Evaluation Questions:
Stakeholder Needs and Evaluation Design

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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

Challenge: To pose a limited number of clear, answerable and relatively stable evaluation questions

Answerable Evaluation Questions

To make EQs answerable requires

- Some kind of evaluability assessment at an early stage in the evaluation design process – preferably when the programme itself is being designed

- An early awareness of data requirements including data sets and monitoring systems for secondary data analysis *and* agreement for programme participants to provide feedback and respond to questions/surveys – possibly contractually based

Stakeholder priorities

Evaluations like projects and programmes have stakeholders

- Stakeholders 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 - this requires a sustained process of engagement

Engaging with stakeholders is a key part of formulating Evaluation Questions – Managing Authorities, Partners, delivery responsibles….

Stakeholder priorities

- Ideally this should begin when a programme or project is designed and continue throughout the evaluation cycle

- Relationships with stakeholders are a conversation not a one-time consultation or survey

- Raises questions about how to manage this process and what should be the role of contracted evaluators

….and centrally

How to focus Evaluation Questions and avoid too many questions

Stable Evaluation Questions

In general EQs do not change, but…..

- Possible to distinguish between those EQs that cannot change and those that can – usually not high level EQs

- For example if unanticipated problems emerge during implementation or if there are major contextual problems, e.g. financial crisis

- Useful to offer some flexibility – in ToRs; in responses to ToRs; in inception reports; and at various project/programme review points

….but flexibility is limited

Evaluation Questions is not Monitoring

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

  - They are also *not* descriptive or monitoring questions, e.g.

    ➢How has productivity changed

    ➢How many young people are now employed

    ➢How was the programme implemented

- Need to be linked to the focal project or programme – embedded in a Theory of Change or Intervention Logic

Evaluation Questions & Theories of Change

A good Theory of Change will represent ….

- 'Products' *and* processes – including implementation and delivery as well as outputs and impacts

- Follow through the life-cycle of a programme/project from ex ante needs analysis, through to implementation and outcomes

and

- Will take account of broader non-programme theories related for example to entrepreneurship, economic growth and social inclusion

These axes provide a useful starting map when identifying Evaluation Questions – e.g. to guide conversations with stakeholders

Contexts and Contribution

A Theory of Change will also acknowledge interventions and contextual influences that are *not* within programme control, e.g.

- Contextual 'risk' factors; trends and tendencies that can affect programme results; other overlapping or neighbouring programmes; big 'events' that may interact with the focal programme……

- Programmes are 'open systems', few are self contained – for many EU funding is only a small proportion of total funds

- This underpins an important distinction between Evaluation Questions about outcomes, results and impacts:

between Attribution and Contribution questions….

Evaluation Questions and Evaluation Purposes

A more granular approach is to relate EQs to the purposes of an evaluation. These will include:

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

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?

Evaluation Questions and Methodology

Evaluation Questions are the foundations for evaluation design
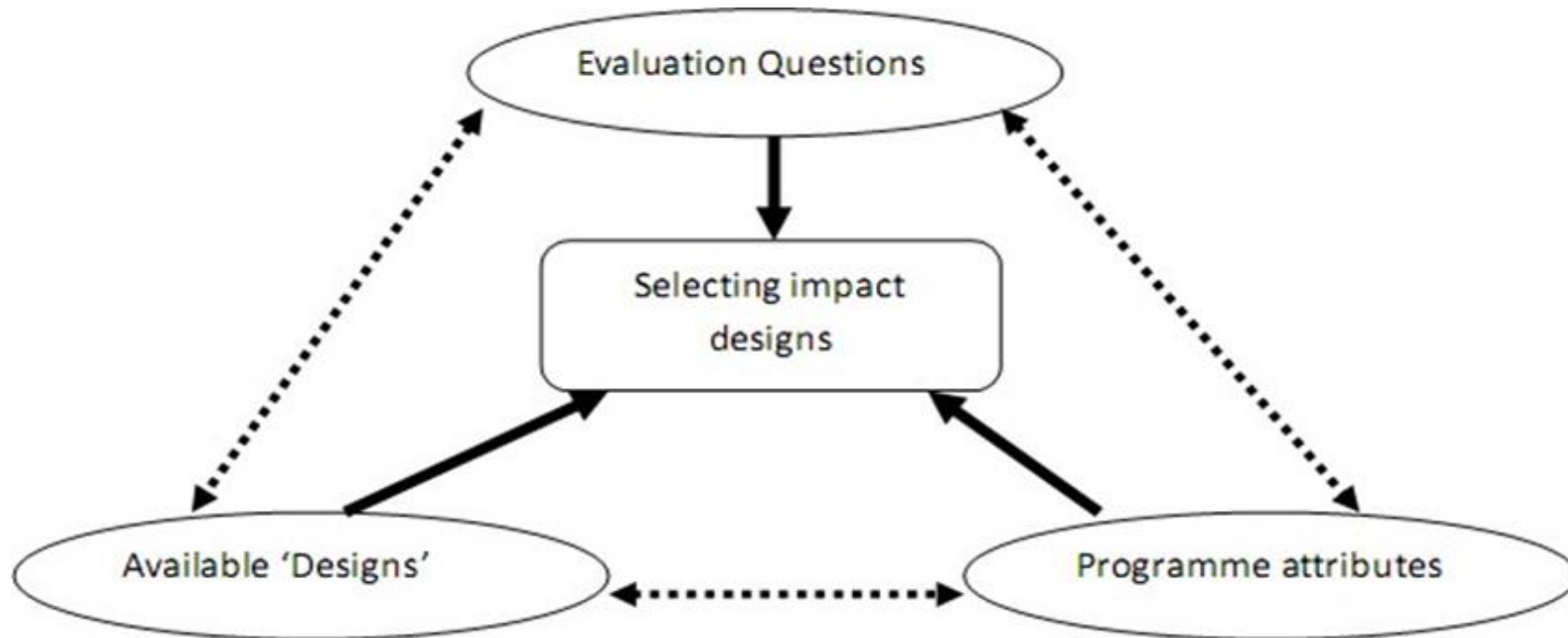
Evaluation Questions and Methodology

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)

Programme Characteristics

Programmes & project characteristics influence methodological choice
- Are they multi-stranded (many separate interventions) or not?
- Are they well-understood and replicative or new and innovative?
- Do time scales conform with programme time-scales?
- Is this a continuation of a predecessor programme?
- Is it embedded or free-standing….?

Available Designs

The 3rd leg of the Design Triangle is available designs

- This is partly a methodological issue: what are we able to do with available methods – we cannot predict the future; and some complex systems cannot be analysed with available tools

- Partly a 'value for money' issue – is it practical and feasible to evaluate everything if the methodological investment is disproportionate

- Partly a contractual question – when ToR is being drawn up and evaluators selected – do the consultants have the required skills?

Implications for when EQ preparation takes place

Centrality of Evaluation Questions
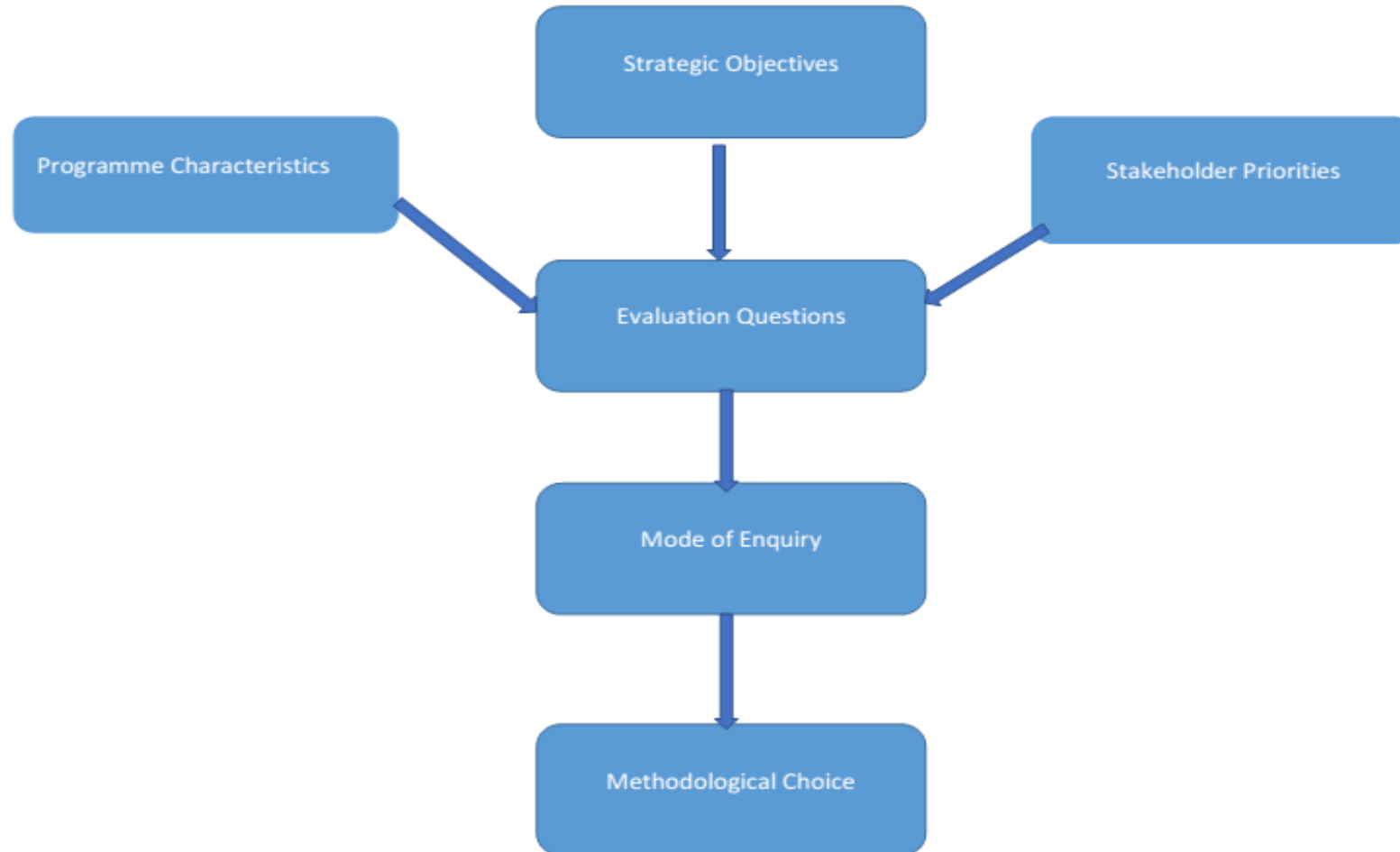
Evaluation Questions and Methodology

The bridge between Evaluation Questions and methodology is the 'mode of enquiry' that a question requires to be answered . These may for example be:

- Descriptive
- Explanatory
- Predictive
- Prescriptive
- Critical/normative

Modes of Enquiry and Methodology

- *Descriptive,* describes or measures outcomes and processes – implying qualitative and statistical methods
- *Explanatory,* establishes causal links between programmes and their effects implying theory based or counterfactual methods
- *Predictive,* implies identifying trends or modelling future scenarios
- *Prescriptive,* links management/policy findings to recommendations & priorities implying policy-mapping/policy elicitation methods
- *Critical,* explores how to introduce normative change – e.g. gender equality, reducing social exclusion - implying participatory methods, value analysis and consensus building

Conclusions

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

- Deciding on EQs requires early stage programme analysis and evaluability assessment

- They will reflect the main purposes of an evaluation – which may be process/implementation or outcome/impact oriented

- EQs respond to questions stakeholders want answers to; and therefore require a process of stakeholder engagement

- EQs set the parameters for evaluation design and methodological choice

Checklist for Group Session

1. Has there been early and sustained stakeholder engagement to identify, focus and limit number of evaluation questions?

2. Are the Evaluation Questions rooted in an initial ToC?

3. Did early planning and evaluability assessment consider data requirements of Evaluation Questions?

4. Have the methodological implications of selected EQs been clarified?

5. Do these methodological choices following from EQs take account of programme/project characteristics?

6. Have the methodological requirements of the chosen EQs been taken into account in ToRs and the selection of evaluation consultants?