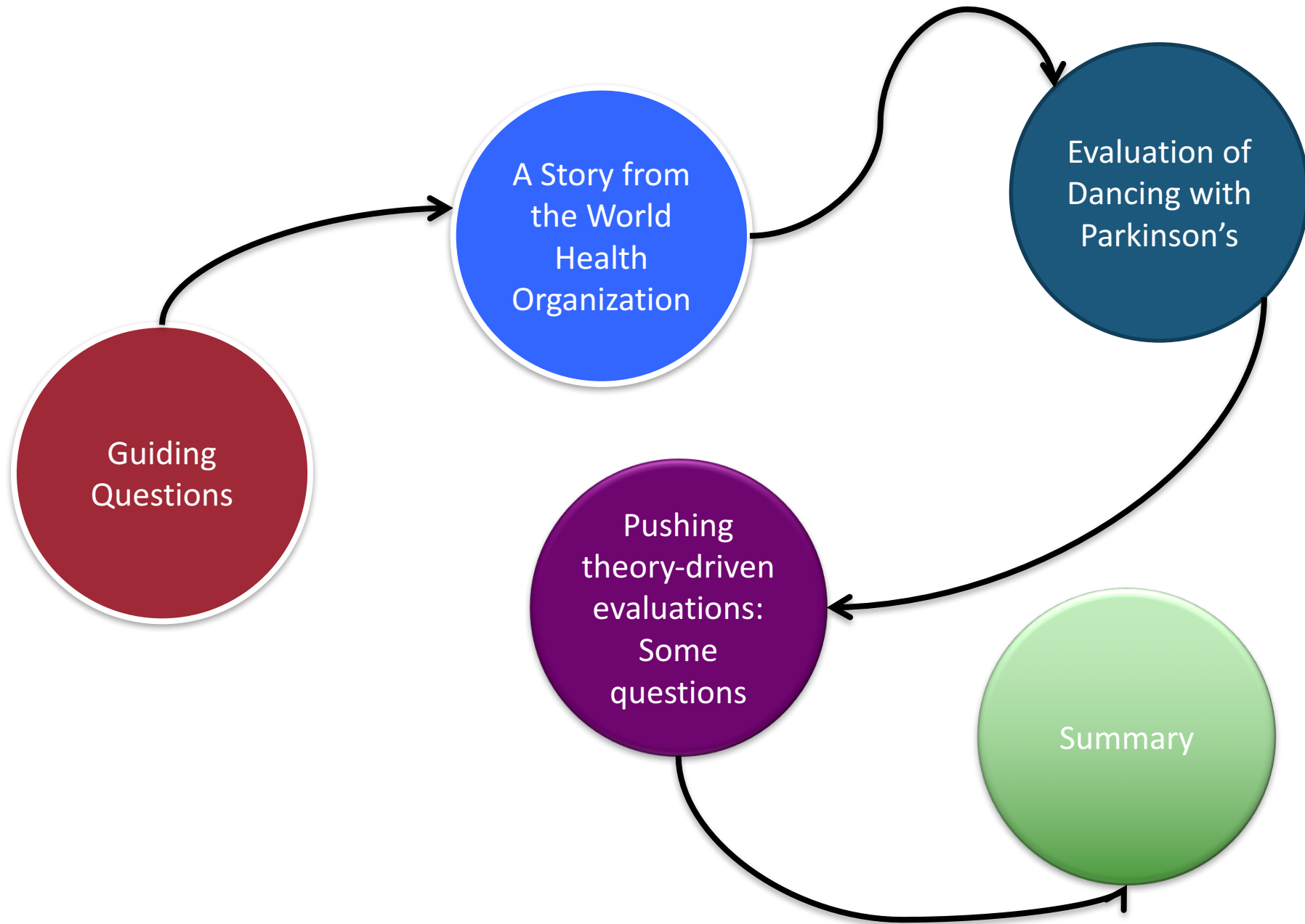


Questions for
proponents of
theory-driven
evaluation



In Appreciation

- Focus on useful/'good' theory of change
- Learning is a process not just a product
- Empirical basis for a theory of change
- A richer vocabulary around theories of change
 - Capabilities, opportunities, motivation
 - Unpacking the black-box of interventions
- A science of causation
 - Assumptions, risks, mechanisms
 - Contribution analysis
- Richer description of how programs can work
- Knowledge translation description
- Highlights the complexity of the intervention
- Steps towards precision in theorizing



Some questions

- How does one test a theory of change?
- How does one test a link of the theory of change?
- How does one test key assumptions?
- What works for whom, under what contexts?
- How does one test if the assumptions will hold across contexts?
- Representation challenges;
- **From representation to testing**
- **Understanding diversity**

A STORY FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: Of Mice and Elephant



LESSONS

The importance of understanding the nature of connections	Issues of power
The attribution/contribution problem	The inequity problem

**AN EXAMPLE OF A REALIST
EVALUATION: EVALUATION OF
DANCING WITH PARKINSON'S**

Parkinson's disease (PD)

- PD is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease
- Causes a variety of physical symptoms: rigidity, tremor, slowness of movement, impaired balance, as well as “freezing” or the inability to initiate movement
- Other non-motor symptoms include: depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment, problems swallowing, chewing, and speaking, masked facial expressions, fatigue, and sleep disturbances
- These symptoms invariably lead to **increased social isolation and lack of engagement with the world**

Why Dance with PD?

- Dance offers similar benefits as other movement forms: focus on balance, strength, and flexibility
- But **artistic elements of dance add value that other types of exercise do not**
- For Example:
 - **Music**: rhythmic and emotional stimuli help initiate movement more easily for people with PD
 - **Imagery**: assists in fostering movement and self-expression
 - **Social**: dance is learned, practiced, and enjoyed with others
 - **Cognitive**: new movement sequences, improvisation exercises engage and stimulate the mind

Context

Individuals who danced regularly before symptoms of Parkinson's disease

Mechanism

Dancing at a lowered capacity reminds them of how they have deteriorated

Outcome

They avoid attending classes and therefore don't get health benefits of participation

Individuals who have never danced regularly before DWP

While dancing they experience the feeling of freedom from their symptoms and relief from stress and depression

They feel better, have an incentive to attend classes regularly, and therefore gain health benefits

Individuals who live alone

Social connection with other participants, teachers and volunteers, physical contact, and creative and emotional expression

Deepened social connections, enhanced artistic expression, improved quality of life

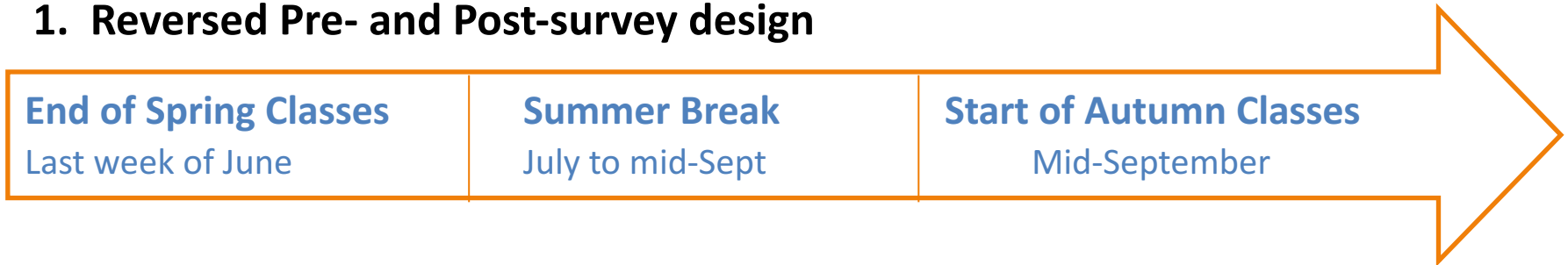
Individuals with care-partner or caregiver

1+ hour that person with PD is engaged in dancing in a safe environment with others with PD

Enhanced care-partner/caregiver relief and support

Data: Focus on short term variations, linkages between DWP and outcomes, understanding of other drivers, temporal context, between and within-individual variations

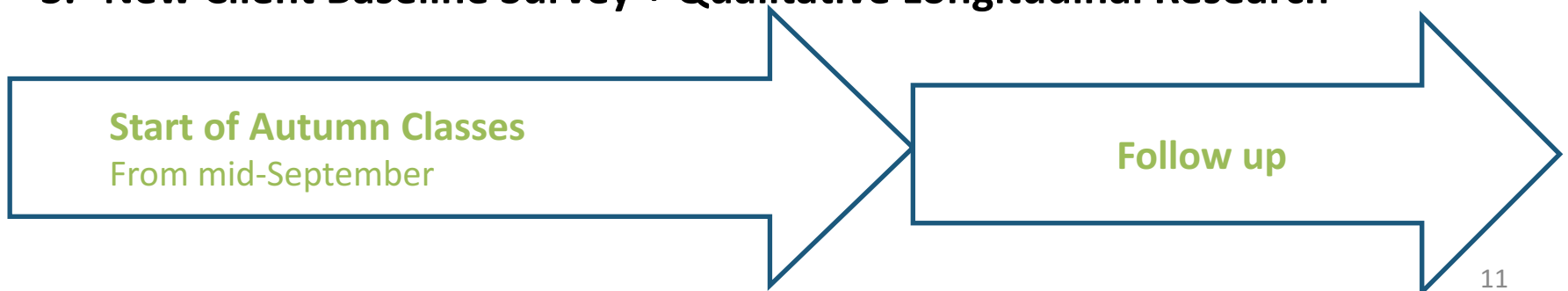
1. Reversed Pre- and Post-survey design



2. Daily Journals



3. New Client Baseline Survey + Qualitative Longitudinal Research



How are you doing today?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

Journal entry time: _____

Please circle or check one:

Very Bad



Bad



Okay



Good



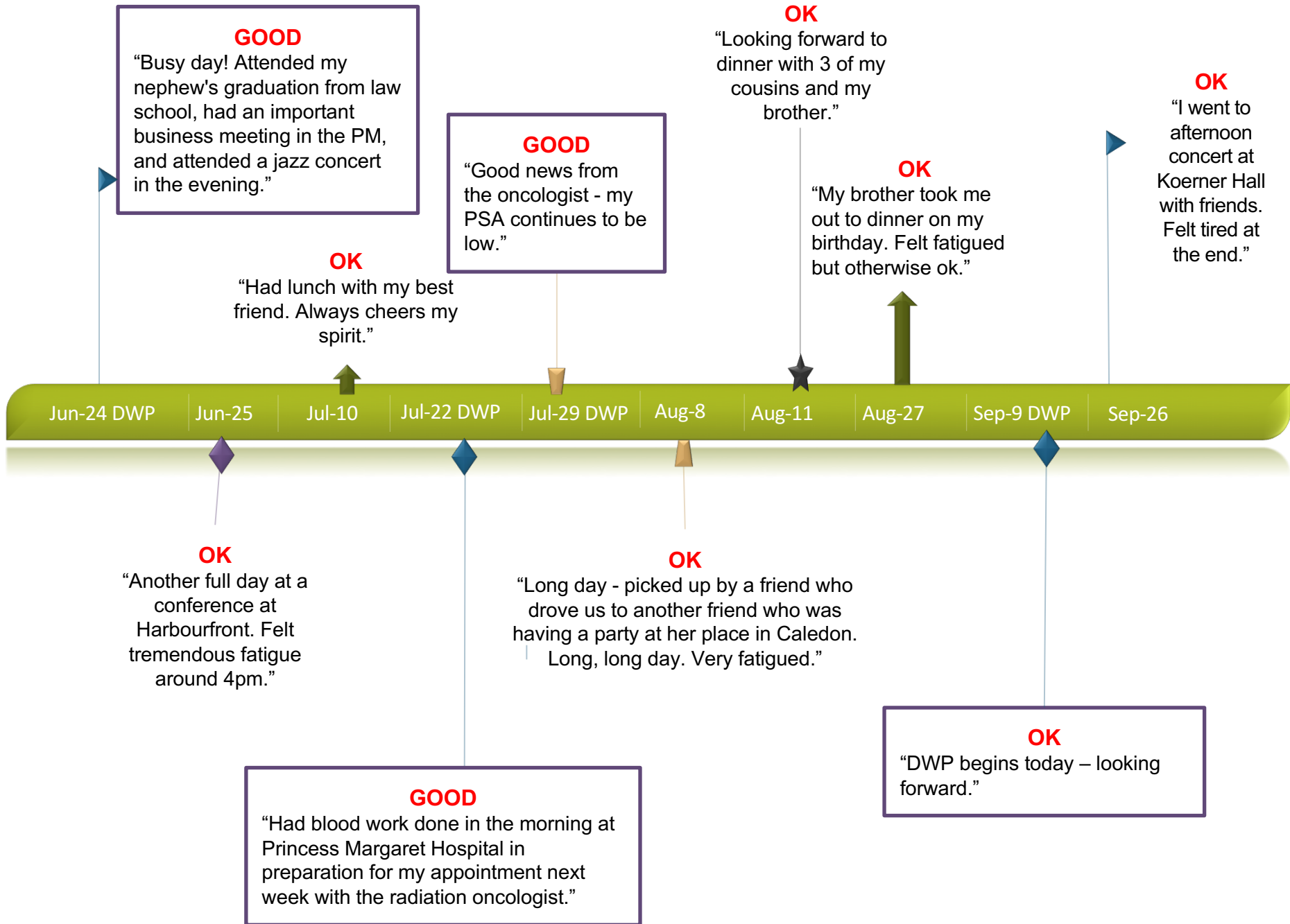
Very Good



Any reflections or comments are welcome below:

- **An Example of a Single Individual:**

- Daily Entries: How are you doing today?
- Responds “okay” 91% of the time, “good” 5% of the time, and “bad” 4% of the journal days
- Rates the day as “okay” even on days with something to look forward to (e.g., dinner with friends, concerts, birthdays)
- Notably, 3 of the five “good” days were DWP class days



How has your energy level been in general over the past week?

Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
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How has your body felt in general over the past week?

Very much worse than usual	Somewhat worse than usual	Usual	Somewhat better than usual	Much better than usual
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How would you describe your most frequent mood in the past week?

Sad, Depressed	Worried, Anxious	Angry	Contented	Happy
Other feeling/ emotion:				

SOME QUESTIONS FOR PROPONENTS OF THEORY-DRIVEN EVALUATION

1. A 'good enough' programme theory:

How do we know that there is an initial theory of change? What is a good enough programme theory? How does such a 'good' theory aid implementation?

2. The dynamic expectations challenge:

How does one build expectations of programme impacts? How does one understand the trajectory of impacts?

3. The knowledge translation problem:

How does a programme build in knowledge of what should work for whom? How can knowledge of heterogeneous mechanisms be implemented?

4. The learning problem:

What is the relationship between evaluation and learning?

6. The methods problem:

How can an application of design and methods help develop an ecology of evidence?

5. The causality and complexity challenge:

What are some of the challenges in making causal statements in very complex systems?

1. What is a good enough theory of change?

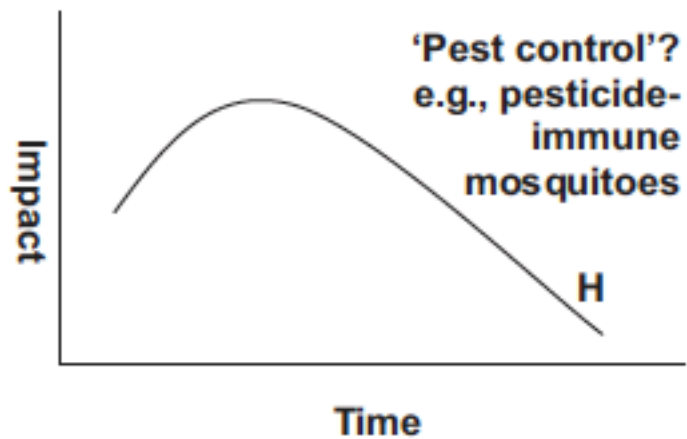
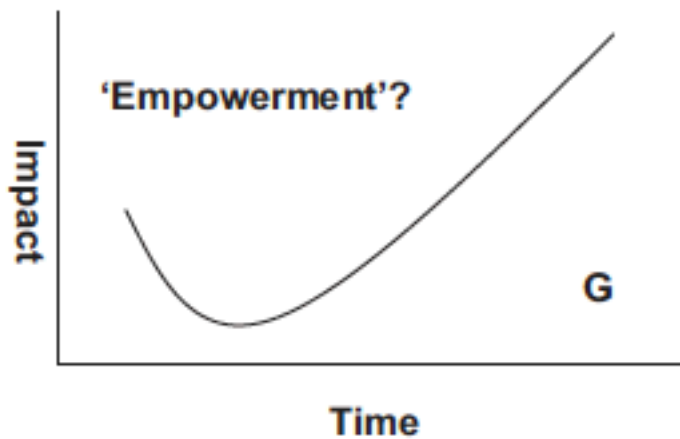
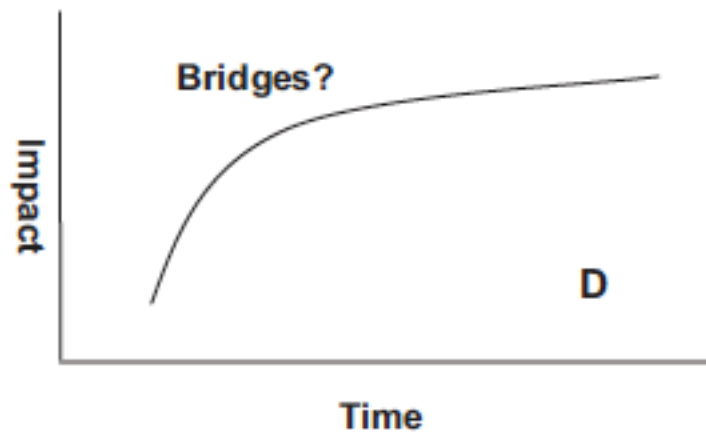
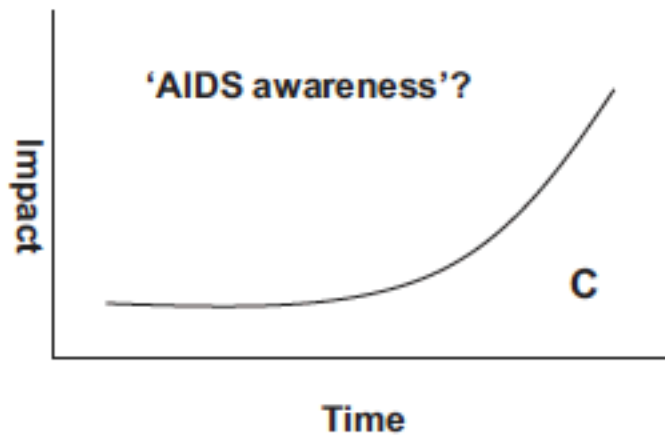
- **“What are characteristics of a useful implementable theory?** How does the theory of a complex intervention differ from a theory of a simple intervention?”
- **“... in virtually every case, the theories of change that drove the initiatives and their evaluations were not really adequate to substantiate the connections between activities and outcomes.”**

– Auspos and Kubisch, 2004

- ““Is it time to shift the balance in what we define as quality from an exclusive focus on empirical method (the extent to which authors have adhered to the accepted rules of controlled trials) to one that embraces theory **(the extent to which a theoretical mechanism was explicitly defined and tested)?**”
- **The need for case studies on “what are useful theories of change? What makes a good theory of change?”**

2) The Expectations Problem: The Anticipated Trajectory of Impacts

- “Fundamental to judging performance is having clear expectations of an anticipated trajectory of impact of programmes (Woolcock, 2009). **It is not entirely clear how the knowledge of such a trajectory of impacts is arrived at, especially for complex interventions.**”
- **How does one develop a clear understanding of the anticipated trajectory of impacts?**



- “Even a cursory reading of social theory, for example, would suggest that in fact the most likely shape of such projects’ functional form is a J-curve (that is, things get worse before they – hopefully, maybe – get better) or a step function (that is, long periods of stasis followed by a sudden rupture brought on by, say, an election or the reaching of a ‘tipping point’ in the adoption of a new fertilizer technology, in which prevailing norms and/or uptake by an influential local leader rapidly leads others to do likewise).”

- **“In short, the development profession strongly prefers to sell known, universal solutions with high, immediate and readily measurable impact rather than wrestle with ambiguous, context-specific problems that may not have (at least ex ante) a known or even knowable solution.”**

3) The Knowledge Translation Problem

- **How does a program build knowledge of what works for whom?**
- “What programme mechanisms are needed for what contexts? The evaluation exploration in our view should not be restricted to the impact evaluation question (what works for whom?) but also should be focused on the knowledge translation question: what should work for whom?”

- How is such knowledge of heterogeneous mechanisms implemented in programs?
- How do we incorporate knowledge of such heterogeneity into our theories of change?

4) The Methods Problem: Developing an Ecology of Evidence

- A problem that also comes through reasonably clearly in the recent literature on evaluation methods is the recognition that ‘learning is not the monopoly of a single method’ (Rodrik, 2009).
- The lesson increasingly is on the types of evidence that are useful given the heterogeneous nature of the real world/complex systems.
 - For example Rodrik (2008: 5) makes this important point: “The ‘hard evidence’ from the randomized evaluation has to be supplemented with lots of soft evidence before it becomes usable.”

- For the most part the theory-driven evaluation field has not fully engaged with methods that can help explicate the programme theory more fully, nor has it clearly described how methods can be used to test linkages in the programme theory.

Some examples of methods

- **Network Analysis** How does the programme operationalize networks of interventions?
- **Event Structure Analysis** What is the impact of the event structure (for example, the interactions between partnering organisations) on outcomes over time?
- **Concept Mapping** How do different groups of stakeholders conceptualise the intervention? Do these conceptualisations change over time?
- **System Dynamics** What are the anticipated trajectories of the impacts of the overall policy intervention? How would changing key components of the policy intervention alter the expected trajectory of outcomes?

- **Observational Studies** (Propensity scoring techniques) In the absence of randomized designs, what alternative analytical techniques can help assess causal effects of interventions? What is the hidden bias in observational studies?
- **Methods of Developmental Trajectories** Does the same intervention have very different impacts over time for different groups of individuals (or communities)?
- **Respondent-Driven Sampling** How does the programme (and evaluation) reach individuals who are hard to reach and not found in a standard sampling frame?
- **Adaptive/Sequential Designs** How can a design help an intervention adapt/evolve from large complexity with many components to an intervention with a few 'effective' components?
- **Realist Synthesis** How does evidence synthesis help identify the mechanisms by which an intervention works?

Summary

