Learning from innovation:

towards a 'what works' evaluation framework

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Presented by Suzie Forell

Value of innovation → our capacity to learn from it and share learning

How to improve the capacity of legal assistance sector to:

- learn from innovation, as well as 'standard' services

- assess 'what works': for whom, in what circumstances and at what cost

- collectively build the 'what works' evidence base

…but to be realistic and proportionate, recognising service capacity

The paper covers

- Background to our work /perspective: legal needs research, systematic reviews, data strategy and the evaluative work through alliances with legal aid agencies

- Challenges to evaluating 'what works' for legal assistance services

- Suggested elements to build a 'what works' evaluation framework and evidence base

Challenge 1: Understanding 'effectiveness'

Gap between desire to know if services are effective …and the an appreciation of what it takes to evaluate and establish 'effectiveness'.

… increase the likelihood that a desired outcome will occur, independently of other concurrent factors …

* Requires a very specific and robust methodology to evaluate effectiveness in these terms

50 YEARS

Problem…

Demands for effectiveness evaluation, but

- lack of commensurate resources

- limited capability of services – skills, knowledge, time to evaluate in these terms

Risk: money, time, effort spent on poorly executed evaluation that does not appropriately answer the question asked

Challenge 2: Lack of specificity about interventions

What they are and what they are not /how they differ

Lack of shared definition of interventions - so difficult to compare services

Outreach

advice

Duty service

Health Justice Partnerships

50 YEARS

Challenge 3: Lack of clearly defined outcomes

To evaluate effectiveness in measurable terms, need to know what is the difference the service aims to make and for whom?

Tend to see activity or outputs …or grand statements of intent

Number of duty services

'Access to Justice'

Clients seen in outreach

50 YEARS

Challenge 4: Data

Not well served for evaluation by existing administrative systems – but scope is increasing with technology.

Ideally need systems which routinely:

- record inputs/resources used

- capture the specificity of clients served, activities, outcomes

- Ideally, use consistent definition between systems (or at least enough specificity to see differences)

… both for innovation AND existing services (baseline)

Supports and is supplemented by evaluative activity

In the face of these challenges

how do we draw on the experience of service providers to build the 'what works' evidence base?

A 'what works' evaluation framework to

- Engage with funders, jurisdictional leaders, legal assistance services and program managers who ask evaluative questions

- Support services to answer evaluative questions

- Help build evaluative culture and thinking (and resources!)

- Encourage and enable shared learning to build the 'what works' evidence base

- Coordinate strategic use of effectiveness evaluation

A 'what works' evaluation framework

Key Elements

Identify research questions

Identify a fuller range of evaluative questions that:

- o are useful (can inform decision making) and *valued*

- o are proportionate to the scale of the program and capacity of different services to answer

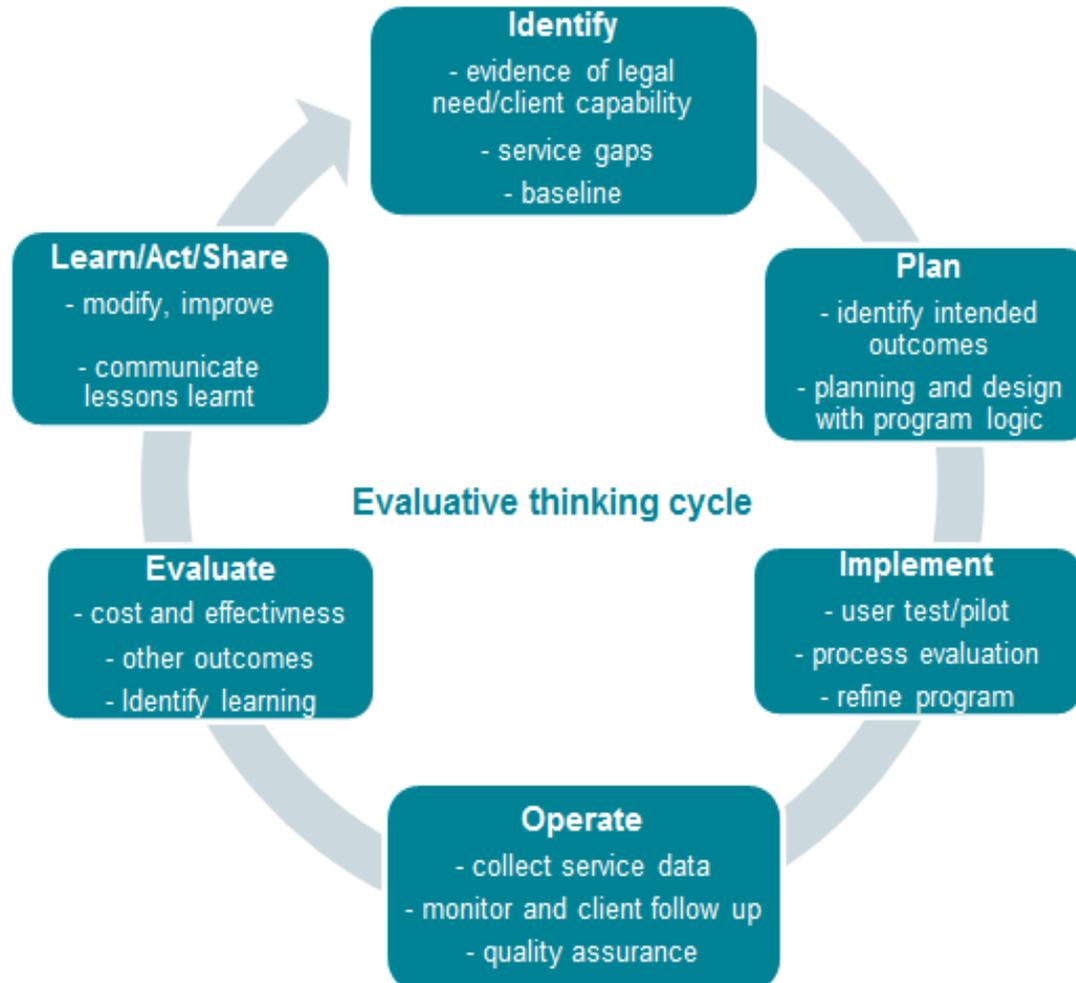- o contribute incrementally to the evidence base

Given challenge of effectiveness evaluation, be sparing but strategic in its use

Do it less but do it well

Example: evaluative questions

Identify
- evidence of legal need/client capability
- service gaps
- baseline

Plan
- identify intended outcomes
- planning and design with program logic

Implement
- user test/pilot
- process evaluation
- refine program

Operate
- collect service data
- monitor and client follow up
- quality assurance

Evaluate
- cost and effectivness
- other outcomes
- Identify learning

Learn/Act/Share
- modify, improve
- communicate lessons learnt

Evaluative thinking cycle

Clearly articulate outcomes

An evaluation framework must clearly articulate desired outcomes.

Acknowledge shared outcomes (for shared clients)

- within organisations

- within jurisdictions

- across sectors (e.g. social determinants of health)

50 YEARS

Outcome domains

- For the client (impact, experience)

- For the program (evidence-based strategies, quality, adherence to Access to Justice service principles)

- For organisations (sustainable, efficient services)

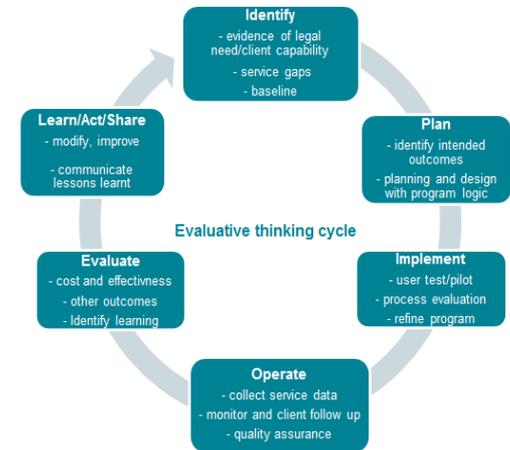- For systems (e.g. justice system efficiencies, fairness)

An incremental approach to what works evaluation

resources	→	activities	→	outputs	→	outcomes	→	goals

- Using program logic in planning

- Identifying and testing assumptions

- Evaluation proportionate to program and service capacity

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Evaluative thinking cycle

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Evaluation methodologies appropriate to purpose and questions asked

50 YEARS

Clearly define interventions/services

- what each is and what each is not

- do not need to be the same but need to see where they align and where they differ

- 'standard' services – baseline to innovation

Smart integrated data solutions

- data linked to evaluation questions

- data integrated into admin systems

Coordination and communication for shared learning

Opportunity to work incrementally depends on willingness and capacity to pull together the pieces of the 'what works' puzzle.

- definitions of services, strategies and outcomes

- data that matches these definitions

- resource base for evaluation and evaluative thinking

- strategic 'big ticket' evaluation

- shared learning: willingness to learn from 'failure'.

Vital role of funders/leaders

Vital role in learning what works by:

- articulating outcomes and research questions

- understanding, valuing and resourcing different evaluative work

- collaborating within and across jurisdictions

- decision making about strategic effectiveness evaluation

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Council of Australian Governments
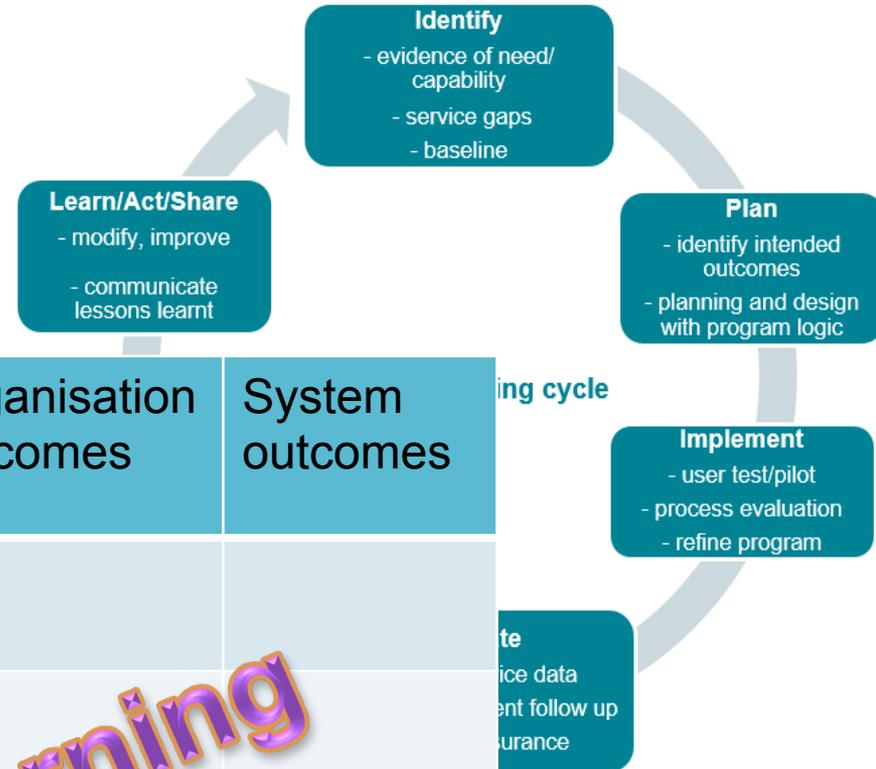
An agreement between
- the Commonwealth of Australia and
- the States and Territories, being:
  - The State of New South Wales
  - The State of Victoria
  - The State of Queensland
  - The State of Western Australia
  - The State of South Australia
  - The State of Tasmania
  - The Australian Capital Territory
  - The Northern Territory of Australia

An agreement to facilitate reform in the legal assistance sector and provide access to justice for disadvantaged Australians through the delivery of legal assistance services.

Towards a what works framework…

Identify
- evidence of need/ capability
- service gaps
- baseline

Plan
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- planning and design with program logic

Learn/Act/Share
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Strategic goals..	Client outcomes	Program outcomes	Organisation outcomes	System outcomes
Defined activities				
Evaluation questions				
Appropriate methodology				
Data				
Resources				

Shared learning

50 YEARS

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