



Evaluative Thinking:

The ‘Je Ne Sais Quoi’ of Evaluation Capacity Building & Practice

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Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation

AEA Coffee Break Demonstration Series

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Evaluative Thinking is...*mentioned*:

“How do we build the capacity of individuals, teams, and organizations to think evaluatively and engage in evaluation practice?”

- Hallie Preskill (2008)

“Evaluative thinking is not just limited to evaluation projects...it’s an analytical way of thinking that infuses everything that goes on.”

- Michael Patton (2005)

“The concept of free-range evaluation captures the ultimate outcome of ECB: evaluative thinking that lives unfettered in an organization.”

- Jean King (2007)

“Willingness to ask: ‘How do we know what we think we know?’”

- Michael Patton (2005)

“Reminding all of us to think evaluatively!”

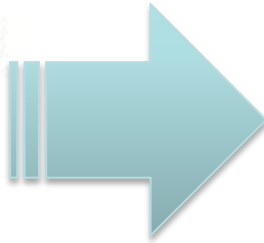
- Jim Rugh (n.d.)

*...but not
succinctly defined*

How Evaluative Thinking fits in:

Knowledge

Action



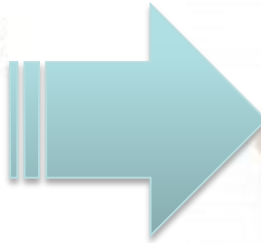
Evaluation

How Evaluative Thinking fits in:

Evaluative Thinking

Knowledge

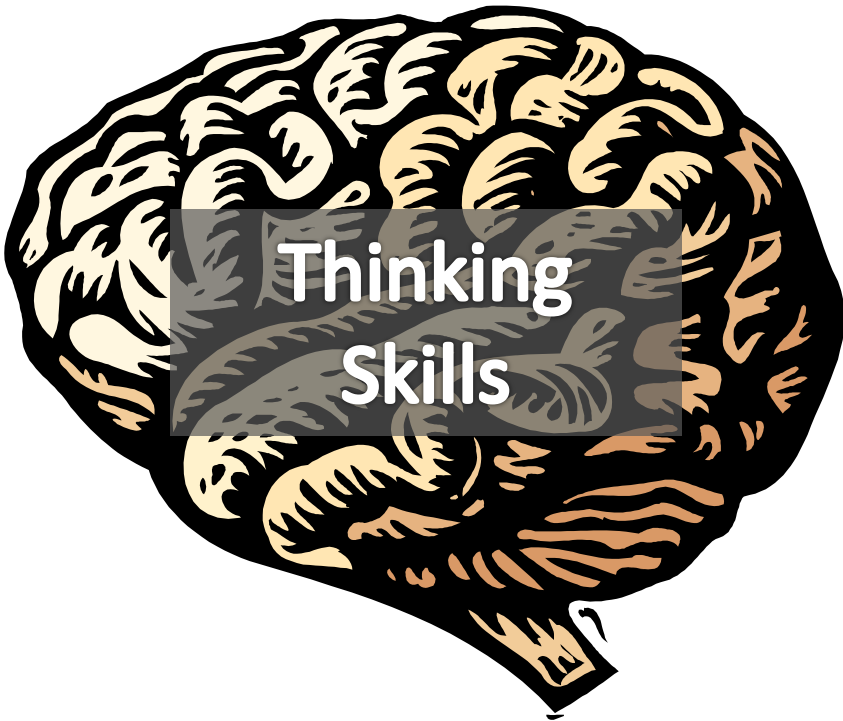
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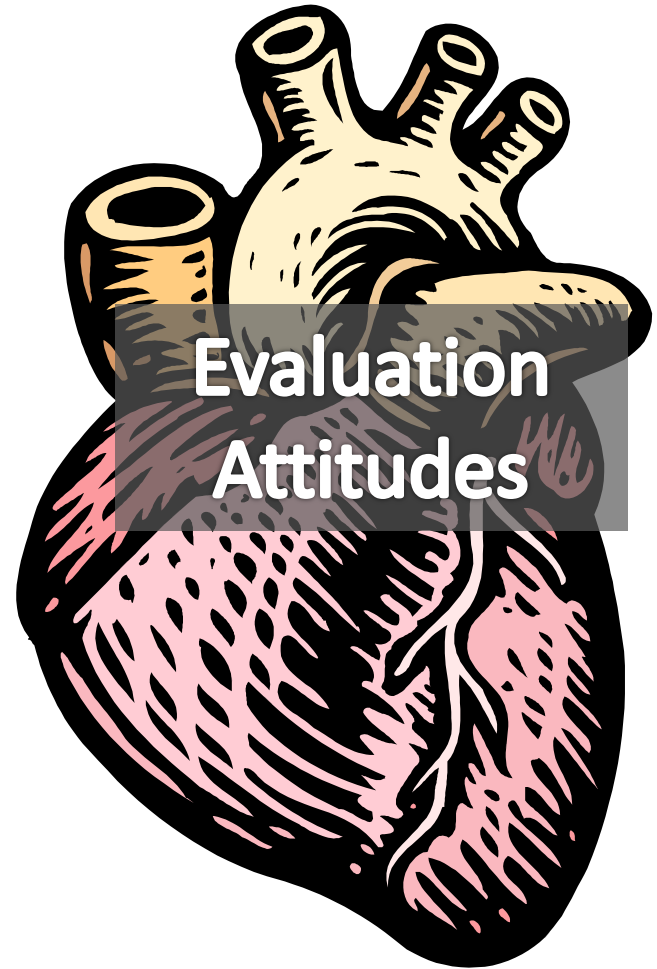
Evaluation



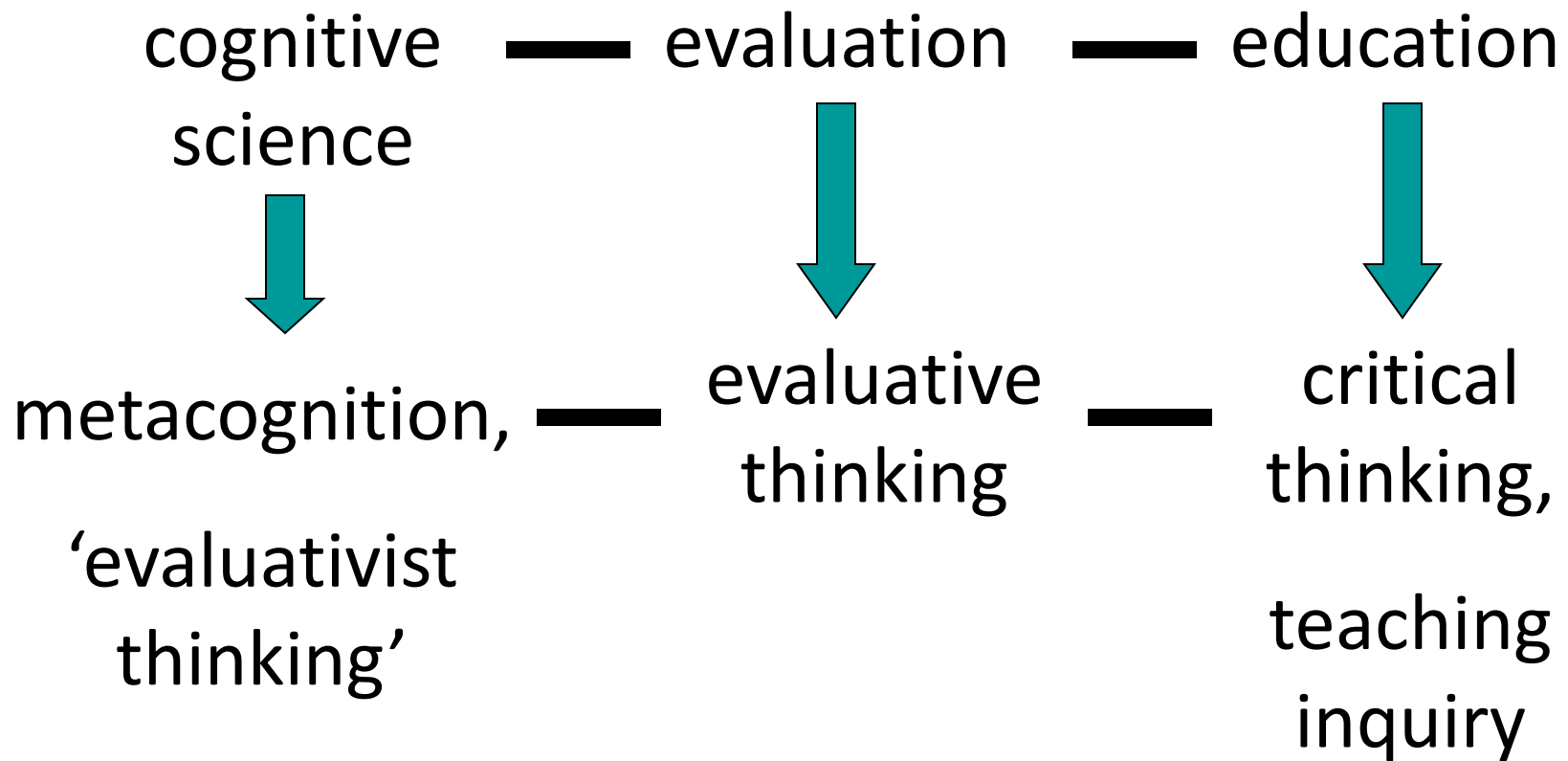
Evaluative Thinking is Both:



and



Defining Evaluative Thinking



Thinking Skills

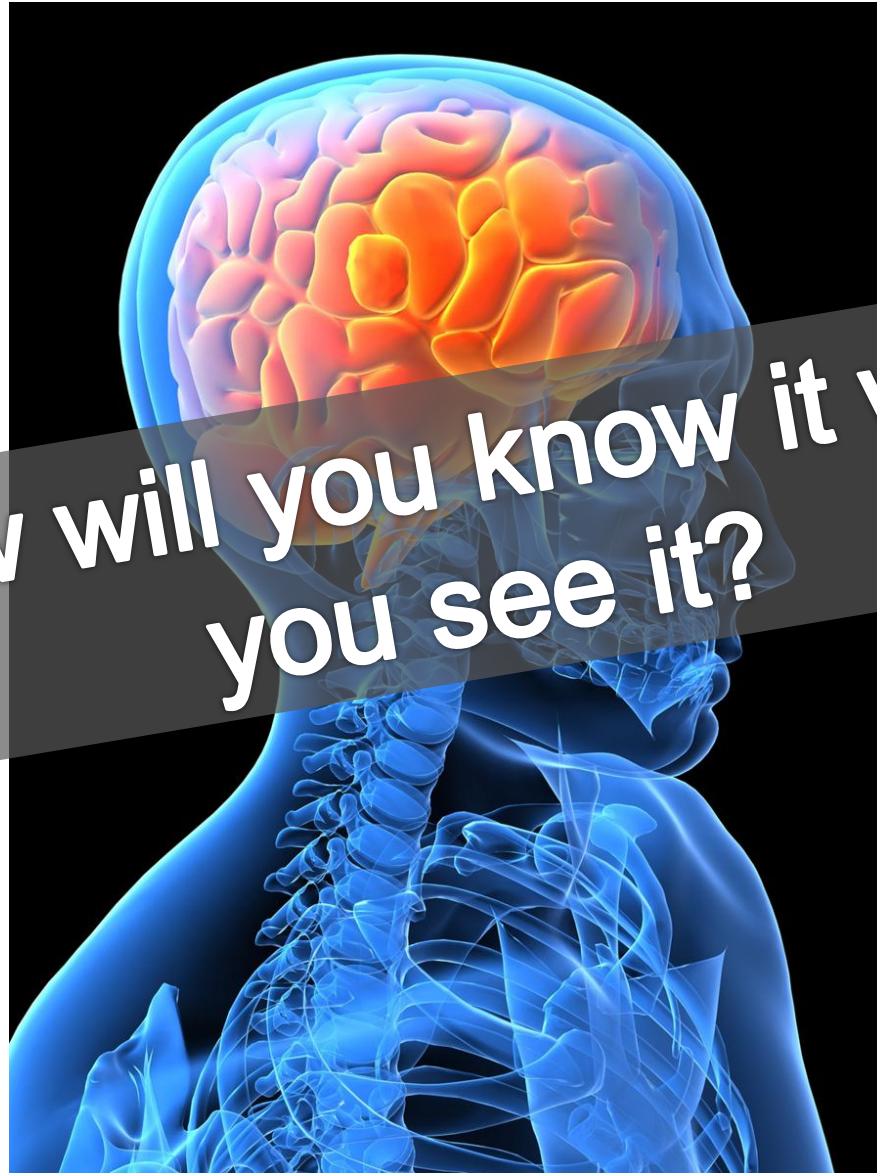
- Questioning
- Reflection
- Decision Making
- Strategizing
- Identifying Assumptions

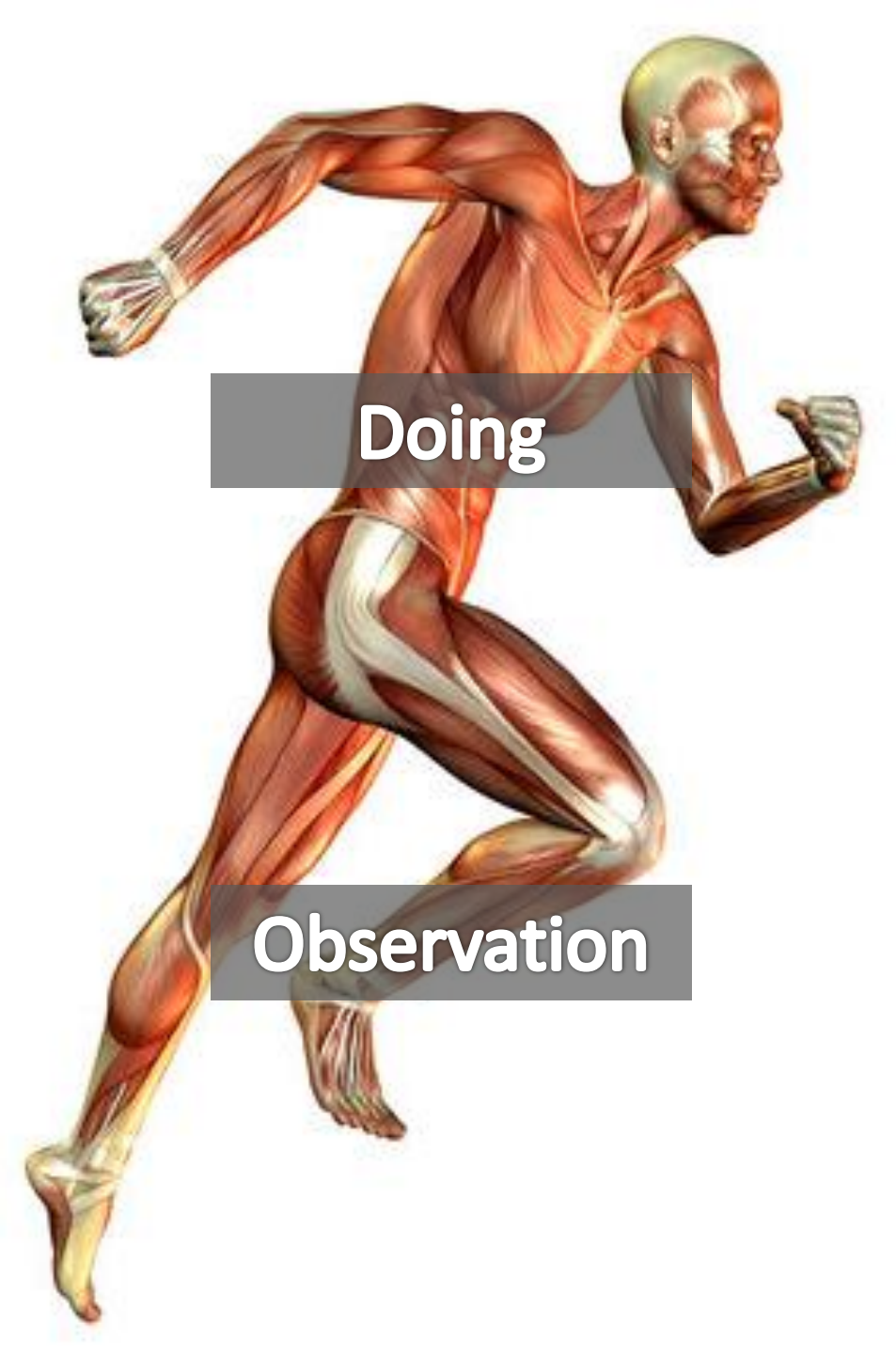
Evaluative Attitudes

- Desire for the truth
- Belief in the value of evaluation
- Belief in the value of evidence
- Inquisitiveness
- Skepticism

Identifying Indicators of E.T.

How will you know it when
you see it?





Indicators of Evaluative Thinking

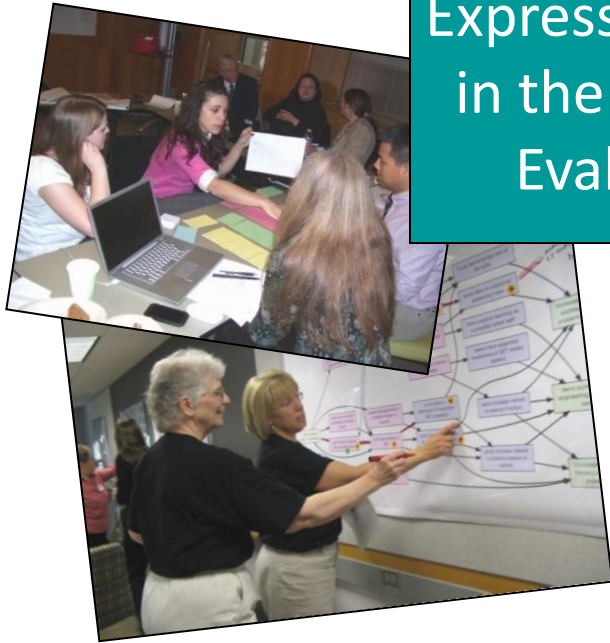
Posing
Thoughtful
Questions

Describing and
Illustrating
Thinking

Actively
Pursuing Deeper
Understanding

Expressing Belief
in the Value of
Evaluation

Seeking
Alternatives



Macro-level Indicator

Observational Checklist

Inventory/Scale

Posing Thoughtful Questions	1	1
		2
	2	3
		4
Describing and Illustrating Thinking	3	5
		6
	4	7
		8
Actively Pursuing Deeper Understanding	5	9
		10
	6	11
		12
Believing in the Value of Evaluation	7	13
		14
	8	15
		16
Seeking Alternatives	9	17
		18
	10	19
		20

Capturing Indicators of E.T.

Evaluative Thinking Inventory

ID #:

- Please read each of the statements below and check the appropriate box to indicate how often you do what is described by each statement.
- When applicable (depending on the question), consider how you think and act in both professional and personal settings.

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasion- ally	Rarely	Very Rarely	Never
1. I describe my thinking to others.						
2. I am eager to engage in evaluation.						
3. I suggest alternative explanations and hypotheses.						
4. I use models and/or other diagrams to clarify my thoughts.						
5. I am reflective about the way I do my work.						
6. I discuss evaluation strategies with my colleagues.						
7. I logically justify my evaluation strategy.						
8. I consider alternative explanations for claims.						
9. I am wary of claims made by others without evidence to back them up.						
10. I seek evidence for claims and hypotheses.						

Capturing Indicators of E.T.

Evaluative Thinking Observational Checklist

Date:

Number of people in group observed:

Event/Meeting:

Name of observer:

1. Poses questions about claims and assumptions.

Frequency:	Very Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Occasion-ally <input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Notes:
Quality:	Very Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	

2. Reflects on self-generated claims and assumptions.

Frequency:	Very Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Occasion-ally <input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Notes:
Quality:	Very Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Describes logic/thinking to colleagues.

Frequency:	Very Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Frequently <input type="checkbox"/>	Occasion-ally <input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Notes:
Quality:	Very Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	Very Bad <input type="checkbox"/>	

Learning More About E.T. in Context

Evaluative Culture & Thinking Focus Group Prompts

Date:

Number of people in focus group:

Group name or identifying information:

Name of focus group facilitator:

- This tool can be used by **external** evaluators or researchers and by **internal** program or organization staff interested in learning more about the evaluative thinking and evaluative culture of a group.
- The prompts are divided into two sets, one focused on **culture** and the other on **thinking**; in a focus group, the facilitator should go through both sets (all ten questions.)
- While there is one follow-up prompt defining what is meant by “culture” in this context, it is also expected that context-specific definitions of “evaluative thinking” and “evaluative culture” will emerge from the group through this focus group activity.

I. Evaluative Culture Focus Group Prompts

1. What does the work planning process look like in your organization?
 - a. How are changes made?
 - b. What motivates changes to the way things are done?
2. How often are beliefs and assumptions related to your work and goals discussed?
 - a. How would you explain this pattern?
3. How often are beliefs and assumptions questioned by members of the organization?
 - a. How would you explain this pattern?
4. How would you characterize your understanding of your work’s impacts (as an organization)?

Next Steps

- Piloting and improving these tools
 - They are available for download at:
https://cornell.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eLKEC3fIFDNuU8A
 - We welcome your feedback
- Practicing and reflecting on ways to promote evaluative thinking
- Examining the interplay of thinking, culture, and policy; role of social cognition
- Growing a community of practice among those interested in evaluative thinking

Thank you!

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