

How to make use of evaluation results

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Input into Evaluation Helpdesk Training Seminar

Burgas July 2019

How to make use of evaluation results

- Evaluators & those who commission evaluations want the results of their work to be used
- The report that sits on the shelves, unread is one of the persistent nightmares for an evaluator or evaluation commissioner
 - As a result there has been much research on evaluation use, evaluation usability and evaluation influence
 - I am going to draw heavily on that research as well as my own experience in my presentation this morning

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Many reasons are put forward as to why evaluation use is important

- To terminate, continue or extend projects or programmes
- To improve and plan better programmes & policies in future
 - To improve programming and implementation skills
- To more reliably improve the conditions of people, society & economy
 - To strengthen accountability and justify public expenditure
 - To strengthen democratic accountability

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What will be clear from this list is that they envisage many different types of 'use' and various classification have been developed to identify the distinctive characteristics of these and other examples

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The most familiar of these classifications distinguishes between:

- *Instrumental* use - the direct use of evaluation findings in order to lead to some change in actions and decisions
- *Conceptual* use - leading to lessons and understandings that can be applied elsewhere in future
 - *Symbolic* use - mainly for justificatory purposes by key decision makers
- *Process* use - that occurs through stakeholder and actor engagement during an evaluation

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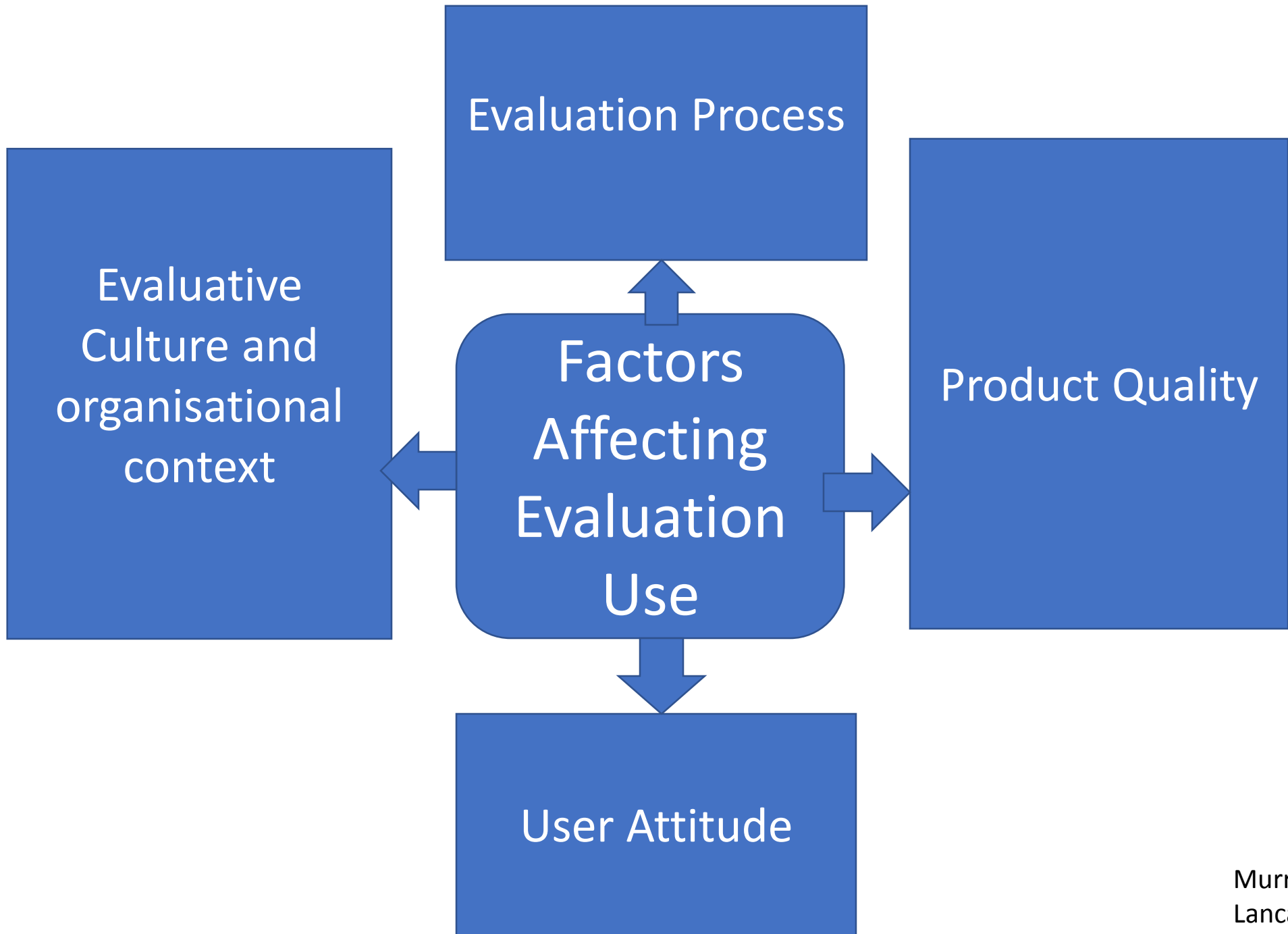
What is now well known is that direct 'instrumental' use is very rare!
Possibly when combined with symbolic use – i.e. policy makers
coincidentally want to use an evaluation for their own reasons....

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One of the pioneers of research into evaluation use in policy settings, Carol Weiss argued in the 1970s that evaluations had limited effects but by the 1990s had decided that:

'I have come to have more respect for the incremental changes that evaluation helps to bring about. If evaluation contributes to making small continuing improvements in current policy, as I think it does, that is no small beans. It is well worth our time and effort.'

Weiss also discussed how 'slow drip of new knowledge' changes policy



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In addition to evaluation use some researchers speak more about *evaluation influence*

This acknowledges that the evaluation process offer many opportunities to exercise influence beyond reports and findings, for example:

- Evaluation planning
 - Developing Theories of Change
 - Specifying data requirements
 - Drawing up Terms of Reference
- Validating findings, conclusions and recommendations

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Recent research has started to focus on the mechanisms that might support and explain evaluation use, for example:

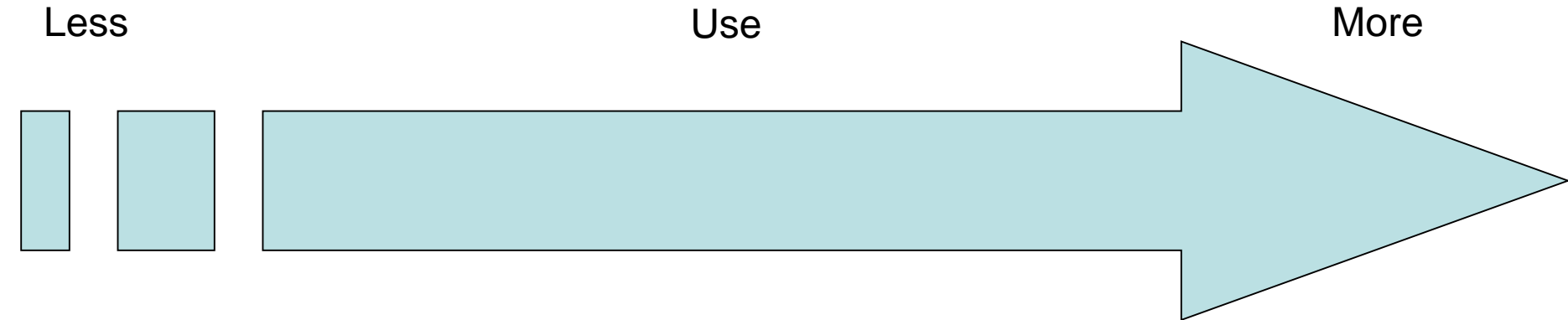
- *Persuasion* in order to influence individual attitudes
- *Credibility* which sets out to boost confidence in evaluation quality e.g. high quality reports
 - Accumulating *evaluation knowledge* through synthesis studies
 - Changing evaluator *communication practices* through skill enhancement
- *Improving stakeholder engagement* via process & facilitation practices

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Overall we have seen an evolution in the way evaluation use is understood moving from a focus on evaluator behaviour to a more organisational and institutional focus. For example from:

- Evaluator mindsets – changing attitudes to communication and skills
to
- Evaluator practices – how to engage and work with stakeholders
to
- Organisational learning – changing organisational rules and systems
to
- Institutionalisation processes – embedding evaluation in policy making institutions and processes

Use as 'engagement': engagement practice



Dissemination practice:

- Report
- Executive summary
- Article

Presentational practice:

- Seminars
- Presentations
- Active workshops
- Embodiments

Interactional practice:

- Working alongside colleagues
- Analysis of situational enabling and constraining factors for change (with decision makers/users)

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The *organisational* perspective on evaluation use, has led to an explicit focus on evaluation systems and how to strengthen them – partly by applying ideas from organisational learning & systems change.

For example

- Creating ‘innovative experiments’ in organisations from which others can learn – coalitions of ministries, universities and consultants
- Developing networks that support horizontal knowledge transfer, using intermediaries and knowledge brokers – experts, trainers, twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp groups
- Establishing national and sectoral evaluation societies to promote good practice and promote networking

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- There have now been two rounds 'mapping' the institutionalisation of evaluation worldwide – these examine how evaluation fits within policy making arrangements in ministries and legislatures, the extent of professionalisation and the demand and supply for evaluators
- Clear that there are major differences in the extent of evaluation institutionalisation in different countries that relate to broader aspects of governance and public management

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There are ways that evaluators can improve evaluation use:

- They can they can disseminate their reports and ensure that they are of good quality
- They can work with stakeholders in collaborative ways and build professional and collegiate networks with other policy makers
 - They can enhance their networking skills & build networks
- They can conduct synthesis studies and accumulate evaluation findings
- They can work to encourage their employing agencies to adopt organisational practices that support evaluation use

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However some key ways that evaluation use can be encouraged are not open to evaluator control

These mainly relate to

- The way policy-making bodies – ministries, agencies, regional authorities etc. – are organised
- and
- The way evaluation is institutionalised in government and public bodies more generally

Checklist for Group Session

1. Review the figure 'Use as Engagement' and discuss it in the context of your programmes and responsibilities
2. Consider what could be done at an organisational level i.e. in your ministry, agency or MA, to strengthen evaluation use and influence
3. Consider in relation to EU evaluations, what in an ideal world should change in the way evaluation is institutionalised in your country, i.e. to better embed evaluation in the policy process

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Jacob, S, Speer, S and Furubo J-E (2015). The institutionalization of evaluation matters: Updating the International Atlas of Evaluation 10 years later: *Evaluation the international journal*. Volume 21.1, January 2015

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