Designing Evaluations 1: Frameworks & Evaluation Questions

Elliot Stern

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Frameworks & Evaluation Questions

Evaluations need to be *designed*

- This starts with an ITT or specification leading to a strong proposal and methodology

- Weak evaluations nearly always start with a poor ITT and a badly thought out methodology

- As part of work of the helpdesk, we have reviewed the quality of many structural Fund evaluations

- Poor quality evaluations were often traced back to weak designs

Designing Evaluations

- A 'design' is more than a method

- Interview surveys, case-studies, statistical analyses of labour market data, observational studies, all can be part of different designs

- A design involves a deep understanding of what we want to know, the programme context in which we are working and of the capabilities of different families of methods

- On the basis of this understanding we can consciously choose which of the many ways we could evaluate any programme

The Design Triangle
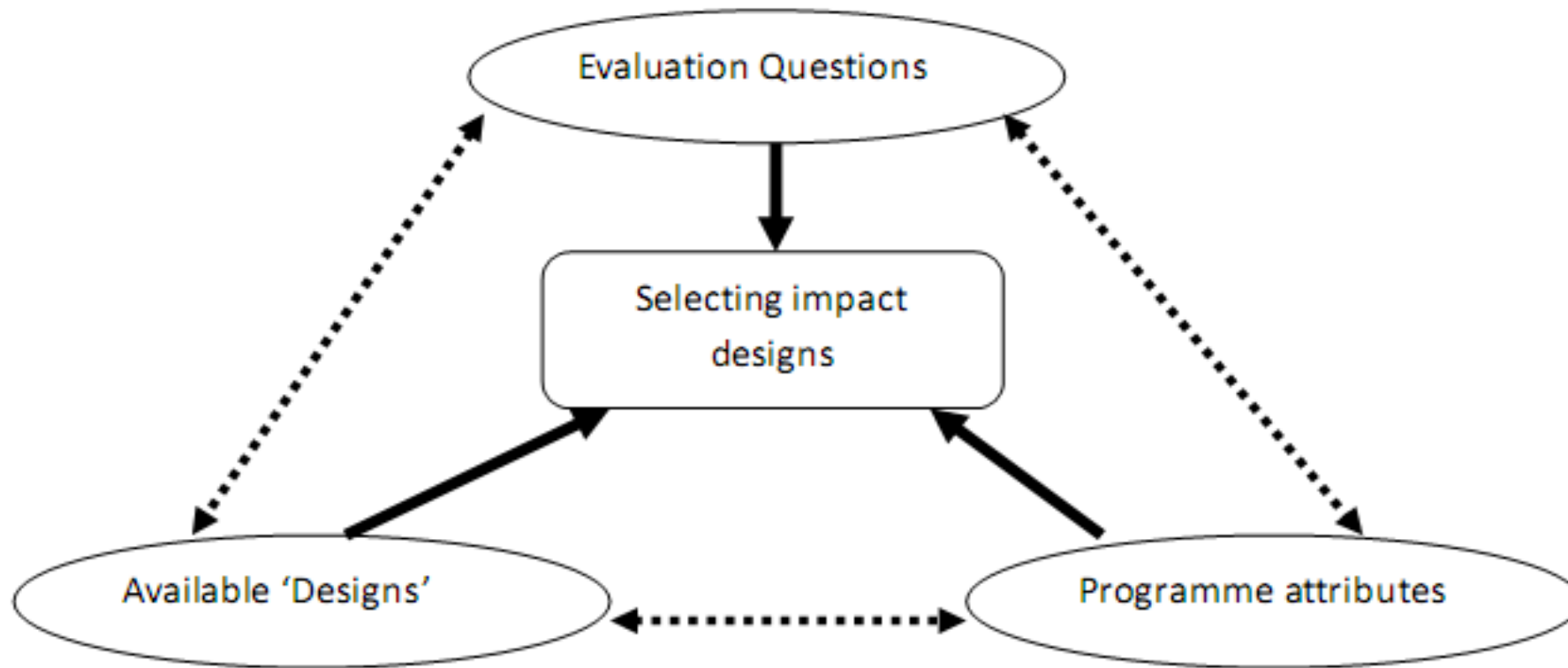
Designing Evaluations

The 'Design Triangle' suggests we need to match:

- Evaluation Questions (what we want to know)

with the

- Characteristics of Programmes (the 'object' to be evaluated)

with

- Available designs and their capabilities (what these designs can do given the Evaluation Questions being asked and the characteristics of Programmes)

Importance of Evaluation Questions

- Historically evaluations were structured around generic criteria such as Effectiveness; Relevance; Efficiency; Coherence; and Sustainability

- These criteria-led evaluations often produced evaluations that lacked specifics and were not useful for policy purposes. Nowadays we tend to operationalise criteria into more specific *Evaluation Questions*

- Evaluation Questions (EQs) are also a crucial link between evaluation purpose and how we make methodological choices

Evaluations need to answer clear and answerable questions!

Importance of Evaluation Questions

- EQs are not the same as an 'interview question' – they are 'high-level' question able to be analysed and studied

- EQs focus on the relationship between a programme and real world 'consequences' 'effects' and 'results'

- EQs that only focus on the internal operations of a programme and do not try to illuminate the relationships between programmes and real-world effects are not EQs!

- Most evaluations will have a number of prioritised EQs – each addressing a specific point of interest in a programme

Centrality of Evaluation Questions
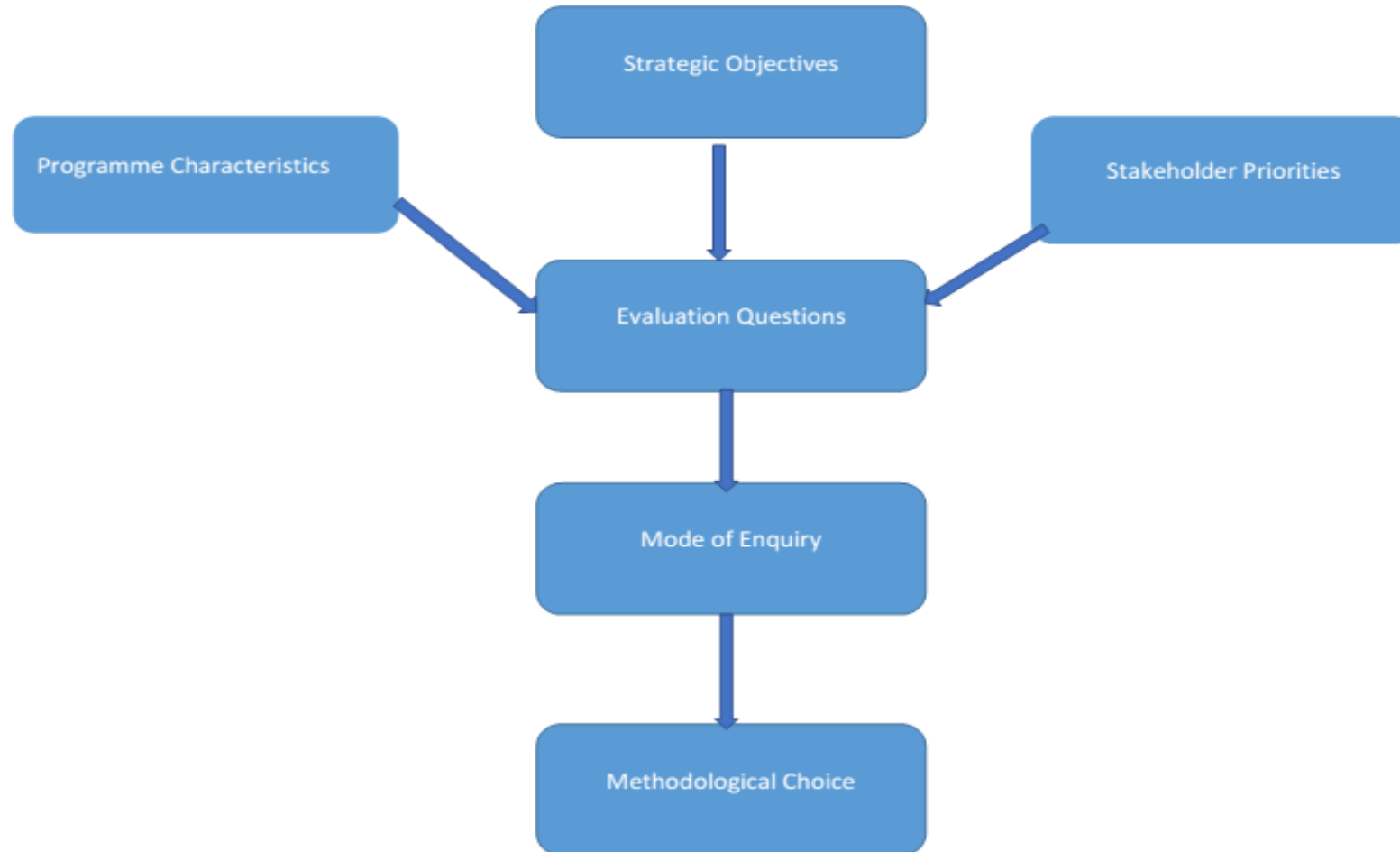
Evaluation Questions and Strategic Objectives

- Strategic Objectives refers to the policy goals that justify a programme – in our case through the various programme priorities – strengthening research; access to ICTs; enhancing competitiveness; promoting social inclusion etc. - that are intended to contribute to 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'

- Evaluation Questions need to relate to these goals and priorities although monitoring/indicator exercises that are not necessarily evaluative will also address results

Programme Characteristics

- Evaluation Questions have to take account of programme characteristics

- There are many ways to characterise a programme – in terms of sectors; objectives, their degree of innovativeness etc.

  - For the purpose of specifying EQs, characteristics should first be understood in terms of an 'intervention logic', 'theory of change' or 'programme theory' set into a wider context

- Theories of Change can be variously described but usually cover the sequencing of a programmes cycle set into a wider socio-economic and regional context

Programme Characteristics
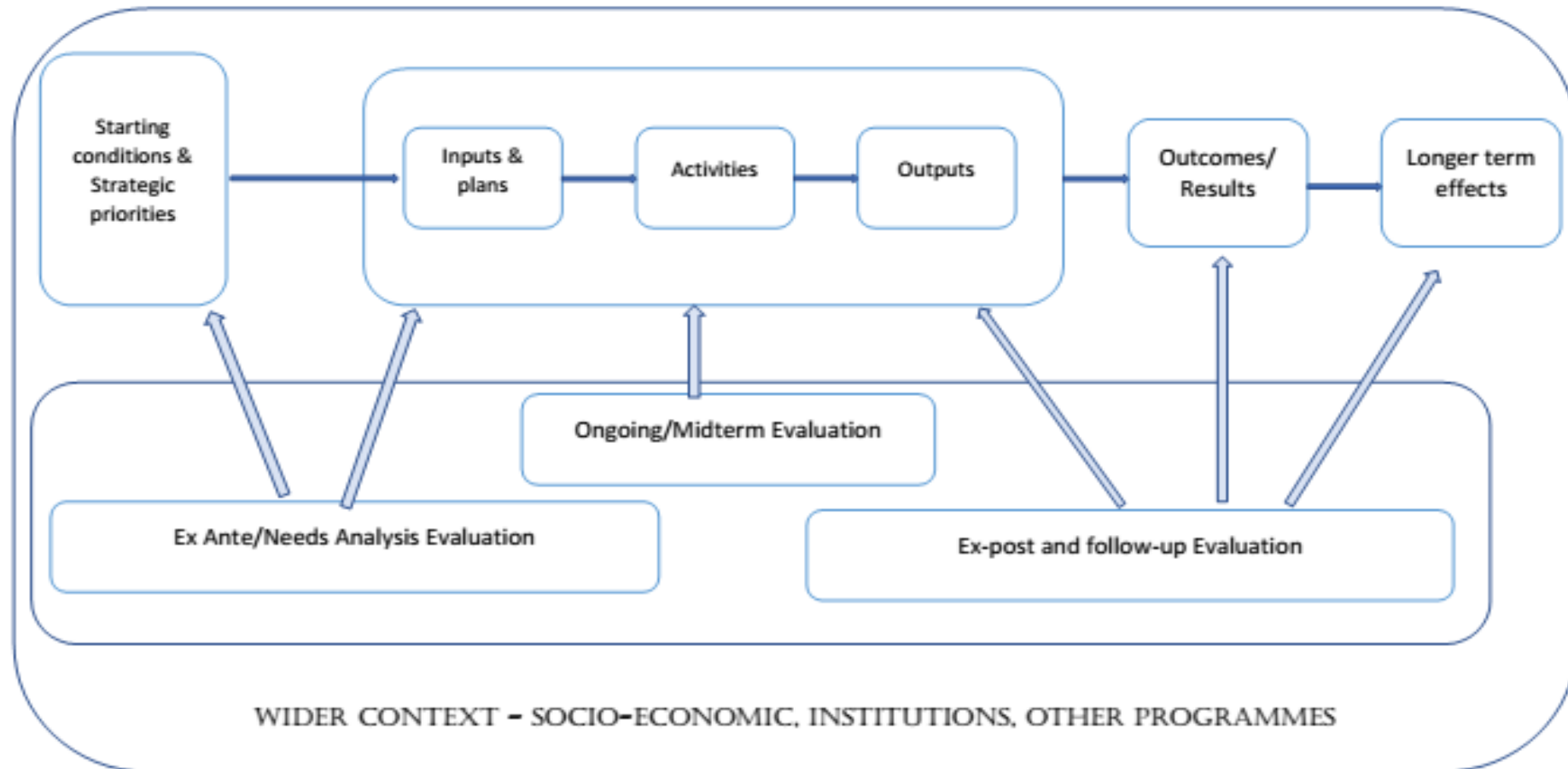
Programme Characteristics

When we discuss methodological choices there are other kinds of programme characteristics that also have to be considered. These include for example:

- Innovativeness of programme goals and delivery

- Simplicity or complexity of the intervention

- Types of outputs envisaged – whether they are material, behavioural, new services, new institutional arrangements

- Timescales and trajectories of change

- How bounded or embeddedness programmes are in relation to other programmes, activities and systems

Stakeholder priorities

- Evaluations like programmes have stakeholders
- Stakeholders will want answers to *their* questions
- Stakeholders are the users of evaluation – they are also often the gatekeepers to evaluation data and provide necessary cooperation for evaluators
- The credibility and legitimacy of an evaluation will often depend on how far the questions of stakeholders are prioritised

Evaluation Questions and Evaluation Purposes

EQs fall into broad types, related to the purpose (or purposes)

of an evaluation. These will include:

- Accounting for Results
- Better Management and Delivery
- Learning and improvement
- Capacity development and sustainability

It is also worth differentiating between 'High Level' EQs from subsidiary EQs – in order to decide on evaluation priorities and where efforts should be concentrated

Accounting for Results

At a *high level* we may want to know:

- Have programmes achieved their objectives?

In greater detail we may want to know:

- Can results be shown to be consistent with the ToC/Intervention Logic?
- Can we demonstrate that the programme caused the result?
- Who were the programme beneficiaries & how did they assess its results?
- Have results occurred consistently and if not, how can we explain differences across programmes?

Better Management and Delivery

At a *high level* we may want to know:

- How well-managed was the programme?

In greater detail we may want to know:

- Were resources well-targeted?

- Were resources efficiently spent?

- Did delivery/implementation proceed as planned?

- Were mid-course corrections needed and why?

Learning and Improvement

At a *high level* we may want to know:

• What have been the lessons for programming and policy in future?

In greater detail we may want to know:

• Could a similar programme be better targeted and delivered if it was to be repeated?

• Are there new ideas about how to achieve similar results through other means?

• Do these kinds of programmes contribute sufficiently to strategic policy goals?

Capacity development and sustainability

At a *high level* we may want to know:

- Has the programme helped create new capacities and networks?

In greater detail we may want to know:

- Will new capacities continue to generate the kinds of results that the programme intended?

- Are these capacities likely to be self-sustaining and economically viable?

- Have capacities been created in civil society or in public administrations?

- If there is little evidence of sustainability, why is this?

Conclusions

- This session has been provided a number of frameworks to consider when deciding on Evaluation Questions

- EQs are shaped by Strategic objectives; Stakeholder priorities; and Programme characteristics

- We have also seen that there are different 'types' of EQs that relate to the main purposes of an evaluation

- Working through these kinds of frameworks should also help when prioritising EQs – remembering that we can't evaluate everything!

- Finally the 'Checklist' can be a useful aide memoire when applying the principles described in this session