

Systemic evaluation in an uncertain world.

An introduction.

Barbara Schmidt-Abbey

SCiO Ireland,

14 November 2024, 11:00-12:00



The top of the slide features a decorative border with a dark red background. It contains several overlapping geometric patterns: concentric circles, a solid semi-circle, and a semi-circle filled with small dots.

Can we make shifts to more systemic evaluations?

So, what is ‘e-valu(e)ation’... actually?

Evaluation:

Any systematic process to judge merit, worth or significance, by combining evidence and values.

(“[Better Evaluation](#)” (2022))

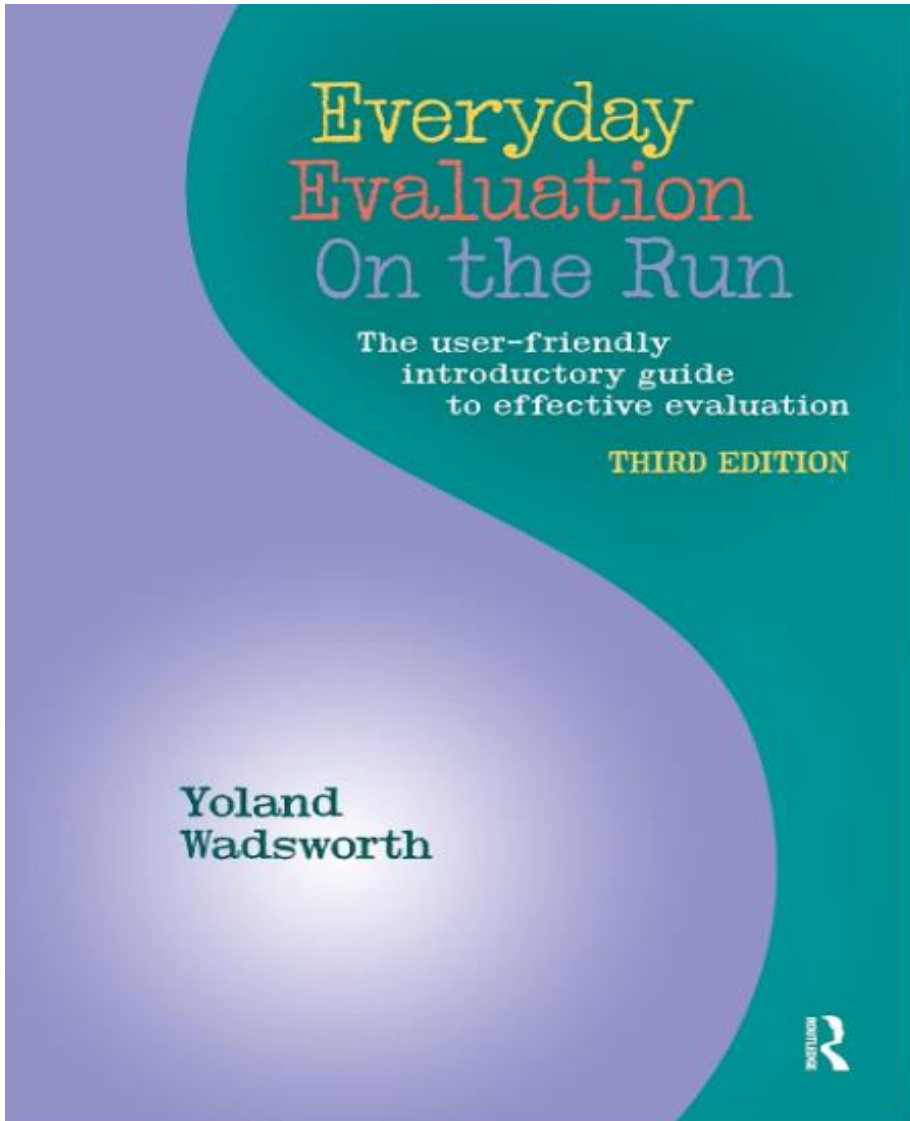
(extension from Scriven (1991): “Evaluation is the systematic process to determine merit, worth, value, or significance.”)

Evaluative thinking:

Evaluative Thinking

*Evaluation is an activity.
Evaluative thinking is a way of doing business
–Michael Quinn Patton*

We evaluate *all* the time!



- When we meet someone new,
- go through today's emails,
- walk into a shop,
- decide on week's activities...
- When we decide what things are important or not important, worthwhile or not...
- Notice discrepancies...
- Difference between 'is' and 'ought'..



Over to you!

Which kind of 'evaluations'
did you already make today?

Breakout groups: in pairs

Discuss for 3 minutes



Why and how do we (have to)
'evaluate'?

Evaluation: a tool in the public policy toolbox



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Evaluation for Policy-making: Are We There Yet?

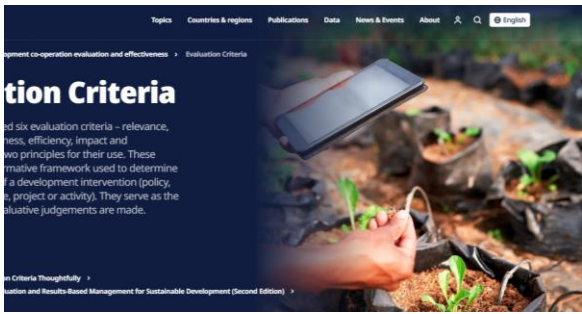
Done well, evaluation can and should be a tool for informing policy as one of the core pillars of the evidence-based policy-making agenda.

By: **Auguste T. Kouamé**

September 12, 2017

 [Comment](#)



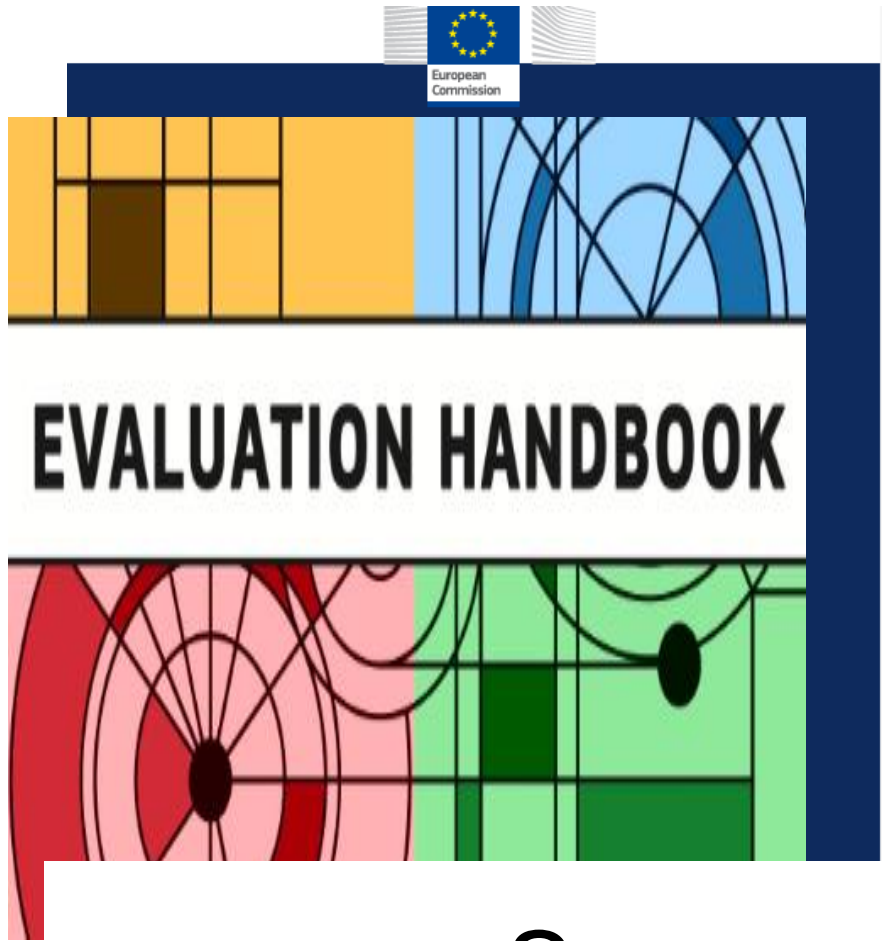


Magenta Book

Central Government guidance on evaluation



Public Spending Code
A Guide to Evaluating,
Planning and Managing
Public Investment



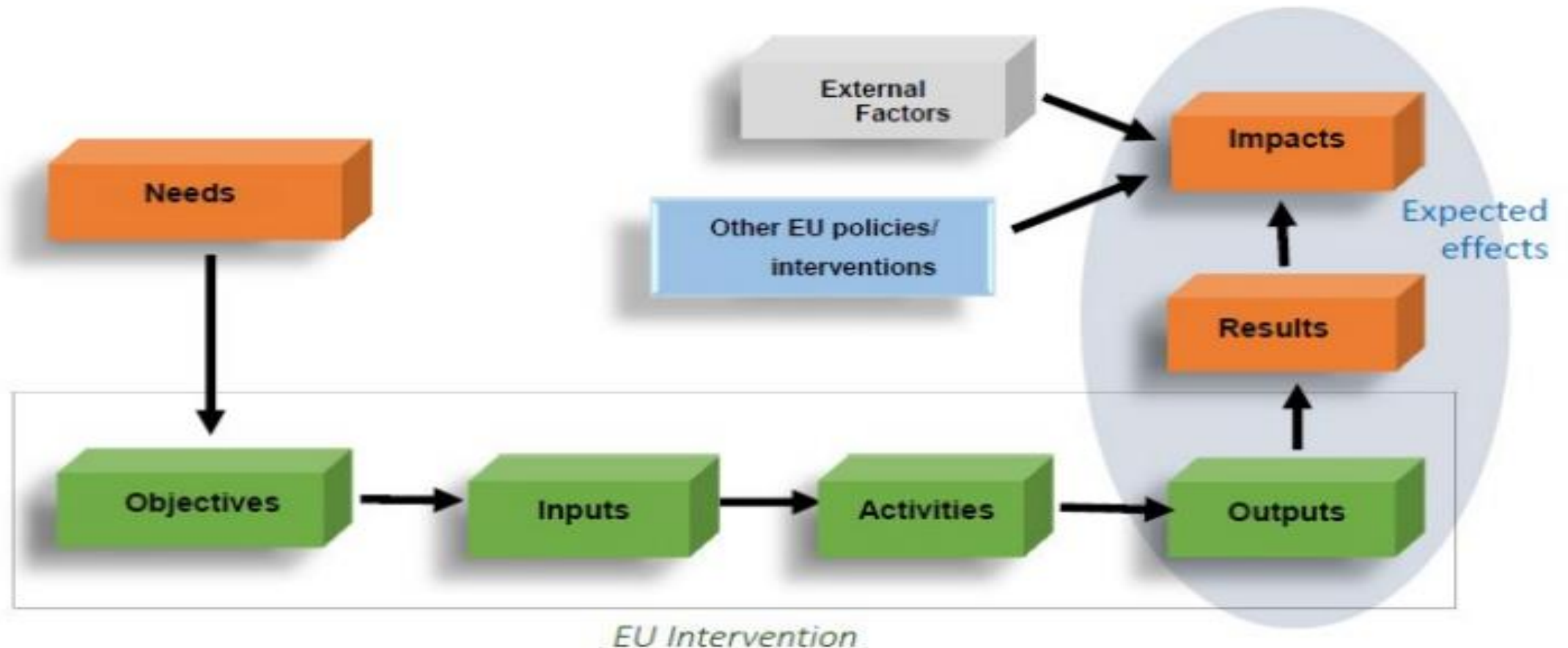
Chapter 6 – How to carry out an evaluation and fitness check

TOOL #45. What is an evaluation and when it is required	378
TOOL #46. Designing the evaluation	388
TOOL #47. Evaluation criteria and questions	404
TOOL #48. Conducting the evaluation.....	416
TOOL #49. Format of the evaluation report.....	422

...Some public evaluation standards and guidelines we encounter

Common features in public evaluation guidelines

Figure 1: Simplified intervention logic



‘Evaluation’ is political ...

THE IRISH TIMES

Opinion

This is the ‘Yes Minister’ approach to a Covid inquiry

An ‘evaluation’ is not an inquiry. But the question of what happened in nursing homes will not go away

✕ Expand



How effectively did we protect the life and health of those in nursing home care during the Covid pandemic? This is a question that will not go away, and for which there must be a credible answer. Image: Paul Scott.

Donncha O’Connell

Wed Nov 08 2023 - 08:07



Never look into anything you don’t have to, and never set up an inquiry unless you know in advance what its findings will be. This Sir Humphrey Appleby nugget of advice to his minister must have been to the fore in Government thinking to belatedly establish an “evaluation” into how we handled Covid.

Press release

Government appoints chair and agrees terms of reference for evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)
Published on 30 October 2024
Last updated on 5 November 2024

The Government has agreed to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of how the country managed COVID-19.

This will provide an opportunity to learn lessons from our experience dealing with a pandemic.

Today, the Government has agreed the [Terms of Reference](#) for an evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and appointed Professor Anne Scott to oversee the process.

The focus of the evaluation will be on the whole-of-government response to the pandemic and how we might do better and be in a stronger position if another pandemic or other similar type event were to occur.

It will include consideration of the health service response covering hospitals, the community and nursing homes, along with the wider economic and social response, including the impact on education and businesses.

The evaluation will be undertaken by a multi-disciplinary panel with relevant expertise and will be chaired by Professor Anne Scott. The intended outputs are future-focused recommendations which will:

- Strengthen decision-making and transparency
- Assist in assessing and balancing the complexity of potential trade-offs along with the need for speed and agility
- Provide a Framework to ensure democratic processes and civil rights are safeguarded in context of whole of society responses to rapidly moving threats of this scale and duration

There will be an opportunity for submissions from individuals, cohorts or their representatives. It is also intended to have a public consultation element to hear the lived experiences of all society.

ENDS

THE IRISH TIMES

Subscriber Only Politics analysis

Ireland’s Covid ‘evaluation’ will avoid UK’s ‘gotcha’ moments - but critics say it looks tokenistic

Government officials believe it is entirely unfair to compare Ireland’s handling of the pandemic to that of the UK

12 Nov



A person waits for a Covid-19 test at a community centre in Dublin.

12 Nov 2020

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Inside Politics

Our politics team will be on hand to answer your questions of the day. Email [the.irishtimes@irishtimes.com](#) or call 01 454 4444

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THE IRISH TIMES

Subscriber Only Opinion

Covid-19 left deep scars in Irish society. Those whose lives were lost or upended deserve better

People need, want and deserve a proper accounting of the successes and failures of the handling of the pandemic

12 Nov



A person wearing a face mask and a face shield, possibly a healthcare worker or a person in a high-risk environment.

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The amount of space allocated to our social memory to historical events is strangely uneven. Pandemics were more than usually susceptible to social forgetting. [anecdotes of us back in the world’s South Sea](#).

It had an almost unimaginable death toll of somewhere between 50 and 100 million people, mostly young people between the ages of 25-35, somewhere between two and five in every 100 people died.

In Ireland, [1918/1919 influenza](#) should hold an eerie space in our reflection, yet the opposite is true. Not a scar almost fully explained by the pandemic being overshadowed by the First World War, or in Ireland also by the consequences of the famine.

The tumultuous few years of the Covid-19 pandemic are already receding from our social memory, becoming blurry and surreal. But those whose loved ones died far from human touch or love, and those who are still traumatised by having through it as frontline workers, have not forgotten.



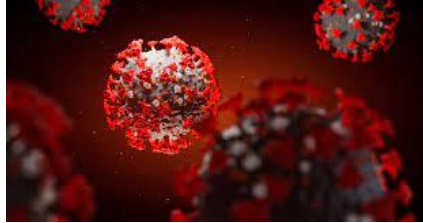
Are traditional evaluation approaches and assumptions (still) 'fit for purpose' in times of uncertainty?

Discussion in breakout groups of 3

- 5 mins

- 10 mins in plenary

Evaluation – fit for VUCA conditions?



A ‘practice turn’ in evaluation?

1) Turning to ‘practice’ – what do we do as evaluators in this ‘new normal’?

2) Taking a second-order practice shift :

- “*What do we do, when we do what we do?*”

owards systemic evaluation in
turbulent times – Second-order
practice shift

2020, Vol. 24(2) 2.
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Abstract

The need for, and possibilities of, a second-order shift in evaluation practice are explored. Second-order evaluation practice enables an evaluator to improve practice as a skilled practitioner, acknowledging her embeddedness within an evaluand. The article explores evaluation practice as experienced by professional evaluators, using ideas from developmental evaluation coupled with systemic evaluation in the tradition of systems thinking in practice. Systemic evaluation aims to capture systemic sensibilities – the bigger picture – of complex turbulent situations of change underpinning evaluands. Attributes of second-order practice with systemic evaluation are understood as being aligned with both systemic and systematic modes of evaluation praxis. Personal experiences are provided where this juxtaposing praxis has been found wanting. By example, a systems thinking in practice framework is explored as heuristic support for making second-order practice shift. The article concludes with a discussion of some implications for developments in professionalising evaluation practice and research.

evaluation, evaluation praxis, evaluation professionalisation, isoph
systemic evaluation, systems thinking in practice

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1356389020909120>

Distinctions between first- and second order traditions

First- order tradition

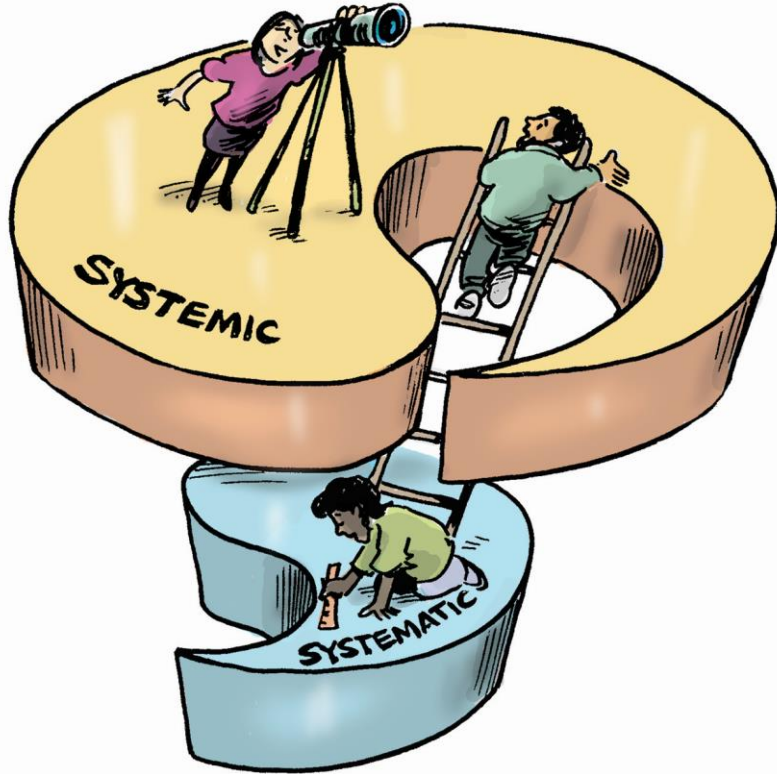
Second-order tradition

- ‘Objects’ of study = fixed entities we can study, evaluate and measure objectively – as ‘external’ evaluators
- Fixed objectives, targets, goals;
- Linear causation (eg logframe, theories of change...)

Observer-inclusion!

- *Experiential and relational understanding of evaluators **engaging in situations they are themselves part of** (not distant observers).*
- Critical reflections: **reflexivity about a reality that includes the evaluator.**

Systematic AND Systemic: a duality



We need both!

- Measure, monitor, evaluate...

AND

- View of the whole and the context.
- Frequently zoom in, and out.

To be continued soon!

Let's stay in conversation!

Contact Barbara: schmidtabbey@gmail.com

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<https://mailchi.mp/2f9255d673f6/scio-ireland>

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SCiO Ireland

The Irish branch of SCiO brings together practitioners from across the island of Ireland to develop our systems practice. Everyone with an interest and commitment to working systemically with organisational and social issues in an uncertain and complex environment is invited to take part and learn alongside our international colleagues. By doing so, we aim to amplify the positive impact that a systems approach can have on Irish society, institutions and organisations including organisational development.

EMAIL JOAN O'DONNELL



Just Added!

Saturday, December 7

The art and practice of finding ground in the midst of turbulence

Resource yourself with a workshop with other systemic change practitioners in Dublin: find ground and shift systems together

Select tickets

One last thing

Final thought: please share in chat...

How can we make shifts to more systemic evaluations?