



# The Evaluator's Methodological Toolkit

## A Helicopter Tour with a Few Landings

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## Tour Itinerary



- What is evaluation?
- What's in a methodological toolkit ...
  - For applied social scientists?
  - For evaluators?
- A closer look at two methodologies:
  - Importance determination
  - Merit determination
- Where to next with development of the evaluator's methodological toolkit?



## What is evaluation, exactly?

- Evaluation is the systematic determination of the quality, value, or importance of something
- e-**VALU**-ation has two components  
Descriptive Facts (what's so) + **Values** = Evaluative Conclusions (so what)
- Values are what get us from "What's so?" to "So what?"  
- and they are the trickiest part of an evaluation!



## What is evaluation for?

- Good evaluation can provide useful information for strategic decision making.

**Innovation**



**Evaluation**



**Decisions**

Try something new ...



- Is it better than what we had before?
- Is it better than the alternatives?
- How might it be improved?
- Is it worth the additional cost?



Improvement/  
streamlining



Choices among  
alternative options



## Evaluation: The basic steps

- Identify stakeholders & their information needs
- Identify key evaluation questions
- Identify all the evaluative criteria
  - What distinguishes a good one of these from a poor one?
- Determine importance of criteria
- Gather information/data
- Determine merit
  - How good is OK/good/excellent?
  - How poor is unacceptable?
- Identify useful comparisons
- Synthesize all of the above  
→ answer the evaluation questions



## The social scientist's approach

- When designing and conducting applied research:
  - How do you **define research questions** (e.g., choose a thesis/dissertation topic)?
  - How do you **identify variables** to include in your study?
  - What **tools or methods** are available for analyzing your data?

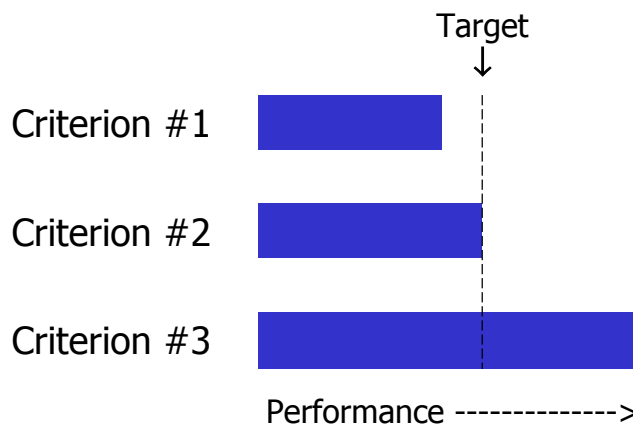


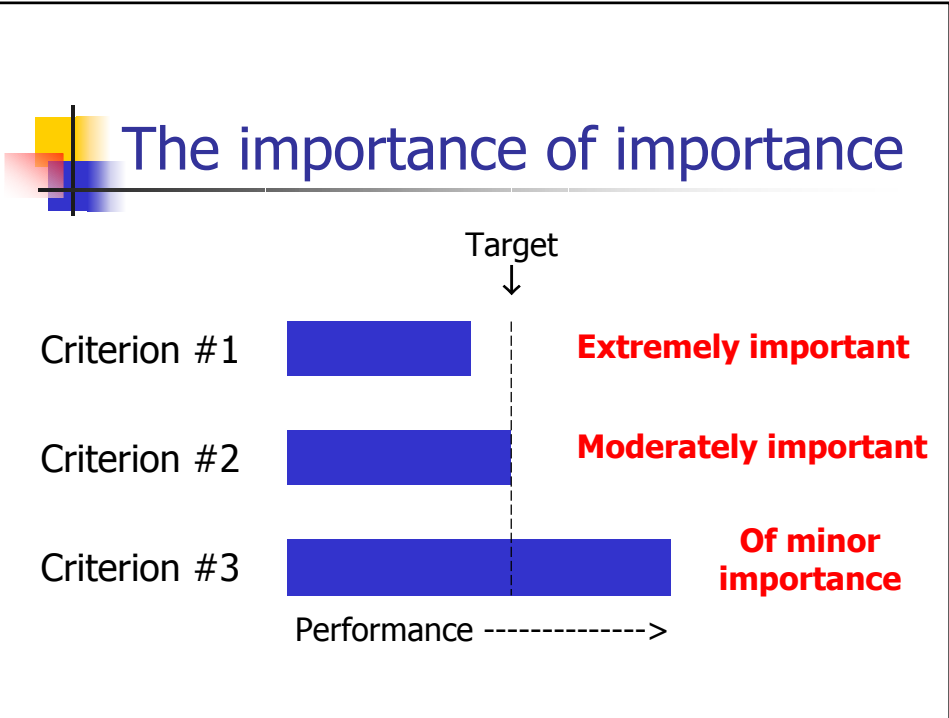
## What else would an evaluator need?

- Think of an intervention [X] from your field ...
- What tools/strategies are available for:
  - Identifying all of the criteria that distinguish a good (effective, valuable, etc) [X] from a poor one?
  - Figuring out which of these criteria are extremely important vs. important vs. marginally important?
  - Defining what level of performance on each criterion constitutes "excellent" vs. "OK" vs. "unacceptable"?
  - Synthesizing mixed results (pros and cons) on 20-30 variables → conclusion about X (your evaluand)?



## A hypothetical example





## Importance Determination

- Use expert judgment
- Have stakeholders “vote”
  - Whose views should you poll?
  - How should you ask them? \*
- Investigate for yourself:
  - Probing interviews of key informants → judgment \*
  - Evidence from the literature
  - Causal linkages \*

The illustration shows a man in a brown hat and coat, looking through a magnifying glass at a small, simple house with a chimney. This likely represents the process of investigating or examining a specific area of interest.



## Having stakeholders “vote”

- Survey
  - Rate importance; average responses
  - Paired comparisons → ranked importance
- Group process
  - Rate importance, pool ratings, discuss differences, negotiate agreement
- Key issues:
  - When would opinion NOT be the right way to determine importance?
  - Who should you ask/NOT ask for input?



## Probing interviews + judgment

**Focus:** Which outcome criteria are the most important here?

**Probe:** Actual or probable impact:

- How beneficial would it be overall if performance on this criterion were really excellent?
- How detrimental would it be overall if performance on this criterion were really poor?
- How do you know? Based on what evidence/experience?



## Ex: The "Organizational IQ Test"

### CULTURE

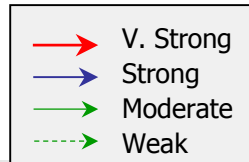
High-Performance Culture  
 Challenging Assumptions  
 Shared Vision & Intuition  
 Team Learning & Communication  
 Systems & Nonlinear Thinking  
 External & Future Scanning  
 Innovation & Experimentation  
 Systematic Evaluation

### OUTCOMES

- Feeling able to add max. value  
*extremely important*
- ◆ Retention of top talent  
*v. important*

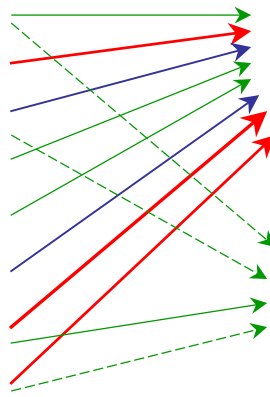


## Add strengths of links



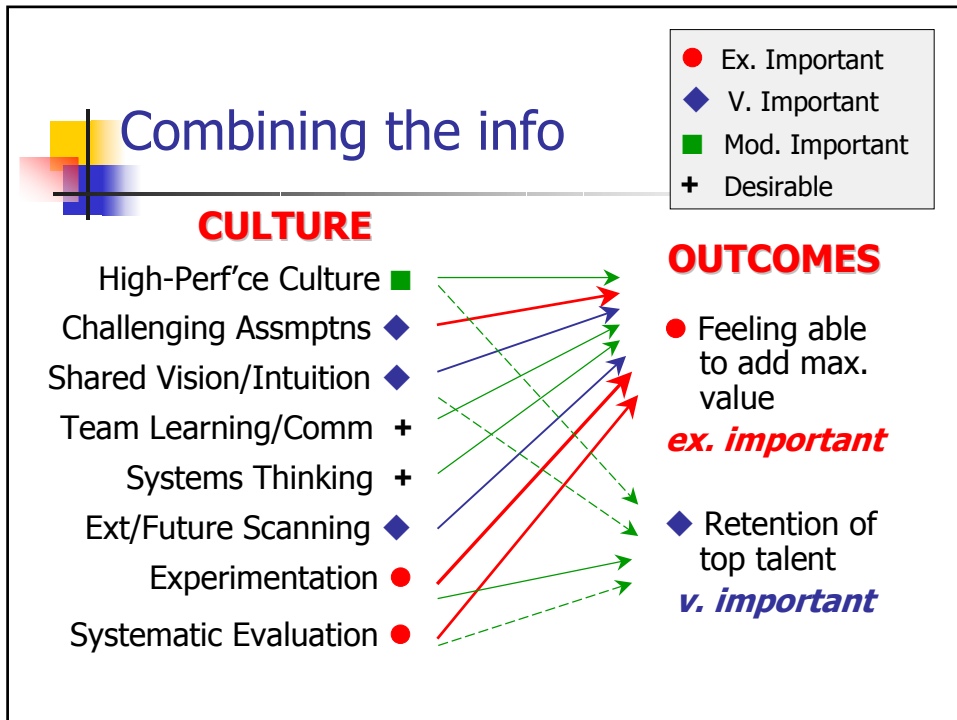
### CULTURE

High-Perf'ce Culture  
 Challenging Assmpt'ns  
 Shared Vision/Intuition  
 Team Learning/Comm'n  
 Systems Thinking  
 Ext/Future Scanning  
 Innov'n & Experiment'n  
 Systematic Evaluation



### OUTCOMES

- Feeling able to add max. value  
*ex. important*
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*v. important*



- ## Merit Determination Options
- Evaluate relative to **goals** (weak option)
  - Have stakeholders **"vote"** on standards
  - Evaluate individual indicators relative to some standards (e.g., fixed **quality standards**)
  - **Benchmark** against other efforts, alternatives, or competitors
  - **Interview/probe** real impact on recipients needs: How substantial is this impact in people's lives?
  - Use **rubrics** that combine several of the above



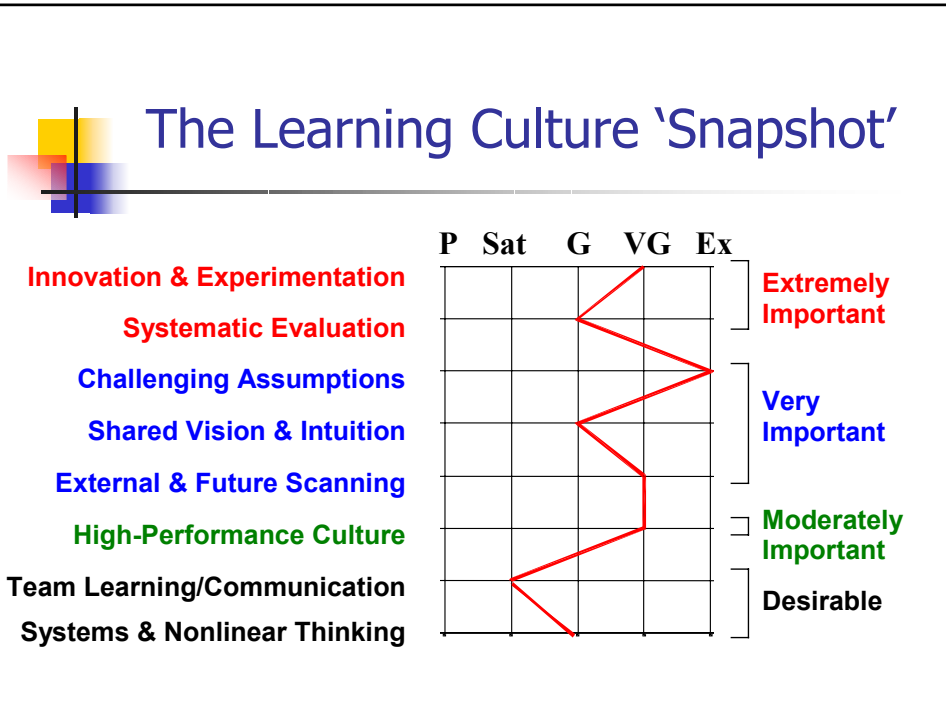
## A basic rubric for determining merit

<b>Excellent</b>	Clear example of best practice in this domain; no weaknesses.
<b>Very Good</b>	Very good or excellent performance on virtually all aspects; no real weaknesses.
<b>Good</b>	Reasonably good performance overall; may have a few slight weaknesses.
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Fair performance - some serious (but non-fatal) weaknesses on a few aspects.
<b>Poor</b>	Clear evidence of impaired functioning on this dimension; very serious weaknesses.



## Ex: High-Performance Culture – V.G.

- Striving for excellence – **excellent**
  - Strong consensus of high-performance culture
  - Median score 4.5/5.0
- Seeking out criticism – **very good**
  - Owner/manager excellent role model for this, though not all employees aware how open he is to criticism
  - Median scale score 3.7/5.0
- Understanding the 'performance gap' – **very good**
  - Ambiguity in innovative work prevents consensus on this
  - Median scale score 4.0/5.0



- ## The Methodological Toolkit
- Identification of all relevant criteria
    - Multilevel needs assessment
    - Search for other relevant values
  - Determining importance of criteria
  - Determining merit of performance on criteria
  - Synthesis methodology
    - Pulling together the pros and cons to draw overall conclusions



## Where to next?

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- Not reinventing the wheel:
  - What other disciplines are grappling with the same problems?
  - What have they developed?
- Exporting proto-methodologies
  - How can evaluation-specific methodologies be applied in a variety of fields/settings?
  - What can we learn from critiques of how well it works (validity, simplicity, relevance, utility)?
- Interdisciplinary brainstorming!