Recommendations: getting the big tick: Can evaluators learn anything from the policy wonks?

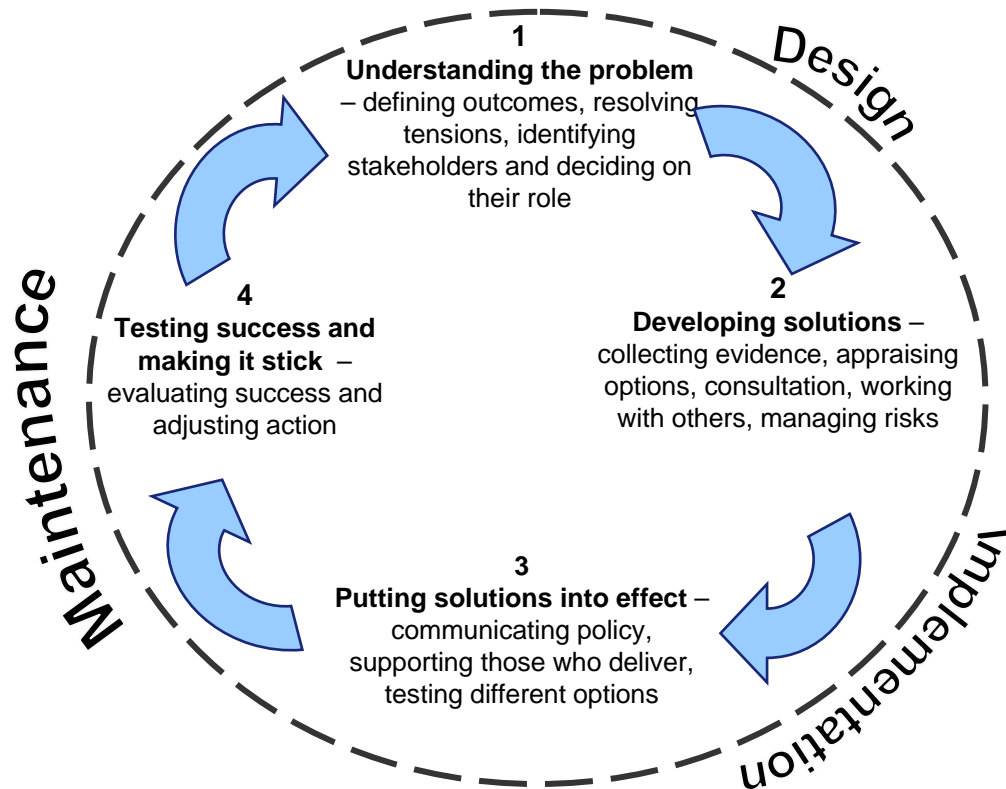**Lis Cowey**

AES Conference 12 September

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Outline of presentation

- **Creation of policy 'value'**

- **The policy advisor's role**

- **The evaluator's role**

- **A strategic framework for targeting influence:**

  - Three alternative 'value' styles of evaluation
  - Considerations on effective practice

- **Conclusion**

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The policy-evaluation cycle

Design

1
Understanding the problem
– defining outcomes, resolving tensions, identifying stakeholders and deciding on their role

2
Developing solutions – collecting evidence, appraising options, consultation, working with others, managing risks

3
Putting solutions into effect – communicating policy, supporting those who deliver, testing different options

4
Testing success and making it stick – evaluating success and adjusting action

Maintenance

Implementation

National Audit Office UK (2001) Modern Policy Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money

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3

What is policy 'value'?

"translation of government's political priorities and principles
into programmes and courses of action
to deliver desired changes"

- **Evaluators have choices about how they position themselves relative to this 'chain' of value**

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The policy advisor's role

•**Policy advice is:**

❙ Providing advice on
  • resolving conflicting priorities and
  • managing risks
  • within finite resources

•**Quality is judged in terms of:**

  • Honesty and impartiality
  • Responsive to Minister's objectives and regard to public good
  • How well it fits into its environment
  • *Over the long term: judgments of its cost, implementation, effects and iterative development*

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Requirements for policy recommendations

Answer the questions:

❙ What should the client do?
❙ Why should the client do it?
❙ How should the client do it?
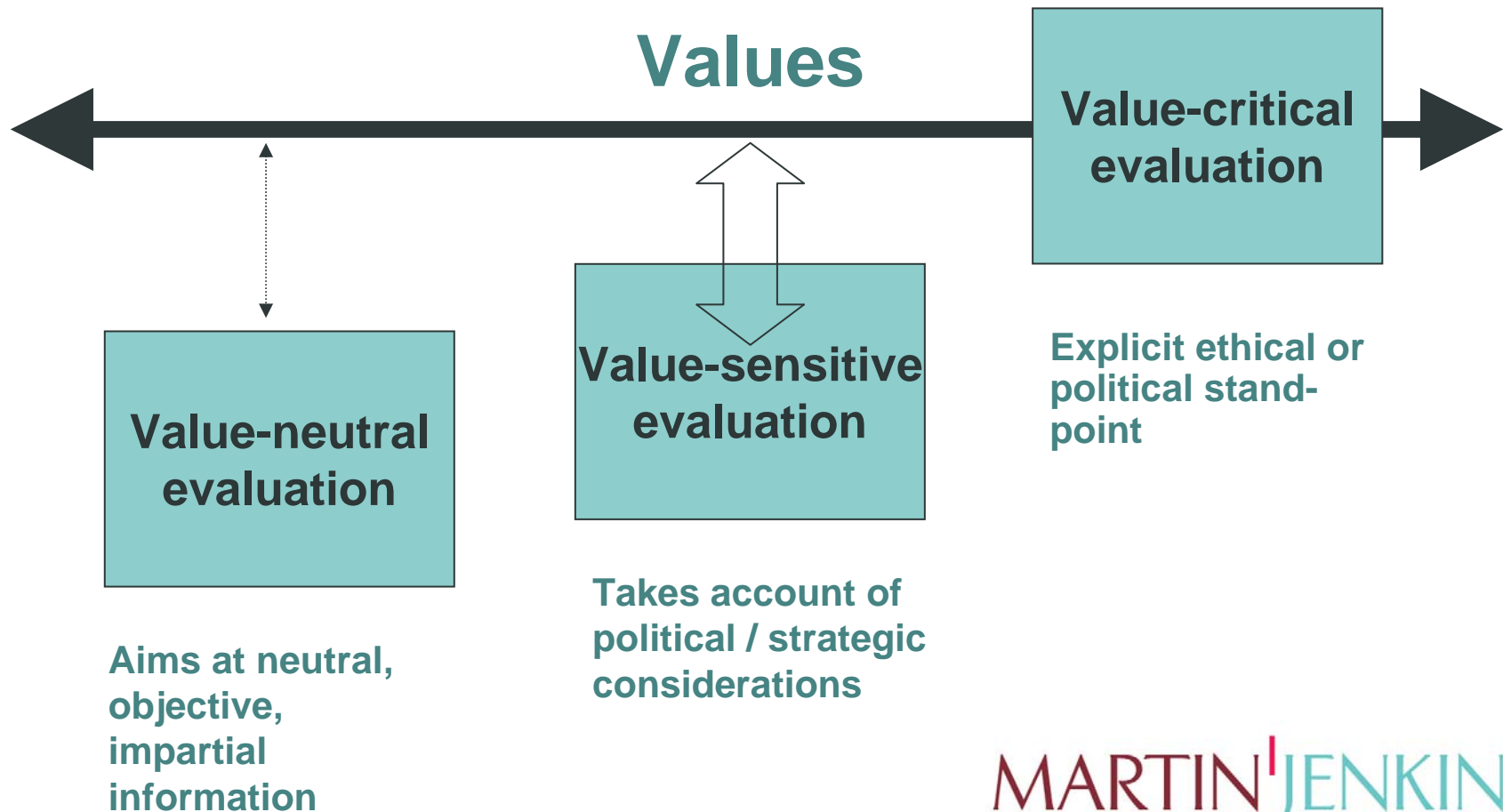
Relate to explicit decision-making criteria

Consider:

❙ Technical feasibility
❙ Implementability
❙ Political aspects (e.g. likely opposition / potential to gain necessary political support)

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The evaluator's role

- **Evaluates any or all stages of the policy development and implementation process**

- **Influences iterative development and implementation of policy through comparison of status relative to, e.g. policy objectives or nature of the problem**

- **Choices about**

  - methodology and
  - stance relative to strategic or political values

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A strategic framework for targeting influence: operating along the values continuum

Values

Value-critical evaluation

Value-neutral evaluation

Value-sensitive evaluation

Explicit ethical or political stand-point

Aims at neutral, objective, impartial information

Takes account of political / strategic considerations

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Features of the three approaches

Value-neutral:

❚ Technically defensible findings

> ❚ But doesn't illuminate alternatives

•Value-sensitive:

❚ Useful where policy objectives and context are complex

> ❚ But may create unrealistic expectations

•Value-critical:

❚ Useful to inform what 'should be'

> ❚ But hard to disentangle personal values from other findings

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Effective practice: what does it take?

Value-neutral:

- Clarify expectations of policy decision-makers
- Test findings early for intelligibility
- Design in potential for early information release if context changes

Value-sensitive:

- Include policy advisors on project reference group
- Inquire into organisational and political context
- Seek stakeholder views on alternatives, proposals for change
- Test key conclusions with client to line up priorities with context

Value-critical:

- Partner with key influencers to communicate findings
- Make underlying value position explicit

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Conclusion

The policy 'value chain' needs distinct policy and evaluation functions: they have significant commonalities AND differences

Influence – or value - increases where:

- evaluators' 'value' style is adapted to meet client's need
- evaluation is designed to inform a range of policy decisions

Shaping – not sanitizing – presentation of findings in partnership enables evaluators and policy advisors to learn from each other and together to optimise value from policy and evaluation

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