

# What can evaluators learn from Machiavelli and systems thinking: to **survive** and **thrive**



AES 2023

Systems Evaluation Special Interest Group



*"...all armed prophets have been victorious, and all unarmed prophets have been destroyed."*



## Agenda

Uses for Evaluation

Systems thinking

Machiavelli & The Prince

Recognition: Surviving:

Thriving

World Café

# Uses for Evaluation



Instrumental

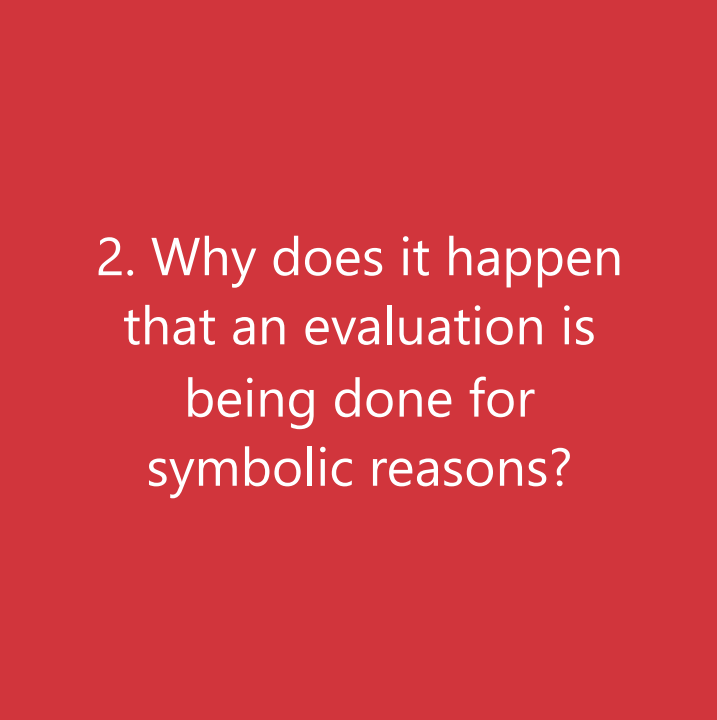
Conceptual

Symbolic

# Which use is happening here?



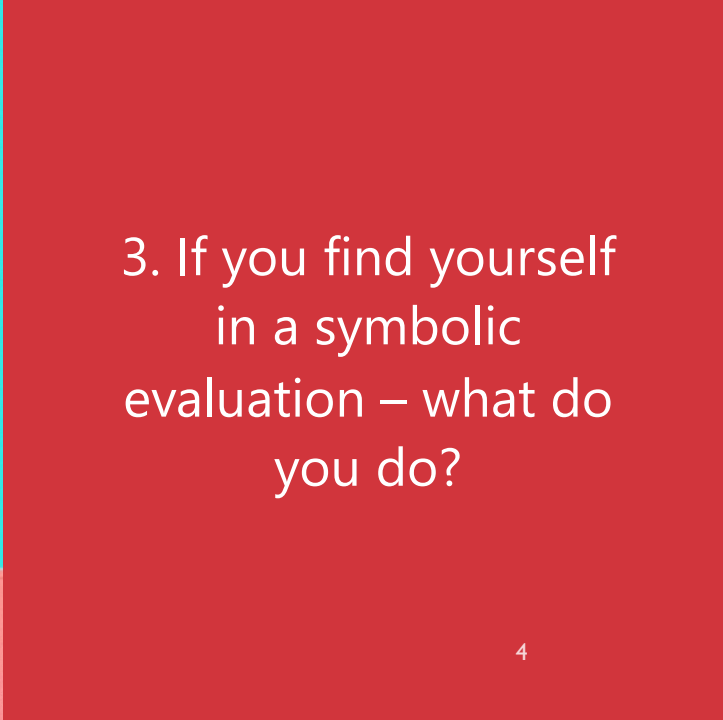
1. How do you recognise the use for which an evaluation might be done, as soon as possible?



2. Why does it happen that an evaluation is being done for symbolic reasons?



3. If you find yourself in a symbolic evaluation – what do you do?



# The Prince and Public Sector Evaluation

The general theme of political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli's 16th-century instruction guide for new princes to obtain and keep power.

Machiavelli's thought may be transferred to modern executive authority in a parliamentary Westminster system of government where 'Princes' may be faced with evaluation.

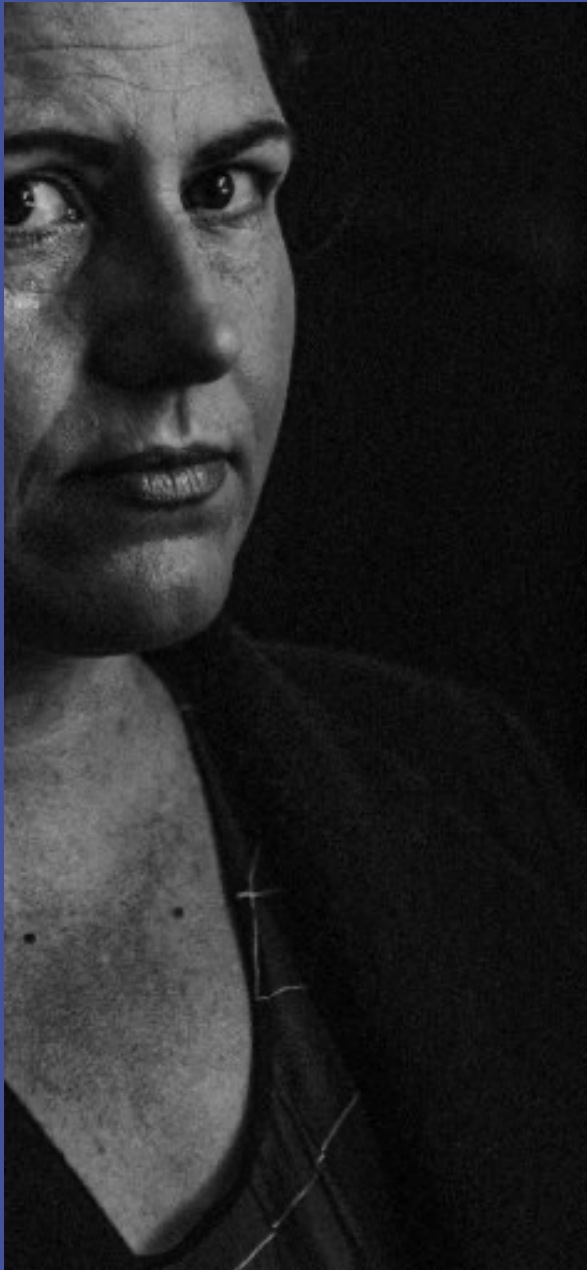


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SAMANTHA  
CROMPVOETS

BLOOD LUST,  
TRUST  
& BLAME



# Systems Thinking



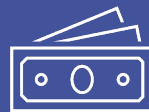
Perspectives



Interrelationships



Boundaries



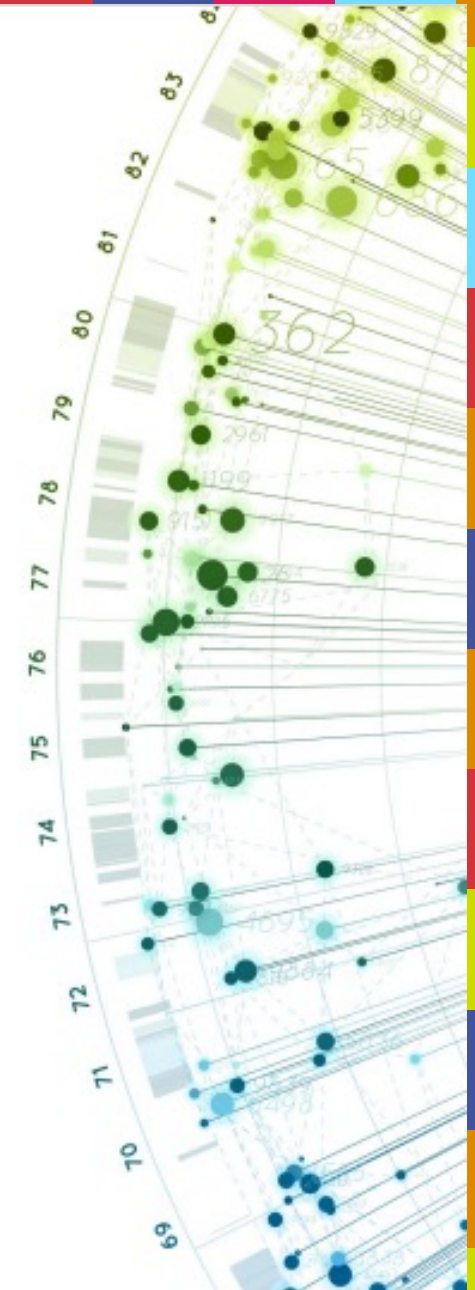
Dynamics

## Principles for Effective Use of Systems Thinking in Evaluation

Systems in Evaluation TIG

A Topical Interest Group of the American Evaluation Association


Revised September 9, 2018






☰ 🔍 FINANCIAL REVIEW Newsfeed 👤

## Commissioner rejects PwC partner's oral evidence

  
**Edmund Tadros**  
*Professional services editor*  
Jul 7, 2023 - 5:49pm

The robo-debt royal commission rejected the oral evidence of a PwC partner who testified he could not recall if the firm was preparing a report about the scheme for the Department of Human Services.

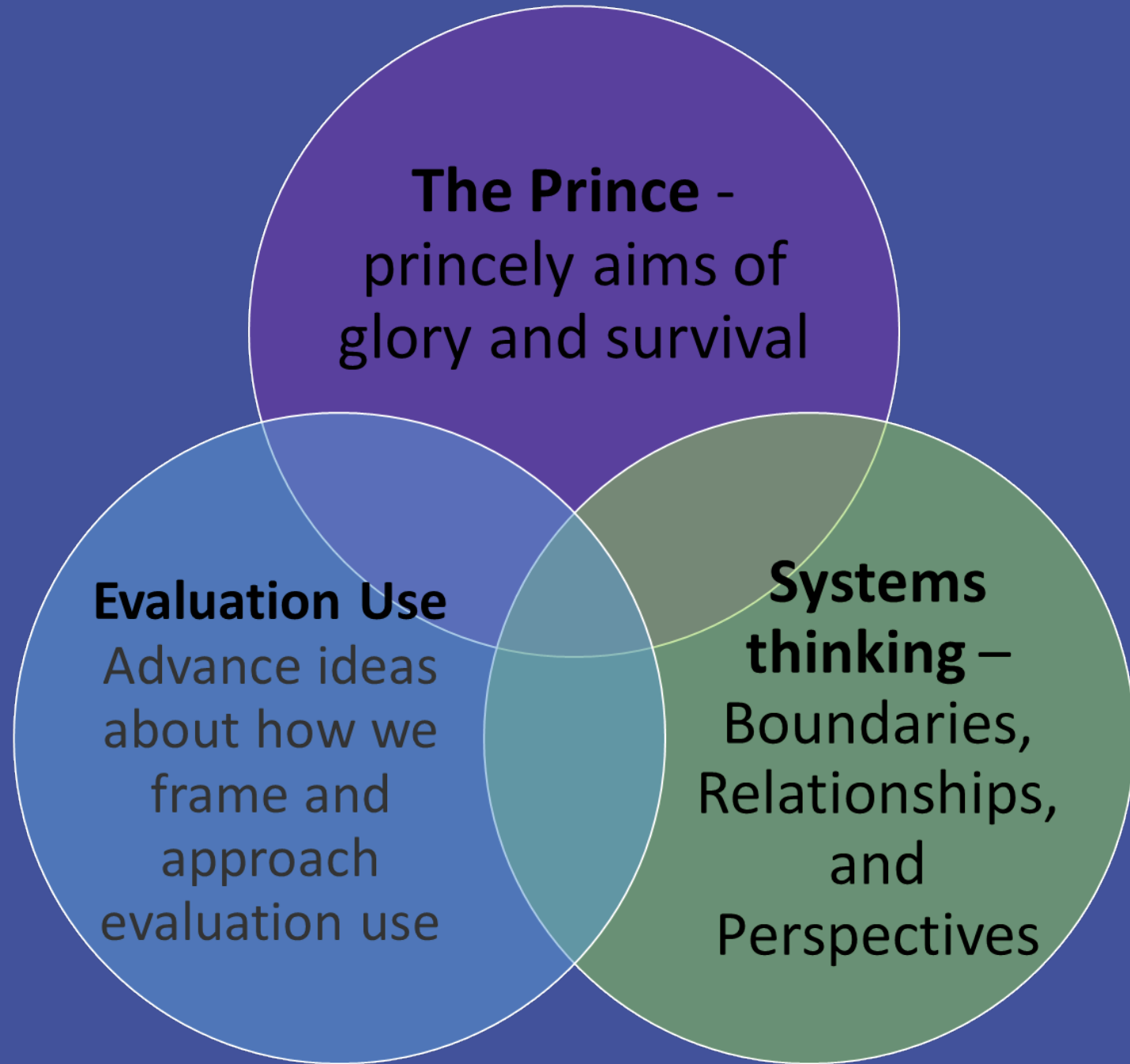
Royal commissioner Catherine Holmes said she instead accepted the evidence of three other PwC personnel who all said they believed the firm was preparing a report for Human Services. She also accepted the revised evidence of the first partner who admitted it was "likely" Human Services knew a report was being prepared.



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# So what?



**Thank you**



# Additional Slides



Concerns about non-use of evaluations have plagued the profession since it emerged in the 1960s.

Maloney (2017) found non-use of evaluation by government agencies in Australia is a substantial problem for AES-member survey respondents.

*You will have felt the burn  
The deeper the changes needed,  
the more trouble you're in*



# The Prince

The general theme of political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli's 16th-century instruction guide for new princes to obtain and keep power. An effective leader.

- Strives by all their actions to inspire a sense of greatness and goodness
- Is perceived to be wise, just and governed by higher moral laws
- Understands that politics is as much about image as it is about substance, and acts accordingly
- Is never profligate with state funds – it is better to be tight at first then receive gratitude for dispersing it when appropriate
- Is careful of flatters & has a handful of close advisers who can speak their minds without fear
- Consults widely but is always seen to be making up one's own mind since vacillation quickly erodes faith in your rule
- Backs what they say by force. A leader may be good or effective in all respects, but the perception of weakness is fatal to anyone in power.

Source: Tom Butler-Bowden 2010



# The Prince and Public Sector Evaluation

Machiavelli's thought may be transferred to modern executive authority in a parliamentary Westminster system of government where 'Princes' may be faced with evaluation. What might happen?

- Appear to be wise and caring – fanciful program logic and 'visionary' theory of change
- Delay and waste time to evade scrutiny – long term studies with unrealistic outcomes measurement and inadequate data
- Control the narrative and win the blame game – scope, terms of reference know beforehand if there will be a positive or negative economic value and make rounds of 'comments' on the draft report
- 'See' rather than steward – describe conditions (outcomes?) in your realm rather than seek to understand your true value to citizens
- Consult stakeholders and be informed by the evaluation – but not graded—who makes recommendations?



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Politics Federal AFP

EDITORIAL

## Shameful treatment of the messenger who exposed war crimes



The Herald's View

June 28, 2023 – 5:00am

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Sometimes people who raise the alarm and expose corruption in big organisations see themselves as collateral damage when institutions close ranks against attack and the public mood swings against them for little apparent reason.

And so it would appear with Samantha Crompvoets, an expert on organisational culture, whose 2016 report on war crimes allegedly committed by cliques of elite Special Air Service regiment soldiers serving in Afghanistan started a chain of events that has visited a world of pain on the Australian Defence Force and eventually helped disclose the truth surrounding the obscene behaviour of Ben Roberts-Smith, VC.



Samantha Crompvoets says she has paid a high personal and professional price for her work exposing alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. DANIELLE SMITH

Writing in the *Herald* today, Crompvoets has revealed the price she believes she paid for raising the alarm. She had suffered years of internet and phone attacks threatening to bash, kill or torture her and her livelihood has been destroyed to the extent she can no longer obtain government contracts. Before her war crime





# Three types of system



Simple



Complicated



Complex