

The practicality of good theory

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Theory as capital in evaluation

- Evaluation needs to adapt to keep up with change in the world around us
- Theory is a form of capital which can help us do that
- Four (or seven) different types of theory = different kinds of capital.
- Expand our constructs of program theory
- A contribution to evaluation theory

The capital analogy

1. **Wealth** in the form of money or assets, ...and **assumed to be available for development or investment**.

2. Accounting: Money invested in a business **to generate** income.

3. Economics: Factors of production that are used to create goods or services and are not themselves in the process.

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/capital.htm>
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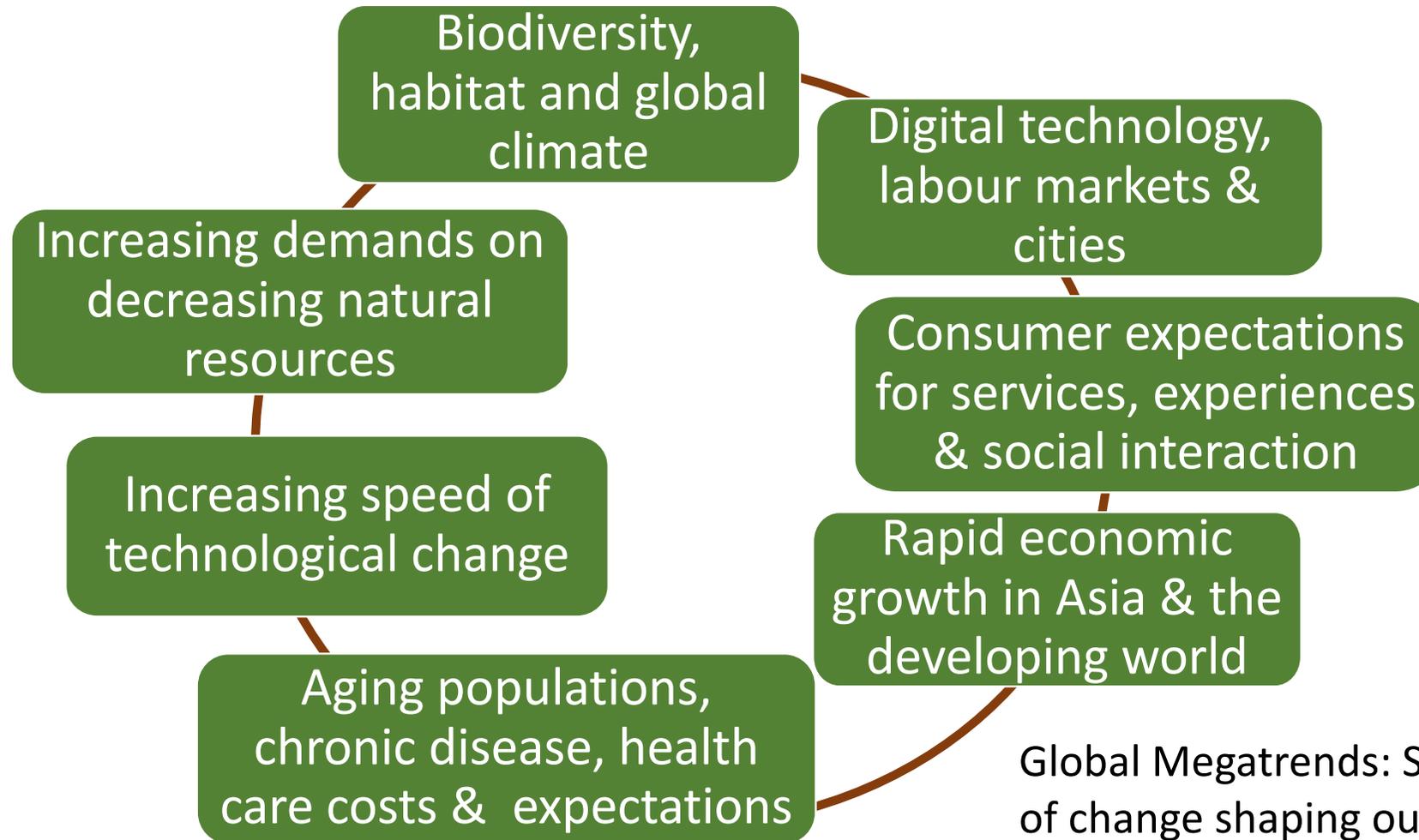
- 'Intellectual capital is the group of knowledge assets that are attributed to an organisation and most significantly contribute to an improved competitive position of this organisation by adding value to defined key stakeholders' (Marr and Schiuma, 2001)

Theory as evaluation capital: a knowledge asset and factor of production available for investment in an evaluation, used to produce additional value to defined key stakeholders.

My hypothesis

- Just as evaluation can provide capital for policy and programs, theory can provide capital for evaluation.
 - Capital is a resource: its value varies according to how it is used (by whom, in what contexts...)
 - Understand how it can be used to decide how you will use it
- The divide between what different groups need from evaluation is widening
 - As evaluators, we need to be able to draw on different kinds of capital to meet their needs

Seven megatrends shaping what policy makers need



Global Megatrends: Seven patterns of change shaping our future
Steven Hajkowicz, CSIRO, 2015

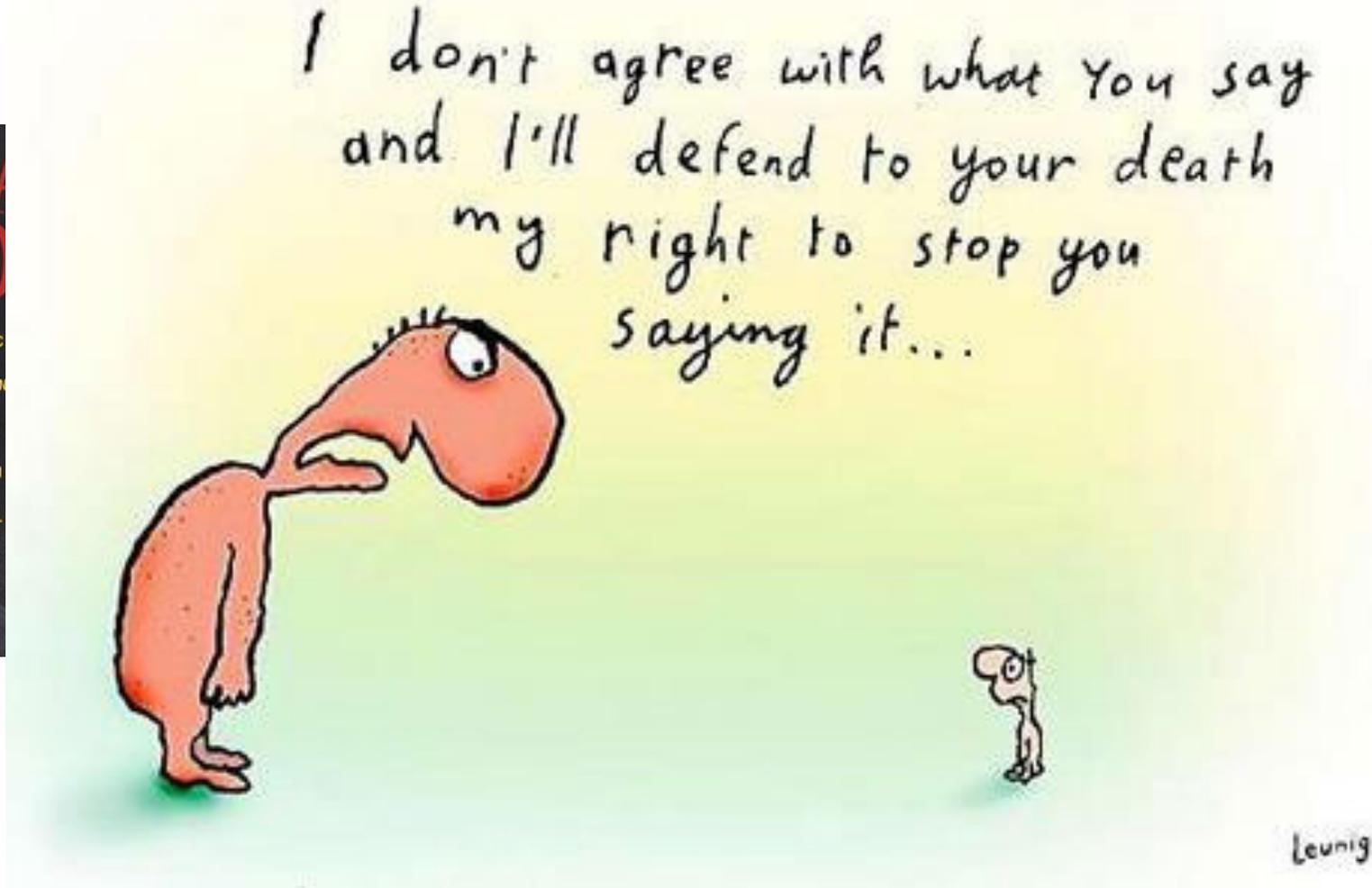
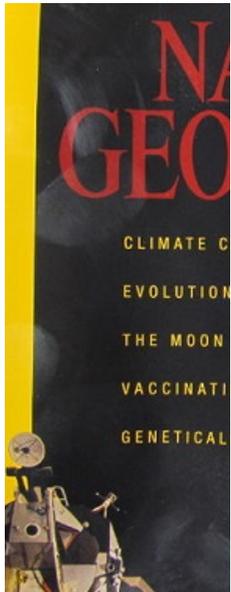
Volvo admits its self-driving cars are confused by kangaroos

Swedish company's animal detection system can identify and avoid deer, elk and caribou, but is yet to work against the marsupials' movements



<https://www.theguardian.com> 1 July 2017

Anti-science and anti-democratic perspectives



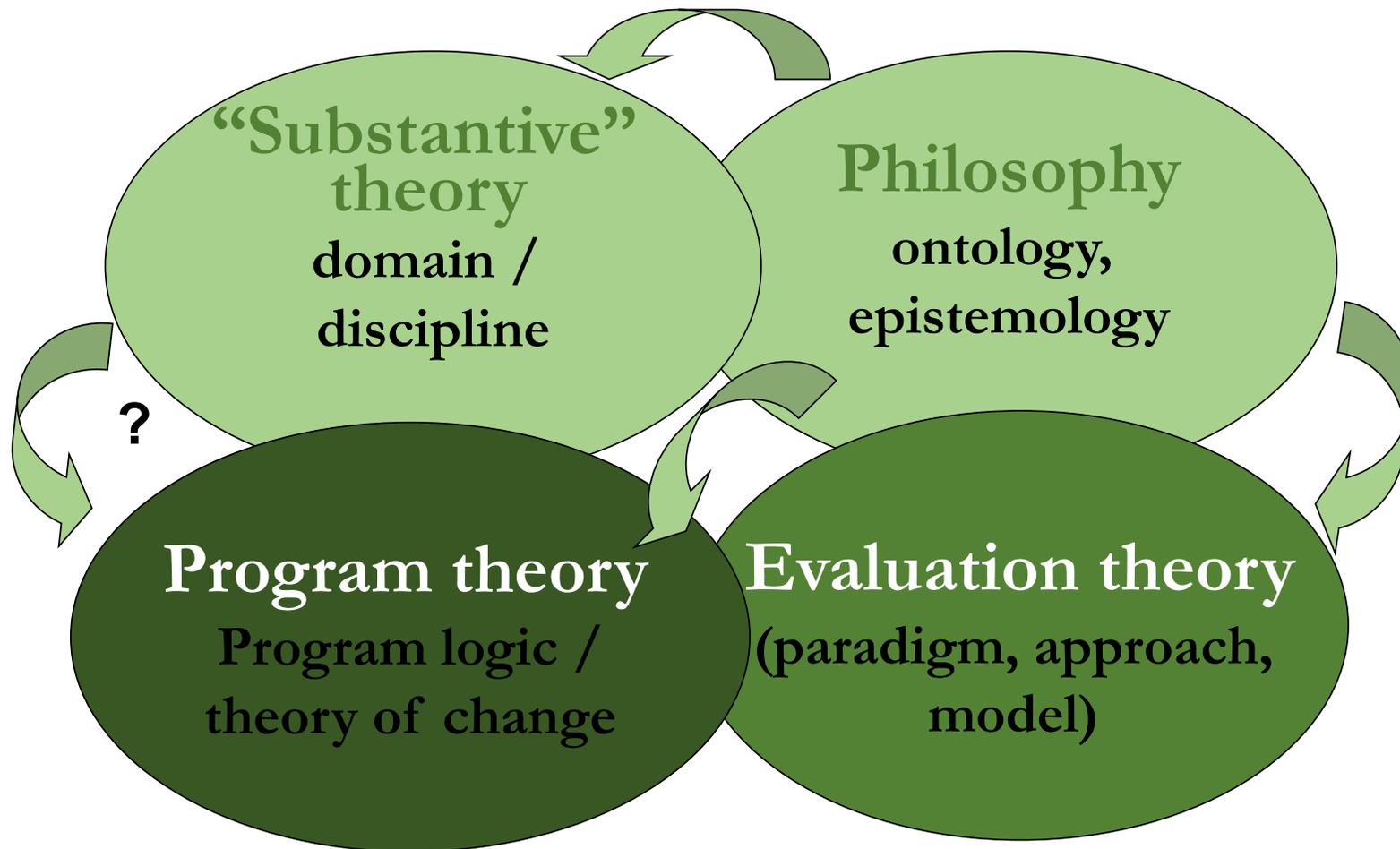
Challenges for policy and evaluation

- New areas of policy required in previously untested areas (transhumanism, geo-engineering, emergent social impacts of technologies...)
- Complexity: new interactions within and between rapidly changing systems
- Scale: the issues are global, and so are some of the programs to tackle them
- Disinterested – hostile political contexts

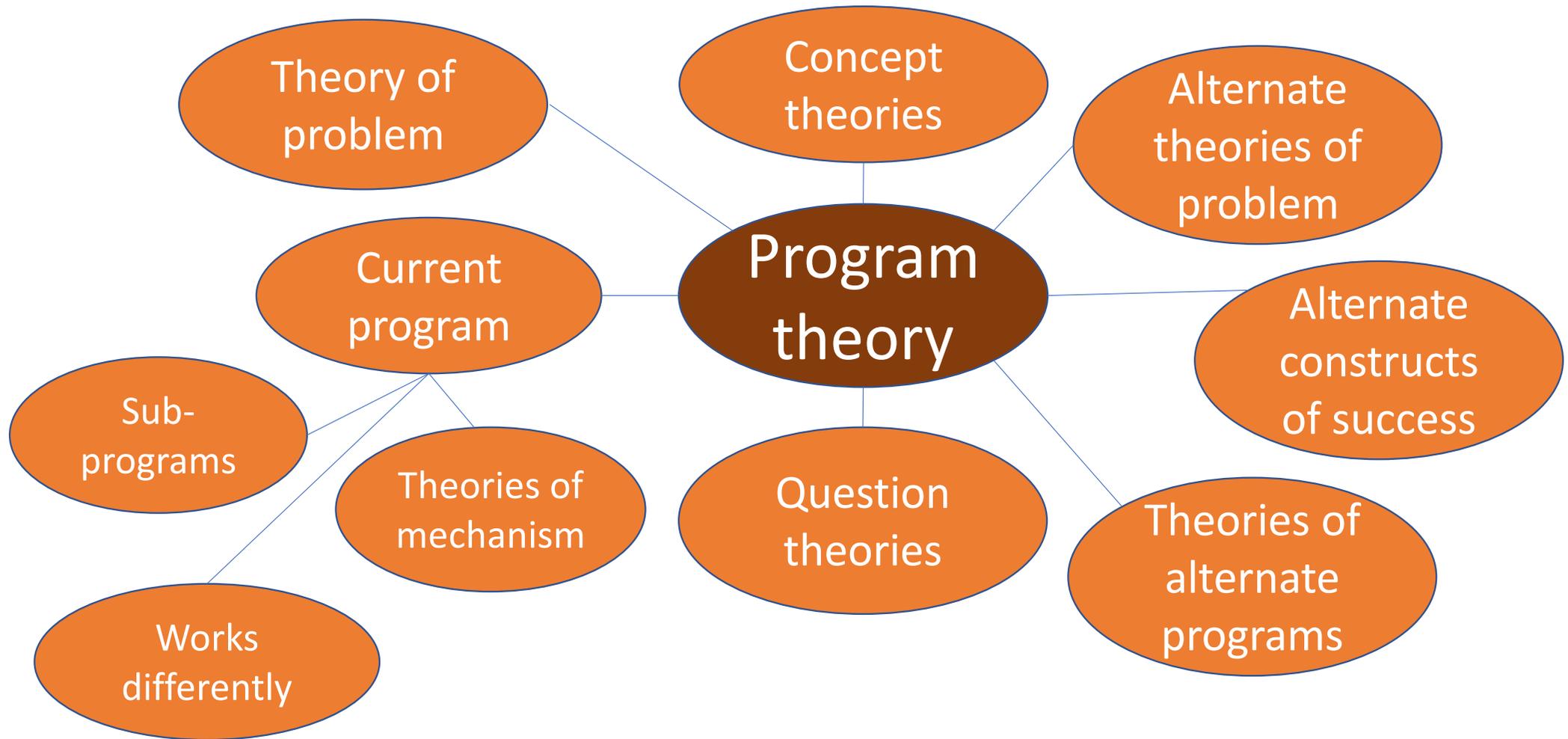
Possible implications from evaluation

- Closer integration / collaboration with other disciplines
- Approaches that are adaptable and cope with high levels of uncertainty and change
- Stronger focus on ex-ante evaluation
- Better use of more types of theory
- Going back to first principles to build theory and build tools

Four kinds of theory



Reconceptualising 'program theory'



Conceptual platforms in implementation theory

Evaluation questions relate to relationships between

- Program fidelity
- Contextualisation
- Sustainability
- Outcomes

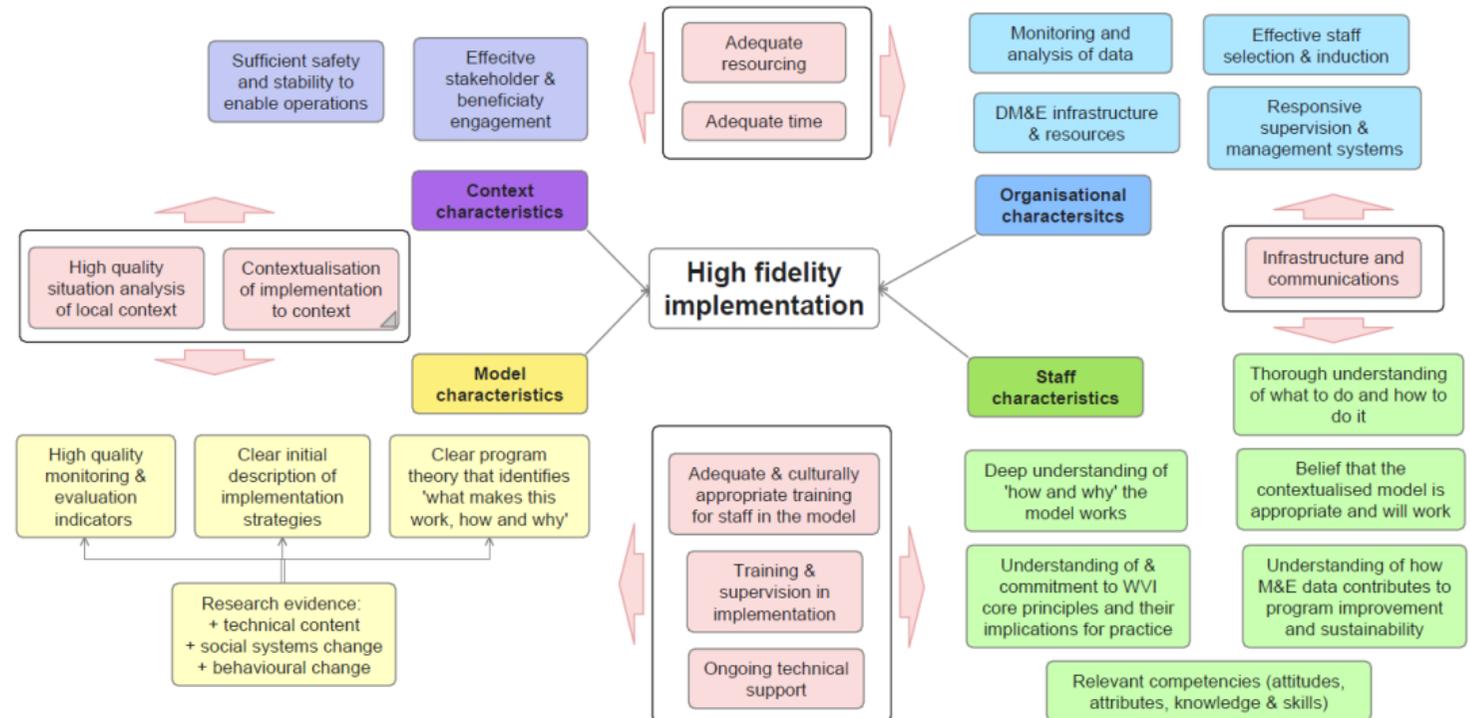
In contexts classified as

- Fragile
- Developing

- Concepts are clarified
- Relationships between concepts are mapped
- Identifies contexts & mechanisms but not yet linked

Initial rough program theory: "PROGRAM FIDELITY IN ADAPTIVE PROGRAMING"

Focus Questions: In an organisation that expects models to be adapted to context, what does 'fidelity to the program model' mean? What does it take to produce it?



How programs cause outcomes

Not
Mechanisms

Programme
activities

Programme
outcomes

Resource
Opportunity
Constraint

Decisions
Choices

Mechanisms

Reasoning, preferences, norms,
collective beliefs

Pawson and Tilley, 1997

Complex adaptive systems

- All systems are made up of sub-systems and in turn are part of larger systems
- Interactions between elements at one level, following “local rules”, generate complex behaviours and emergent properties at higher levels of systems
- All levels of systems have their own “powers and liabilities” which cannot be reduced to the powers of their constituent parts
- Open, dynamic, evolving and interacting with other systems, and other levels of systems, all the time.

5 ways to think about mechanisms

- **Reasoning and resources**
 - How new resources offered by the program influence the 'reasoning' of participants
- A **force** : *forces either push or pull*
 - Gravity (physical); love (psychological); peer pressure (social); law (institutional)
- An **interaction**: *a transfer from one party to the other resulting in 'changed states'*
 - Gunpowder; contracts
- **Powers & liabilities** : *abilities & weaknesses of things, whether or not currently in use*
 - Trees grow; states make laws; workers can work whether or not currently employed
- **Processes**: *feedback and feedforward sequences: later elements depend on earlier ones*
 - Genetic inheritance; stock market crash

The practicality of good theory

- Underpins invention and innovation in policy, programs and evaluation
- Supports better quality planning, including thinking our way into the future
- Enables high quality evaluation
- Supports deeper understanding
- Supports reflection
- Builds bridges between bodies of knowledge and the people who hold them

Implications for commissioners

Do less

- Self-contained individual program or project evaluations
- Treating the program as a discrete entity

Do more

- Commission theory based evaluations
- Write real learning questions into evaluations
- Include time and resources for literature and research

Implications for evaluators

Do less

- Examining the program 'in its own right', without examining its interactions with other parts of the system or other systems
- Working within evaluation silos

Do more

- Building from earlier research and evaluation into bids
- Working in cross disciplinary, multi-stakeholder teams
- Make the most of the theory capital you have by using different kinds of theory in different ways

Thank you

