent years has stressed the importance to tackling complex development challenges (as stated in the Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development); and to use systems thinking as a way to lead in the SDG implementation (as stated in the UN Leadership Framework).
In UNFPA, the A-Compass provides a roadmap to move towards a systemic mindset, and UNFPA as part of the UN system, also behaves as a complex organizational system. All these three reasons explain why capturing complexity is not only important, but fundamental.

Creative tensions

!

My problem is…

That my programme or intervention is not performing as expected and we do not know why.

We experience the same recurrent problems or structural challenges, so we feel we are stuck with the same issues.

We are dealing with the same ‘elephant in the room' and we do not know how to address them.

WHAT

Creative Tensions (CT) is a systems diagnosis tool that help leaders analyzing the current situation about a programme or a strategy that is implemented in complex context by focusing on an interrelated set of gaps that seek to be resolved.

A creative tension designates a gap between a desired goal or idea (the way it should be) and a current state of reality (the way it is). A creative tension, which may also show gaps between different perspectives, always focuses on a gap that seeks to be resolved – that is why it is “creative”.

CT will help you identify the main issues, gaps and bottlenecks that prevent your work or system (programme, intervention, activity or initiative) from optimizing its performance.

WHY

Because creative tensions help you analyze reality in terms of challenges as gaps between the situation as it is, and how it should be.

This approach transcends the single focus on problem-solving. Instead of asking, *what problem are we trying to solve?*, the key question becomes: *what are we trying to create?*

It is in this space that the evaluation designs the questions that will guide the inquiry process. CT are a natural fit for developmental evaluations, but they can also be applied in the context of summative or formative evaluations

HOW

Preparation:

1. Make sure that, as the facilitator of the meeting, you have a clear idea on the purpose and objectives of the meeting and why this tool can help you achieve them. The facilitation requires setting a conducive environment for critical and creative thinking, psychologically safe, avoiding judgment and early criticism.

2. Use the tension metaphor as a powerful visual to explain the current situation and the objectives of the meeting.

3. For a face to face meeting, prepare materials that allow discussing and collecting feedback, such as flipcharts or post-it notes; for online meetings, use digital platforms such as Mural or Miro.

STEPS. How to facilitate a session to identify and analyze creative tensions:

1. Start with a preliminary list of the **main issues, gaps and bottlenecks** -the tensions- that prevent your programme, intervention or work to develop, advance or optimally perform.

2. Elaborate a vision that seek to resolve the tension from the current reality (an aspiration). Congrats, you have turned it into creative tensions (CT).

3. Make sure you engage with **all opinions and perspectives** on the matter.

4. Map them **collectively**, focusing on **developing strategies and/or actions** to addressing them.

Often this method is …

Used together with Iceberg Model.

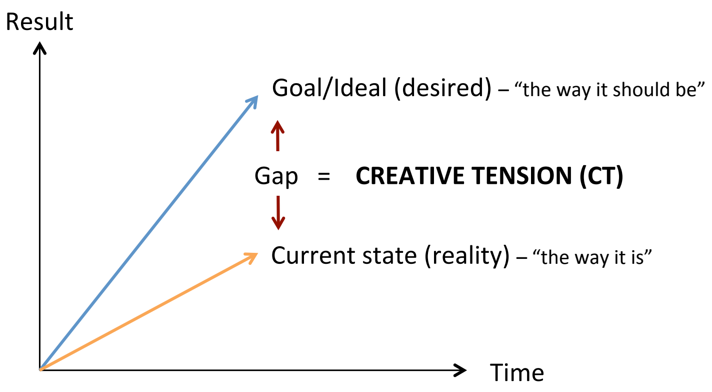
Applied in Developmental Evaluations.

But you can use it also in summative and formative evaluations.

HOW

CREATIVE TENSIONS

Visuals of the Creative Tension concept



PRACTICE with the following exercise:

1. Identify **main issues, gaps and bottlenecks** -the tensions- that prevent your programme, intervention or work to develop, advance or optimally perform.
2. How do you turn them into Creative tensions? **Elaborate a vision** that contra poses the tensions with the current reality for each of them.

Phases of an evaluation to apply CTs:

Scoping

During the scoping phase of evaluations (in developmental) CTs can help framing the pervasive challenges / problems we are trying to address with the new intervention/innovation.

Design

CTs can be used to frame evaluation questions (in developmental evaluations). The evaluation matrix can be built around CTs.

Data analysis

CTs can be used to understand, analyze and present findings. CTs allow for collective sense-making of the data and/or findings in complex settings.

Drawing recommendations/actions points

CTs can be used to identify actions points aimed at generating meaningful changes by resolving the tension. They lends themselves to do that in a dialogue-based, collective manner (no shame and blame but through creative energy)

RESOURCES

Methods to capture complexity – Creative tensions

See all resources on methods to capture complexity.

Check this slide deck on methods to capture complexity. Item two of the presentation is creative tensions.

A-Compass

Tool#3 of the A-Compass also includes a summary of creative tensions. You can find toolkit on page 35 of the A-Compass.

Resources to learn more about this method

The Developmental Evaluation of Results-based Management at UNFPA used creative tensions as the basis for the design of the inquiry framework. To see how this was designed and applied check the details in the Account Report, available on UNFPA IEO website: https://www.unfpa.org/node/21093

Peter Senge popularized the concept of creative tensions (appeared in Robert Fritz book 'The Path of Least Resistance) in his seminal book on learning organizations called 'The Fifth Discipline". Here's a short video of Prof. Senge explaining the concept: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz337pj-oLE

Causal loop diagrams

!

My problem is…

That I am aware of the complexity of the intervention but I do not know how to explain it.

That I do not know how mutual causality of different elements and variables explain the behavior of the intervention.

I do not know how to map all the interrelationships that affect the outcomes of the intervention.

WHAT

A causal loop diagram (CLD) is a visualization tool in form of a diagram that aids in mapping how different variables in a system are causally interrelated. In evaluation it is used to collectively make sense of how a system works in practice.

CLD is a foundational tool used in system dynamics, a method of analysis used to develop an understanding of complex systems. Prof. Jay Forrester of MIT's Sloan School of Management founded system dynamics in the 1950s and his book *Industrial Dynamics* was groundbreaking. Thirty years later, Peter Senge in his book *The Fifth Discipline* covered in detail systems thinking, another unique discipline, using the CLD as its centerpiece.

CLD–also called causal feedback loops- can either be reinforcing (showing a positive effect between the variables) or balancing (showing a negative effect among variables).

WHY

CLD are used because, overall, help you move away from linear cause-and-effect relations by focusing on circular, mutually reinforcing and influencing interdependencies between the variables or factors that explain the behavior of a system or complex phenomenon. In particular, they are used:

- To create stories about complex issues, so that we can talk, discuss and examine them critically and creatively.
- To identify, discuss and understand the causal interrelationships between the variables/elements of a system.
- To understand the behavior of a complex systems.
- To discuss how best and where to intervene in the system to improve, change or transform it by identifying leverage points.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Make sure that, as the facilitator of the meeting, you engage and invite to the session the stakeholders that are directly involved in the intervention, so that they can provide their own perspective about the programme implementation and evaluation.

2. Explain that CLD is a tool used as part of a collective sensemaking exercise where all participants are free to speak their truth.

3. For a face to face meeting, prepare materials that allow collecting and visualizing the map, such as flipcharts or post-it notes; for online meetings, use digital platforms such as Mural, Miro or Kumu.

STEPS. How to start working with Causal Loop Diagrams:

1. Define the scope of the problem or complex issue you want to explore and understand.
2. Start with a variable that you know and understand.
3. Map the other variables that are key to explain the system's behavior, visualizing them in a physical or virtual board.
4. Pick a direction: what this variable is causing or influencing others.
5. Continue by linking the variables together and determining how one variable affects the other.
6. Synthesize the overall story to explain the behavior of the system.

Often this method is …

Used in contextual analysis, and for grounding the theory of change within the larger systemic context.

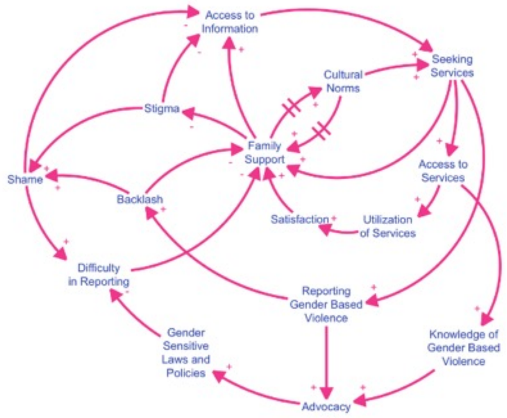
It pairs very well with Creative Tensions.

Applied in Developmental Evaluations.

But you can use it also in summative and formative evaluations.

HOW

Example of a CLD's visuals:



Source: "Barriers to Service Seeking for Gender Based Violence in Low Income Countries", Brown School

Direct access

CAUSAL LOOP DIAGRAMS

PRACTICE with the following exercise:

1. Scope: consider the provision of services to prevent Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in low-income countries.
2. What are the interrelated barriers (variables) to service seeking for GBV in low-income countries? Identify the elements of the Causal Loop Diagram.

Phases of an evaluation to apply CLD:

Data analysis & presentation of findings

Causal feedback loop diagrams can be very useful to help evaluator analyze complex problems and most importantly, show how these complex problems operate, what are the variables involved and how they relate to one another.

Identification of recommendations or action points

Causal feedback loop diagrams can help evaluation teams identify realistic and meaningful actions based on a more thorough analysis of the problems. This helps avoiding quick fixes that backfire.

RESOURCES

Methods to capture complexity – Causal loop diagrams

See all resources on methods to capture complexity.

Check this slide deck on methods to capture complexity. Item three of the presentation is causal loop diagrams.

Resources to learn more about this method

The Developmental Evaluation of Results-based Management at UNFPA used causal feedback loops to map the interrelations of creative tensions and to identify the leverage points in the RBM system. To see how this was designed and applied check the details in the Account Report, available on UNFPA IEO website: https://www.unfpa.org/node/21093

This video provides a brief and succinct overview of Causal Loop Diagrams, also called Causal Feedback Loops. This tool helps move away from linear cause-and-effect relations by focusing on circular, mutually reinforcing and influencing interdependencies between the variables or factors that explain the behavior of a system or complex phenomenon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTo06jbSZ4M&t=169s

Iceberg model

!

My problem is…

That I'm busy focusing on the obvious problems of what is happening, based on facts or data, but I do not know the real causes that explain the observed events.

We usually focus on finding quick fixes to the problems we have, but they keep repeating again later on because we are not able to change the mindset or the prevailing culture.

WHAT

The Iceberg tool is a systems thinking tool that helps you shift your perspective and see beyond the immediate events that everyone notices (the tip of the iceberg).

The Iceberg helps you to uncover the root causes of why those events actually happen. That's possible by looking at deeper levels of abstraction within the system that are not immediately obvious (the mass of the iceberg that keeps unseen under the water).

If you are looking for a deep thinking method in order to unravel and understand a complex problem, then the Iceberg is a great tool. It comprises four levels of thinking.

These levels are known as the event level, the pattern level, the structure level, and the mental model level. Each level represents a different depth of thinking about a problem or event. The levels can also be thought of as the visible level, the surface level, the underlying level, and the hidden level.

WHY

Because the Iceberg is a helpful tool for understanding complex problems that are often caused by hidden patterns, structures and mental models. Learning about these issues that occur below the surface -patterns, structures and mental models- will bring you to discovering the real problem and to identifying longer term, sustainable solutions that will allow you to address the complex situation and move on.

Because rather than reacting to individual problems that arise, the Iceberg helps inquire about relationships to other activities within the system, look for patterns over time, and seek root causes.

This tools helps critically examine hidden causes behind known structural problems that are hard to talk about (elephants in the room).

HOW

Preparation:

1. Make sure that, as the facilitator of the meeting, you engage and invite to the session the stakeholders that are directly involved in the intervention, so that they can provide their own perspective about their understanding of the programme or the issue you are exploring.

2. Explain that the Iceberg is a tool used as part of a collective sensemaking exercise where all participants are free to speak their truth.

3. Use the visual iceberg (shown in the next slide) as a guide to facilitate the four levels of inquiry, either physically or virtually.

STEPS. How to start working with the Iceberg Model:

1. **Events**: first, observe and describe what has happened or what is happening (the problem, challenge or issue you are experiencing and want to solve). Ask questions such as: What is happening right now? You'll have better results if you are able to duplicate (recreate) or reenact the steps that led to the discovery of the problem.

2. **Patterns and Trends**: determine if this event or similar events have happened before. Ask questions such as: What has been happening over time? What are the patterns of occurrences? What trends have you seen? Is there a particular situation, environment or role that experiences this problem?

3. **Structures and Systems**: proceed to identify the things, procedures or behaviors that contributed to this event. Ask questions such as: What's influencing these patterns? Where are the connections between patterns?

4. **Mental Models**: finally, what are the beliefs, values and assumptions that created and shaped the system?

5. The potential solution ways on a reverse logic. Instead of trying to change the event directly, the solution stands and leverages upon defining a strategy aimed at changing the mental models. This will, in turn, change the structures, the patterns and finally the event.

Often this method is …

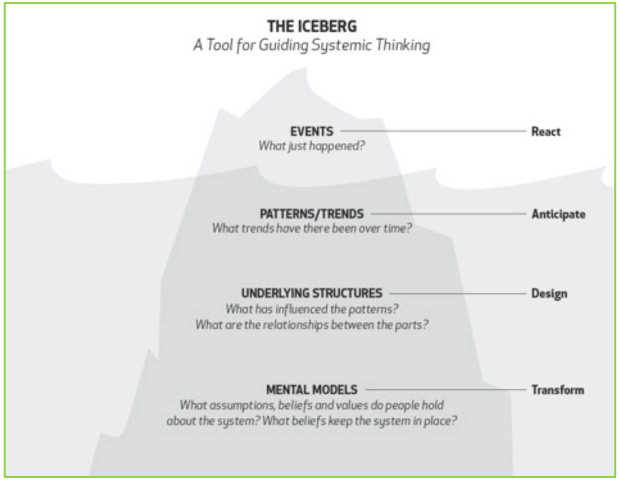
Used in contextual analysis, and for grounding the theory of change within the larger systemic context.

It pairs very well with Creative Tensions.

HOW

ICEBERG MODEL

Visual example of an Iceberg model:



PRACTICE with the following exercise:

1. Using the visual model on the left, ask the following question about Female Genital Mutilation. What are the root causes?
2. Think in terms of patterns, structures and mental models, following this order.

Phases of an evaluation to apply the Iceberg model:

In short, at any time you need to analyze the cause (deep root) of a problem, provided you have access to the information required to do so:

Scoping & Design

If you conduct a scoping phase you may use the iceberg model to identify the scope of the problems to address (the depth). This, in turn, can help you target evaluation questions more precisely.

Data collection, analysis & findings

Collect data thinking of the four levels (go beyond the surface. Analyze data (evidence) by level and present findings by level.

Drawing recommendations/actions points

Recommendations and action points can then be targeted by level, knowing that what will generate lasting change will be effective actions at the mental models and underlying structure level.

RESOURCES

Methods to capture complexity – Iceberg model

See all resources on methods to capture complexity.

Check this slide deck on methods to capture complexity. Item four of the presentation is on iceberg model.

A-Compass

Tool#6 of the A-Compass also includes a summary of the iceberg model. You can find toolkit on page 35 of the A-Compass.

Resources to learn more about this method

The Developmental Evaluation of Results-based Management at UNFPA used the Iceberg model to identify the causes behind the lack of use of results information for organizational learning. To see how this was designed and applied check the details in the Account Report, available on UNFPA IEO website: https://www.unfpa.org/node/21093

The Iceberg is a systems thinking model useful for analyzing root-cause(s) that explain the behavior of complex phenomena. This short article provides a clear explanation of the four levels of thinking that allows us to go deeper in analyzing the most-often invisible causes (and therefore not part of the conversation) that influence and explain current events: https://toolbox.hyperisland.com/a-systems-thinking-model-the-iceberg

4. Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments

Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments

WHY

In unpredictable environments, "business as usual" does not work. We need other methods. A high degree of unpredictability inverts the traditional M&E logic of a programme. Traditional logic typically starts with project activities and then works forward to see what outcomes have been derived from them, making assumptions about outcomes and impacts (ToC). M&E looks at whether and how these expected connections occur, and examines deviations and insights/learnings. However, in a complex environment, original assumptions are likely to become invalid.

So how do we know if and how the programme is contributing to change (planned and unplanned) in an unpredictable environment? We will look at two alternatives that can be used together: Strategy testing and Outcome Harvesting.

WHAT

In an unpredictable environment, we cannot forecast what will happen. We cannot predict because we are operating in a complex and turbulent environment.

Complex systems have the following characteristics. They consist of a large number of interacting elements. The interactions are nonlinear, which means that small changes can have disproportionately large effects. Complex systems are dynamic, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and solutions cannot be imposed; rather, they arise from circumstances.

Even if a complex system appears orderly and predictable in retrospect, looking to the past does not help anticipate the future because external conditions and systems are constantly changing.

In a complex system, we cannot predict what will happen. What will happen depends on the (evolving) interactions between actors and changing external conditions.

Outcome harvesting

!

My problem is…

That traditional monitoring and evaluation do not give the full picture of what you have achieved, how and why.

That our monitoring and evaluation systems focus far too much on measuring only against planned goals and leave out an important part of what was achieved.

WHAT

Outcome harvesting is used in complex environments, where objectives and the paths to achieve them are unpredictable and predefined objectives and theories of change must be modified over time to respond to changes in the context.

Outcome harvesting is a way of thinking about monitoring and evaluation when the programming context is complex and decision makers are interested in learning what change we contributed to and how it happened.

Unlike some evaluation approaches, outcome harvesting does not measure progress towards predetermined outcomes. Instead, it collects evidence of what has changed and then, working backwards, determines whether and how your intervention contributed to these changes.

WHY

Because outcome harvesting makes it possible to get the full picture of what we have achieved, how and why in complex and unpredictable settings.

Because in such settings measuring only against planned goals leaves out important parts of what we have achieved.

Because outcome harvesting helps us generate learning for adaptive programming. By making all types of outcomes visible and showing what changed and how we contributed (or not) to these changes (be them planned or not), outcome harvesting helps us to adapt based on an understanding of how we generate changes.

HOW

Preparation:

Make sure outcome harvesting is what you need. If what you want is to compare planned outcomes with what is actually achieved, and planned activities with what is actually done, you need conventional monitoring.

Outcome Harvesting can be used for monitoring as well as for evaluation (including developmental, formative or summative evaluation) when:

1) The purpose is to learn (how and why) about your contributions and achievements not just to measure or track changes.

2) When you operate in dynamic, uncertain (i.e., complex) situations, in which unforeseen outcomes dominate, including negative ones.

Make sure is a collaborative exercise. Outcome harvesting is based on collaboration by definition: those contributing to change take part in the M&E process. It is an opportunity to reflect together on what you are achieving together.

STEPS. How to use Outcome Harvesting:

1. Design the harvest: decide the scope and inquiry questions to guide the process, that is, what you want to know. Define who should engage in the process, when and where.

2. Review documentation and draft outcomes: this involves reading documents such as reports, minutes, past evaluations, or press releases, which might lead to the formulation of outcome statements. When writing outcome statements think about all types of outcomes in your sphere of influence (see figures on the next page)

3. Engage with informants: this involves talking and discussing with those who have most knowledge on the changes that have taken or are taking place. The goal is to obtain further information to formulate outcome statements and collect information on them. The main guiding question here is "what changes in behavior have we contributed to" (see figure 1). To collect information you can use interviews, surveys, focus groups, workshops or email exchanges. It is useful to use experienced harvesters to facilitate this dialogue.

4. Substantiate: this is an external review or fact check of the outcome statements - and the information you use to supports them. People independent but knowledgeable about the changes you have achieved provide information to verify your outcomes. This strengthens credibility and deepens understanding on the outcomes. You can also use (external) documents to substantiate outcomes.

5. Analyze & interpret: you answer the inquiry/ harvest questions (the monitoring and evaluation questions) that you formulated in step one. Here you usually sort and categorize outcomes to make sense of what changed, which actors you influenced, what worked well and what did not work well (see figures). Then, you usually map the outcomes to identify patterns and trend (see the World Bank example in resources)

6. Support the use of findings: you make decisions based on the answers to your harvest questions. Such decisions may imply revising the theory of change, readjusting assumptions, or take any other adaptive actions such as changes to allocations, activities, modalities, stakeholders/partners, intended beneficiaries, or strategies/objectives.

HOW

Figure 1. Prompting questions to draft potential outcome statements

What changed because of what we did?

Who did we influence (directly or indirectly)?

What changed?

For whom?

When and where?

Why does this change matter - to our objectives?

How did we (our programme) contribute to the change?

Figure 2. Categorization of outcomes

	FORESEEN	UNFORESEEN
POSITIVE	*Guiding question:* *What worked well / is working well?* *(The focus here is on changes you intended or planned from the beginning)* Planned programme goals	*Guiding question:* *What worked well / is working well?* *(the focus here is on changes that you did not intend or did not plan)* Nice surprises and emergent (new) programme goals
NEGATIVE	*Guiding question:* *What did not work / is not working well that we already knew could happen?* Predicted risks or side effects	*Guiding question:* *What did not work / is not working well that we did not / could not foresee?* Mishaps or backlashes

Figure 3. Spheres of control, influence and interest

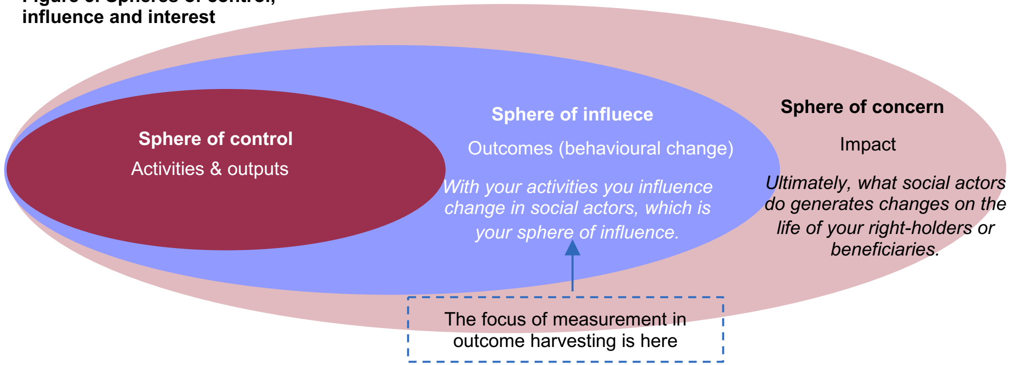


Figure 4. Outcome harvesting basic glossary

Outcome	Observable changes in behaviour (of a social actor) that your intervention contributed to.
Changes	Changes include changes in relationships, in activities (what actors do), in knowledge (what they know), in policies and practice.
Social actors	Individuals, groups, organizations or communities that have changed behavipur as a result of your intervention.
Change agents	People that conributed to the changes observed (e.g. Civil Society Organizations, Government, Community members, UNFPA)
Harvesters	Those who facilitate the identification and formulation of outcomes.
Harvest users	People who make decisions or take action based on the findings. These could be the harvesters and the change agents themselves but also management or donors

RESOURCES

Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments – Outcome harvesting

See all resources on methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments.

Check this slide deck on methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments. The last section includes outcome harvesting.

In this presentation you will find links to several examples of organizations using outcome harvesting such as UNESCO, USAID, The World Bank, OXFAM, CARE, The European Union, and the Civil Society Education Fund in the UK.

Adaptive Evaluation session 4 | Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments

This video session includes outcome harvesting, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Who has experience with this method in UNFPA?

The UNFPA Country Office in Myanmar has applied outcome harvesting to third-party monitoring. In this link you can find a presentation summarizing their experience.

Resources to learn more about this method

The first and original brief on outcome harvesting developed in 2013. Wilson-Grau, R., & Britt, H. (2012). Outcome harvesting. *Cairo: Ford Foundation*.

Check out the outcomeharvesting.net for a very comprehensive resource on outcome harvesting.

To learn more, you can also visit the BetterEvaluation website, which has a section on outcome harvesting.

To learn to map outcomes showing how changes connect and built to one another over a period of time read: Gold, J., Wilson-Grau, R., & Fisher, S. (2014). *Cases in Outcome Harvesting: Ten pilot experiences identify new learning from multi-stakeholder projects to improve results* (No. 90172, pp. 1-108). The World Bank

This video is a three-minute introduction to Outcome Harvesting (3 minutes) by The Danish Institute of Human Rights.

This is a nine-minute blog article on Medium that describes the recent experience of an intervention that uses outcome harvesting as a primary element of its MEL strategy (Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning). The author provides several tips for its use.

Strategy testing

!

My problem is…

That we are dealing with complex, fluid, unpredictable problems where I feel that the programme design should be revised, but we are not revising it.

Our programme is taking place in a complex and unpredictable environment that requires shifts in programme strategy, but we are not revising the original theory of change.

WHAT

Strategy Testing (ST) is a periodic, structured break from day-to-day programme implementation in which stakeholders collectively reflect on what they have learned and ask whether assumptions and programme strategies are still valid in light of new information, insights, and contextual changes. Strategy testing is like an adaptive moment focused on revisiting your programme strategy.

Unlike traditional monitoring tools, its purpose is not to report to external parties or track progress based on planned activities, targets and accomplishments.

Strategy Testing is a learn-to-adapt monitoring tool that helps teams reflect and reassess programmes to adjust as needed to increase the likelihood of achieving results and accelerate progress.

Strategy Testing tracks and documents the revision and adjustment process, making it a transparent tool and serving accountability.

WHY

Because there are cases where bringing about change requires navigating an unpredictable and complex landscape of (shifting) interests, incentives, ideas, and relationships among different groups and individuals. We need to identify where there is room for manoeuvre. In such contexts, a precise plan of activities to achieve results cannot be determined a priori.

Moreover, the path to outcomes (e.g., policy change, reform) sometimes evolves over time through relationship building, deeper understanding of the issues and interests at play, experimentation, adjusting programme strategies as new insights emerge, and recognizing and seizing unexpected opportunities as they arise. In such situations, an iterative approach that closely links learning and action is most likely to bring about effective solutions.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Have the elements of the programme strategy ready. Strategy Testing is based on the Theory of Change / Programme Theory (ToC/PT). It would thus be optimal if you could use the ToC/PT. At least make sure you identify the problems being addressed, the outcomes, the interventions (strategies/ set of activities) and assumptions.

2. Work on the *programme Timeline* (see next page and step 1 below), feeding it with relevant entries, and making sure the information it includes is up to date.

3. Plan in advance to engage relevant stakeholders in the strategy review discussions (step 2) e.g., colleagues from other business units, implementing partners, government partners, other UN agencies in joint programmes, and donors.

STEPS. How to use the Strategy Testing

Strategy Testing follows a sequence of four steps:

Step 1. State of play. The team examines what has happened since the programme design was drafted or since the last ST review. This means looking at major external events, changes in the political context, key decisions, accomplishments, and setbacks. To assist with this discussion, programme teams maintain a programme Timeline (see the figure on the next page).

Step 2. Step 2. Reviewing & Discussing: The team reviews and discusses the programme's strategy using a set of guiding questions (see the figure on the next page). The purpose of this discussion is to critically assess whether new information since the last ST session confirms the appropriateness of current strategies or suggests that they need to adjust the programme. This would be the equivalent to answering the *What* and *So what* triggering questions in an Adaptive Moment.

Step 3. Revising. Based on the discussion, the team revises the overall strategy (theory of change) and makes adjustments and refinements to activities (interventions), assumptions and outcomes as deemed necessary. The focus here is on adjusting or reformulating strategies to implement those with the higher impact potential (acceleration).

Step 4. Documenting. The final step in the ST process is to document how and why the current strategy (ToC) has been revised and identify any related programmatic, operational or budgetary implications (see the adjustment tracker figure on the next page).

HOW

Several templates are used in Strategy Testing: programme Timeline, guiding questions, Adjustment Tracker, and the Theory of Change. You can find the templates and real examples at the end of the Asia Foundation case study. The following figures are adapted versions from the UNFPA A-Compass Toolkit.

Guiding Questions

Overall guiding question

Have there been changes in context or new information that require adjusting our strategy in any way?

Problem statement

Possible review questions

- Since last working with our Strategy design/Theory of Change, what more have we learned about the nature or extent of the problem we are addressing?
- Have there been significant changes in context that require adjusting how we now frame or define the problem?
- How have changes in the environment or new information we have learned impacted our analysis of the most critical dynamics underlying the problem?

Assumptions

Possible review questions

- How have the political, economic, social, and institutional factors changed our initial assumptions?
- Who are the key actors now, and how have their relationships, interests, and/or incentives changed?

Interventions/strategies/main activities

Possible review questions

- Given the changes in the context or our understanding of the problem, do we need to change or drop any of our current interventions/strategies/activities or add any new ones?
- Is there new information or recent changes in key dynamics that impact the sequencing of our strategies/interventions/main activities?

Outcomes / Outputs (for country programmes)

Possible review questions:

- Given the current expected impact and the dynamics surrounding the issues, do the intended outcomes or the assumptions to reach impact need to change?

Impact / ultimate outcome

Possible review question:

- Have there been changes in the political economy context or new information that require adjusting our expected impact / ultimate outcome (further specifying it, narrowing it down further)?

Adjustments tracker

Name and country of the inititiative: ______________

Date of the tracker : ______________

Date at which the Adjustment Trackers is presented – for accountabilty of further discussions.

Strategy component	Changes made	Implications of the changes
Problem statement	*Explain how and why the elements of the overall strategy / ToC have been revised*	*Identify and explain any programmatic, operational or budgetary implications (if any) of the changes*
Assumptions		
Interventions/strategies /main activities		
Outcomes / outputs		
Impact / ultimate outcome		

programme Timeline

Name and country of the inititiative: ______________

Date of the timeline : ______________

Date at which the Timeline is presented for discussion. Latest date.

Date	Major Events, Decisions and Accomplishments	Event type	Relevance / explanation
Date of the event, decision or accomplishment.	*Brief description of the event, decision or accomplishment that has or could have an effect on the intervention.*	*You can choose the types. Some suggestions are: decisions (internal), (program) achievements, setbacks (roadblocks), external events, changes in political context.*	*Brief description of the implications of the event/decision/accomplishment) in the program strategy*

RESOURCES

Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments – Strategy testing

See all resources on methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments.

Check this slide deck on methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments. The second section includes strategy testing.

Adaptive Evaluation session 4 | Methods to capture contribution in unpredictable environments

This video session includes strategy testing, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Resources to learn more about this method

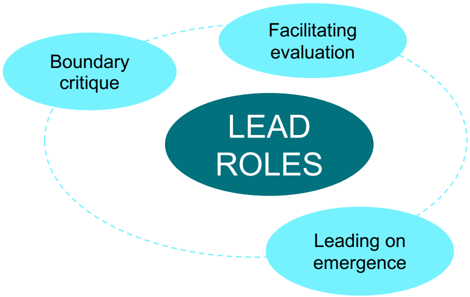
To have an overview of what Strategy Testing is and how it has been used so far, explore the BetterEvaluation site. It has a section called 'Strategy testing: An innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programme',

To have an overview of the tool and how it was originally developed, read the case study from The Asia Foundation: Ladner, D. (2015). *Strategy Testing: An innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programs. Working politically in practice case study 3*. San Francisco, USA: The Asia Foundation.

To see more examples and case studies of how Strategy Testing can be used, see the report from Christian Aid Ireland, Irish Aid and ODI. This document shared the experience of a five-year programme on governance, peace building and human rights in seven countries. It combines Strategy Testing, Theory of Change and Outcome Harvesting.

For an overview of how Strategy Testing combines with other adaptive management tools, including outcomes harvesting and using the theory of change, see the working paper published by the ODI: Pasanen, T., & Barnett, I. (2019). Supporting adaptive management: monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches.

5. Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation



Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation

WHAT

Adaptive evaluation requires the evaluation team (including evaluation managers and consultants) to constantly monitor and evaluate the changes that, either internally or externally, happen during the implementation and evaluation of programs. Against this backdrop, evaluation team members need to take a leading proactive role in identifying change, analyzing its implications, making sense of it and taking the decisions to constantly learn and adapt.

Therefore, leading on emergence means to take actions to adapt the evaluation to changes in context and new conditions that affect the evaluation use; boundary critique helps in assessing the changing power dynamics during the course of an evaluation; and facilitating evaluation is critical to make sense, collectively and inclusively, of all the changes experienced during the evaluation.

WHY

In UNFPA, leadership is the first driver of the A-Compass, its Adaptive Management model. Adaptation starts with leadership, enabling a proactive role towards action, at all levels of staff and responsibility. Leadership is not only related to senior management positions, but an ‘all staff’ issue.

Leadership in evaluation requires taking a proactive attitude in the design and conduct of evaluations; leading evaluations in a way staff and stakeholders feel open to sharing concerns, feedback and ideas, and seeing mistakes as part of a continuous learning process.

Leadership in summative evaluations is important.
Leadership in adaptive evaluations is fundamental.

Leading on emergence

!

My problem is…

That we are aware that we are working in highly and rapidly changing environments but we are not able to capture change in a timely manner.

That our monitoring and evaluation systems are too reactive, not allowing the programme to identify and anticipate to unpredictable or unexpected changes.

WHAT

Emergence occurs when new things that can affect the evaluation's utility unexpectedly arise (emerge) during the evaluation (see the guidance tool on emergence). These may be contextual or organizational changes or the result of new interactions with stakeholders. Because such changes can affect the use of the evaluation, we need to adapt the evaluation so that it remains utilization focused.

In order to capture and understand emergence, evaluators (both evaluation managers and consultants) need to undertake a proactive role. In other words, they need to exercise their leadership in such a way that they are able to capture, understand and make sense of the changes that affect the use of the evaluation; and also to enable emergence as a way the evaluation allows the adaptation of the programme that it is being evaluated, or the new design of the programme or intervention.

Leading on emergence means that the evaluation team takes a proactive role in making sure the evaluation is useful for all stakeholders engaged with the exercise in light of the changes experienced during the evaluation.

WHY

Leading on emergence is important because it enables the evaluation team to address emergence: to take actions to adapt the evaluation to changes in context and new conditions that affect evaluation use.

In complex contexts, we need the evaluation to adapt to these changes to remain relevant, meaningful and timely under the changing conditions (new context).

In this light, M&E is key during all phases of the programme cycle in order to identify change, learn and adjust programmes accordingly to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. This requires a mindset shift that implies a stronger leadership role by M&E staff and consultants' functions.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Make sure that, as M&E staff or consultant, you understand what adaptive management means at UNFPA (the A-Compass).

2. Connect with the idea that leadership is not only an issue for senior management. Everyone is a leader, so that you connect with a stronger sense of agency in your area of work and role as M&E staff. Ask yourself what is your agency and act on it.

3. Be aware that leadership, as adaptation, is a mindset, not a procedure, so start applying any method to capture emergence you use with the right leadership mindset. Leading on emergence = mindset + methods to capture emergence.

STEPS. How to start Leading on emergence:

1. Be **active** in identifying users; in facilitating purpose clarity; and in generating questions.
2. Be **reactive** in listening to users and in responding to what they learn.
3. Be **interactive** in establishing rapport, trust, mutual respect and in engaging with different perspectives.
4. Be **adaptive** in altering (adjusting) evaluation questions and design in light of changing conditions and of increased understanding of the situation.
5. Be **mindful** of all monitoring methods that the programme has in place to capture trends, patterns and early signals of change.
6. Be **aware** of the future plausible scenarios that your organization has defined (for example: horizon scanning, scenario planning). The foresight unit is a great place to spot new changes that are emerging in the context of the evaluation.
7. **Use** systematically adaptive moments to spot, stop and make sense of changes that are emerging.

Often this method is …

Used with adaptive moments in programme and evaluation.

It pairs very well with Emergence, check the method out in this guidance.

HOW

Visual example of the Adaptive Moment:

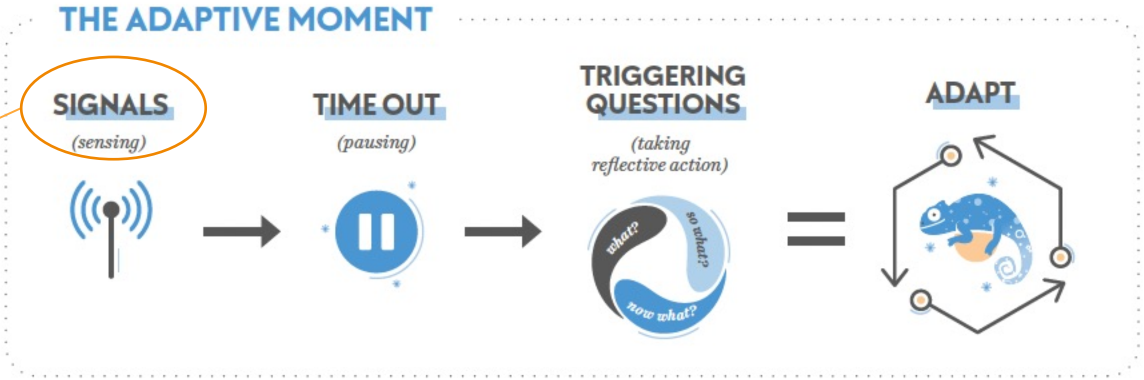


Figure 5. How does the adaptive moment work?

Changing external conditions

Emerging opportunities

Emerging risks

But be always aware that adaptation is a **mindset**, not a procedure

Be active
In identifying users
In facilitating purpose clarity
In generating questions

Be reactive
In listening to users
In responding to what they learn

Be interactive
In establishing rapport, trust, mutual respect and in engaging with different perspectives

Be adaptive
In altering (adjusting) evaluation questions and design in light of changing conditions and of increased understanding of the situation

PRACTICE:
How can YOU adopt an active leadership role in making your evaluations more responsive to emergence?
Consider the implications during all phases of an evaluation: design or inception, data collection and analysis, dissemination and interpretation of findings, decision-making, quality assurance

RESOURCES

Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation – Leading on emergence

See all resources on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation.

Check the slide deck on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation. Item two of the presentation is leading on emergence.

Adaptive evaluation session 5 | Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation

This video session includes leading on emergence, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

A-Compass

The A-Compass includes an explanation of what are and how to implement adaptive moments. You can find it on page 28 of the A-Compass.

Resources to learn more about this method

Michael Patton and Charmagne Campbell-Patton, in their book ‘Utilization-focused Evaluation’ (5th edition, SAGE Publishing), explain the mindset term ‘active/reactive/interactive/adaptive’ to describe the flexibility and leadership that should be involved with the evaluation. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/utilization-focused-evaluation/book268943

The United Nations System Leadership Framework is a call to action to all UN personnel to exercise greater leadership, regardless of position or level of seniority, across all functions: https://www.unssc.org/sites/default/files/un_system_leadership_framework.pdf

Boundary critique

!

My problem is…

That we know the importance of integrating vulnerable stakeholders so nobody is left behind, but we do not know how to critically integrate this principle in the design and implementation of an evaluation.

That we lack systematic structures that allow us to decide which value judgements we include and exclude in the evaluation.

WHAT

Boundary critique (BC) provides a methodological approach to systemically inquire and explore what issues and, whose views, should be included or excluded in an evaluation.

BC is a concept in critical systems thinking that, according to Ulrich (2002), states that "both the meaning and the validity of professional proposition always depend on boundary judgments as to what 'facts' (observation) and 'norms' (valuation standards) are to be considered relevant" or not.

As such, BC examines the assumptions whereby decisions are made, critically reviewing questions such as:

> How can those participating in evaluation effectively reflect on their own assumptions about where they set boundaries around: problems, solutions, measures of success, knowledge claims and other aspects of evaluation?

> How can examination of assumptions about boundaries be employed as an emancipatory practice to assess the assumptions of others and to point to better ways of serving the disenfranchised and marginalised?

WHY

Boundary judgements are fundamental for inclusive and participatory-driven evaluation, thereby integrating the principle of leaving no one behind. Boundaries compel us to look critically at who or what may be included or marginalized.

In adaptive evaluations, BC allows you to capture not only emergence of changes but also emergence of changes in the sources of motivation, control, knowledge and legitimacy of the evaluation.

In sum, BC is important as a critical exercise to be conducted in evaluations that want to consider what should be included and who as a way to enact power to critical stakeholders and beneficiaries of the evaluation.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Make sure that, as M&E staff or consultant, you make a case for using boundary critique.

2. In doing so, frame the discussion on the principles of inclusivity that guides the leaving no one behind as a fundamental principle of the UNFPA Strategic Plan.

3. Enable a psychologically safe space for participants to speak their truth, and use visual materials to discuss and collect the feedback provided

STEPS. How to start Leading on emergence:

1. Start inquiring about the sources of motivation: who is/ought to be the beneficiaries of this evaluation? What is/ought to be the purpose? What is/ought to be the measure of success?
2. Follow by inquiring about the sources of control and power: who is/ought to be the decision maker in control of the success of the evaluation? What resources and conditions are/ought to be under control of the evaluation's decision makers? What conditions of success are/ought to be outside the control of the decision makers?
3. Continue by inquiring about the sources of knowledge: What experts are/ought to be providing the relevant knowledge and skills for the evaluation? What are/ought to be the relevant expertise, knowledge and skills necessary for the conduction of the evaluation? What are/ought to be the assurances of successful implementation of the evaluation?
4. Finalize by inquiring about the sources of legitimacy: who is/ought to be the witness representing the interests of those negatively affected by, but not involved in the evaluation? What are/ought to be the opportunities for emancipation, for the interests of those negatively affected to have expression and freedom in the worldview of the evaluation? What space is/ought to be available for reconciling different worldviews among those affected and involved?

Often this method …

Requires strong facilitation skills. Check the method facilitating evaluation.

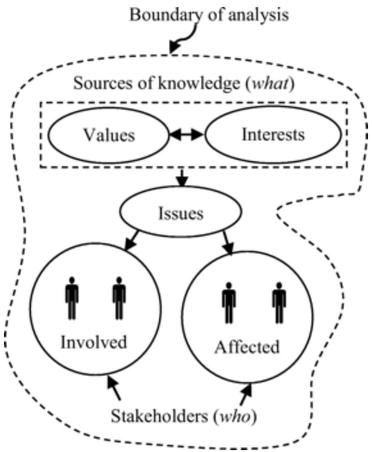
HOW

BOUNDARY CRITIQUE

Visual example of the the Boundary Critique as a systemic inquiry framework

Sources of Influence	Boundary Judgements for a system of interest (S) → **i.e. the evaluation**		
	Social Roles (Stakeholders)	*Specific Concerns (Stakes)*	*Key Problems (Stakeholding issues)*
Sources of Motivation	1. Who is/ought to be the intended ***beneficiary*** of S?	2. What is/ought to be the ***purpose*** of S?	3. What is/ought to be S's ***measure of success or improvement***?
Sources of Control	4. Who is/ought to be the ***decision maker*** in control of the conditions of success for S?	5. What ***resources***, conditions of success, are/ought to be under the control of S's decision maker?	6. What conditions of success are/ought to be outside the control of S's decision maker, the ***decision environment***?
Sources of Knowledge	7. What ***experts*** are/ought to be providing the relevant knowledge and skills for S?	8. What are/ought to be the relevant (new) ***expertises***, knowledges and skills necessary for the operation of the S?	9. What are/ought to be the assurances of successful implementation of S, i.e. what is its **guarantor**?
Sources of Legitimacy	10. Who is/ought to be the ***witness*** representing the interests of those negatively affected by, but not involved with S?	11. What are/ought to be the opportunities for ***emancipation***, for the interests of those negatively affected to have expression and freedom in the worldview of the S?	12. What space is/ought to be available for reconciling different ***worldviews*** regarding S among those affected and involved?

Ref: Werner Ulrich (2002). "Boundary Critique". in: *The Informed Student Guide to Management Science*, ed. by H.G. Daellenbach and Robert L. Flood, London: Thomson Learning, 2002, p. 41f.



Visual example of the the Boundary Critique approach

This **inquiry framework** is designed to outline and provoke thought about **boundary judgments** that determine situational framings.
Each question is considered in two modes: an ideal mode (what 'should' be), and a descriptive mode (what 'is'), making twenty-four questions in total.
It is useful to apply it for the **design** of an evaluation and **review it throughout the evaluation** given some changes in the sources of influence.

RESOURCES

Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation – Boundary critique

See all resources on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation.

Check the slide deck on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation. Item three of the presentation is boundary critique

Adaptive evaluation session 5 | Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation

This video session includes boundary critique, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Resources to learn more about this method

This article Werner Ulrich (2002). "Boundary Critique". in: *The Informed Student Guide to Management Science*, ed. by H.G. Daellenbach and Robert L. Flood, London: Thomson Learning, 2002, p. 41f. Provides the theoretical foundations of BC as a systemic inquiry tool.

This video makes a case for the importance of reflecting on what boundary choices leaders make to define what and who is included in the design of an intervention. Boundary judgements have relevant implications for the design of an evaluation, for instance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o21WKsM4U8

This article introduces a critical discussion on how we assume certain evaluation criteria for granted and how reflecting upon boundary choices may help evaluators and evaluations assess which criteria are most inclusive, useful and a fit for the purpose of the evaluation: https://evaluationuncertainty.com/2020/07/14/evaluation-criteria-and-boundary-critique/

Reynolds, M. (2007). "Evaluation based on Critical Systems Heuristics". UK Open University. This article explores the application of Boundary Critique in an evaluation of a natural resource management in Botswana.

Facilitating evaluation

!

My problem is…

That we have the user engagement processes and methods in place, but still we need to develop our interpersonal soft skills to engage them during the interactive meetings and workshops we have with them (either physical and/or remote).

That we do not have enough human connection with our stakeholders

WHAT

Facilitation literally means ‘helping people to talk’.

Applied to evaluation, ‘evaluation facilitation is a specialized niche within the larger world of facilitation. Evaluation facilitation applies and adapts general facilitation knowledge to the specialized challenges of working with stakeholder groups involved in programme evaluation” (excerpt from Michael Patton’s book ‘Facilitating evaluation’, 2017).

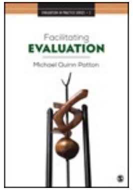
Facilitation helps the evaluation team to harvest the knowledge required to answer the evaluation questions by engaging with stakeholders in a safe and trusted manner.

According to Federica Bottamendi, ‘people lie at the heart of evaluation, beyond tools, methods and approaches: their disclosure of information and data, their feedback and how they engage with the evaluation as a whole. People provide the wisdom; we need to be good enough to harvest it. Facilitation helps to do exactly that. The human component can make the difference both in the results of the evaluation and in its uptake afterwards’. (Eval Forward 2019).

WHY

The purpose of facilitating evaluation is, according to Patton (2017), ’to enhance relevance, credibility, meaningfulness, and utility of evaluations’.

Facilitation encourage authentic communication from stakeholders, ensure achievement of objectives, and synthesize information to addressing evaluation questions and enable decision-making.



As evaluators, according to Amy Griffin, ‘we facilitate discussions at every phase of the evaluation process, including designing the evaluation, developing data collection methods, and analyzing and interpreting evaluation findings. Effective facilitation builds trust with and among community partners and can lead to a more inclusive evaluation process’.

Making sense of the emerging findings collected during the evaluation requires effective facilitation so that the programme can learn and adapt as it is being evaluated.

HOW

Preparation:

1. Be aware that facilitation falls into the category of human and interpersonal skills, so it goes beyond evaluation tools, methods and approaches. Interpersonal skills include cultural competence, communication, facilitation and conflict resolution.
2. Understand that facilitation in evaluation is a core competence for evaluation managers and consultants. In fact, evaluation facilitation falls within the interpersonal domain of the American Evaluation Association's competencies (https://www.eval.org/About/Competencies-Standards/AEA-Evaluator-Competencies)

STEPS. How to practice facilitation in evaluation (from Patton's book 'Facilitating Evaluation'):

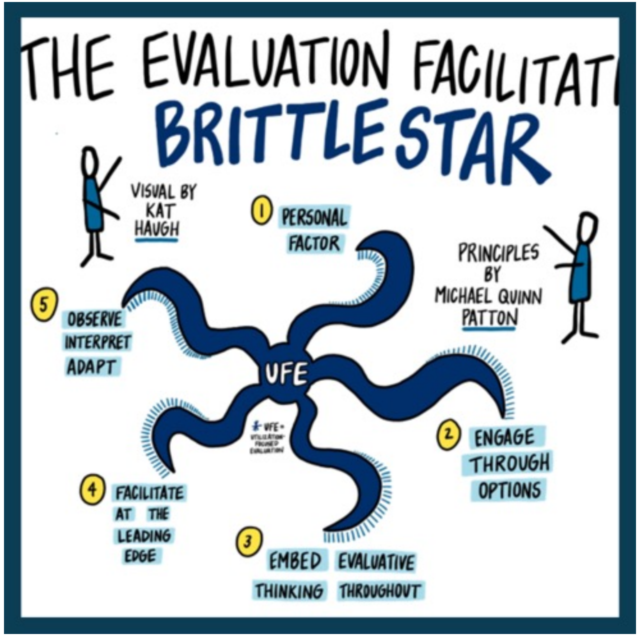
1. **Be guided by the personal factor**: conduct pre-facilitation calls to get to know everyone; make the facilitation fit the people; let people experience you as a person, not as someone filling a role; show interest, commitment and enthusiasm; and use humor whenever you see fit.
2. **Engage through options**: make sure the group understands its task and the decision making's rules it will be following; provide a process for generating and comparing options, exercising choice and making decisions; facilitate systematic comparison of options; guide the group in converging on its preferred option and make design decisions; articulate and communicate the decision and the rationale to the implementers.
3. **Observe, interpret and adapt**: some tips for this include trusting the process; observe yourself as facilitator as well; ask adaptive inquiry questions such as the what, so what and now what (adaptive moment); observe both formal and informal interactions; it's all data all of the time; there's no failure, there's only data; reflection on experience is actually what teaches you the most.
4. **Embed evaluative thinking throughout**: teach and facilitate inquiry through deep and persistent questioning; engage with participants in critical thinking.
5. **Facilitate at the leading edge**: offer added value to participants connecting them to latest developments in evaluation, important research and non-faction and breaking news; use multiple frameworks as you see fit (see A-Compass tools 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (page 35);

Often this method …

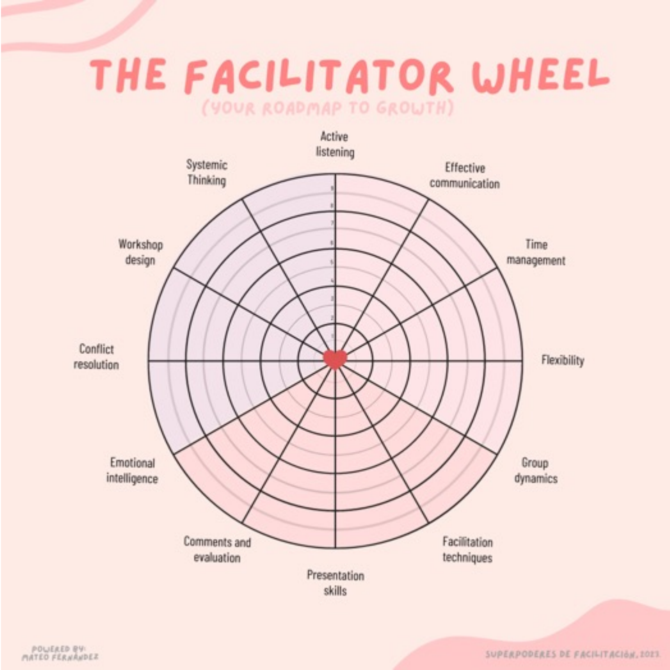
Is highly related with Evaluative thinking.

HOW

Visual recap of the evaluation facilitation brittle star's 5 principles:



Visual recap of key facilitator's competencies:



https://mateo-fernandez.medium.com/the-facilitator-wheel-your-roadmap-to-growth-1bb7b7bdc08b

RESOURCES

Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation – Facilitating evaluation

See all resources on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation.

Check the slide deck on leadership roles in adaptive evaluation. Item four of the presentation is facilitating evaluation.

Adaptive evaluation session 5 | Leadership roles in adaptive evaluation

This video session includes facilitating evaluation, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Resources to learn more about this method

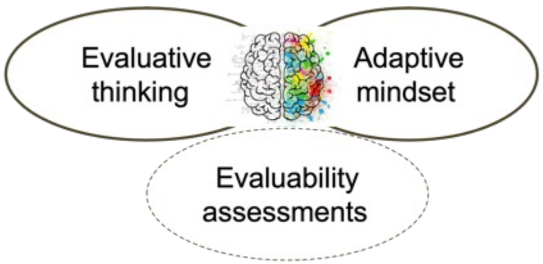
The seminal book ”Facilitating Evaluation”, by Michael Quinn Patton (2017): https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/facilitating-evaluation/book252374

This article explains why facilitation is a highly demanded skill for evaluators in enabling a space where all stakeholders involved in the evaluation can share their perspectives. Therefore, data can be collected from multiple sources more transparently and within a collaborative environment. This process directly influences the evaluation process increasing its effectiveness and ultimately enhancing its use: https://www.evalforward.org/blog/why-use-facilitation-evaluation

In this article Amy Griffin explains the role of facilitation in evaluation, including tips and practical resources: https://aea365.org/blog/the-role-of-facilitation-in-evaluation-by-amy-griffin/

6. The adaptive evaluation mindset

The adaptive evaluation mindset



Adaptive evaluation presupposes a certain mindset, a certain way of thinking, feeling, and being as we evaluate.

WHAT

The mindset of adaptive evaluation refers to the state of mind we need to fully utilise adaptive evaluation. This way of understanding, feeling, and using adaptive evaluation consists of three components: evaluative thinking, the mindset of an adaptive evaluator, and the use of evaluability assessments.

Evaluative thinking embraces the essence of adaptive management and applies it to evaluation by combining critical, creative, practical, and inferential thinking skills. The adaptive evaluator mindset reflects a range of attitudes and behaviours that describe the evaluator, including respect for diverse contributions, inclusiveness in collaboration, eagerness to continuously improve, openness to learning, focus on impact, and ability to adapt.

Evaluability assessments are part of any evaluation mindset. Consideration of the extent to which an intervention is evaluable should be a must in any type of evaluation. However, in adaptive evaluation, evaluability assessments are a requirement rather than an option. They are an integral part of the adaptive evaluation mindset.

WHY

The A-Compass, UNFPA's model for adaptive management, states that the organisation must shift from a linear 'analysis-to-prediction' mindset to a systemic 'learning-to-adapt' mindset. This shift applies not only to programme design and management, but also to evaluation design and management.

Adaptive evaluation is not just about applying methods and step-by-step instructions. It requires specific skills and a way of thinking and feeling with distinct attitudes and behaviours. We need this mindset to fully utilise and apply adaptive evaluation.

The adaptive evaluator’s mindset

!

My problem is…

That we have adaptive evaluation methods and approaches in place but still people do not see the value of implementing them.

That we have adaptive evaluation methods and approaches in place but still people do not take a proactive role towards implementing them, but are rather compliant with existing traditional methods.

WHAT

Adaptive evaluation happens in complex, turbulent and unpredictable contexts. This means that evaluators need to evaluate from a state of mind where flexibility and openness to change characterize their attitude in conducting evaluations. This requires evaluators being able to hold a space for uncertainty and ambiguity as the evaluation unfolds and deals with multiple perspectives, multiple sources of data and different interpretations of findings.

In this context, evaluators cannot approach adaptive evaluations with a business-as-usual mindset: suited-for-stable situations, linear, analyse-to-predict mindset. They need to embrace an adaptive mindset and develop the ability to change quickly in the face of new circumstances.

Evaluation rigour in the context of adaptive evaluation implies being able to make the necessary adjustments and decision based on emerging, new evidence and data spotted, making the case with justified arguments for the changes implemented; and recording the open traceability of changes due to the evidence provided and discussed.

WHY

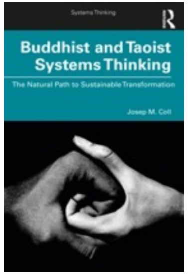
UNFPA emphasizes that the culmination of efforts to operationalize adaptive management is the A-mindset or adaptive/agile mindset (see the A-Compass, page 44).

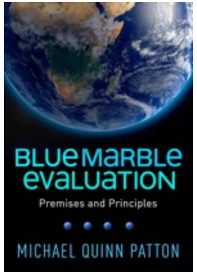
The A-mindset stands in contrast to the ‘bureaucractic’ mindset characterized by compliance. An A-mindset is based on working with each other for impact, rather than competing with each other for power.

It supports the following set of attitudes: respect for diverse contributions, inclusiveness in collaboration, eagerness to continuously improve, openness to learn, ownership for quality, focus on impact, and the ability to adapt.

HOW

Recent approaches to evaluation such as the Blue Marble Evaluation (Patton 2019) and Buddhist and Taoist Systems Thinking (Coll 2021) ground the development of the evaluator mindset on Eastern wisdom, which is based on perennial ideas of flexibility, change and adaptation:





Craig Russon introduced an Eastern Paradigm of Evaluation with key axioms to be applied in evaluation:

[Direct access to the article]()

jmde

http://www.jmde.com/

An Eastern Paradigm of Evaluation

Craig Russon
Senior Evaluation Officer
International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
International Labour Organization (ILO)
Geneva, Switzerland

Eastern Paradigm of Evaluation Axioms Linked to Practice.

Axiom 1: The Nature of Reality	▪ Use metaphors, analogies, and models to approximate reality ▪ Practice hyper-empathy
Axiom 2: The Inquirer-Objective Relationship	▪ Pay attention to intuition ▪ Be in the moment and be real ▪ Embrace ambiguity and uncertainty
Axiom 3: The Nature of Truth Statements	▪ Explore multiple sides of each issue ▪ Balanced reporting
Axiom 4: Attribution/Explanation of Action	▪ Use alternatives to logic models and logical frameworks ▪ Reserve judgements
Axiom 5: The Role of Values in Inquiry	▪ Avoid either/or in favour of both/and thinking ▪ Seek new insights into the object of inquiry

HOW

The following is a guide to practice **key competencies** for developing an adaptive mindset:

Competency	Description of behavior
Oneness and inter-being	Be aware of the whole system, its context, its purpose, its boundaries, the interdependent relations between all stakeholders (including your relation/intervention with the system), processes and dynamics in the system and of the events that emerge as a result of the interaction between these elements. Pull the thread of mutual causality in capturing reality. Approach your work with compassion and appreciation: empathize with the situation, roles and opinions of stakeholders and people with whom you interact. They want to lead a meaningful and fulfilling transformation too, and they want to enhance their capacities to do so. Avoid blame and start with gratefulness.
Emptiness and the Zen mind	Focus on identifying and assessing the quality of patterns, relationships, processes and networks that define the harmony or healthiness of the organization. Do it in a way that your assessment is not conditioned by your previous experiences. Approach evaluation and ask questions with a Zen mind: a calm state detached from the ego, an empty mind that is ready and open for active listening and unconditioned learning. Approach your inquiries with humility. Ask questions with a beginner's mind. When asking and collecting data you are not trying to corroborate or validate your own assumptions and mental models but to provide evidence and context on the causal effects you are observing and analyzing.
Impermanence	Adapt to changes in the context in which the evaluation takes place, to the emergence of unexpected events that may alter your plans and work schedule, to the introduction of new information that may change the course of your evaluation. Review and re-adapt your expectations accordingly and do not forget to contextualize, justify and communicate these adaptations. Focus on the aspects of the evaluation you can directly control and monitor through your work. Let go control and expectations that do not depend on you (e.g., like having all the answers) and replace this desire for control with a positive influence to evaluating the transformation.

HOW

Competency	Description of behavior
Yin-Yang	Identify the tensions that hamper the transition of the organization to the new business paradigm. Spot the opposites. Illuminate the possibilities that are hidden in the opposite direction of the Yin-Yang creative tension. Release the creative energy that is seeking to be resolved and thereby, facilitate the harmonization of opposites.
Wuwei	Go with the flow, do not try to force events to make them fit to your plans. Follow the natural action, the natural path. This process of natural adaptation often requires making real-time decisions as events emerge during the evaluation, as things change. Feel and sense the situation. Channeling your actions to the flow of the evaluation requires intuitive and spontaneous decision-making. Trust it and link it to the purpose of the evaluation, the inquiry process and the collection and interpretation of evidence.
Five Elements and the Zen Business Model	In the context of conventional reality, focus on capturing the generators of that reality: drivers, forces or mechanisms that generate the impact (do not only focus on the outcomes, which sometimes are very difficult to capture!): Use the five elements' dynamics of the Zen Business to identify what generates or blocks the value in the process of transformation.

Source: adapted from 'Buddhist and Taoist Systems Thinking' (Coll 2021, Routledge), chapter 9: *Evaluation for systems transformation.*

RESOURCES

The adaptive evaluation mindset – Adaptive mindset

See all resources on the adaptive evaluation mindset.

See item three of this slide deck on the adaptive evaluation mindset.

Adaptive evaluation session 6 | The adaptive evaluator's mindset

This video session includes adaptive mindset, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

UNFPA A-Compass

The UNFPA A-Compass (page 44) includes important considerations on adaptive mindset. The A-mindset plays an important role in operationalizing adaptive management as a catalytic aspect of learning and adaptation. The A-Compass is aimed at accelerating UNFPA's organizational effectiveness and efficiency, one of the six accelerator's of the Strategic Plan 2022-25.

Resources to learn more about this method

Coll, J.M. (2021). Buddhist and Taoist Systems Thinking: the natural path to sustainable transformation. London and New York: Routledge. Chapter 9 of this book focuses on the core competencies of adaptive evaluation mindset.

Patton M. Q. (2019). Blue Marble Evaluation: premises and principles. Guilford Press. Chapter 9 of this book explain the of Yin-Yang principle.

This Blue Marble webinar recoding offers some insights and discussions on adaptive mindset applied to evaluation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVArj_pRBz4

This article offers valuable insights on how to move from an ordinary to an adaptive mindset: https://medium.com/@jojo2/from-ordinary-to-outstanding-you-only-need-to-know-adaptive-thinking-f3223644c671

Evaluative thinking

!

My problem is…

That we use adaptive evaluation methods, but that is not enough. Our current thinking does not promote adaptive evaluation and management.

That we need to know more about how to promote ways of thinking that enable learning and adaptation.

WHAT

Evaluative thinking is not synonymous with evaluation. As IllumiLab says, “Evaluation is the doing, while evaluative thinking is the being”. Evaluation is a set of activities, while evaluative thinking is an approach and a way of thinking.

Evaluators and researchers, both academics and practitioners, have written a lot about this. They all refer to the same core concepts, but from different perspectives. For Michael Quinn Patton (2005), evaluative thinking is “an analytical way of thinking that infuses everything that goes on". For Gavin Bennett and Nasreen Jessani (2011), it is “ questioning, reflecting, learning, and modifying … conducted all the time. It is a constant state of mind within an organization’s culture and all its systems"

Thomas Archibald (2013) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University elaborates on the skills involved when he defines it as “a cognitive process in the context of assessment that is motivated by an attitude of curiosity and a belief in the value of evidence and includes skills such as identifying assumptions, asking thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and making informed decisions in preparation for action”.

WHY

Evaluative thinking is important to adaptive evaluation because it takes the essence of adaptive management and applies it to evaluation.

Evaluative thinking includes elements such as reflective practice, systematic questioning, evidence-based decision making, analyzing implications of findings, gaining deep understanding, and learning and adaptation. All of these elements form the core of adaptive management.

HOW

You can apply evaluative thinking by combining four types of thinking: critical, creative, practical, and inferential thinking. To apply these ways of thinking, you can do the following:

Critical thinking

- Question assumptions
- Look for disconfirming evidence
- Examine rival explanations
- Seek diverse perspectives
- Analyze what and how we think and why we think that way

Creative thinking

- Use artistic, evocative and visualization techniques to data analysis and findings presentations
- Synthesize in search of coherence while being comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty
- Allow and invite outside-the-box perspectives and interpretations

Practical thinking

- Integrate theory and practice
- Examine the real-world implication of findings
- Invite interpretations from non-evaluators / non-researchers

Inferential thinking

- Examining the extent to what the evidence supports the conclusions reached
- Putting forward the findings and the reasoning that led to those findings (rigorous reasoning)

Evaluation research shows that we can promote evaluative thinking by engaging those who participate in the process. In fact, research has found that evaluations have an impact when they engage participants in evaluative thinking. Evaluative thinking creates a culture of evidence-based decision making that ultimately leads to organizational learning.

RESOURCES

The adaptive evaluation mindset – Evaluative thinking

See all resources on the adaptive evaluation mindset.

Check the slide deck on the adaptive evaluation mindset. The first section is about evaluative thinking.

Adaptive evaluation session 6 | The adaptive evaluator's mindset

This video session includes evaluative thinking, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

UNFPA Evaluation Strategy

The UNFPA Evaluation Strategy, 2022-2025 (pages 4 and 22) includes important considerations on evaluative thinking. Evaluative thinking plays an important role in the UNFPA Evaluation Strategy as a key driver of learning and adaptation, to deliver on the Strategic Plan, and as a driver of organizational transformation.

Resources to learn more about this method

A four-minute video on evaluative thinking and why it matters. In this video, Dr Michael Q. Patton explains that evaluation research shows that evaluations' major impact is not just producing evaluation findings but engaging people who participate in the evaluation in evaluative thinking.

To learn more, you can visit the BetterEvaluation website, which has a section on evaluative thinking.

Patton M. Q., Campbell-Patton C. E. (2022). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapter 3 of this book is about utilization-focused evaluative thinking.

Evaluability assessments

!

My problem is…

That we commission evaluations and discover too late that it was not the right time to do an evaluation.

That we do not know how to determine when an intervention can be evaluated in a reliable and credible way.

WHAT

The OECD-DAC defines evaluability as "the extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion'.

Evaluability assessments look at three aspects. They consider whether the quality of the design (reflected in the theory of change) permits the evaluation. They consider the availability of information to be used in the evaluation, and they consider how conducive the institutional context is to support an appropriate evaluation.

The end result of an evaluability assessment is an evidence-based decision about whether or not to proceed with the evaluation, including recommendations about what should be addressed to improve the evaluability of the intervention.

Evaluability assessment is different from conducting an evaluation. An evaluation aims to assess the merits of a particular intervention. In contrast, an evaluability assessment precedes an evaluation with the goal of recommending whether or when the evaluation should be conducted and how its value can be maximised.

In organisations with good intervention planning, appropriate stakeholder management, and a sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach, an evaluability assessment may not be necessary.

WHY

We need evaluability assessments because they test the foundations for robust evaluation design to reduce the risk of irrelevant or invalid findings.

Evaluability assessments are very important in impact evaluations and summative exercises where it is critical to test whether it is possible to measure impact, but they are equally important in adaptive evaluations where learning to adapt is central. For interventions to be a source of organizational learning, they must be evaluable.

Evaluable projects have a clear design. Interventions are hypotheses about how to address a problem. Without a clear intervention model that addresses the underlying causes of the problem, it is difficult to see where lessons can be learned. If we evaluate but do not learn lessons - because evaluability was low – evaluations do not contribute to adaptive management. Evaluable projects have systems in place to provide the evidence needed for learning (available information) and an institutional context that fosters the use of the evaluation. Without actual data on outcomes, there is no credible evaluation. Evaluable projects need a conducive institutional context because the institutional context determines evaluation use, which is central to adaptive evaluation.

We can also use evaluability assessments to improve intervention design by adjusting and improving the intervention as we go along, which usually happens in developmental evaluations and is a central feature of adaptive evaluations in general.

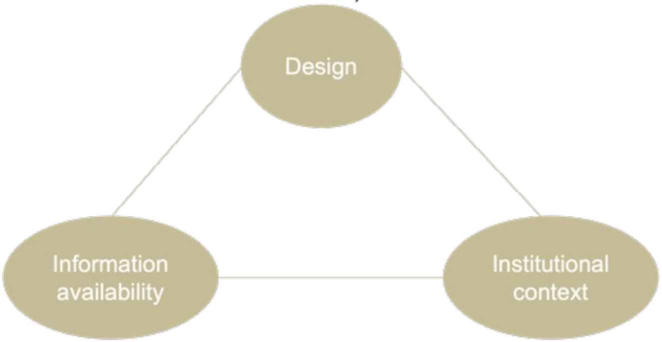
HOW

Evaluability assessments are conducted using checklists of questions related to the three aspects under review: Quality of design, availability of information, and institutional context

There are no standard checklists for evaluability assessments. You can customise them to fit your evaluation. Here are some examples of templates from UNEG, UNODC, UNICEF, and FCDO.

To what extent does the quality of the design allow for the evaluation?

(Check the adequacy of intervention design for what it is trying to achieve)



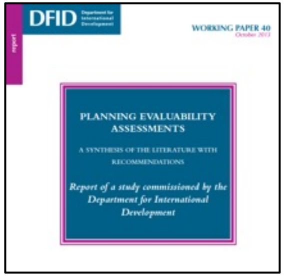
To what extent are the results verifiable?

(Check the availability and quality of information to be used in the evaluation)

Will the evaluation be feasible, credible and useful?

(Check the conduciveness of the institutional context to support an appropriate evaluation)

FCDO

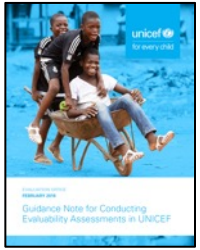


UNEG

UNODC

UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNICEF



RESOURCES

The adaptive evaluation mindset – Evaluability assessments

See all resources on the adaptive evaluation mindset.

Check the slide deck on the adaptive evaluation mindset. The last section is on evaluability assessments.

Adaptive evaluation session 6 | The adaptive evaluator's mindset

This video session includes evaluability assessments, as well a presentation of the tips and examples in the slide deck.

Resources to learn more about this method

A recurrently cited piece on planning evaluability assessments commissioned by FCDO on planning evaluability assessments. Davies, R. (2013). Planning evaluability assessments: A synthesis of the literature with recommendations. *Report of a study commissioned by the Department for International Development*.

To learn more, you can visit the BetterEvaluation the website, which has a section on evaluability assessments.

The Methods Lab project produced an interesting piece on evaluability assessments for impact evaluations (not adaptive evaluations). Nevertheless, this is a very interesting document on this topic. Peersman, G., Guijt, I., & Pasanen, T. (2015). Evaluability assessment for impact evaluation: Guidance, checklists and decision support, A Methods Lab Publication.

A 3-minute blog article about evaluability assessments in wich a methods advisor from the Independent Evaluation Group at the World Bank reflects on evaluability and why it is important for evaluators and non-evaluators alike.

Independent Evaluation Office

Driving evidence-based actions
Delivering rights and choices for all

This is a publication by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNFPA.

unfpa.org/evaluation

@unfpa_eval

evaluation.office@unfpa.org

@UNFPA_EvaluationOffice