



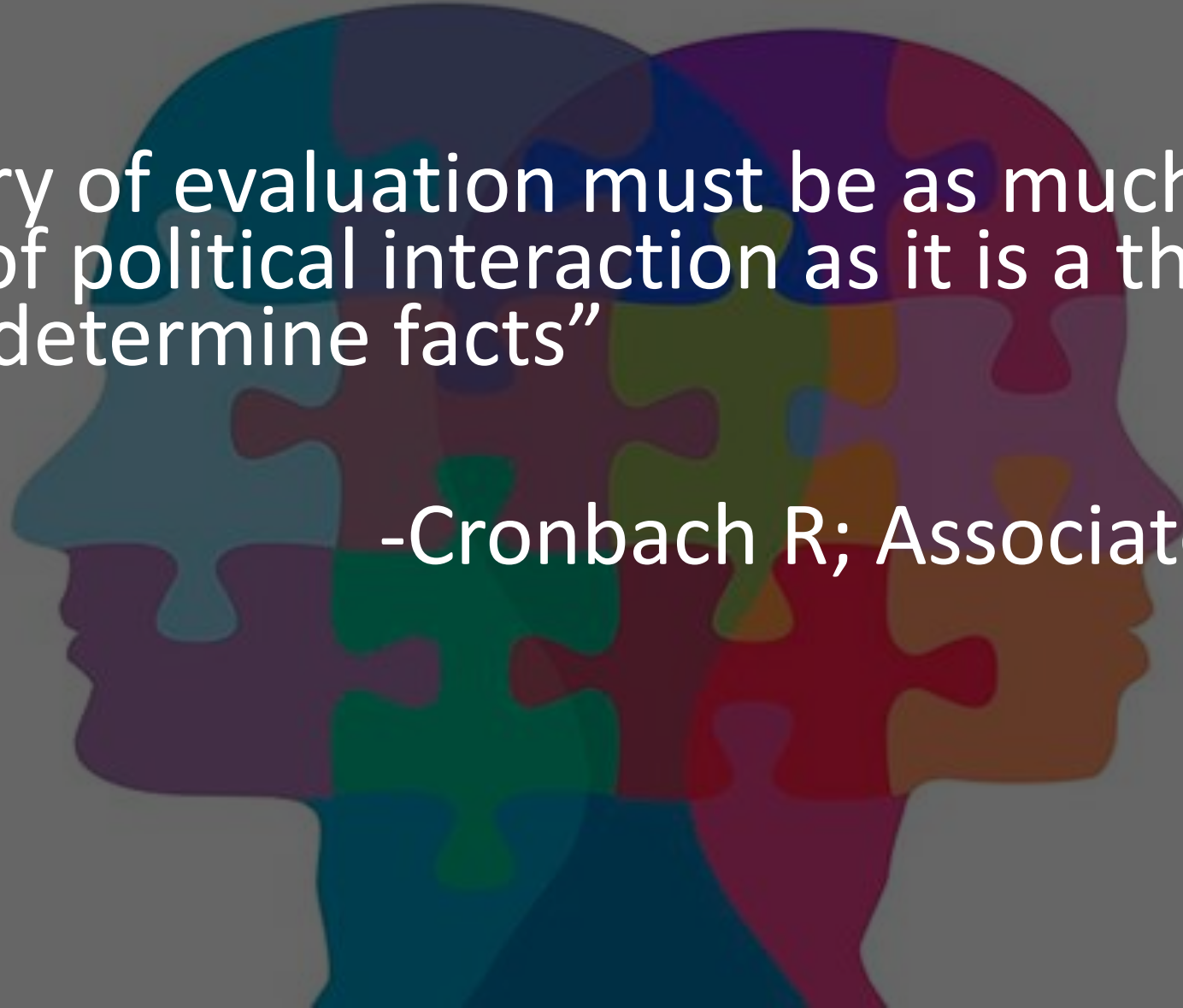
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Investigating Political Situations in Evaluation

Politics & Evaluation

“A theory of evaluation must be as much a theory of political interaction as it is a theory of how to determine facts”

-Cronbach R; Associates, 1980



Politics & Methods

The background features a graphic of two overlapping human head silhouettes. The interior of the heads is composed of numerous interlocking puzzle pieces in various colors, including shades of blue, green, red, purple, and orange. The entire graphic is set against a dark gray background.

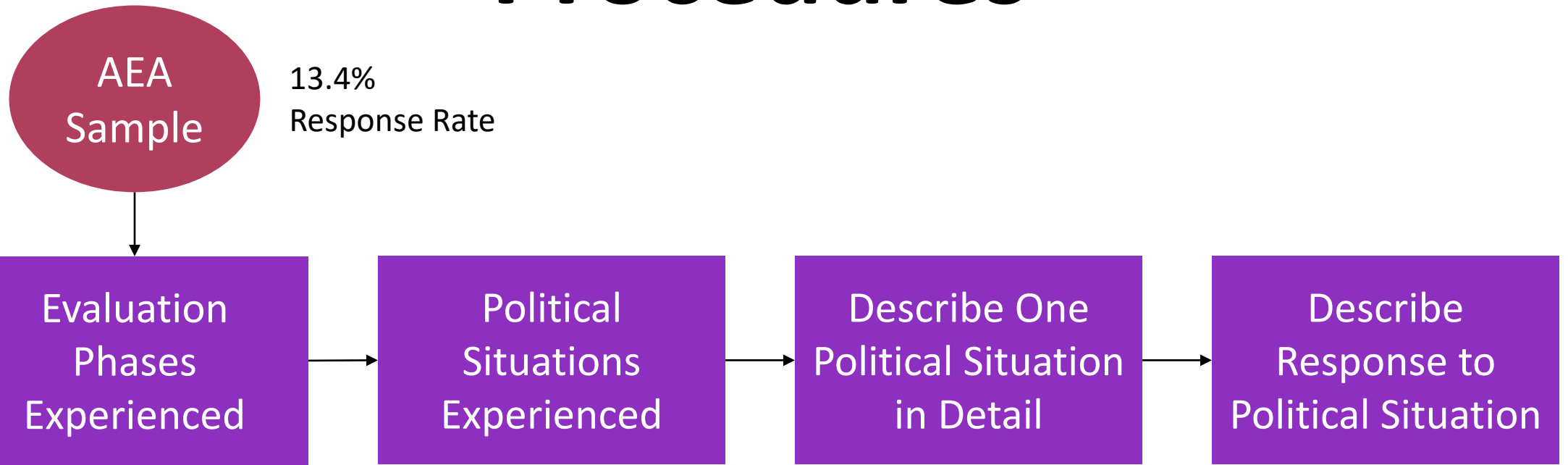
“It is rarely prudent to enter a burning political debate armed only with a case study, even if the case study were the most rational approach to the original evaluation question.”

- Chelimsky, 1987, p. 28

Purpose of the Study

1. Explore how politics can manifest during the evaluation process.
2. Describe how evaluators respond to these situations when they emerge.

Procedures



1. Identifying Stakeholders

2. Developing Questions

3. Creating the Design

4. Collecting Data

5. Analyzing Data

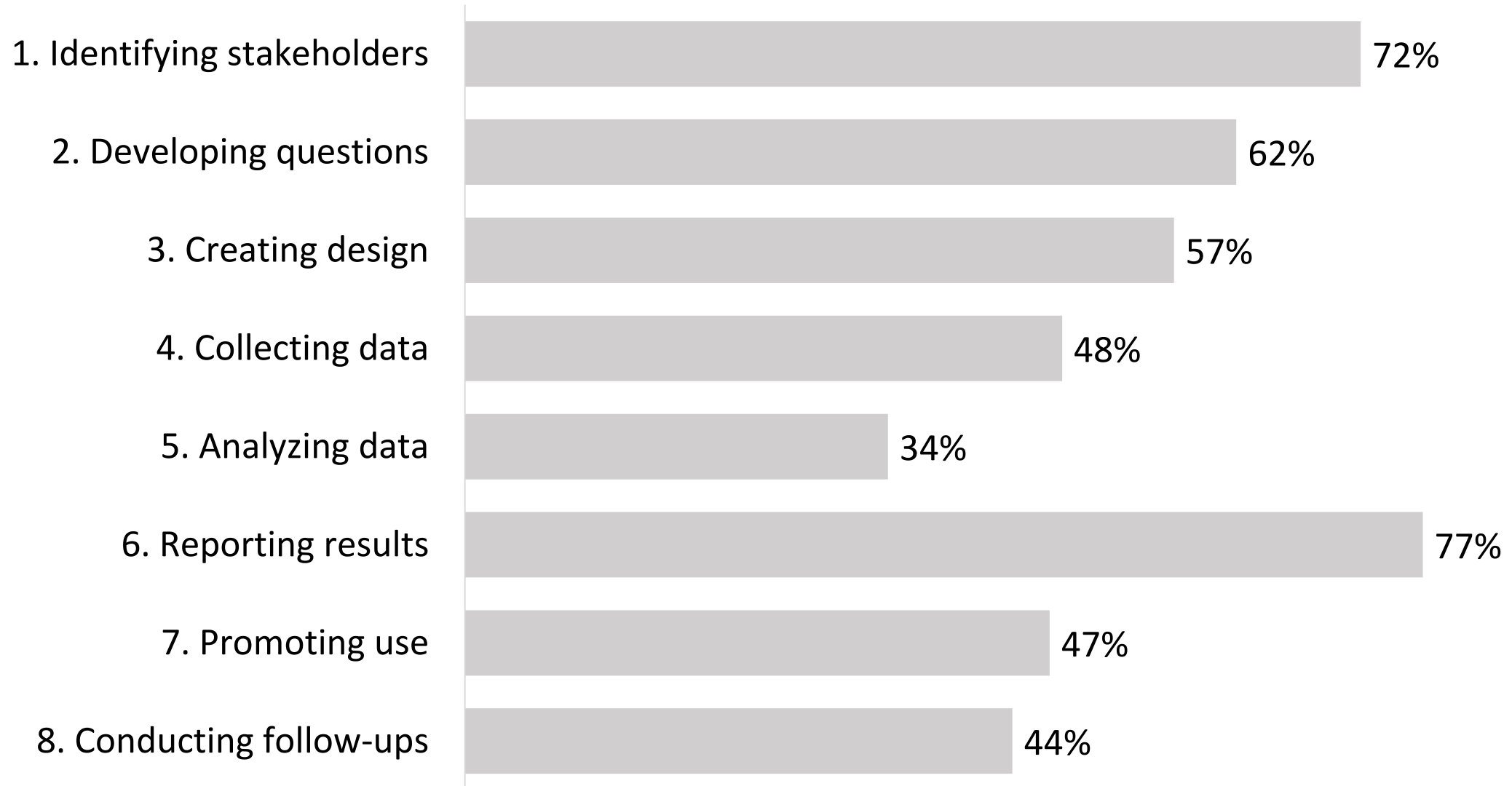
6. Reporting Results

7. Promoting Use

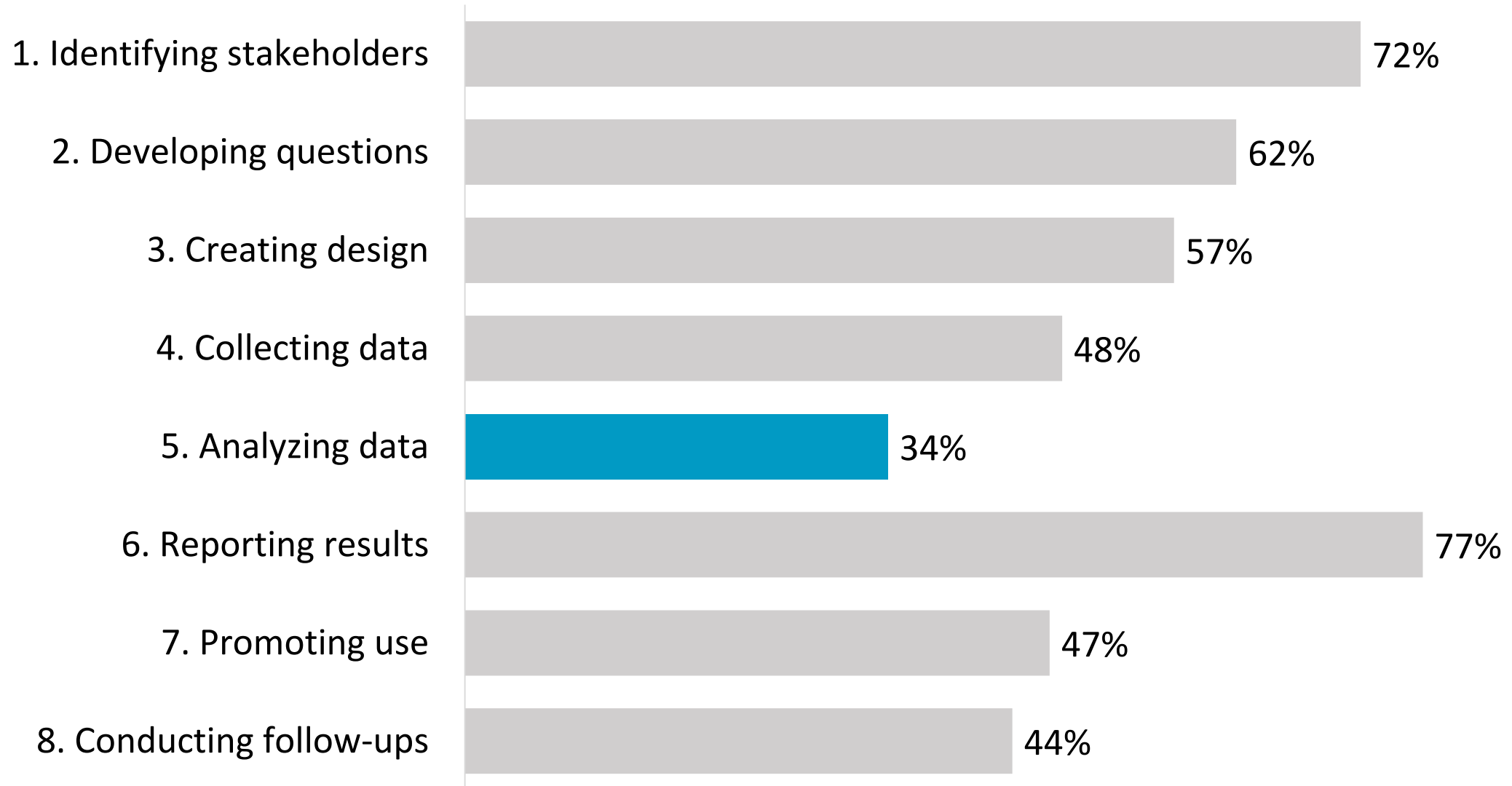
8. Conducting Follow-ups

Phases based on modified version of Alkin's (2010) framework

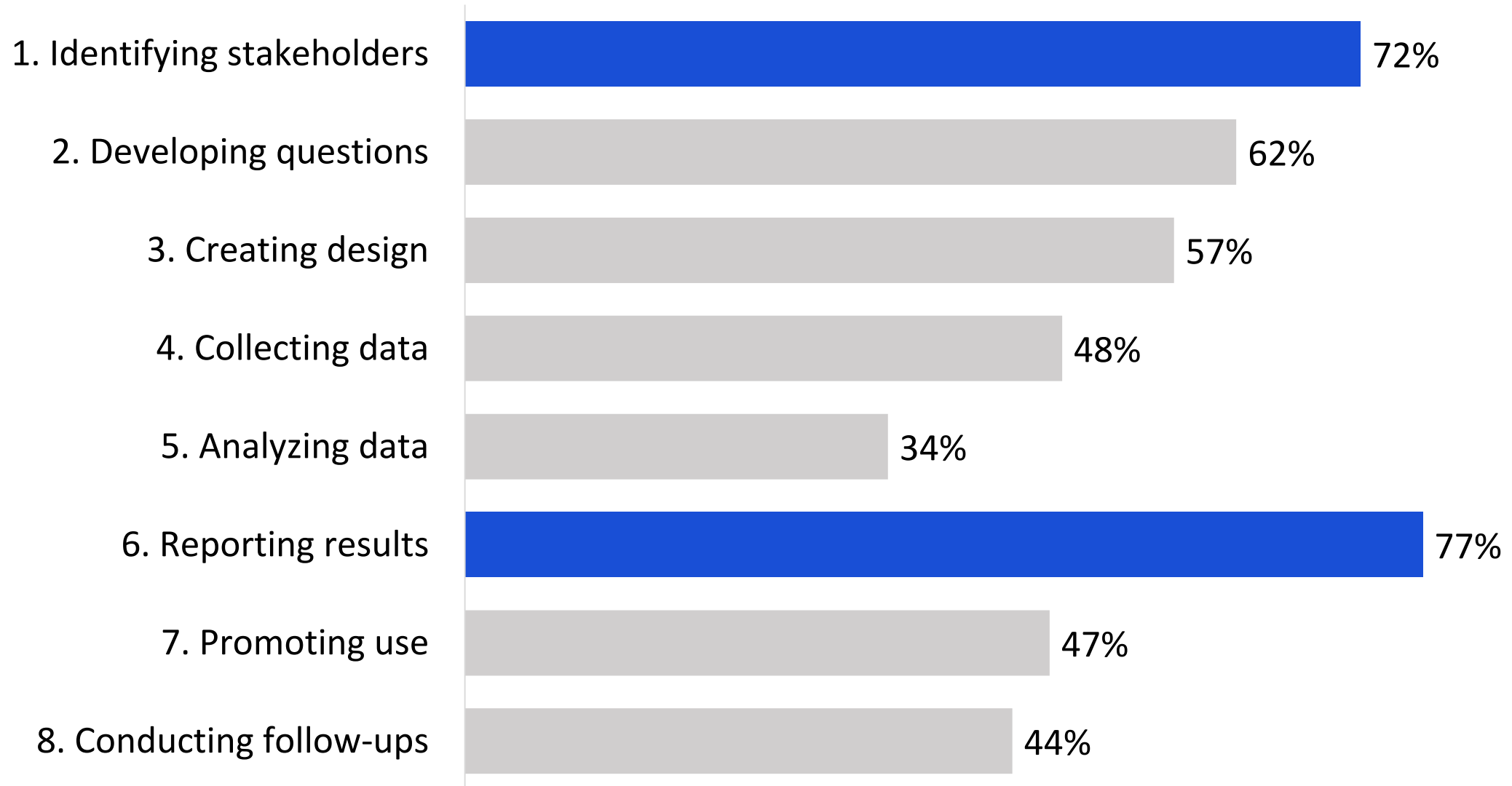
Phases Experiencing Political Situations



Few people experienced political situations in phase 5



Most people experienced political situations in phases 1 and 6



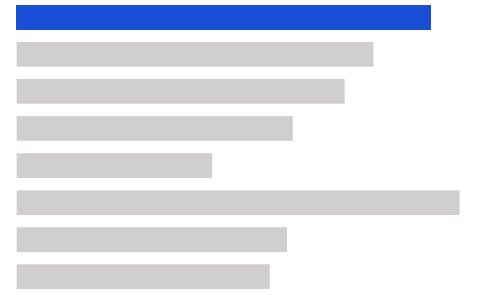
Qualitative Coding Process

Consensual qualitative research analysis (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997)

- Open coding, inductive analysis approach among four researchers
- Discussed analysis and came to consensus on emerging codes
- Individual coding → re-convene to discuss and compare codes
 - Consistent codes retained
 - Inconsistent codes discussed until consensus obtained

Phase 1

Identifying Stakeholders

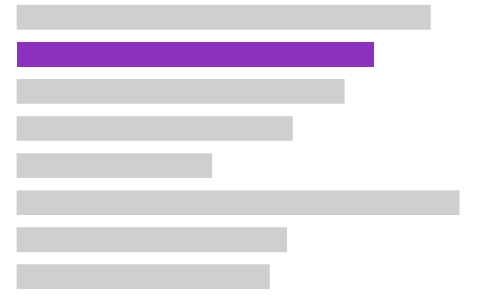


Most evaluators experienced political situations in determining who to include or exclude from participating in the evaluation or being represented.

“The client did not believe that we should be interviewing certain stakeholders. They put up roadblocks and made excuses. This created a very tense dynamic and negotiations.”

Phase 2

Developing Questions

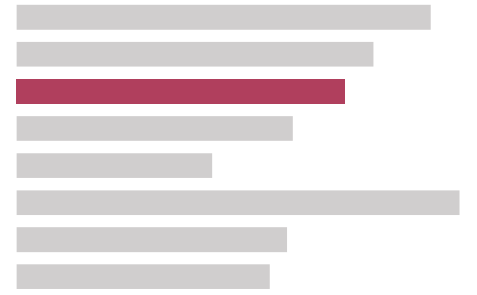


The political situation in this phase focused on who gets to determine the evaluation question.

“There have been several situations in which the questions to include or exclude were determined ultimately by a single individual. This is a point in the process that requires true collaboration since it serves as the foundation for the rest of the projec[t]”

Phase 3

Creating the Design



Most evaluators experienced political situations in stakeholders wanting a certain evaluation design.

“Despite advising the stakeholders on the best design approach, I was told the way in which they wanted the design to be developed, which did not align with my suggested design.”

Phase 4

Collecting Data



Many experienced a political situation where stakeholders made data collection difficult.

“[The] primary point of contact (client) attempted to prevent my team from accessing [a] sub-group of participants.”

“During one evaluation that included multiple sites, two sites that were certain their results would not be so great began to refuse to report or to administer surveys. Leadership had to step in, which more than likely influenced the data that was finally collected under duress.”

Phase 5

Analyzing Data



Most evaluators experienced stakeholders influencing the results of the data analysis.

“pressured by the host country government and [removed] that was funding the evaluation to ‘soften’ the outcomes of the study.”

“the head of the organization kept asking me to evaluate the data using a statistical technique that was inappropriate for the data collected.”

Phase 6

Reporting Results



Most evaluators experienced a situation where stakeholders attempted to influence the evaluation reports.

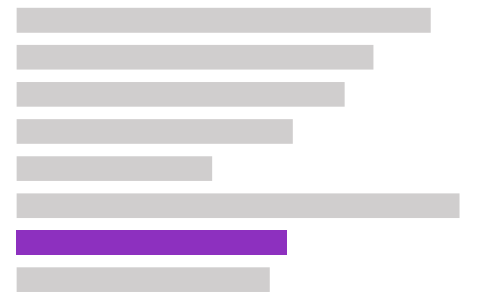
“[The stakeholder] re-wrote the report using track changes. Anything that could be interpreted negatively was eliminated, re-written, or downplayed.”

Client had the data “re-analyzed by two other statisticians because the results did not favor the program.

“faced political pressure to not release or de-emphasize evaluation results that were counter to a larger political/community narrative.”

Phase 7

Promoting Use



Most evaluators experienced stakeholders using (or not using) the evaluation for political reasons, often because they do not like the results or do not value evaluation.

“A program evaluation indicates that program was not successful but the organization [was] forced [to?] continue to maintain it because a key stakeholder uses the project to meet a political purpose.”

Phase 8

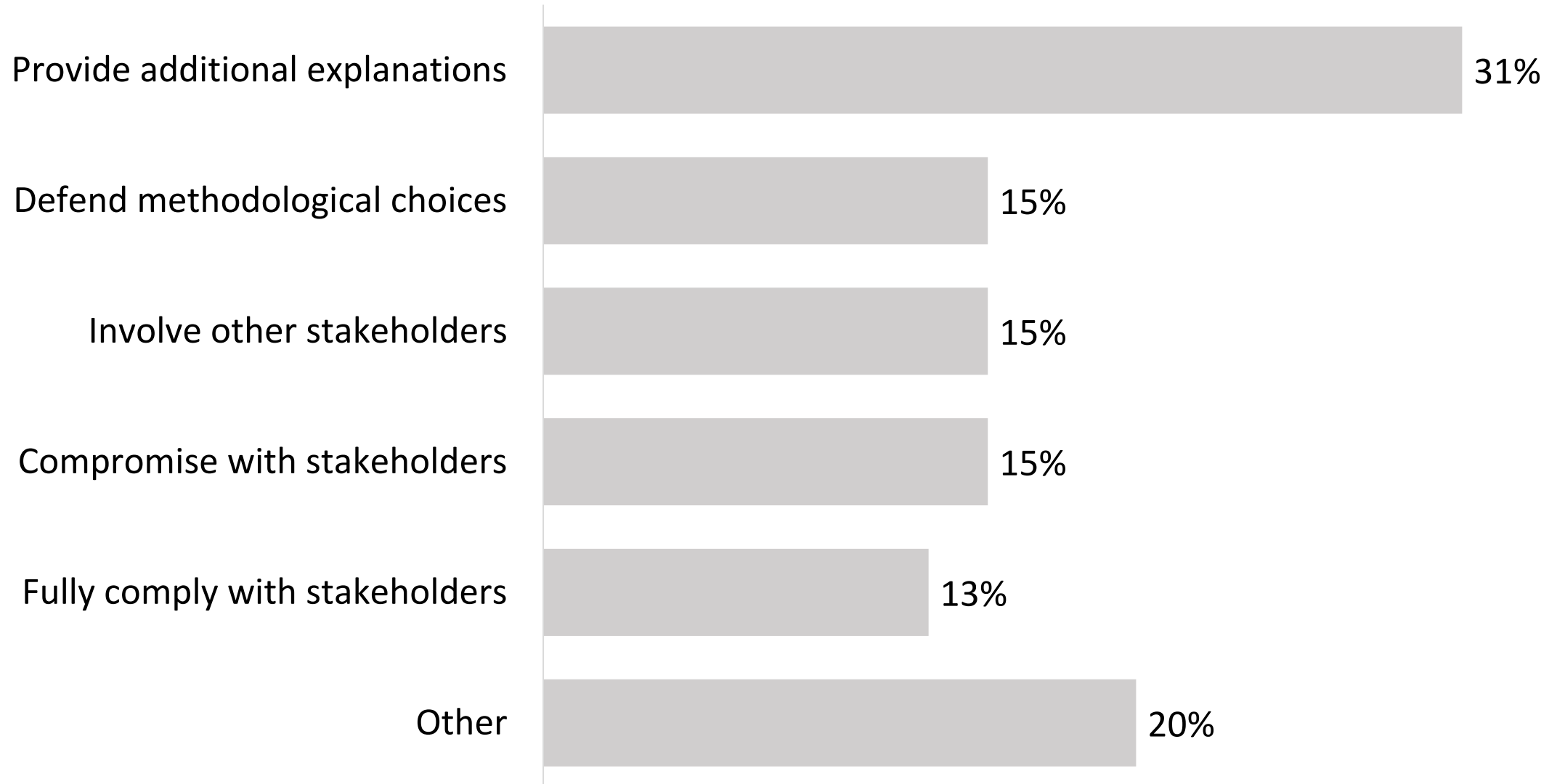
Conducting Follow-ups



Most evaluators experienced stakeholders controlling or completely stopping the follow-up process.

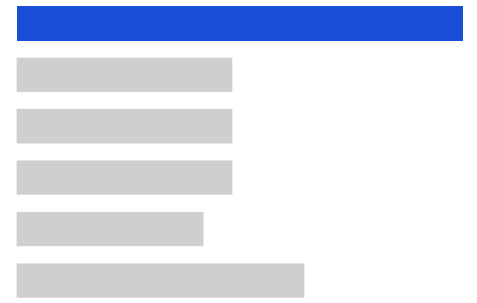
“...The evaluation was completed at the request of the prior administration and the new administration was trying to distance themselves from policies and practices under the new administration. The new administration did not find value in any of the work that had been done because they did not prioritize the project that had been evaluated”

Evaluator Responses to Political Situations



Responses

Provide Additional Explanations



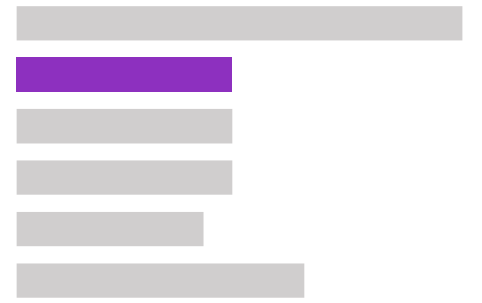
“inform[ing] [stakeholders] of the limitations of the study without the participation of the subgroup they did not want included.”

One evaluator informed their clients “how evaluations and their results are not punitive but rather informative.”

This was a particularly common response in phases 1 (identifying stakeholders), 2 (developing questions), and 4 (collecting data).

Responses

Defend Methodological Choices

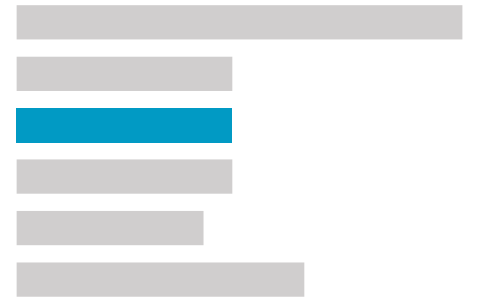


“presented strong theoretical evidence of questions I wanted included in the survey, and 'argued' [with stakeholders] about how the survey should be constructed.”

This was a particularly common response in phase 5 (analyzing data).

Responses

Involve Other Stakeholders

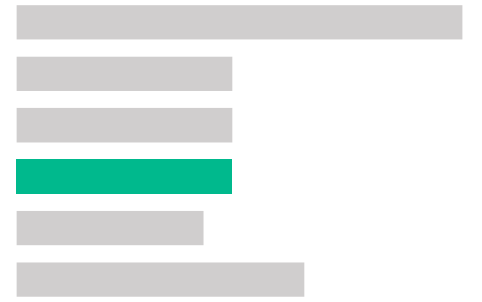


Consult with other key stakeholders, engage more stakeholders in the evaluation process, and create relationships with other stakeholders to establish credibility within the organization.

This was a particularly common response in phases 1 (identifying stakeholders), 4 (collecting data), and 8 (conducting follow-ups).

Responses

Compromise with Stakeholders

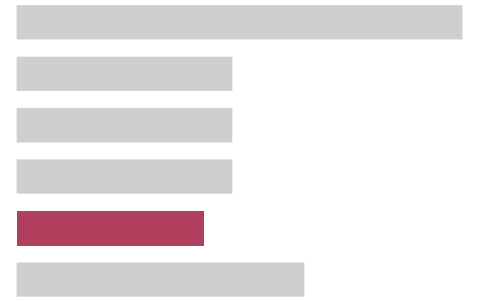


“take a collaborative approach, [so] I shared the issue with the project director so that we could jointly design an evaluation that would be responsive to both the grant officer and the project’s needs.”

This was a particularly common response in phase 5 (analyzing data).

Responses

Fully comply with Stakeholders



“[We] were forced into a situation of (a) conduct the evaluation [despite the political situation] or (b) don’t conduct the evaluation at all.”

“When the stakeholder says do something, you do it or you lose the project.”

This was a particularly common response in phases 3 (creating the design) and 6 (reporting results).

Takeaways

1. Evaluators are experiencing political situations throughout the evaluation process.
 - Especially at the beginning and end.
2. Evaluators may not always be in a position to respond to political situations.
 - Evaluators who don't want to lose their jobs or clients.
3. More training may be needed to help equip evaluators with tools and approaches to deal with these political situations
 - **how** to speak truth to power.

Next Steps

1. Examine how other evaluators identify these situations:
 - Do all evaluators think these are political situations?
 - Do they all agree on the severity of the situation?
 - The response to the situation?
2. Developing these situations into teaching case scenarios for emerging evaluators.



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