



VIRGINIA TECH™

Evaluative Thinking: Principles and Practices to Enhance Evaluation Capacity and Quality

13 September, 2018

Tom Archibald
Assistant Professor

introductions

Please share:

1. Your name
2. Your organization
3. Your area of work

goals



Image credit: **Bronski Beat** on flickr

goals

At the end of this session, you will know:

1. What evaluative thinking (ET) is and how it pertains to your context;
2. How to promote and strengthen ET among individuals and organizations with whom you work; and
3. How to use ET to identify assumptions, articulate program theory, and conduct evaluation with an emphasis on learning and adaptive management.

roles for
today



Photo credit: **Mike Pennington** on [geograph](#)

objectives

Evaluation is an activity. *Evaluative thinking is a way of doing business.* This distinction is critical. It derives from studies of evaluation use. Evaluation is more useful—and actually used—when the program and organizational culture manifests evaluative thinking.

- Michael Quinn Patton

Preface to 2014 InterAction Report,
Embracing Evaluative Thinking for Better Outcomes:
Four NGO Case Studies

A photograph of an outdoor cafe area. In the foreground, a round, light-colored table is surrounded by four wicker chairs with metal frames. The chairs have a dark, woven texture. The ground is paved with reddish-brown bricks. In the background, more similar tables and chairs are visible, along with a building facade and some greenery. A semi-transparent teal rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

world café on learning and evaluation culture

Photo credit: **Michael Rowen** on flickr

world café
on learning
and
evaluation
culture

- (1) *Under what conditions does evaluation contribute to learning?*
- (2) *What makes a “culture of evaluation” in an organization or program?*

introduction to evaluative thinking



introduction
to
evaluative
thinking

Indulge Your Cravings—and Slim Down!


PREVENTION
Magazine

The Ice Cream Diet

The Amazing Plan That Helps You:

- Lose Weight
- Lower Blood Pressure
- Cut Your Colon Cancer Risk
- Reduce PMS Symptoms

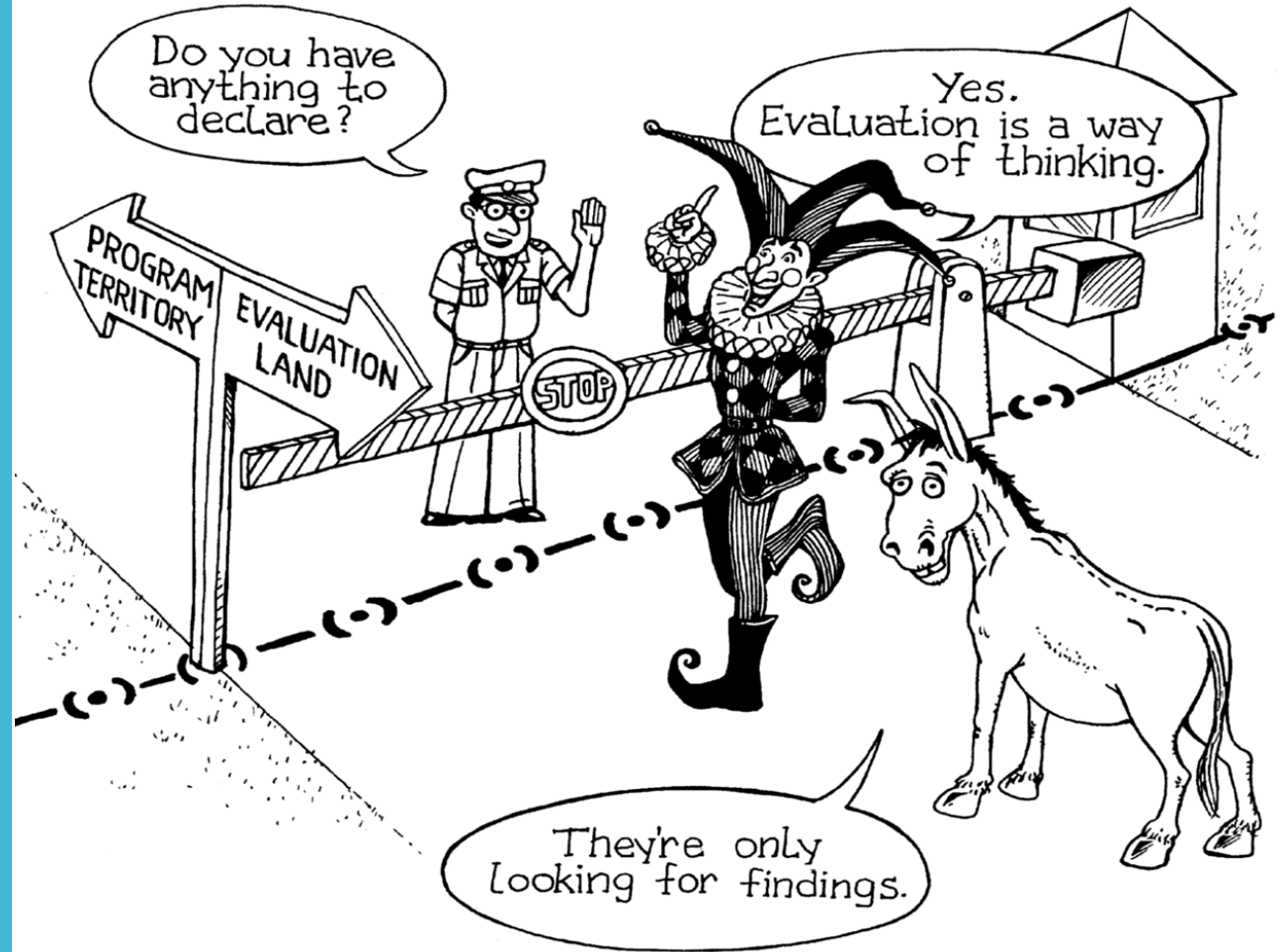
Holly McCord, M.A., R.D.
Nutrition Editor of Prevention magazine



introduction to evaluative thinking



introduction to evaluative thinking



(Patton, 2008)

introduction to evaluative thinking



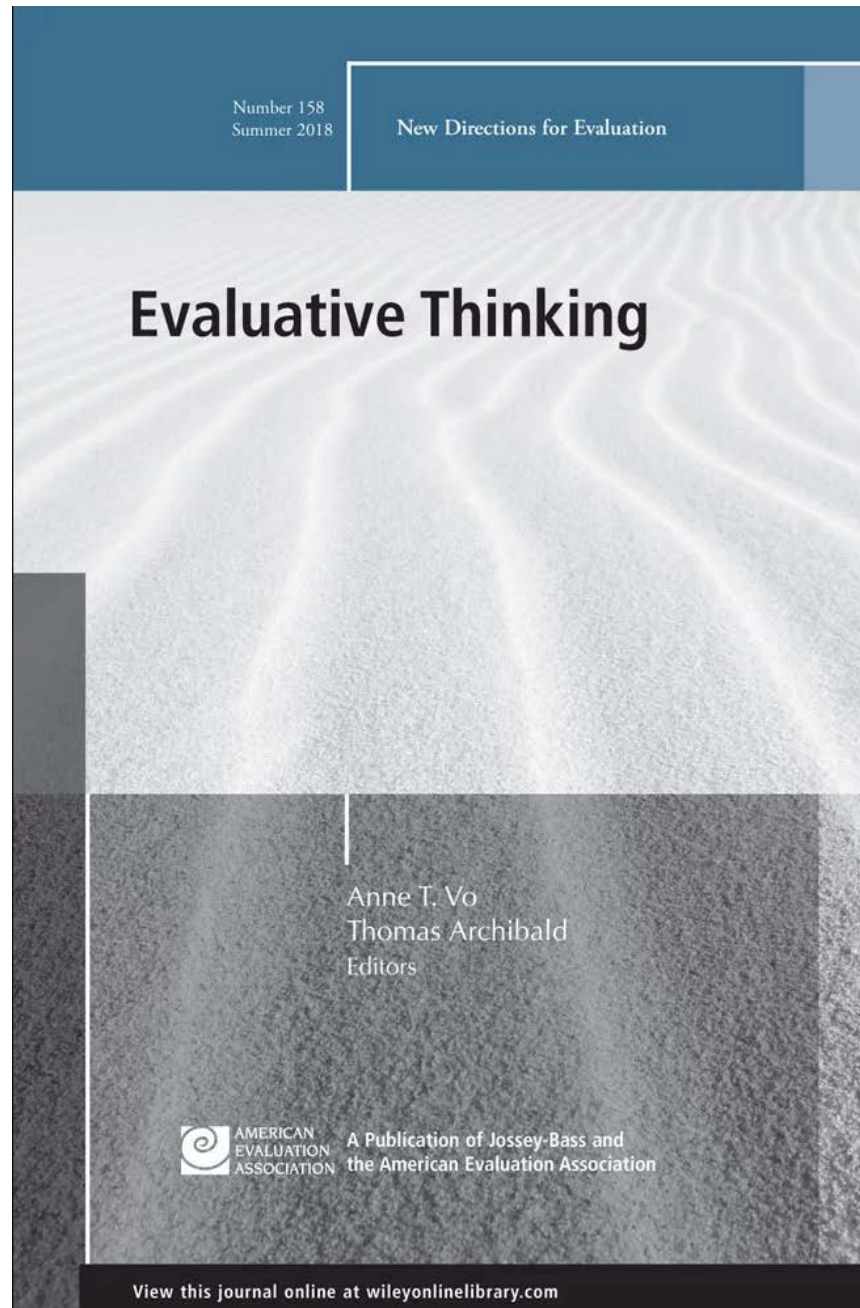
introduction to evaluative thinking

Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation and program management, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves:

1. identifying assumptions,
2. posing thoughtful questions,
3. pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and multiple perspective taking, and
4. making informed decisions in preparation for action.

(Buckley, Archibald, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2015)

introduction to evaluative thinking



introduction to evaluative thinking

Evaluation requires:

- Knowledge: understanding of the “how” and “why” of basic M&E concepts, terms, methods and resources
- Working skills: observation, analysis, communication, etc.
- Thinking skills: reflection, questioning, strategizing, mental modeling, perspective taking, decision making, the ability to identify assumptions
- Attitudes: belief in the value of M&E, an intrinsic motivation to pursue evidence



introduction to evaluative thinking

"Evaluative thinking is a way of doing business." (Patton)

"...being results oriented, reflective, questioning, and using evidence to test assumptions." (Wind & Carden)

"Reflective Practice" (Baker & Bruner)

"questioning, reflecting, learning, and modifying ... It is a constant state-of-mind within an organization's culture and all its systems." (Bennett & Jessani)

**free-range
evaluation:

evaluative
thinking that
lives unfettered in
an organization**



Context & Purpose

Inference & Warrant

Question

Evidence

Claim

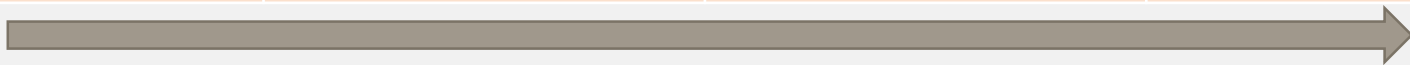


Alignment:
the new gold
standard in
evidence

INTERNAL ALIGNMENT



Question	Method	Analysis	Intended Claim
Is participation in our program associated with an increase in knowledge?	Measure knowledge using a survey both before (pre-) and after (post-) the program	Score pre- and post-surveys and compare scores for each individual participant	Participants demonstrated an increase in knowledge after participating in the program as compared to before



MISALIGNMENT



Question	Method	Analysis	Intended Claim
Can participants perform [X skill] after participating in the program?	Interview each participant about their knowledge of [X skill] both before and after the program.	Thematically code the interviews, allowing for emergent themes related to knowledge.	Participation in the program causes an increase in participants knowledge in a variety of ways.

practicing evaluative thinking

- Requires a “safe space” for questioning, identifying assumptions, making suggestions (consider power dynamics)
- Start with outside examples and then work inward
- Practice alongside peers and colleagues
 - build skills and establish trust

Guiding Principles for Promoting Evaluative

- I. Promoters of evaluative thinking should be opportunist about engaging learners in evaluative thinking processes in a way that builds on and maximizes intrinsic motivation*** (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Brookfield, 2012; Piaget, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978).
- II. Promoting evaluative thinking should incorporate incremental experiences, following the developmental process of “scaffolding”*** (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Brookfield, 2012).
- III. Evaluative thinking is not a born-in skill, nor does it depend on any particular educational background; therefore, promoters should offer opportunities for it to be intentionally practiced by all who wish to develop as evaluative thinkers*** (Brookfield, 2012; Ericsson & Charness, 1994).
- IV. Evaluative thinkers must be aware of—and work to overcome—assumptions and belief preservation*** (Brookfield, 2012; Lord et al., 1979; Nkwake, 2013).
- V. In order to best learn to think evaluatively, the skill should be applied and practiced in multiple contexts and alongside peers and colleagues*** (Bransford et al., 1999; Brookfield, 2012; Foley, 1999; Halpern, 1998; Simon, 2000).

what does
Evaluative
Thinking
sound and
look like?



Photo of: Gender Analysis- CRS Ethiopia

Evaluative Thinking:

what it sounds and looks like in a program work context

■ Things you may hear:

- Why are we assuming X?
- How do we know X?
- How might we be wrong?
- What evidence do we have for X?
- What is the thinking behind the way we do X?
- How could we do X better?
- How does X connect to our intended outcomes?
- Stakeholder X's perspective on this might be Y!

■ Things you may see:

- More evidence gathering and sharing
- More feedback (all directions)
- Reflective conversations among staff, beneficiaries, leadership
- More ToCs/illustrating thinking
- More motivation to do systematic M&E work
- Program evolution
- More effective staff and programs
- Greater field staff influence over project decisions

break



Photo credit: **Stanislaw Szydlo** via **Wikipedia**

your evaluative thinking experiences & stories

- Identify an example from your own work when you have seen, heard, or engaged in evaluative thinking. What was the outcome or effect?
- Discuss in a two- or three-person buzz group and prepare to share out one example per group.

identifying & working with assumptions

“If we teach proper nutrition, youth will make more healthy food choices.”

What are the underlying assumptions here?



identifying & working with assumptions



Uncovering these often “buried” or unstated assumptions to light can affect your:

- Program plan
- Evaluation plan
- Interpretation of evaluation results

identifying & working with assumptions

Are assumptions always “bad?”

No! Assumptions are a necessary part of survival!! We *all* make assumptions.

The important thing is to identify assumptions and be conscience about choosing to accept them, seek evidence for them, or plan to “work around them” as needed

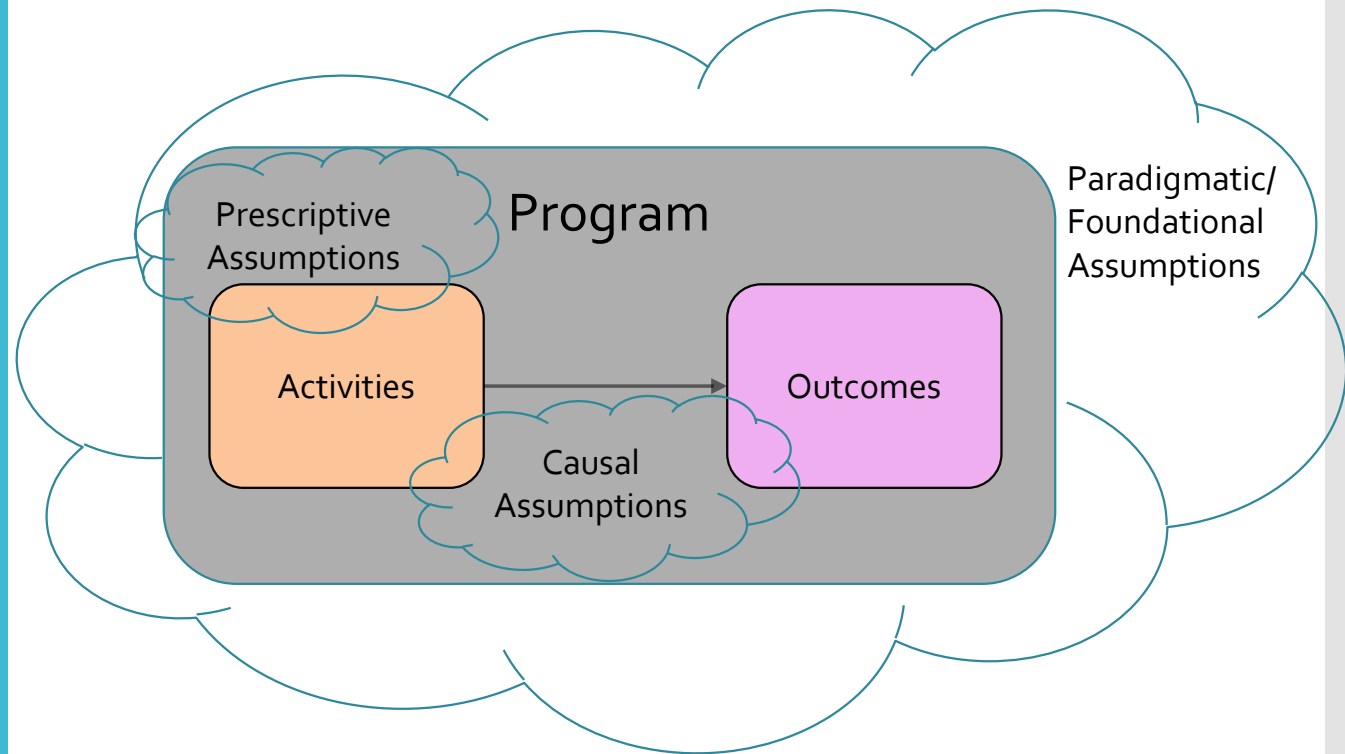


identifying & working with assumptions

Types of Assumptions

- **causal**: about how different parts of the world work and about the conditions under which these can be changed. e.g., *If we do X, then Y will result.*
- **prescriptive**: about what we think ought to or should be happening in a particular situation. e.g., *All projects must have a gender component.*
- **paradigmatic**: deeply held foundational beliefs about the world, like a world view. e.g., *Scientific knowledge is fundamentally better than indigenous knowledge.*

identifying & working with assumptions



identifying & working with assumptions

Assumption Brainstorm (5 minutes)

1. Think about your everyday life (outside of work). What sorts of assumptions do you make?
2. With your break out group, brainstorm a few assumptions in any of the categories below.

	causal	prescriptive	foundational
1) in everyday life			
2) in the media			
3) in your program/org			

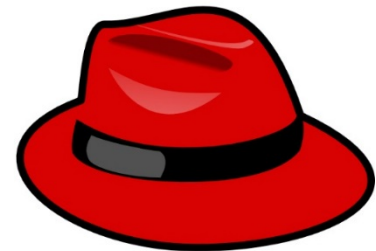
The Mayor has decided that she wants to make addressing homelessness a major focus this year. Working with the city council, they contract with a university researcher who studies homelessness, who is brought in for 2 weeks to study the situation and propose a course of action. The researcher accesses administrative data from the police and health departments about incidence of homelessness, and also visits one government-run shelter that provides hot meals. The researcher then proposes a PR campaign to use posters on bus stations to educate homeless people about services available to them, and also suggests using vouchers to pay for hotel rooms for some homeless people in urgent cases.

Scenario Analysis

1. What assumptions—explicit and implicit—do you think the characters in the story are operating under? List as many as you can.
2. Of the assumptions you've listed, which ones could the characters check by simple inquiry? How could they do this?
3. Give an alternative interpretation of this scenario—a version of what's happening that is consistent with the events described but that you think the character would disagree with or has not noticed.

pursuing
deeper
understanding
through
reflection and
perspective
taking

Thinking Hats Exercise



pursuing
deeper
understanding
through
reflection and
perspective
taking

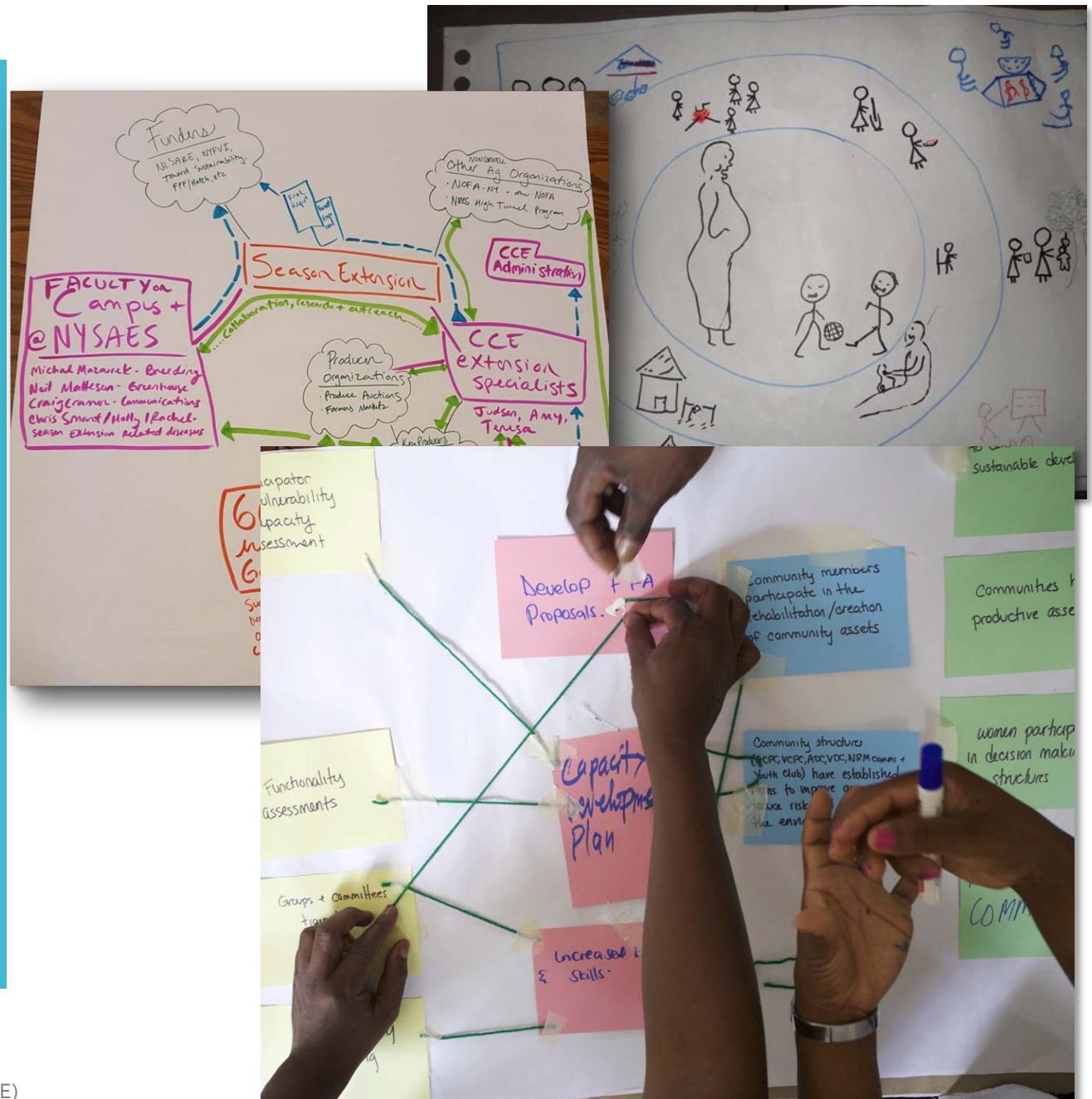
6 Thinking Hats Exercise

- **Optimistic response** (Yellow) – Positive. Logic applied to identifying benefits, seeking harmony.
- **Discernment** (Black) – Negative. Logic applied to identifying reasons to be cautious, critical, and conservative.
- **Emotions** (Red) - Intuitive or instinctive gut reactions or statements of emotional feeling (but not any justification).
- **Creativity** (Green) - Statements of provocation and investigation, seeing where a thought goes.
- **Information** (White) - Considering purely what information is available, what are the facts?
- **Managing** (Blue) - What is the subject? What are we thinking about? What is the goal?

**pursuing
deeper
understanding
through
reflection and
perspective
taking**

- Imagine next week you present a proposal to your organization to instill intentional ET work as a new part of your program's M&E system
- In small groups, assign a different color hat to each group member.
- Discuss the ET proposal, from your 'colored hat' perspective, allowing each group member to have a say from their perspective (i.e. according to their hat color).
- Be prepared to report out on the various ideas that are discussed.
- You have 20 minutes.

modeling & diagramming thinking

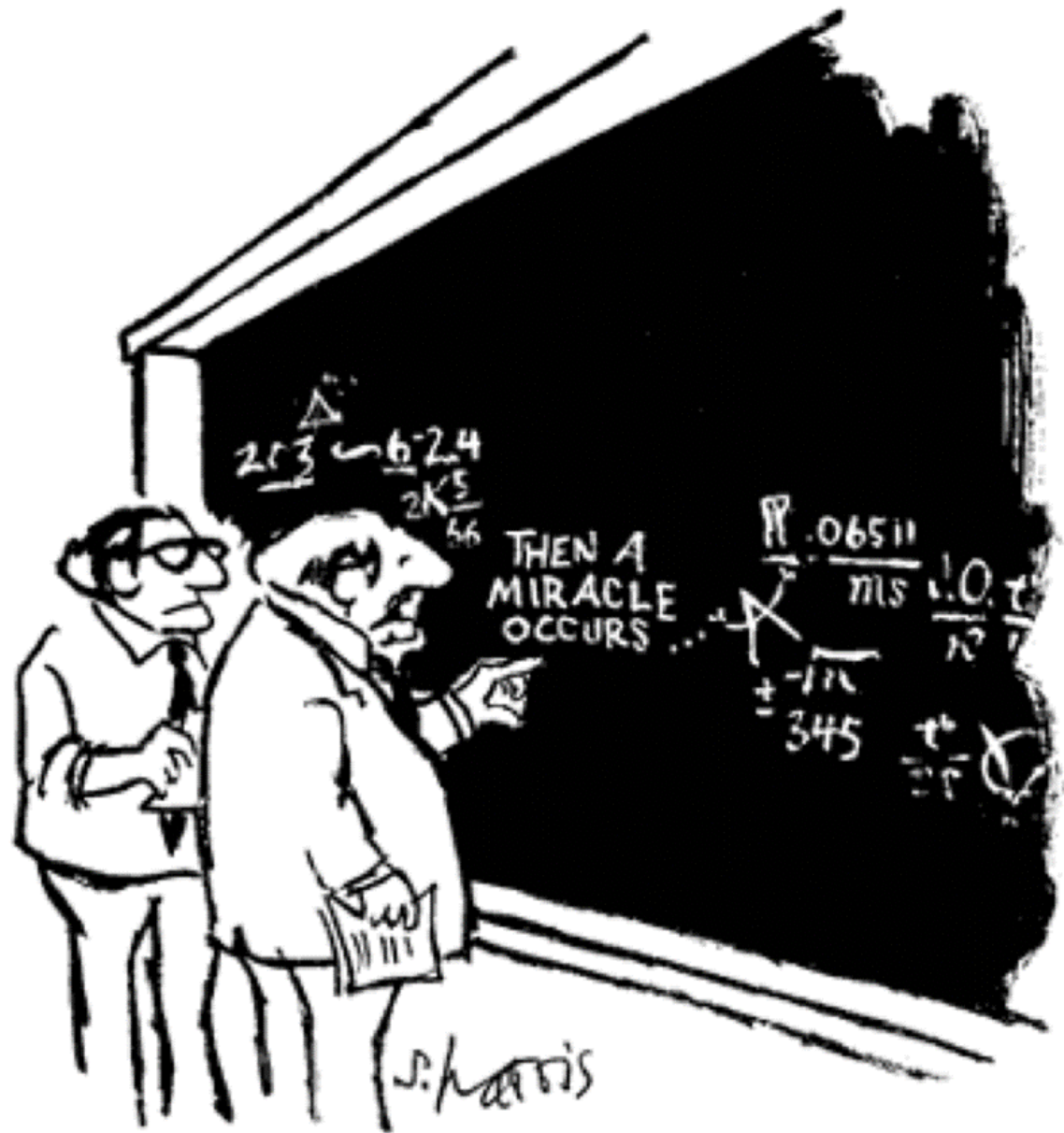


modeling & diagramming thinking

Introduction to Pathway Models



modeling & diagramming thinking



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

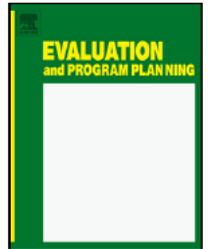


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Assumptions, conjectures, and other miracles: The application of evaluative thinking to theory of change models in community development



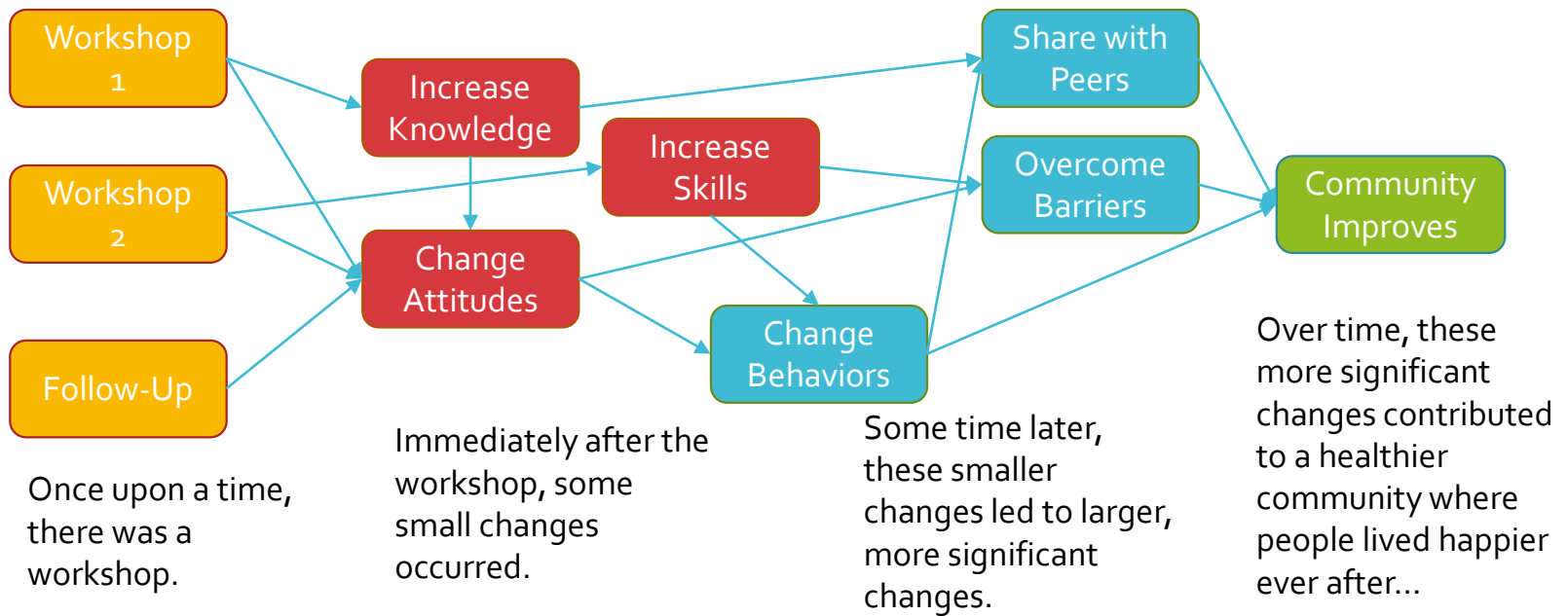
Thomas Archibald^{a,*}, Guy Sharrock^b, Jane Buckley^c, Natalie Cook^a

^a Virginia Tech, Agricultural, Leadership, & Community Education (0343), Litton-Reaves Hall, Rm. 284, 175 West Campus Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24061, United States

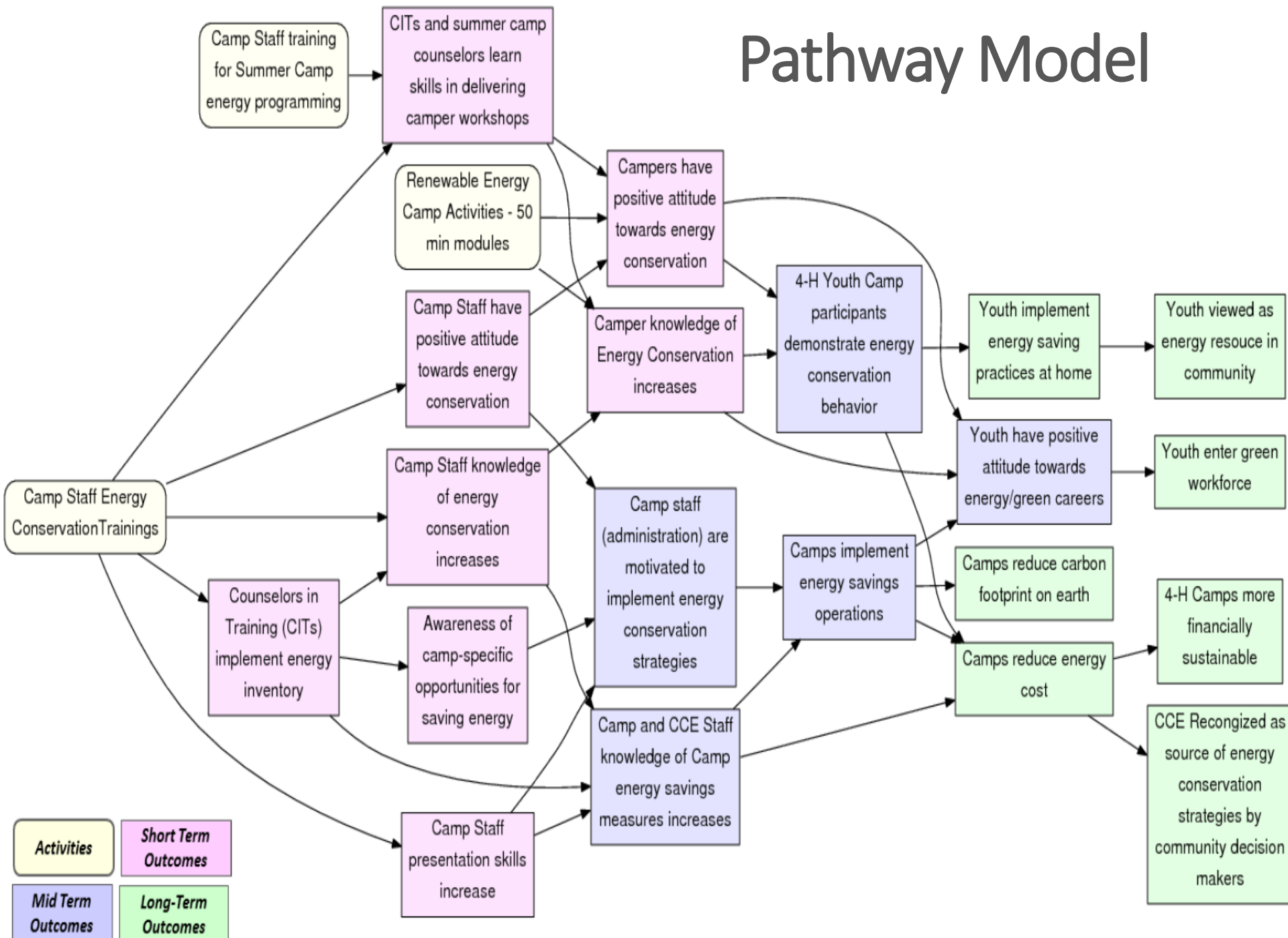
^b Catholic Relief Services, 228W. Lexington Street, Baltimore, MD 21201, United States

^c JCB Consulting, Evaluativethinkingcapacity.com, 68 Chesapeake Landing, West Henrietta, NY 14586, United States

modeling & diagramming thinking



Pathway Model



Pathway Model

1. Review and critique the pathway model on the slide
2. Identify assumptions in and around the pathway model provided


promoting Evaluative Thinking

Building capacity is ultimately about building relationships.





**create an intentional evaluative
thinking learning environment**

- 
1. Display logic models
 2. Create “parking lots” for questions and assumptions
 3. Post inspirational questions:
 - “Is there an alternative explanation?”
 - “How do we know what we think we know?”

establish ET practice-focused
discussions and/or meetings



1. “Mine” your model
2. Use opening questions (Brookfield, 2012)
 - a. What assumptions are we working under?
 - b. How can we check our assumptions for accuracy?
 - c. What alternative perspectives or explanations might we use?
3. Conduct a media critique (Taylor-Powell, 2010)
4. Engage in critical debate (*neutral but relevant topic*)

A stage with red curtains and spotlights. The stage floor is wooden, and there are four spotlights on the floor. The curtains are red with tassels. The text is in yellow.

**use role-play
when thinking
about
evaluation
strategies**


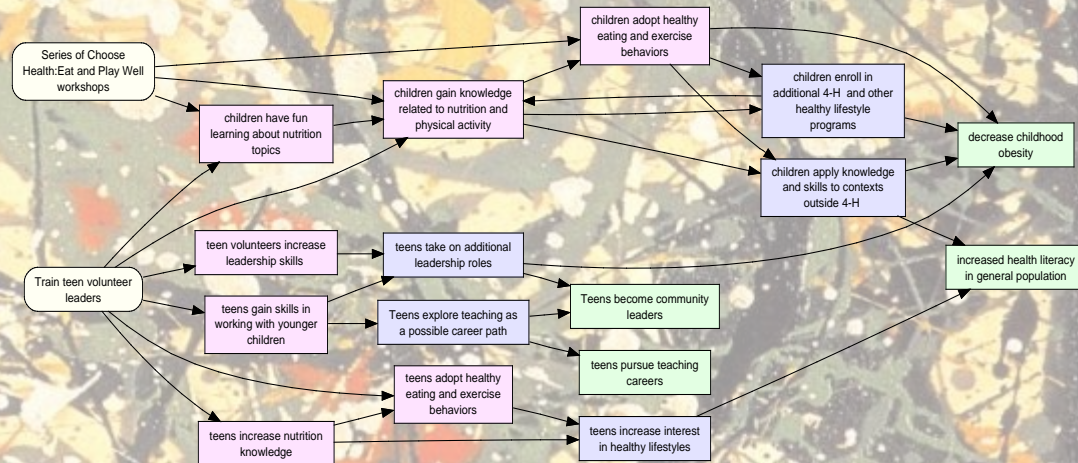
- 
- The background of the slide is a 3D-rendered stage. It features a large, arched opening with heavy red curtains. The curtains are drawn back slightly at the top, revealing a dark stage floor. Four spotlights are visible on the floor, casting a warm glow. The overall atmosphere is that of a formal presentation or performance.
1. **Scenario analysis**
(Brookfield, 2012)
 2. **Thinking hats** (De Bono, 1999)
 3. **Evaluation simulation**



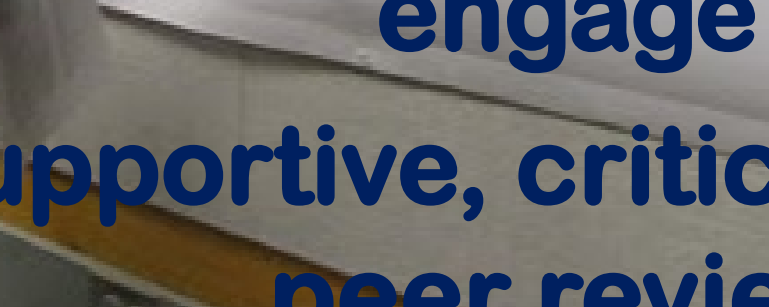
diagram or illustrate thinking when
communicating with colleagues

1. Build logic and pathway models



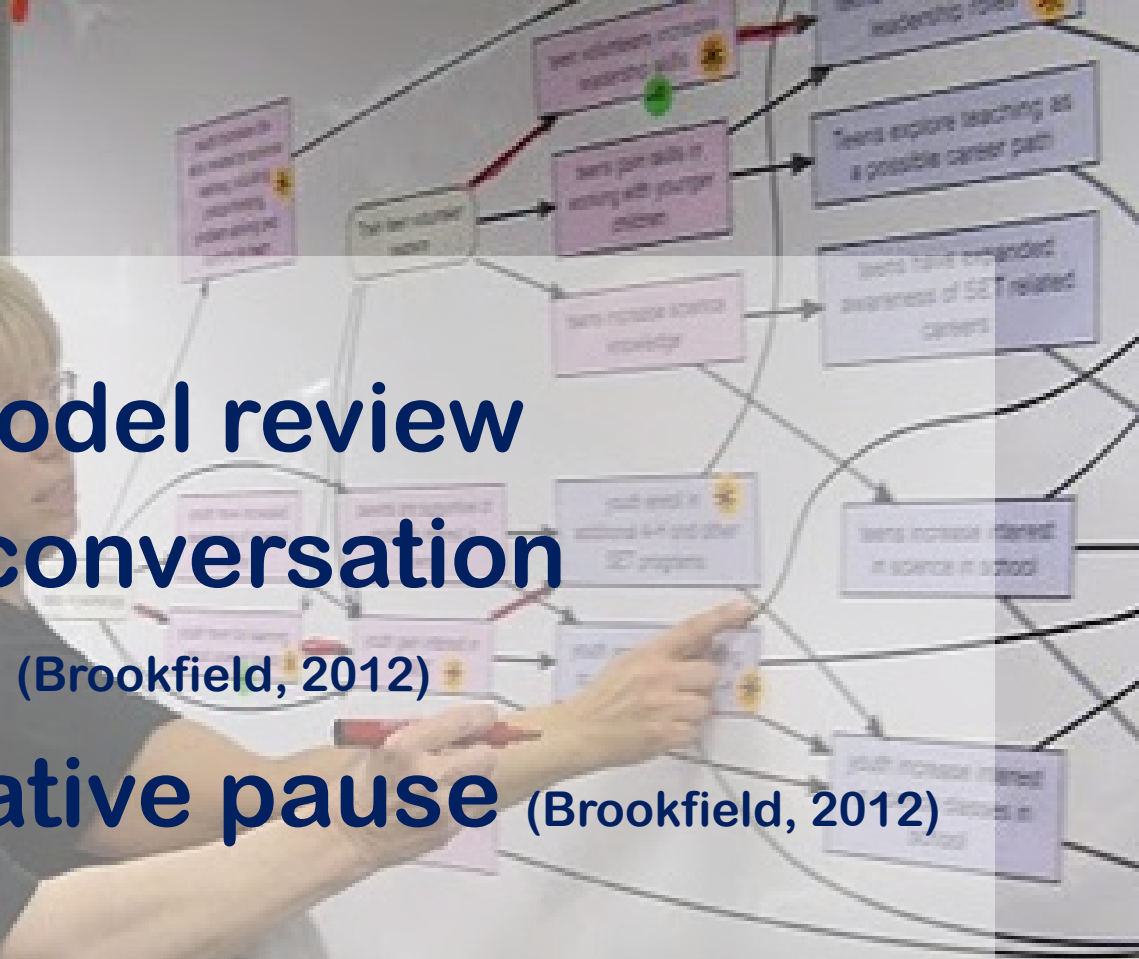
2. Diagram program history

3. Create a system, context or organization diagram



**engage in
supportive, critical
peer review**

1. Logic model review
2. Critical conversation protocol (Brookfield, 2012)
3. Appreciative pause (Brookfield, 2012)



don't leave
evaluation
exclusively
to the
evaluator(s)!

establish time and
space to explore
intrinsically
motivated evaluation
questions both
formally and
informally



Potential practical applications

Enabling Environment

- Governments that are open to questioning and different perspectives
- Donors that are open to questioning and are flexible in their funding
- Trust-based relationships with government, donors, peer organizations, and communities
- Functioning national or regional evaluation networks

Organizational

- Organizational culture supportive of inquiry, reflection, and learning
- Leadership and senior management support for evaluative thinking
- Influential organizational champions for evaluative thinking
- Strategies, policies, and practices that encourage questioning, reflection, and evidence-based decision making
- Staff dedicated to promoting evaluative thinking
- Budget dedicated for evaluative thinking activities
- Job descriptions and performance plans that prioritize and reward evaluative thinking
- Investments in staff's evaluative thinking capacities
- Processes that engage partner organizations and communities in evaluative thinking processes

Individual

- Staff attitude and mindset, including willingness to question assumptions and seek evidence
- Staff knowledge and skills for engaging in evaluative thinking, including skills related to listening, facilitation, and participatory monitoring and evaluation
- Membership or participation in M&E networks or associations

Strategies	Examples of Activities	
1. Create an intentional ET learning environment	a)	Display logic models in the workplace—in meeting rooms, within newsletters, etc.
	b)	Create public spaces to record and display questions and assumptions.
	c)	Post inspirational questions, such as, “How do we know what we think we know?” (Patton, 2005).
	d)	Highlight the learning that comes from successful programs and evaluations and also from “failures” or dead ends.
2. Establish a habit of scheduling meeting time focused on ET	a)	Have participants “mine” their logic model for information about assumptions and how to focus evaluation work (for example, by categorizing outcomes according to stakeholder priorities) (CORE, 2012).
	b)	Use “opening questions” to start an ET discussion, such as, “How can we check our assumptions for accuracy?” (Brookfield, 2012); “What plausible alternative explanations are there for this finding?” (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).
	c)	Engage in critical debate on a neutral topic.
	d)	Conduct a media critique (critically review and identify assumptions in a published article, advertisement, etc.) (Taylor-Powell, 2010).
3. Use role-play when planning evaluation work	a)	Conduct a scenario analysis (have individuals or groups analyze and identify assumptions embedded in a written description of a fictional scenario) (Brookfield, 2012).
	b)	Take on various stakeholder perspectives using the “thinking hats” method in which participants are asked to role play as a particular stakeholder (DeBono, 1999).
	c)	Conduct an evaluation simulation (simulate data collection and analysis for your intended evaluation strategy).
4. Diagram or illustrate thinking with colleagues	a)	Have teams or groups create logic and pathway models (theory of change diagrams or causal loop diagrams) together (CORE, 2012).
	b)	Diagram the program’s history.
	c)	Create a system, context and/or organization diagram.
5. Engage in supportive, critical peer review	a)	Review peer logic models (help identify leaps in logic, assumptions, strengths in their theory of change, etc.).
	b)	Use the Critical Conversation Protocol (a structured approach to critically reviewing a peer’s work through discussion) (Brookfield, 2012).
	c)	Take an appreciative pause (stop to point out the positive contributions, and have individuals thank each other for specific ideas, perspectives or helpful support) (Brookfield, 2012).
6. Engage in evaluation	a)	Ensure that all evaluation work is participatory and that members of the organization at all levels are offered the opportunity to contribute their perspectives.
	b)	Encourage members of the organization to engage in informal, self-guided evaluation work.
	c)	Access tools and resources necessary to support all formal and informal evaluation efforts (including the support of external evaluators, ECB professionals, data analyzers, etc.).



Evaluative Thinking Learning-to-Action Plan Template

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE To help you apply the lessons and skills learned here to your work.

With most professional development workshops, it is often difficult to actually go back to your day-to-day work and actually put something learned or gained from the workshop into practice. The purpose of this plan is for you and your colleagues to come up with a concrete plan to use ET in the next three months and over the upcoming year.

Please fill in the blanks below (*use additional paper as needed*):

What do you ***know*** now that you didn't know yesterday?

What can you ***do*** now that you couldn't do yesterday?

What could you ***teach*** someone to know or do that you couldn't teach them this time yesterday?

Which ***specific activities*** that we practiced today could you use in your work? *Describe how the activity will look in reality (imagine you are looking through a window at yourself doing the activity.)*

THANK
YOU



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