

# Integration of project management and evaluative thinking: is it really working?

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# Session overview

## Introduction

- Aims of the session
- What triggered the session?
- What do we mean by 'project management' and 'evaluative thinking'?

## Stories – good, bad and ugly

- Vanessa....examples from working **within** an organisation
- Heather... examples from working **outside** organisations - as an external evaluator

## Discussion

- Themes emerging – your experience and that of the presenters
- Relating the session to your evaluation practice

## Project management vs evaluative thinking

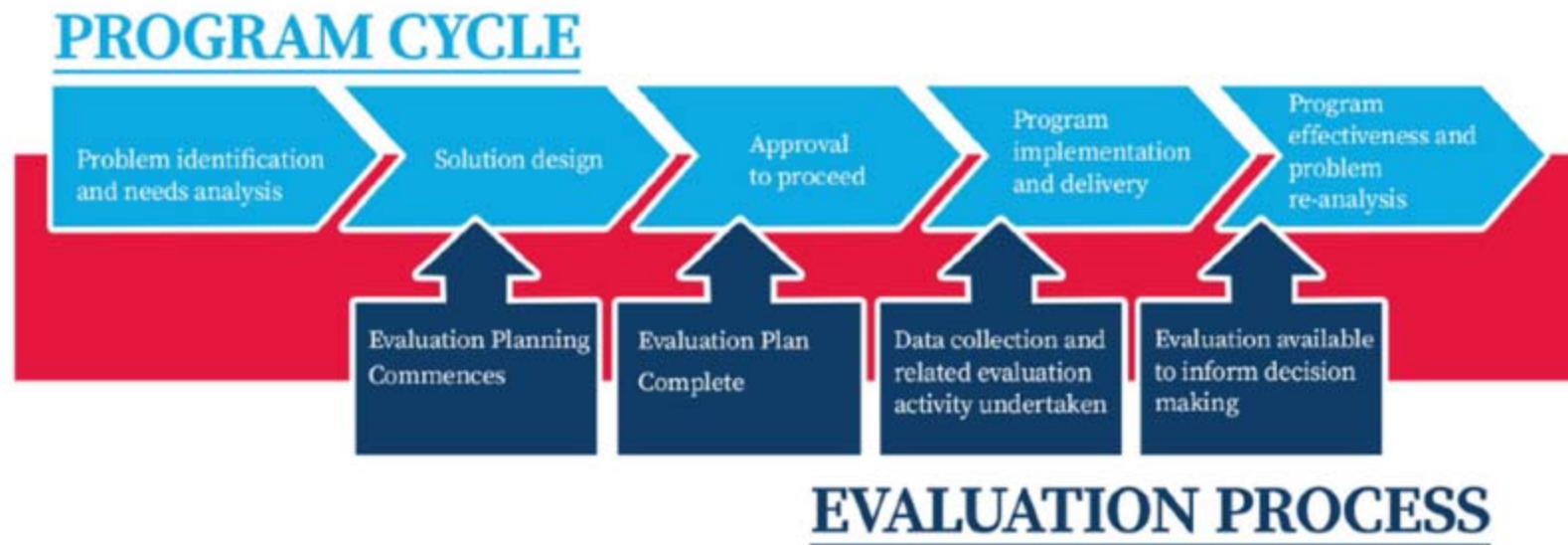
**Project management** – straight road, stay on track, don't deviate, must arrive on time and on budget



**Evaluative thinking** – different ways of getting there, change and adapt

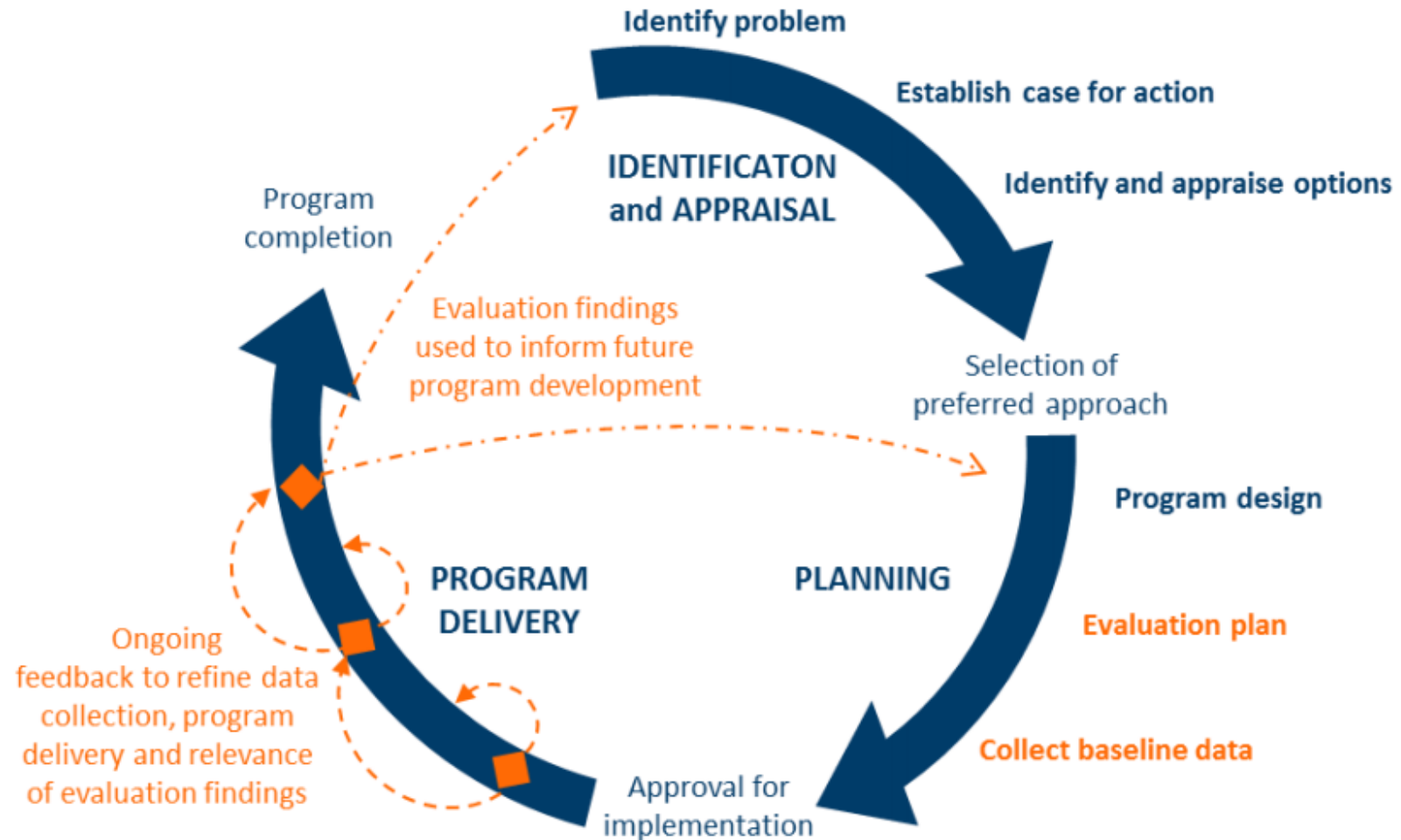
***Will they both reach the same destination at the same time?***

# Program management and evaluative thinking



Source: NSW Program Evaluation Guidelines 2016

# Program management and evaluative thinking

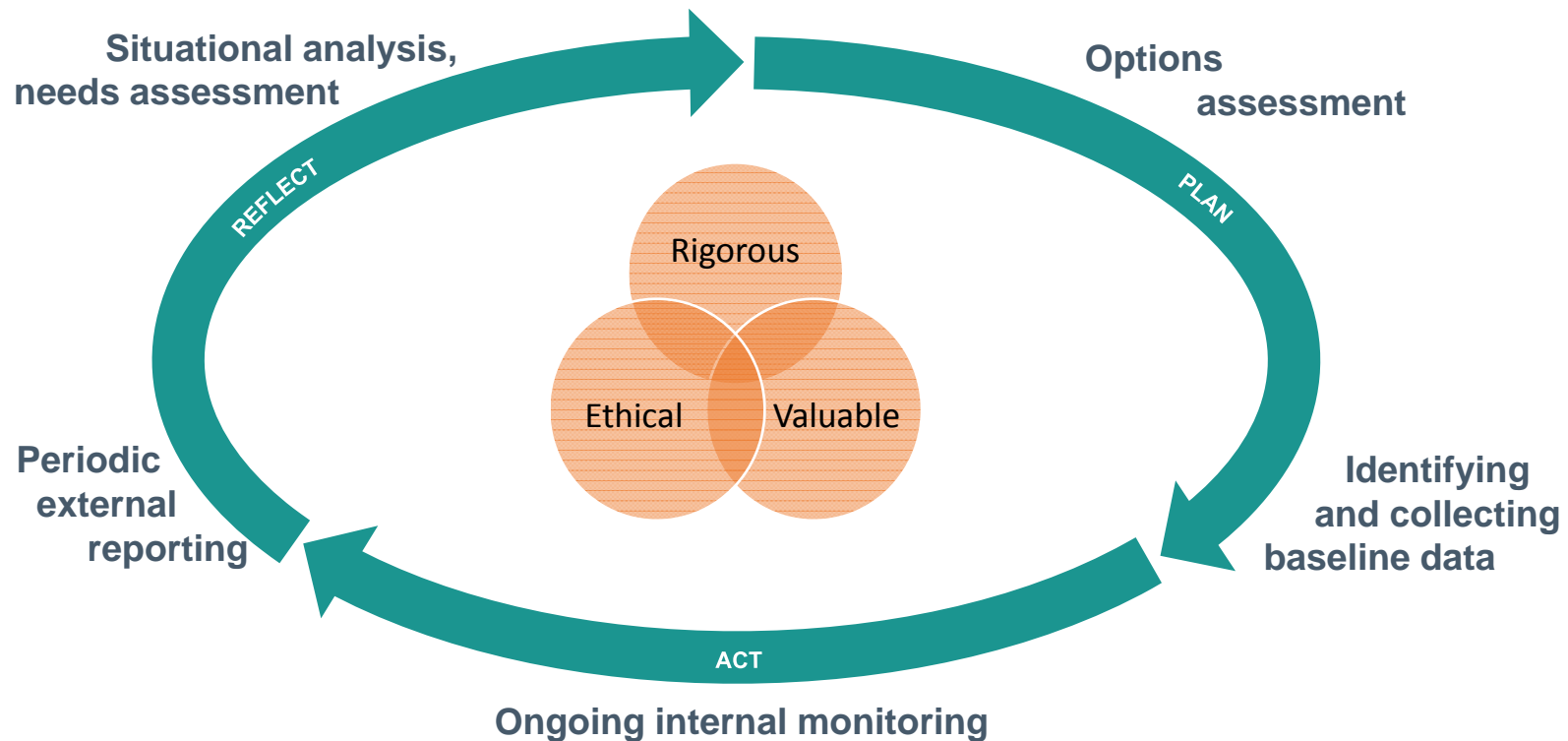


Source: QLD Government Evaluation Guidelines 2013

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## Evaluative thinking and continuous improvement

Evaluation is not an end in itself.  
It is a tool for continuous improvement.



## When project management and evaluative thinking are integrated....

- ✓ **Thinking and questioning** – not just filling out a template
- ✓ Collecting and using evidence **throughout** the project
- ✓ **Reflecting** on progress regularly and adaptively managing
- ✓ **Suspending** judgement until the evidence is in
- ✓ **Open to unexpected** results
- ✓ Part of **everyone's role** – project manager to Director

What kind of evaluation did you need?



Our 3 year project is coming to an end and were told we needed an evaluation.

What kind is that?



[freshspectrum.com](http://freshspectrum.com)

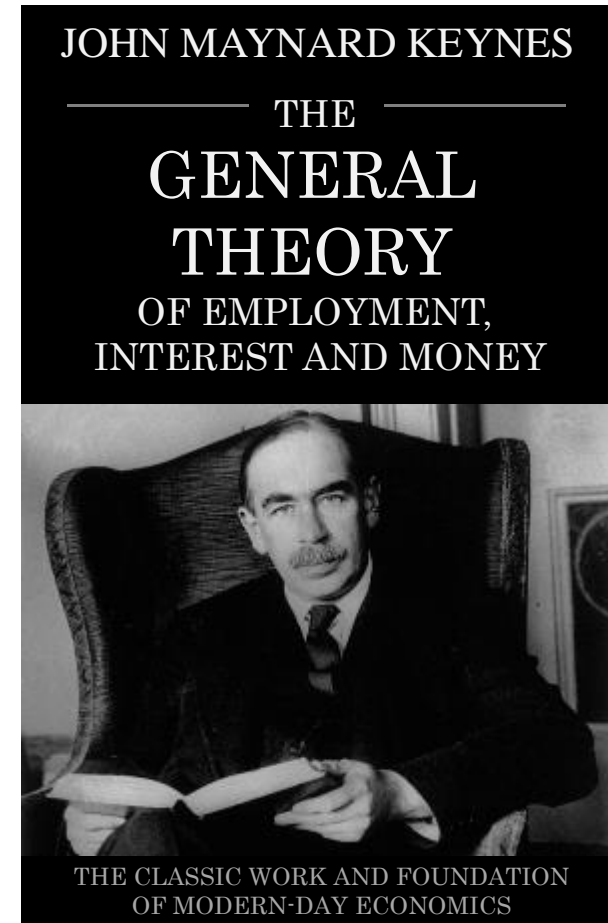


## Building a culture of evaluative thinking

“ When the facts change,  
I change my mind.  
What do you do, sir? ”

### Suspending judgement

- Healthy scepticism
- Openness to unexpected results and alternative explanations





## Project management and evaluation – What actually happens?

Why isn't it done well?

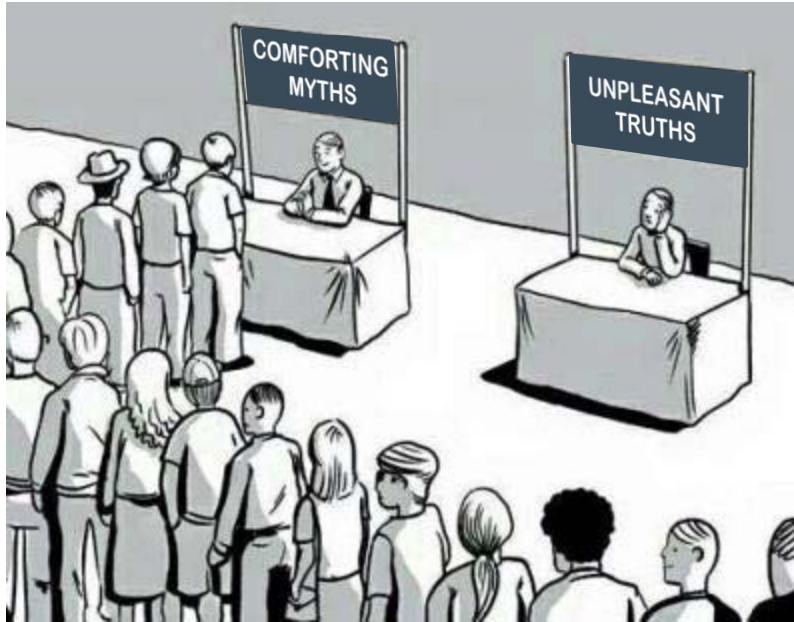
- Funding stress
- Big
- Political forces
- Design
- Questions may be answered but not the right questions.

What should we do to bridge the divide?

- Demand organisation use evaluative thinking

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## Building a culture of evaluative thinking



### Suspending judgement

- Healthy scepticism
- Openness to unexpected results and alternative explanations
- Challenging taken-for-granted ideas

“

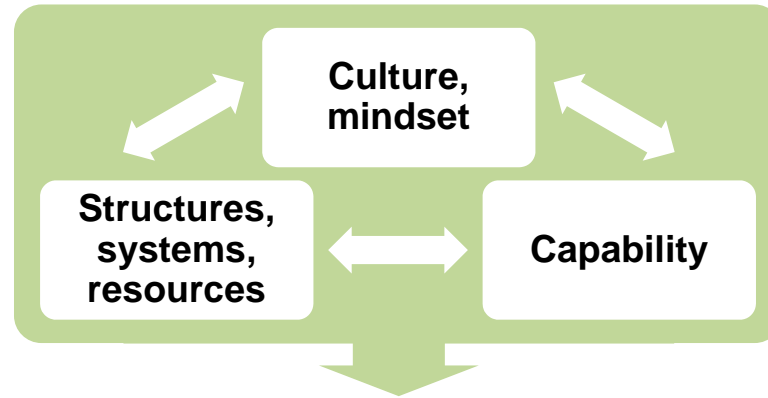
Innovations may be the “brainchild” of individuals or groups who ... are disdainful of appealing to evidence as a strategy for change...

Evaluative thinking is not consistent with only considering positive evidence...

”

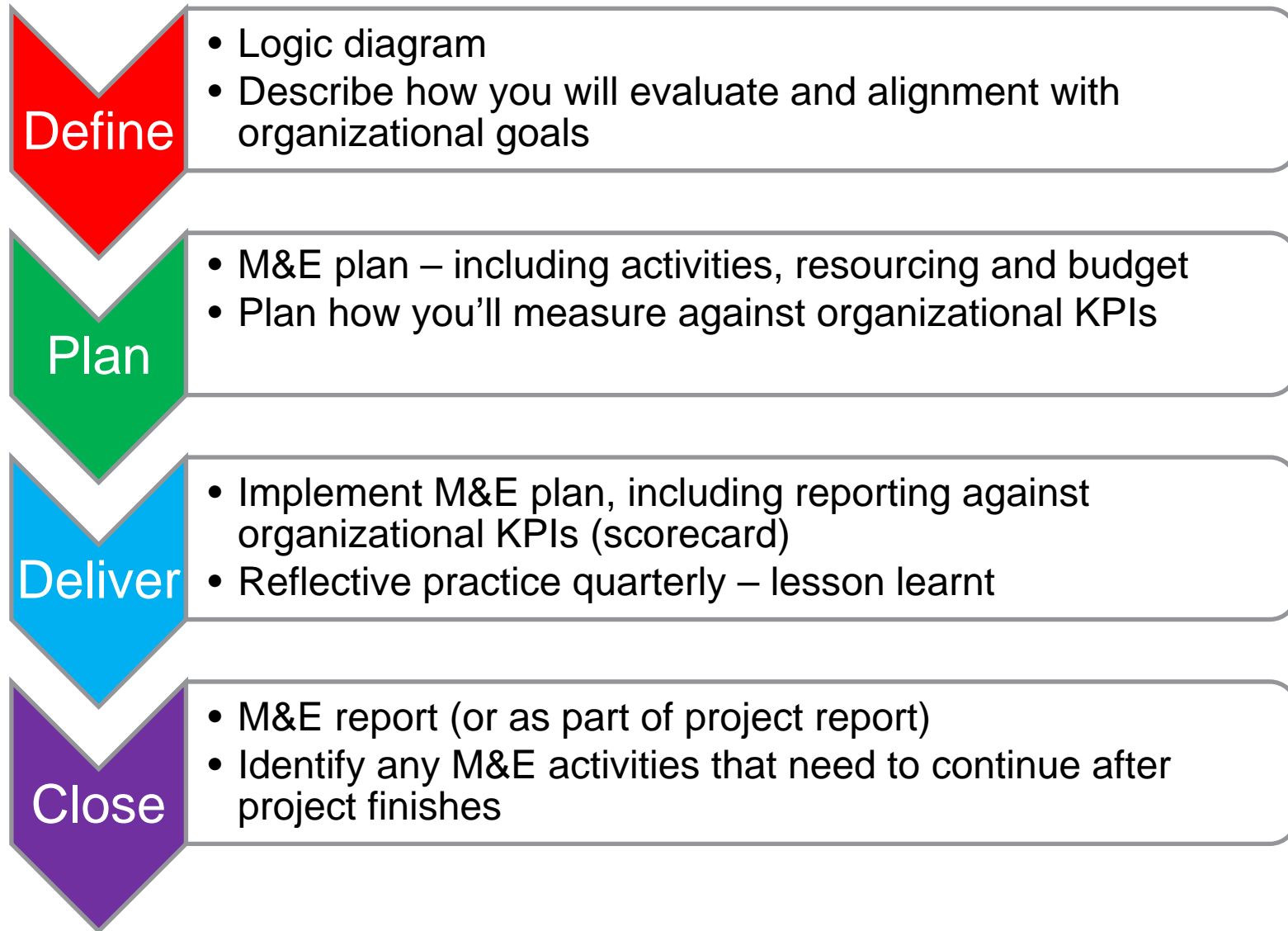
Lorna Earl and Helen Timperley,  
*Evaluative Thinking for  
Successful Educational Innovation*

## Worked to build an evaluative culture within an organisation



- Worked to build demand for evaluations (not just supply)
- 'Fit for purpose' approach
- Embedded evaluation into existing processes
- Worked with people at all levels across the organisation
- Built staff capability
- Engaged critical friends
- Connected projects to organisational outcomes

## Embedded into project management system – words only?

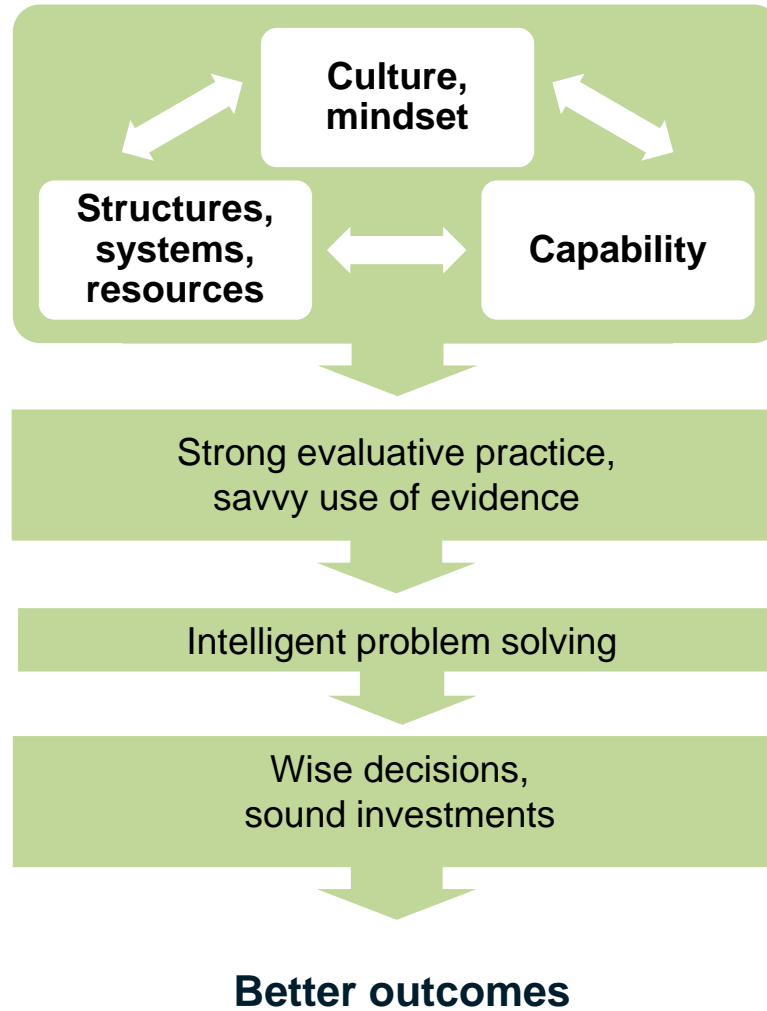


## My experience – from working within an organisation

- ✓ Worked *with* team – beginning to close, including commissioning
- ✓ External demand for impact evaluation
- ✓ Supportive team leader / Director
- ✓ Reflective practice a habit - evidence used to adapt
  
- ❖ Less support provided
- ❖ No external demand
- ❖ Team leader / Director wasn't a champion
- ❖ Viewed as an extra item on a long 'to do' list, not a way of working



# Evaluative thinking for better outcomes



## My experience – from working outside an organisation

Example: Education teacher professional development

- Strong evaluation unit within the organisation
- In at the beginning and throughout
- Construct a robust M&E framework
- Action research with quantitative outcome indicators

Example: Aboriginal employment development program

- Program staff supportive
- M&E framework was already in place
- The KPIs at cross purposes with the stated objectives
- Program underway

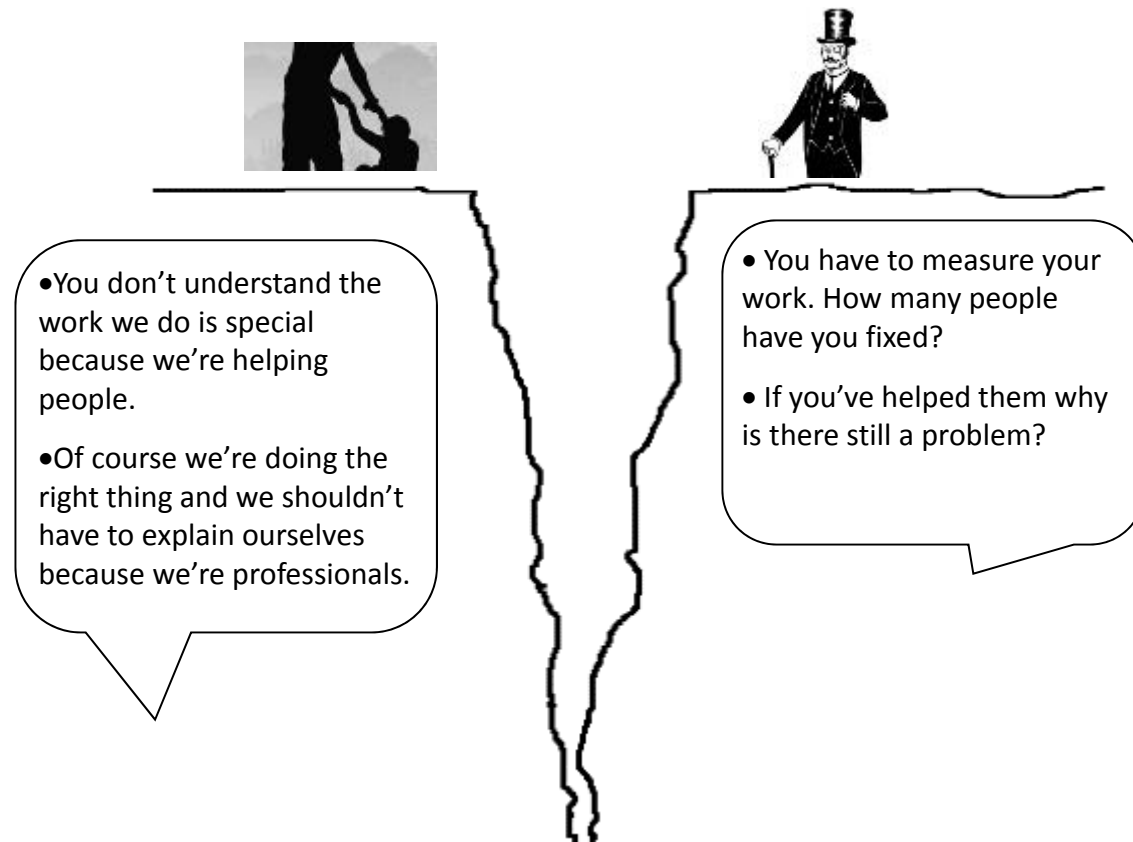


## What's happening?

Funders like clear answers

Program outcomes are hard to measure a lot of the time

Worse... often not talking the same language



## Tapping into your experience

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What can we do to integrate project management and evaluative thinking?

# We'd love to keep talking and learning from each other.

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