CECAN Webinar:

Redefining Evaluation to Support System Change: Theoretical and Practical Insights

Thursday 9th December 2021, 13:00 – 14:00 GMT

Presenter: Emily F. Gates (facilitated by Pete Barbrook-Johnson)

Welcome to our **CECAN Webinar.**

All participants are muted. Only the Presenters & CECAN Host can speak. The webinar will start at **13:00 GMT.**

Emily will speak for around 45 minutes and will answer questions at the end.

Please submit your questions at any point during the webinar via the Q&A box in the Zoom webinar control panel.
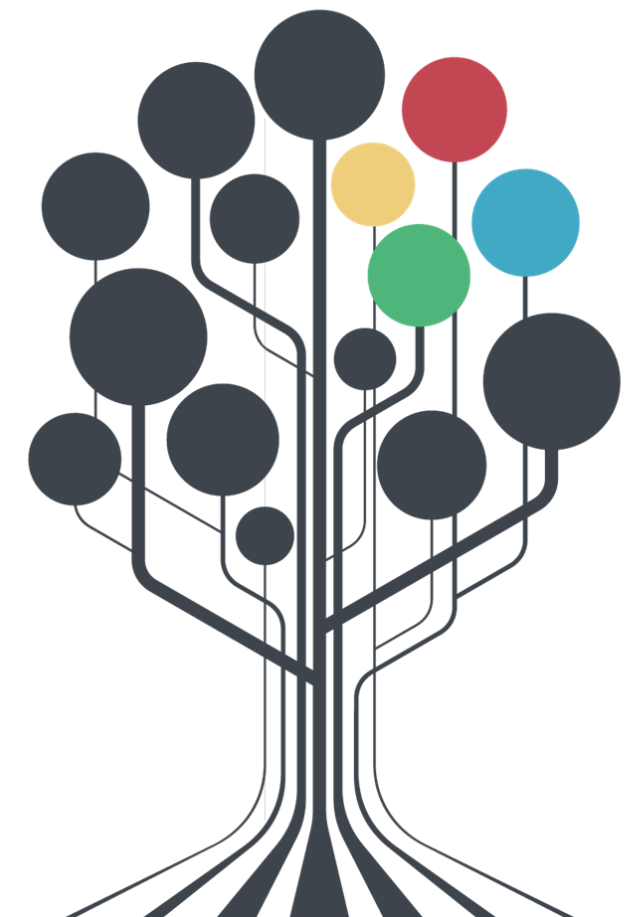
Today's webinar will be recorded and made available on the CECAN website.

E Mail: cecan@surrey.ac.uk   Web: www.cecan.ac.uk

www.facebook.com/CECANEXUS   Twitter: @cecanexus

Redefining Evaluation to Support System Change

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

Emily Gates, PhD

Assistant Professor

Measurement, Evaluation, Statistics, & Assessment Department

Lynch School of Education & Human Development
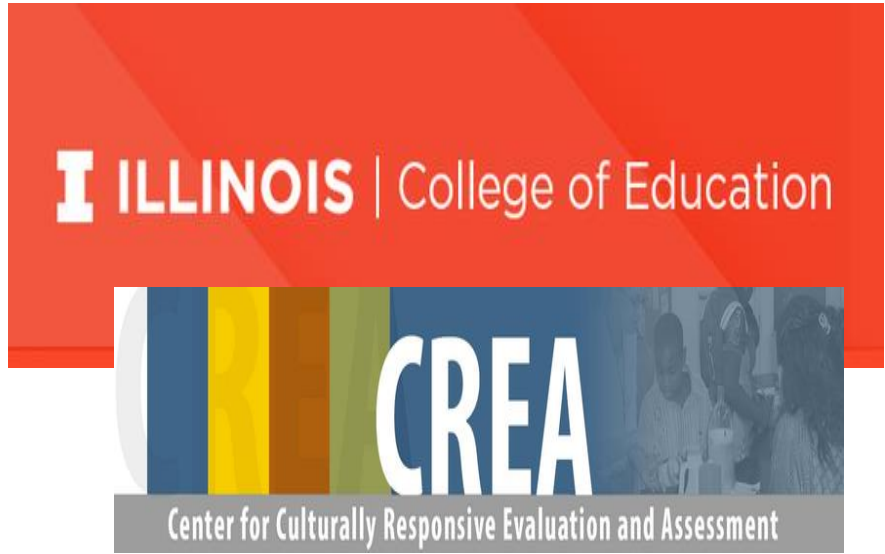
Boston College, Boston, USA

Outline

Background

Key Questions

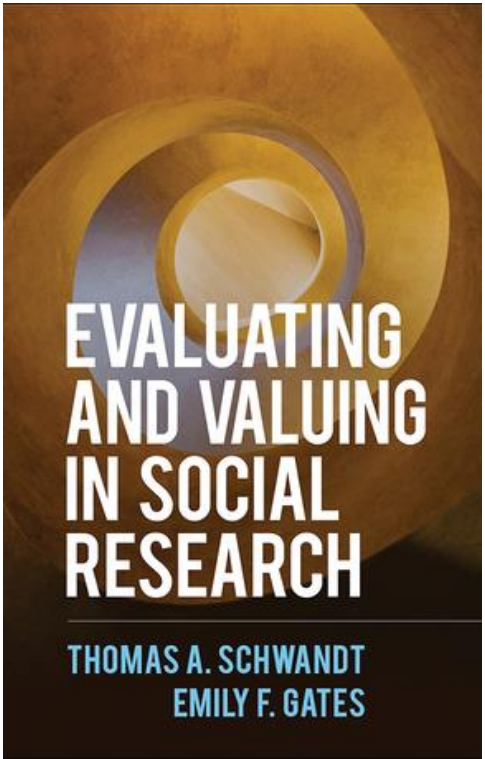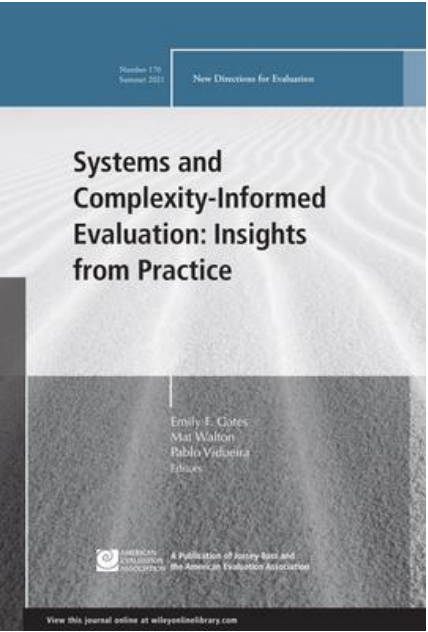Theoretical & Practical Insights

Implications

Q&A

ILLINOIS | College of Education

CREA
Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment

(Gates, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Mastering systems thinking in practice
The Open University

CDC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE
CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Engage Stakeholders

Describe the Program

Ensure Use and Share Lessons

Standards
Utility
Feasibility
Propriety
Accuracy

Focus Evaluation Design

Justify Conclusions

Gather Credible Evidence

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education and Human Development

EVALUATING AND VALUING IN SOCIAL RESEARCH
THOMAS A. SCHWANDT
EMILY F. GATES

(Schwandt & Gates, 2021)

Systems and Complexity-Informed Evaluation: Insights from Practice

(Gates, Walton, & Vidueira, 2021)

"The world has changed significantly in the past decade...There is a need for a **bolder evaluation agenda**, recognizing the evaluators' role in contributing to change..."

BARNETT & EAGER, 2017, P. 294

American Journal of Evaluation
Section on International Developments in Evaluation: Transforming Evaluation for Times of Global Transformation

Speech

Post-normal evaluation?

Thomas A. Schwandt
University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign, USA

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review
Informing and inspiring leaders of social change

SOCIAL ISSUES   SECTORS   SOLUTIONS | MAGAZINE
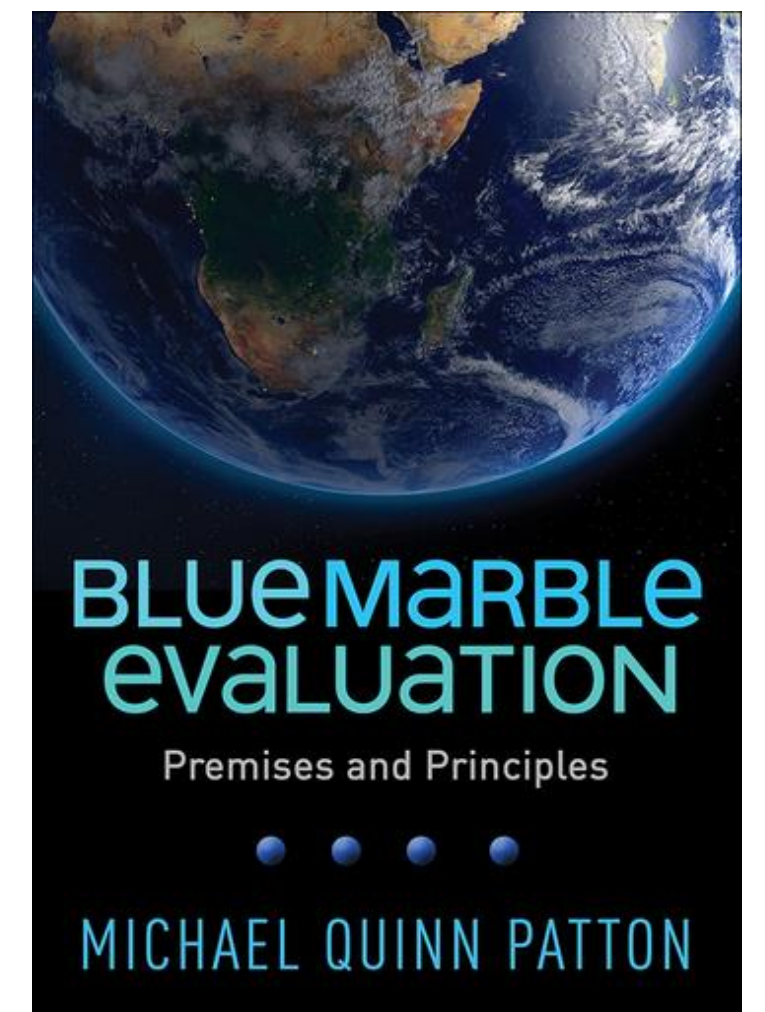
Foundations

Fostering Systems Change

Five simple rules for foundations seeking to create lasting social change.

CITE   SHARE   COMMENT   PRINT   ORDER REPRINTS

By Srik Gopal & John Kania | Nov. 20, 2015

The Future of Philanthropy:
Transformational Impact
Wednesday, April 14, 2021
A Skoll World Forum 2021 Event

ROCKEFELLER   CHANDLER   FORD FOUNDATION   jasmine   skoll

EQUITABLE EVALUATION INITIATIVE

EvalIndigenous

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

BLUE MARBLE evaluation
Premises and Principles
MICHAEL QUINN PATTON

What **role should evaluation play** in systems change and transformation?

How must we **rethink evaluation itself** to adapt to this role?

Systems Change

"At its core it involves tackling the **root causes** of a social problem…" (Mehta & Zakaras, 2020)

"**Fundamental change** in policies, processes, relationships, and power structures, as well as deeply held values and norms" (Gopal & Kania, 2015)

"Improves performance within existing rules" versus "creates previously **unimagined possibilities** and new ways of thinking through visioning, experimentation, and invention" (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2019)

Expert Judge
Determining
Value
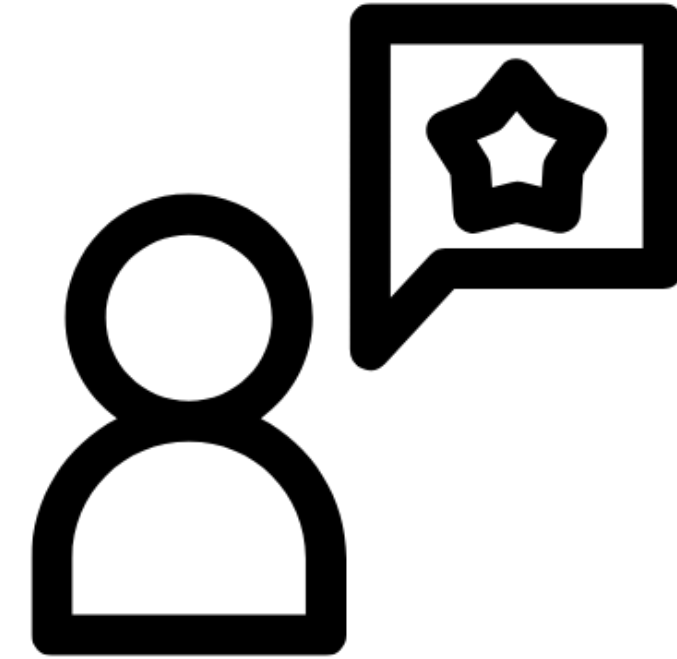
Co-Learner
Developing
Value

Theoretical Insights

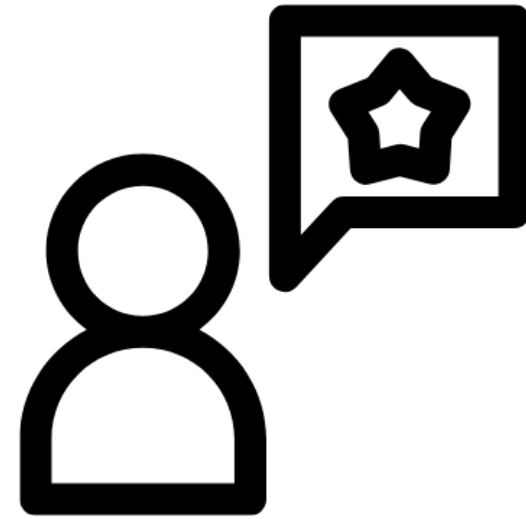"A frame… deals with the perspective by which we see reality and act on it…"

(Rein, 1983, P. 96)

"There is a less visible foundation—an 'assumptional basis'--that lies beneath the more visible surface of language or behavior, determining its boundaries and giving it coherence"

(Rein & Schön, 1996, p. 88)

Conventional Frame

Evaluating as Applied Social Science Research to Determine Effectiveness of an Intervention

| Problem/Needs Analysis | Design and Planning | Program/Project Implementation | Monitoring | Evaluation |

Expert Judge
Determining Effectiveness

Commissioners as primary stakeholders

Interventions as solutions to solvable problems

Questions address performance against goals/objectives

Technical and expert-driven role for evaluators

Apply the right research methodology well

Evaluative judgments as determinations based on results
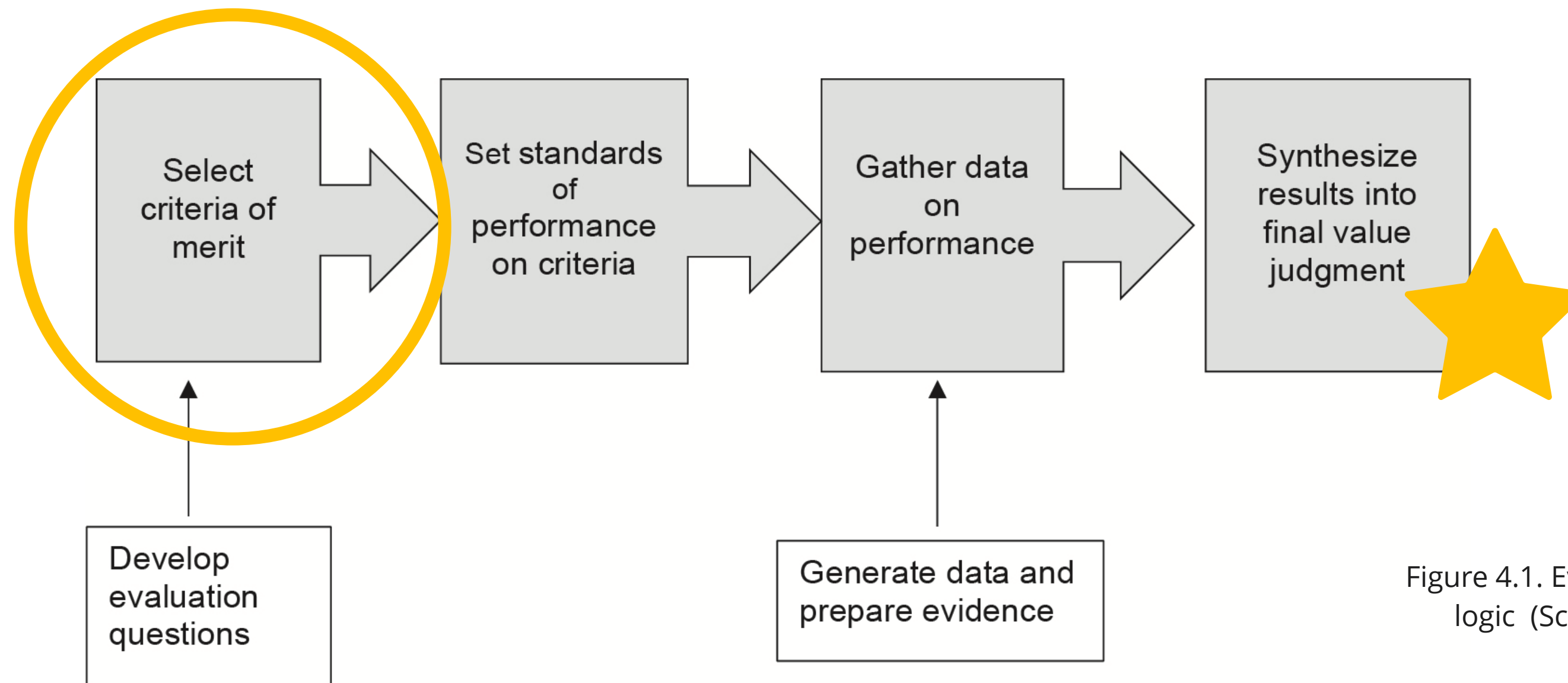
Figure 4.1. Evaluating using the four-step logic (Schwandt & Gates, 2021, p. 92)
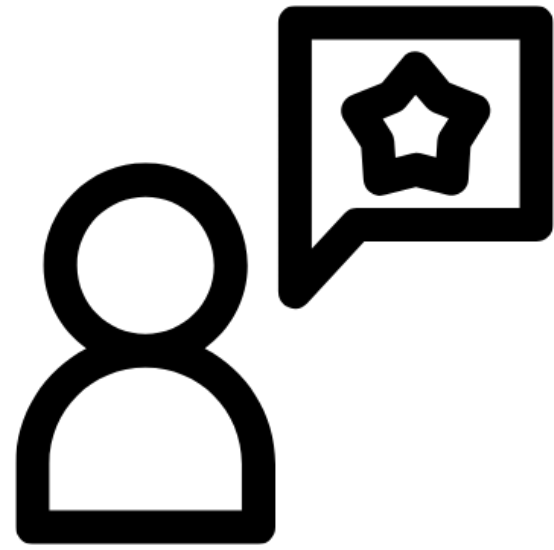
Expert Judge

Determining Value

- Stakeholders include those involved and affected

- Address broader questions and evaluative criteria

- Use of performance standards (benchmarks, indicators)

- Technical *and* facilitative role for evaluators

- Evaluative judgment as multi-faceted, single determination

Emerging Alternative Frame

Evaluating as
Situated
Practical
Reasoning
About Value
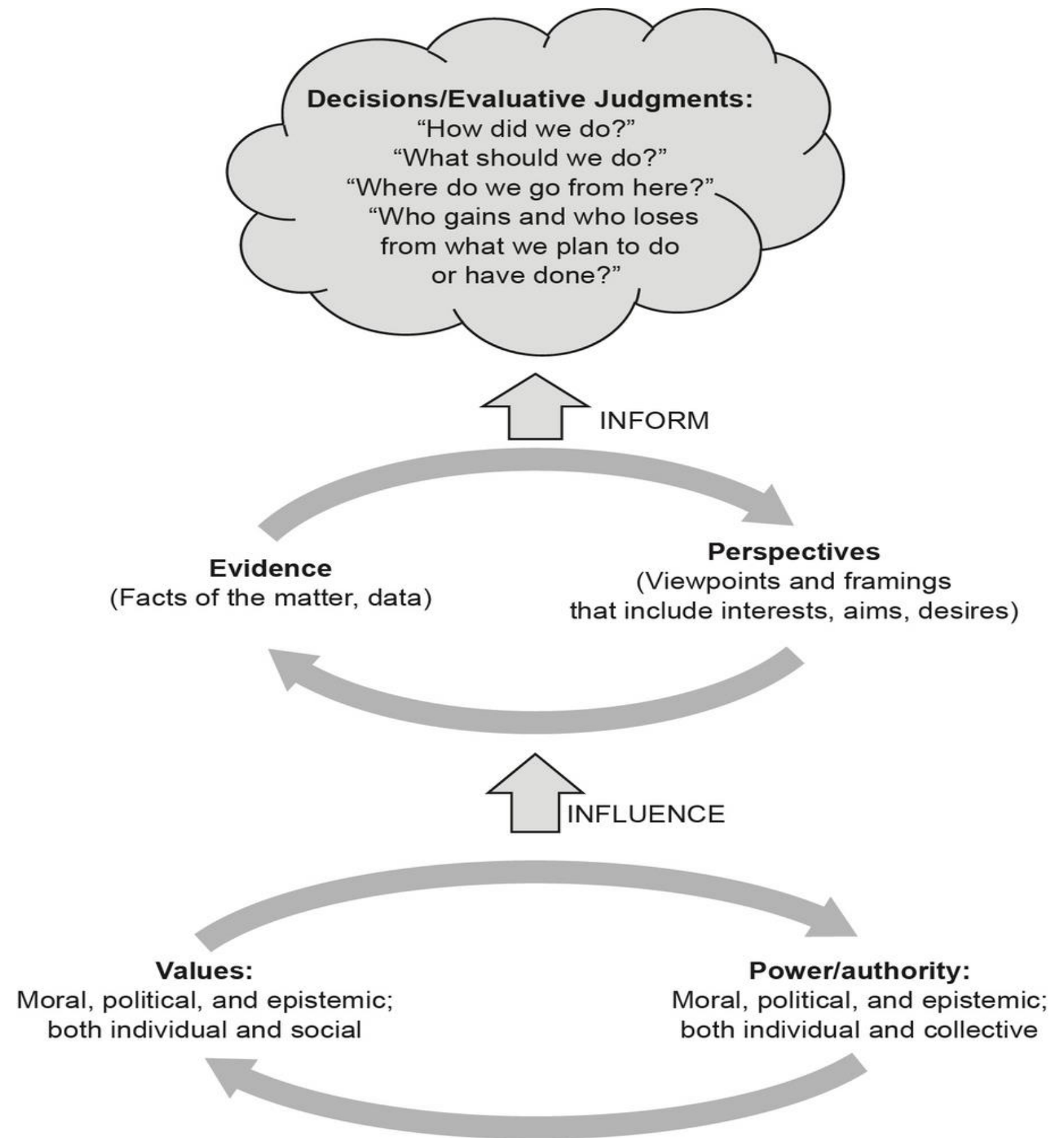
Figure 5.3. Evaluating as situated practical reasoning (Schwandt & Gates, 2021, p. 136)

Co-learner
Developing Value

Focus on problematic situations and systems change – ongoing, not solvable

Differing stakeholder perspectives and values

Evidence amidst uncertainty and change

Inform co-learning about what we are doing and inform what we should do next

Evaluative judgments as unstable, time-bound, and variable across levels of situation or system

Focus on learning more than judgment

Practical Insights [18]

How does Rippel/ReThink Health

- **Envision** system change?
- **Support** system change at different scales?
- **Evaluate and learn** from its efforts?

Open Access Link

(1) REFRAME PROBLEMS	(2) CULTIVATE STEWARDSHIP	(3) USE ADAPTED AND NEW METHODS
(4) FUEL LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY	(5) ITERATE A DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OF SYSTEM CHANGE	(6) ASSESS CHANGES TO SYSTEM CONDITIONS

(7) CONTINUOUSLY DEVELOP VALUE

FROM

HEALTHCARE TO HEALTH AND
WELLBEING

SEPARATE AND FRAGMENTED
TO INTERCONNECTED

MARGINAL OUTCOMES TO

SYSTEM REDESIGN
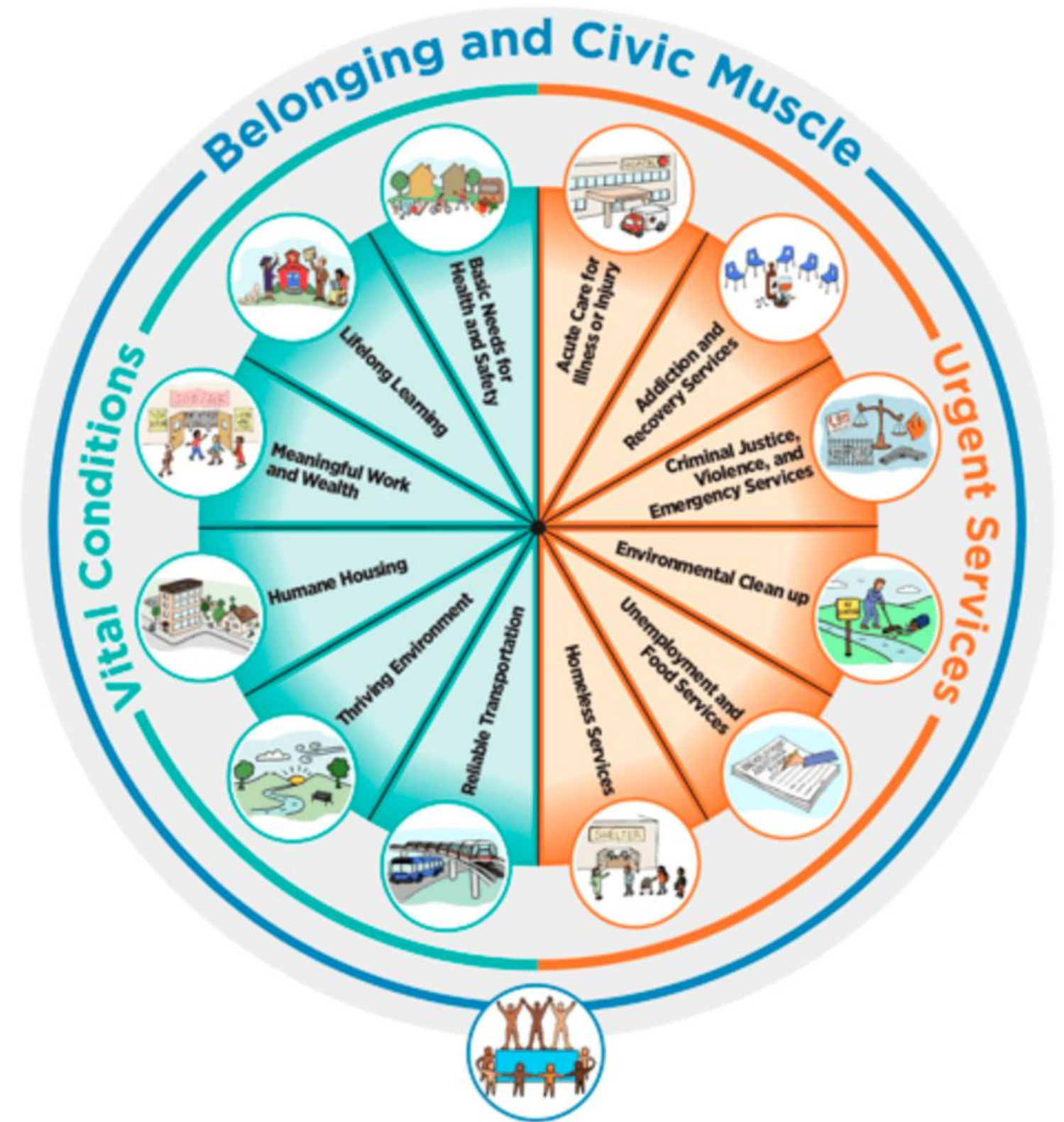
(1) Reframe Problems

"Focusing on improvements of outcomes within a current system may provide clear results in the short term. But, 'the **trouble** is that those may not be the results that you're most proud of because of the constraints you're accepting as unchangeable, and the time horizon for how long those impacts last…Those impacts tend to **plateau or erode** over time, precisely because they get washed away by other forces in the prevailing system that you hadn't dealt with' (Staff interview)"
(Gates & Fils-Aime, 2021, p. 128)

Seeing the system(s) of interest ➡ Visualizing how to change these systems ➡ Stewarding change – working together to influence changes

(2) Cultivate Stewardship

(3) Use Adapted and New Methods

Link to video: https://rethinkhealth.org/our-work/dynamics-model/

Intended Users

Project-level, place-based stewards

Internal staff

Board

Broader field

Action Learning Questions

What does it take...

To be a steward in today's world?

For stewards to reallocate resources to improve their regional health ecosystem?

(4) Fuel Learning and Accountability
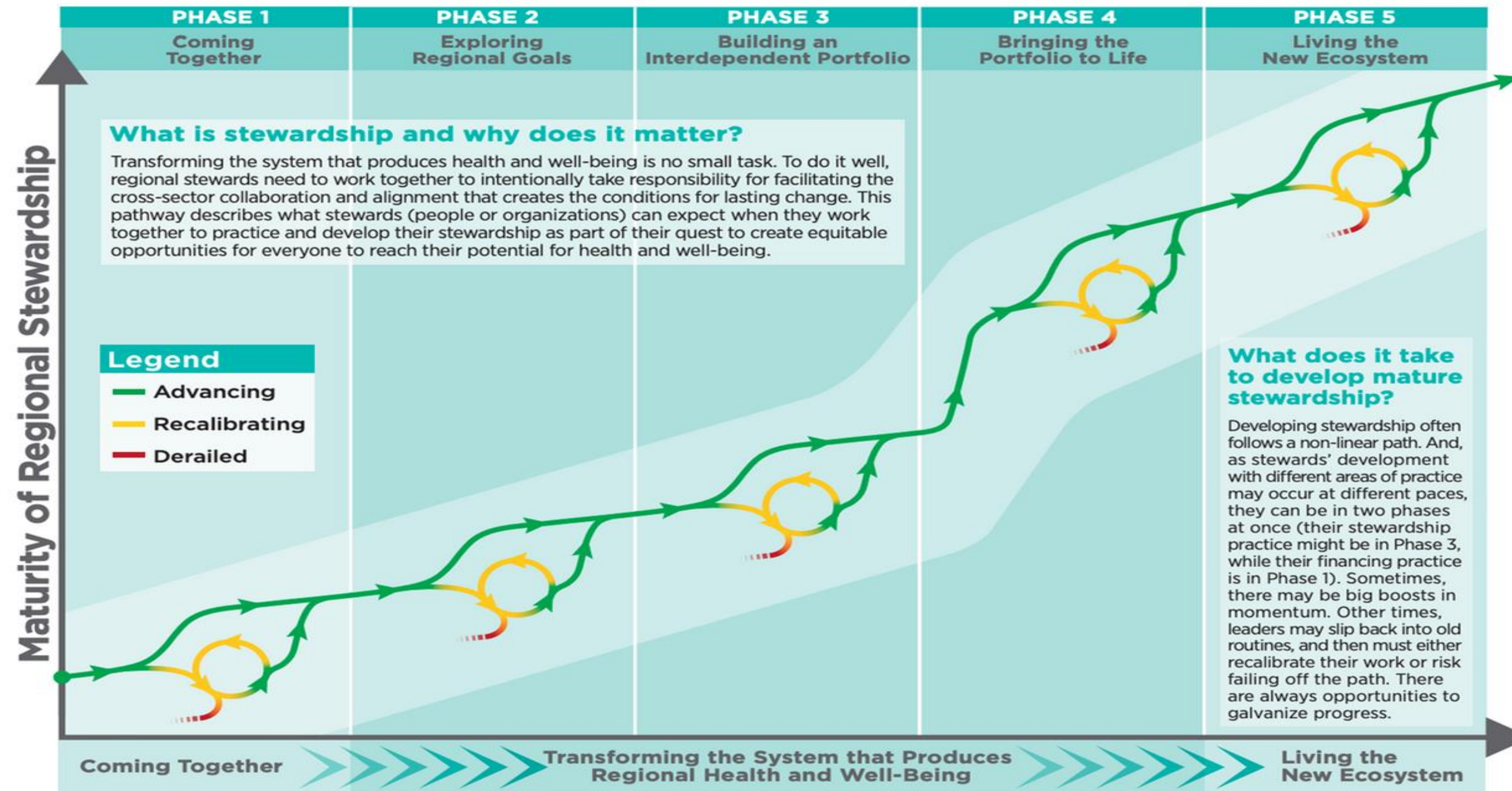
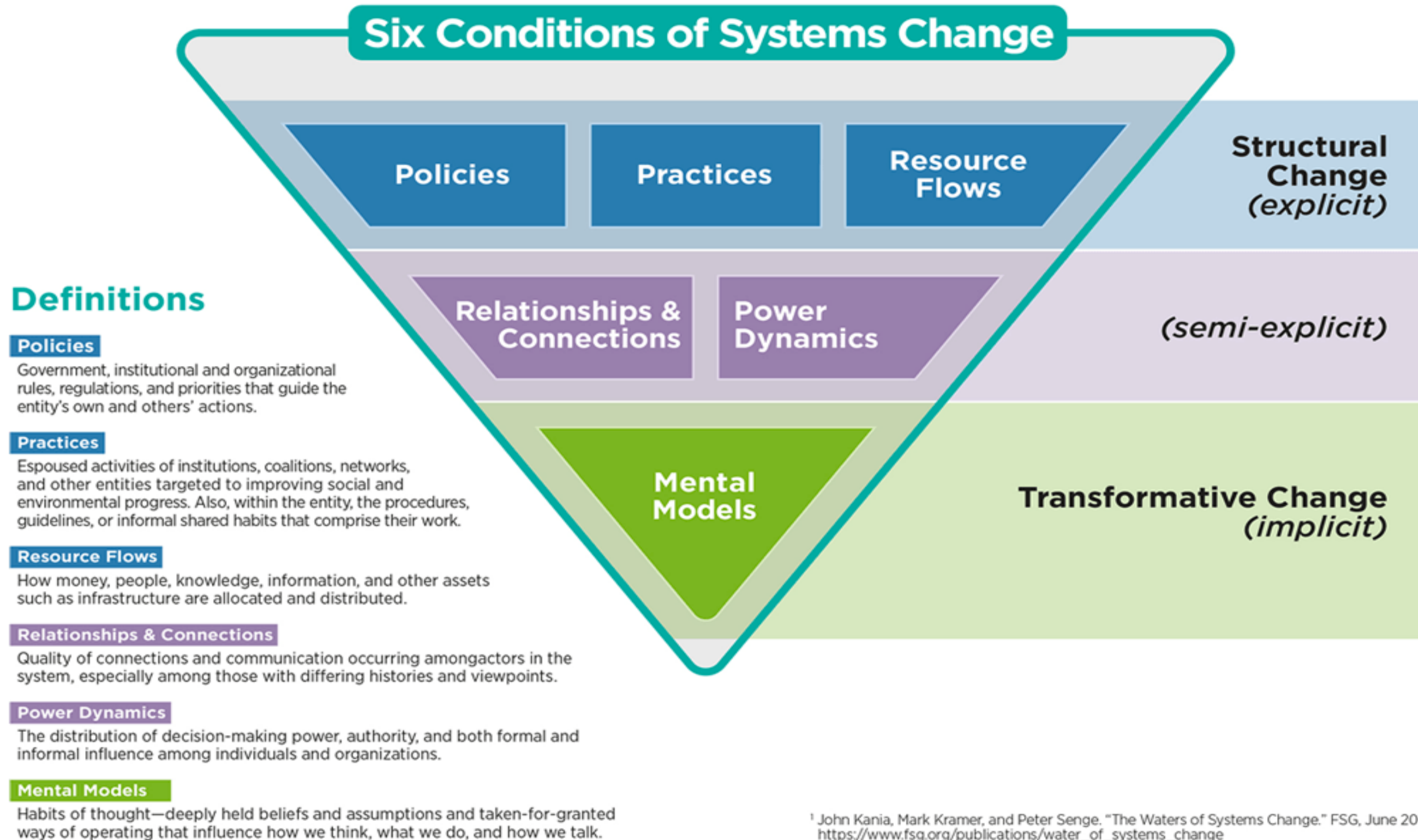"Yesterday's learning is input into tomorrow's hypothesizing" (Staff interview)

(Gates & Fils-Aime, 2021, p. 130)

A Pathway for Transforming Health and Well-Being Through Regional Stewardship

(5) Iteratively Develop a Theory of System Change

Six Conditions of Systems Change

| Policies | Practices | Resource Flows |

Structural Change *(explicit)*

| Relationships & Connections | Power Dynamics |

(semi-explicit)

Mental Models

Transformative Change *(implicit)*

Definitions

Policies
Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.

Practices
Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Resource Flows
How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

Relationships & Connections
Quality of connections and communication occurring amongactors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics
The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

Mental Models
Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

¹ John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge. "The Waters of Systems Change." FSG, June 2018. https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

(6) Assess Changes to System Conditions

Continuously Develop Value

- What is business as usual?
- What is the emerging practice?
- How does ReThink Health make a difference?
- What other factors affect the emergence of the practice?

ReThink Health
Action Learning Synthesis

Shared Stewardship and the Prospects for Thriving Together

Midpoint Update: May 2021

Tina Anderson Smith
Anderson Smith Consulting

Jori Hall
University of Georgia

Francisca Fils-Aime
Loyola University Chicago

[Link to report](#)

Emerging Practices

At this midpoint, we observed five emerging practices that seem especially important for strengthening shared stewardship.

Practice 1: Expanding Aspirations
Seeing and stepping into a "whole system" so that strategies, projects, and initiatives become clearly oriented toward well-being and justice

Practice 2: Embracing Interdependence
Distinguishing unique yet interdependent roles to enable closer alignment, deeper working relationships, and stronger mutual accountability among individuals and organizations

(1) REFRAME PROBLEMS	(2) CULTIVATE STEWARDSHIP	(3) USE ADAPTED AND NEW METHODS
(4) FUEL LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY	(5) ITERATE A DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OF SYSTEM CHANGE	(6) ASSESS CHANGES TO SYSTEM CONDITIONS

(7) CONTINUOUSLY DEVELOP VALUE

Implications

EVALUATORS

- Broaden theoretical and methodological skillsets
- Focus less on evalua*tions* and more on evaluative processes (Schwandt, 2018)
- Share authority and work with intended users

COMMISSIONERS AND LEADERS

- Partner early with evaluators and find ongoing support
- Co-craft learning agendas
- Frame initiatives within action-learning cycles

WIDER FIELD

- Move beyond results-based management
- Develop practice-based theories of system change and stewardship
- Support interdisciplinary and cross-sector learning

Thank You

Contact Info

✉ emily.gates@bc.edu

🐦 @emilyfgates

Gates, E.F. (2021, Dec. 9). Redefining evaluation for system change: Theoretical and practical insights. Webinar for Centre for Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN).

References

Barnett, C., & Eager, R. (2017). *Chapter 18 New Frontiers for Evaluation in a Fast-Changing World*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Chapter-18-New-Frontiers-for-Evaluation-in-a-World-Barnett-Eager/6891962c6f2eea0cc5228db5b6af5a60d4676341

Gates, E. F., Walton, M., Vidueira, P., &McNall, M. (2021). Introducing systems- and complexity-informed evaluation. In E. F. Gates, M. Walton, & P. Vidueira (Eds.), Systems and Complexity-Informed Evaluation: Insights from Practice. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2021, 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20466.

Gates, E. F. (2018). Toward valuing with critical systems heuristics. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *39*(2), 201–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214017703703

Gates, E. F. (2017). Learning from seasoned evaluators: Implications of systems approaches for evaluation practice. Evaluation, 23(2), 152–171.

Gates, E. F. (2016). Making sense of the emerging conversation in evaluation about systems thinking and complexity science. Evaluation and Program Planning, 59, pp. 62-73.

Gates, E. F., & *Fils-Aime, F. (2021). System change evaluation: Insights from The Rippel Foundation and its ReThink Health initiative. In E. F. Gates, M.Walton, & P. Vidueira (Eds.), Systems and Complexity-Informed Evaluation: Insights from Practice. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2021, 125–138. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20462.

Mehta, M. & Zakaras, M. (2020). Philanthropy needs a new playbook to fund systems change. https://www.philanthropy.com/article/philanthropy-needs-a-new-playbook-to-fund-systems-change/

Gopal, S. & Kania, J. (2015). Fostering systems change. Five simple rules for foundations seeking to create lasting social change. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/fostering_systems_change

Milstein, B. (2019). A brief history of stewarding health, wealth, and well-being. ReThink Health. https://www.rethinkhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-Brief-History-of-Stewarding-Health-Wealth-and-Well-Being-Oct-6-2019.pdf

Ofir, Z., & Rugg, D. (2021). American Journal of Evaluation Section on International Developments in Evaluation: Transforming Evaluation for Times of Global Transformation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *42*(1), 47–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214020979070

Rein, M., & Schön, D. (1996). Frame-critical policy analysis and frame-reflective policy practice. Knowledge and Policy, 9(1), 85–104. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02832235

Rein, M. (1983). Value-critical policy analysis. In D. Callahan & B. Jennings (Eds.), *Ethics, the social sciences, and policy analysis* (pp. 83-111). New York: Springer.

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (2019). Seeing, facilitating, and assessing systems change: Learnings from the scaling solutions toward shifting systems initiatives. https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rockefeller-Philanthropy-Advisors-Scaling-Solutions-Report.pdf

Schwandt, T.A., & Gates, E.F. (2021). *Evaluating and Valuing in Social Research*. Guilford Press.

Schwandt, T. A. (2019). Post-normal evaluation? Evaluation, 25(3), 317–329. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389019855501

Schwandt, T. A. (2018). Evaluative Thinking as a Collaborative Social Practice: The Case of Boundary Judgment Making. New Directions for Evaluation, 2018(158), 125–137. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20318