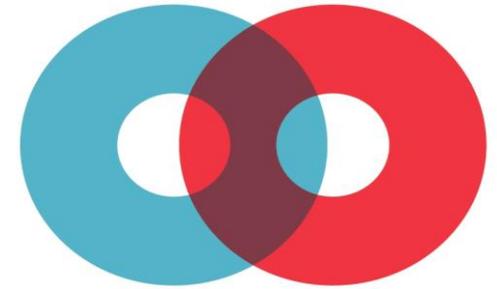

IVAR

Collaborative, practical, problem-solving



Evaluation for Strategic Learning

London Funders, 10 February 2015



Session outline

- UK Evaluation Roundtable
 - State of evaluation across the Roundtable network
 - Evaluation for strategic learning
 - Roundtable findings
 - Discussion
-

Use of the term 'evaluation'

“The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs [or projects and initiatives] to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase understanding.”

(Patton, M. (2008, p.39) *Utilization-focused evaluation*, California: Sage Publications)

Why a UK Evaluation Roundtable?

- Limited opportunities for peer to peer interaction and engaging deeply with questions in this area
 - Some sense that the drive to impact can sometimes squeeze out the space for learning
 - IVAR's partnership with the Center for Evaluation Innovation and a shared interest in the practice of 'evaluation for strategic learning'
-

Three Main Types of Evaluation Uses

Accountability	Demonstrating impact	Strategic Learning
<p>Monitoring whether efforts are doing what they said they would do and that resources are being managed well.</p> <p>Used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Track whether plans are being implemented in accordance with grant agreements.• Track actual against planned expenditure.	<p>Determining whether a plausible and defensible case can be made that an effort contributed to observed results.</p> <p>Used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand impact as individual funder.• Demonstrate to other stakeholders how funding has made a difference. <p>Appears to be most important to funders engaged in strategic philanthropy, programmatic funding or with public stakeholders/living donors.</p>	<p>Using evaluation to help organisations or groups learn in real-time and adapt their strategies to the changing circumstances around them.</p> <p>Used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop greater expertise or knowledge in particular areas, e.g. where involvement will be effective or to find an appropriate niche.• Test out a theory of change.• Inform future strategy and build on what has gone before.• Improve grantmaking decisions based on understanding what does and does not work (e.g. when funding new ideas/pilots).• Enable a relaxed approach to risk/failure: 'If we don't have some failures, we're not doing our job properly'.



Roundtable Framing Paper: Key findings (i)

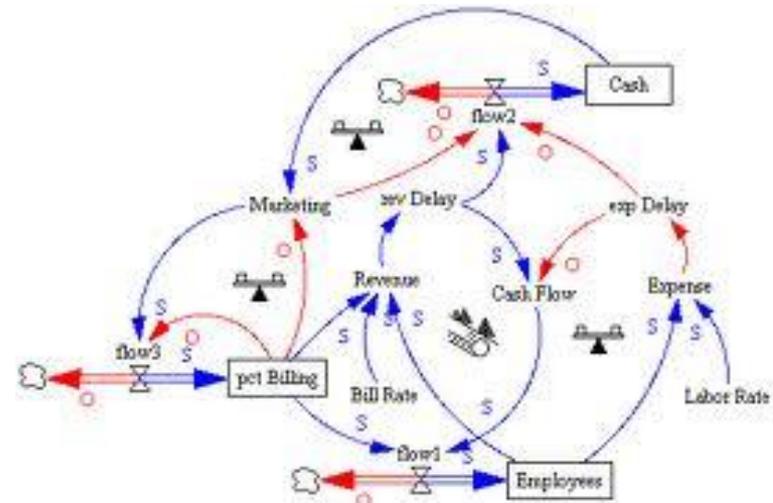
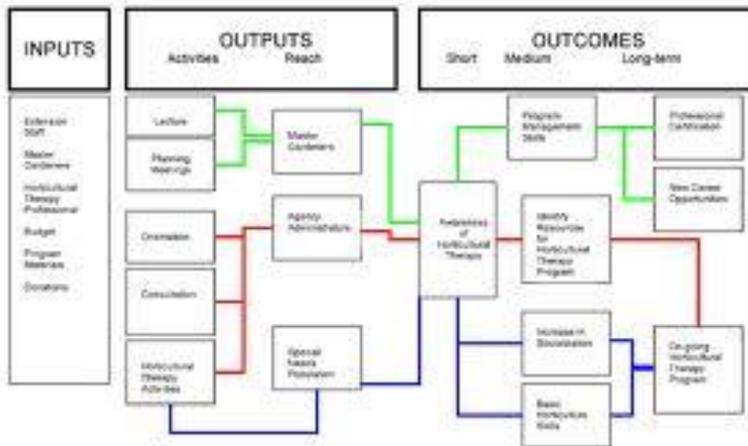
- Evaluation is a '*work in progress*'
 - Changes to systems, personnel and investment balanced by some scepticism about value and usefulness
 - Such concerns can be amplified by failure of evaluation to meet expectations
-

Roundtable Framing Paper:

Key findings (ii)

- Challenges around use, internally and externally
 - Links to issues around function, form and the relationship between the two
 - Strategic learning has its own particular challenges: time, processes, people
 - Governance often at odds with a learning approach
-

Different types of grantmaking call for different approaches.



MODELS

ADAPTIVE INITIATIVES

MODELS

If implemented correctly and with quality, a pre-determined set of activities can be expected to produce a predictable chain of outcomes over time and in different settings.



Program delivery:

- Client-based interventions
- Training and education

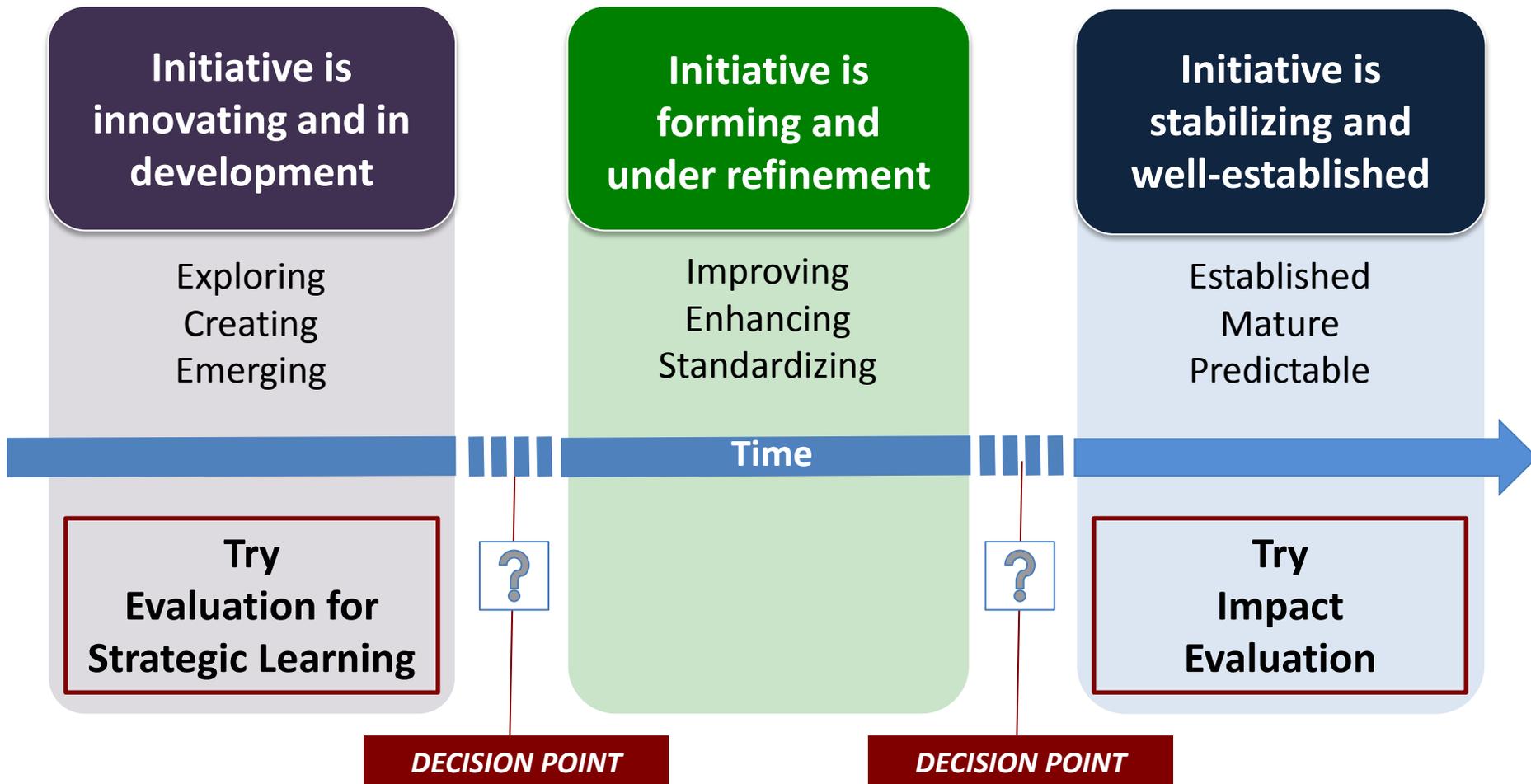
ADAPTIVE INITIATIVES

Dynamic conditions and multiple factors require adaptation along the way, so both the pathway to change and the outcomes themselves may change over time.



- Systems change
- Advocacy & policy change
- Program Innovations

Where an initiative is in its development also matters.



Strategic Learning



EVALUATION

STRATEGY

Strategic learning is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—including evaluation—to inform decision making about strategy.

It occurs when organizations or groups integrate data and evaluative thinking into their work, and then adapt their strategies in response to what they learn.

Evaluation has a seat at the strategy table.

Programs

Finance

Communications

Evaluation

Operations



Evaluation places a high value on use,
and helps to support it.



Hey. Your initiative is
having some
problems. Here's what
the data suggest
about how to fix it.

All three are critical to successful strategic learning.

①

Asking the right questions and getting the right data

②

Structuring the work to enable regular use of data

③

Effectively processing and using the data

Roundtable Findings (i): Purpose of evaluation

- Learning for improvement and change: *'To draw out lessons that help us get better at what we do and how we do it'*
 - Demonstrating outcomes and impact: *'To set out to stakeholders, especially trustees, what the Foundation is achieving'; 'To know whether we have made a difference'*
 - Sharing and influencing: *'To accumulate evidence for policy/practice influence'*
-

Roundtable Findings (ii):

Next steps in the adoption of strategic learning

- **Engaging trustees:** the difficulty of engaging trustees in strategic learning, feeling that it can be hindered by the fact that the structure of trustee business does not lend itself to a focus on learning.
 - **Evaluation design:** the main difficulty here was the lack of evaluation frameworks to guide design, the fact that current systems are not necessarily built for learning (including tender processes) and a lack of buy-in to the underlying principle of strategic learning (namely that learning has a 'seat at the strategy table'). We also heard of the challenge of finding the right evaluators for the job.
-

Roundtable Findings (iii):

Next steps in the adoption of strategic learning

- **Managing relationships:** the difficulty of building trust in relationships, especially where the power dynamic comes into play, e.g. between an evaluator and client (the funder) or between funder and grantee; the need to foster relationships in which both grants staff and grantees can be more open about 'failure' without fear of blame or loss of funding.
 - **Making use of data:** participants felt that making best use of data primarily required shifts in the culture of an organisation (and its partners/grantees). This included helping both internal and external stakeholders to understand evaluation as an ongoing, non-linear process that is *'not just for impact but also for learning'*.
-

Roundtable Impact: Adaptations and changes

- **Strategy:** *We have introduced a new process for looking annually across grants, reporting across the picture, in order to make more use of what grantees tell us. That is linked into an annual Learning Day for trustees with a focus on possible adjustments to strategy; The whole issue of using evaluation for strategic learning is now shaping the development of our new reporting framework.*
 - **Practice:** *For a new programme of work we commissioned evaluators before the programme started and involved them in early discussions – that is a shift from the more traditional approach previously used; The experience helped to demystify evaluation in a useful way and led directly to us commissioning our first ever evaluation.*
 - **Internal learning:** *We have planned a session with trustees to establish formal buy-in to the idea of strategic learning and the need to restructure processes for capturing, distilling, acting on and disseminating learning.*
-

All three are critical to successful strategic learning.

①

Asking
the right
questions
and getting
the right
data

②

Structuring
the work to
enable
regular use
of data

③

Effectively
processing
and using
the data

Web links

- <http://www.ivar.org.uk/publications/evaluation-roundtable-2014-framing-paper>
 - <http://www.ivar.org.uk/publications/trust-and-foundation/evaluation-roundtable-2014-learning-away-teaching-case>
 - <http://www.ivar.org.uk/publications/evaluation-roundtable-2014-proceedings>
 - <http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publications/evaluation-support-strategic-learning-principles-and-practices>
-