What is the place-based landscape?

What is the role of evaluation in the place-based landscape?

- Complex adaptive systems, such as place-based initiatives, are characterised by uncertain and emergent processes and outcomes (Patton, 2010)
- Traditional evaluation is therefore difficult
- The role of evaluation in place-based initiatives, particularly early on, is not to measure implementation and effectiveness, but to **support learning and subsequent improvement of the initiative** (Preskill, Parkhurst, & Splansky Juster, 2014; Turner et al., 2014)

There are a number of 'improvement focused' methodologies...

Developmental evaluation	Action research	Quality improvement
• American evaluator Michael Quinn Patton • 1990s • Evaluative inquiry to support the adaptation of initiatives, particularly those situated in complex environments	• American psychologist Kurt Lewin • 1940s • Research undertaken by subjects of the research to better understand and improve their situation	• American engineers Walter Shewhart, W. Edwards Deming & Joseph M. Duran • Mid 20th century • Iterative approach to improving products, services or systems by identifying problems and trialling solutions

…so how do we select the right one?

What we knew

- All three methodologies enable learning and improvement

What we didn't know

- How they differ and how they are similar
- Which contexts they are each best suited to
- How each of them works when applied to a place-based initiative
- What the result of applying each of them is

How did I go about finding answers to these questions?

Stage one

- Review and synthesis of the literature

Stage two

- Case study for each 'improvement focused' methodology

Underpinned by **realist evaluation** methodology (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; 2004)

Stage one: Literature review

action research OR action learning OR developmental evaluation OR quality improvement OR improvement science OR continuous improvement

+

place based OR collective impact OR whole of community OR neighbourhood based OR community based OR area based

=

15 papers (7 DE; 4 AR; 4 QI)
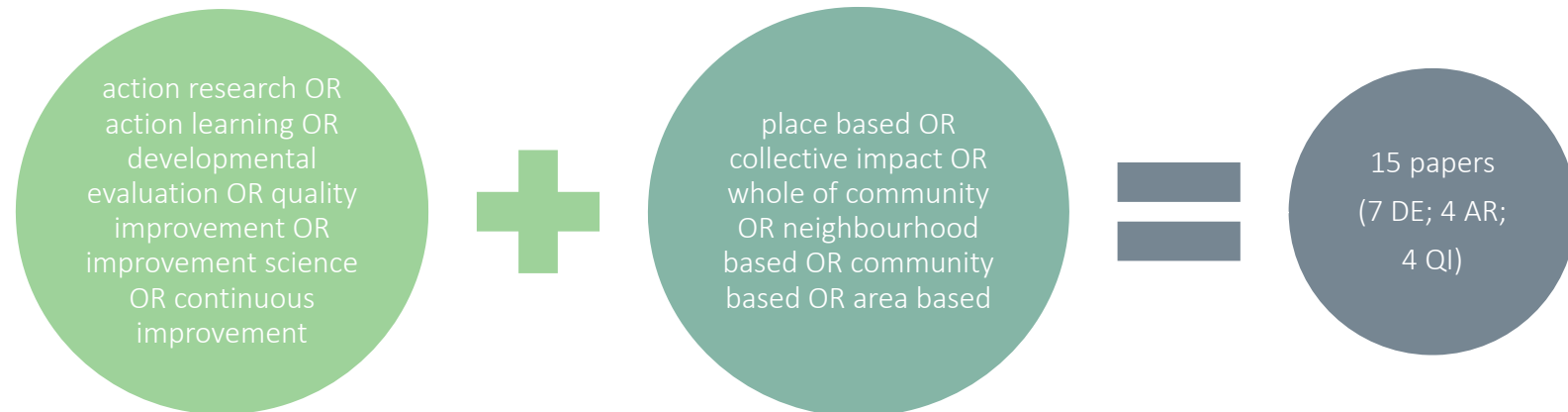
Stage two: Case studies

Case	Methodology	Place-based initiative's location(s)	Single or multi-site initiative	Interviewees
1	Developmental evaluation	Local Government Area in rural Victoria	Single	• Evaluator • Member of initiative's governance group
2	Action research	Ten separate suburbs/ towns across Tasmania	Multi	• Evaluator • Facilitator of the initiative
3	Quality improvement	Outer suburb of Melbourne, Victoria	Single	• Evaluator • Service provider participating in the initiative

Findings: Developmental evaluation theory

Purpose = getting an initiative 'evaluation ready' and developing its theory

Facilitators = evaluation capacity building approach, leadership for the methodology
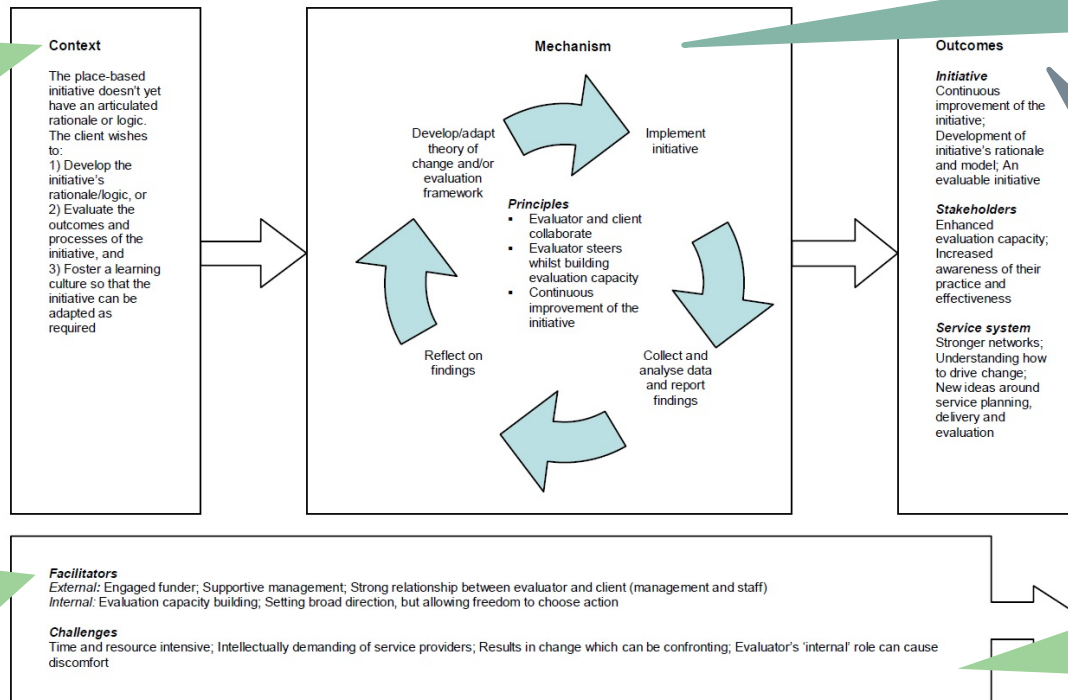
Mechanism = Develop, implement, collect/analyse/report, reflect

Outcomes = Ongoing improvement, increased DE capacity, stronger networks, evaluable initiative

Challenges = internal role of evaluator can cause discomfort, change created can be confronting

Context

The place-based initiative doesn't yet have an articulated rationale or logic. The client wishes to:
1) Develop the initiative's rationale/logic, or
2) Evaluate the outcomes and processes of the initiative, and
3) Foster a learning culture so that the initiative can be adapted as required

Mechanism

Develop/adapt theory of change and/or evaluation framework

Implement initiative

Collect and analyse data and report findings

Reflect on findings

Principles
- Evaluator and client collaborate
- Evaluator steers whilst building evaluation capacity
- Continuous improvement of the initiative

Outcomes

Initiative
Continuous improvement of the initiative; Development of initiative's rationale and model; An evaluable initiative

Stakeholders
Enhanced evaluation capacity; Increased awareness of their practice and effectiveness

Service system
Stronger networks; Understanding how to drive change; New ideas around service planning, delivery and evaluation

Facilitators
External: Engaged funder; Supportive management; Strong relationship between evaluator and client (management and staff)
Internal: Evaluation capacity building; Setting broad direction, but allowing freedom to choose action

Challenges
Time and resource intensive; Intellectually demanding of service providers; Results in change which can be confronting; Evaluator's 'internal' role can cause discomfort

Findings: Action research theory

Purpose = reflection for the sake of improvement, learning and documenting

Facilitators = external & experienced evaluator, trusting relationship b/w evaluator & stakeholders, evaluation capacity building
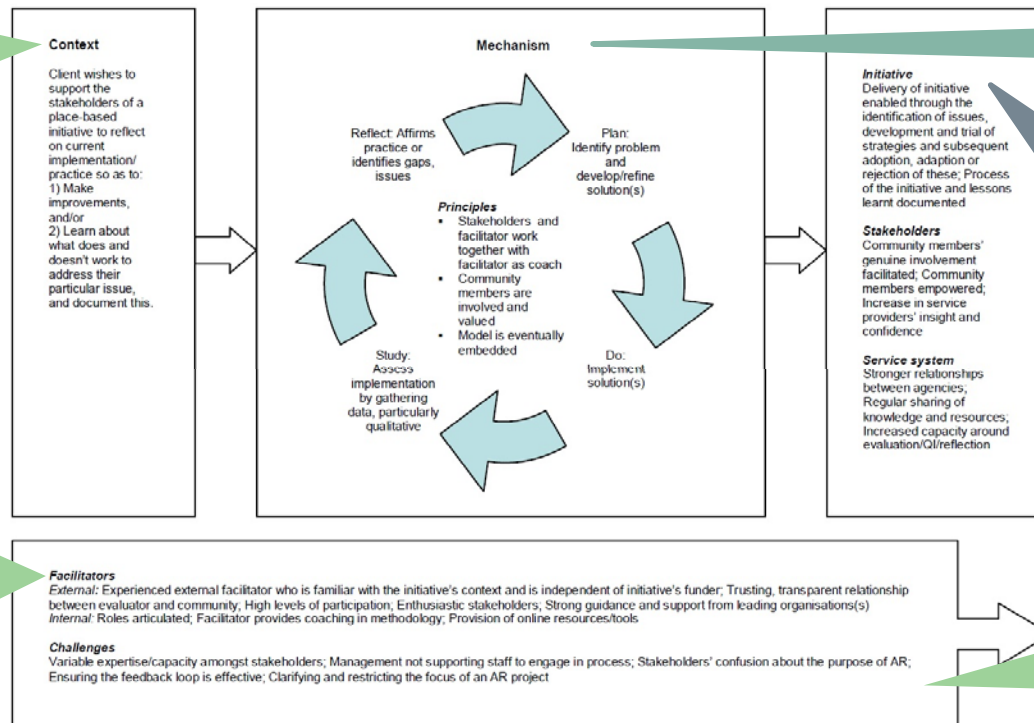
Mechanism = Plan, do, study, reflect

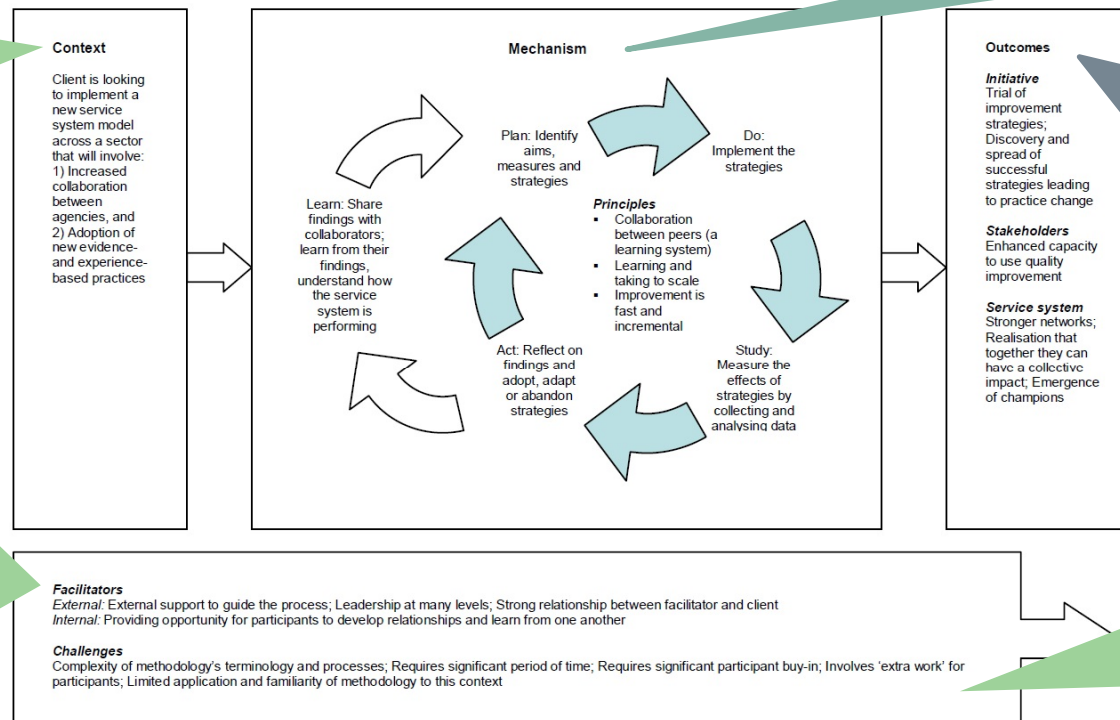**Outcomes =** Ongoing improvement, increased AR capacity, stronger networks, community members involved and empowered

Challenges = lack of endorsement, confusion about the purpose of the methodology

Context
Client wishes to support the stakeholders of a place-based initiative to reflect on current implementation/ practice so as to:
1) Make improvements, and/or
2) Learn about what does and doesn't work to address their particular issue, and document this.

Mechanism

Reflect: Affirms practice or identifies gaps, issues

Plan: Identify problem and develop/refine solution(s)

Principles
- Stakeholders and facilitator work together with facilitator as coach
- Community members are involved and valued
- Model is eventually embedded

Study: Assess implementation by gathering data, particularly qualitative

Do: Implement solution(s)

Initiative
Delivery of initiative enabled through the identification of issues, development and trial of strategies and subsequent adoption, adaption or rejection of these; Process of the initiative and lessons learnt documented

Stakeholders
Community members' genuine involvement facilitated; Community members empowered; Increase in service providers' insight and confidence

Service system
Stronger relationships between agencies; Regular sharing of knowledge and resources; Increased capacity around evaluation/QI/reflection

Facilitators
External: Experienced external facilitator who is familiar with the initiative's context and is independent of initiative's funder; Trusting, transparent relationship between evaluator and community; High levels of participation; Enthusiastic stakeholders; Strong guidance and support from leading organisations(s)
Internal: Roles articulated; Facilitator provides coaching in methodology; Provision of online resources/tools

Challenges
Variable expertise/capacity amongst stakeholders; Management not supporting staff to engage in process; Stakeholders' confusion about the purpose of AR; Ensuring the feedback loop is effective; Clarifying and restricting the focus of an AR project

Findings: Quality improvement theory

Purpose = enabling service system improvement

Facilitators = external & experienced evaluator, trusting relationship b/w evaluator & stakeholders, leadership for the methodology, bringing participants together

Context

Client is looking to implement a new service system model across a sector that will involve: 1) Increased collaboration between agencies, and 2) Adoption of new evidence- and experience-based practices

Mechanism

Plan: Identify aims, measures and strategies

Do: Implement the strategies

Learn: Share findings with collaborators; learn from their findings, understand how the service system is performing

Principles
- Collaboration between peers (a learning system)
- Learning and taking to scale
- Improvement is fast and incremental

Act: Reflect on findings and adopt, adapt or abandon strategies

Study: Measure the effects of strategies by collecting and analysing data

Outcomes

Initiative
Trial of improvement strategies; Discovery and spread of successful strategies leading to practice change

Stakeholders
Enhanced capacity to use quality improvement

Service system
Stronger networks; Realisation that together they can have a collective impact; Emergence of champions

Facilitators
External: External support to guide the process; Leadership at many levels; Strong relationship between facilitator and client
Internal: Providing opportunity for participants to develop relationships and learn from one another

Challenges
Complexity of methodology's terminology and processes; Requires significant period of time; Requires significant participant buy-in; Involves 'extra work' for participants; Limited application and familiarity of methodology to this context

Mechanism = Micro: PDSA Macro: Learn, PDSA

Outcomes = Ongoing improvement, increased QI capacity, stronger networks, spread successful strategies

Challenges = staff turnover, complexity of methodology, limited application in similar settings

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Answering my original questions

Are these methodologies better suited to different contexts?	How does each of these methodologies achieve their purpose?	What has each methodology been able to achieve?
• They share the same facilitators • But they are seen as having different purposes	• All use a cyclical process of plan, do, study, act • However the cyclical process appears to be applied at a micro level in QI, and at a 'whole of initiative' level in DE and AR	• All three demonstrate the ability to support ongoing improvement of place-based initiatives • All three offer additional impacts to sector/participants • Action research may offer one further benefit of enabling community involvement

How useful did stakeholders find each methodology to be?

- Facilitators and participants of all three methodologies felt:
  - Their methodology was useful
  - They would use it again
- Facilitators of the AR and QI initiatives were unsure about the ability of their methodology to bring about systematic improvement
- In terms of user-friendliness:
  - Facilitators and participants of the DE and AR initiatives identified both user-friendly and unfriendly features
  - Facilitator and participant of the QI initiative rated their methodology as reasonably user-unfriendly

So how do we select the right methodology?

What is the purpose of the evaluation?	Evaluable initiative; articulation of initiative's theory	Developmental evaluation
	Reflection, learning and documentation	Action research
Which methodology is the evaluator most experienced with?	Service system change	Quality improvement
Which methodology is the commissioner most comfortable with?		
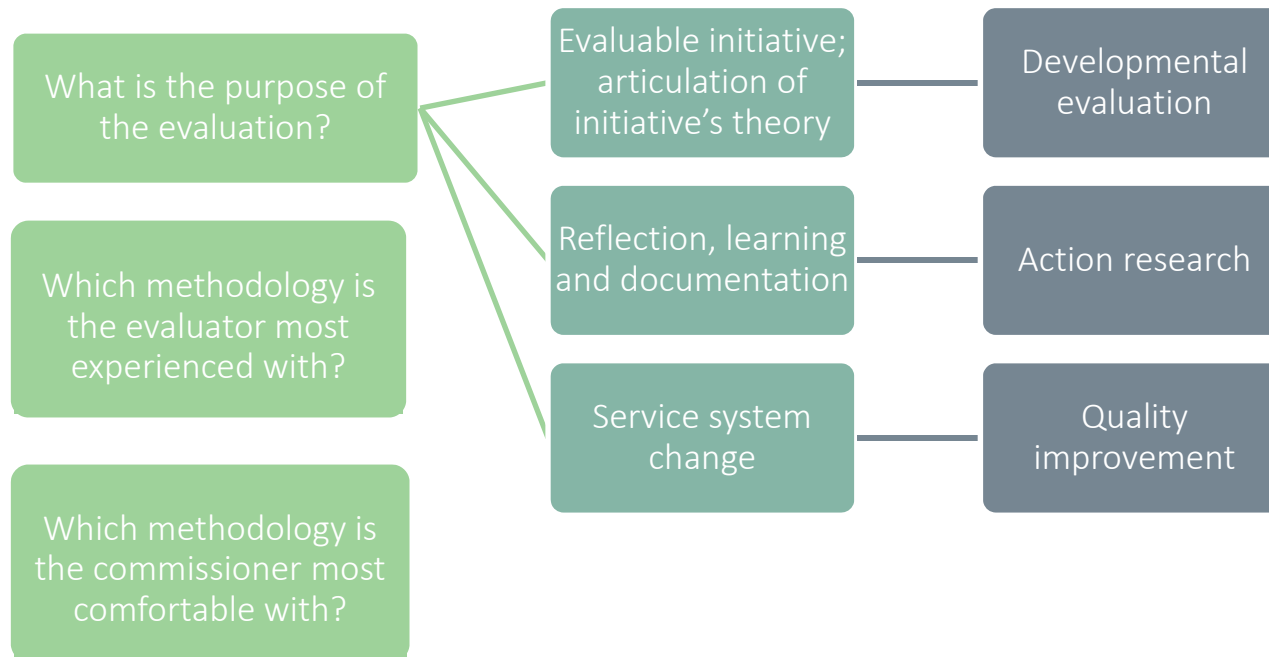
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The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital
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