Making the Most of Multisite Evaluations

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Note

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Today's Agenda

- Overview and introductions
- What? Our research grounding
- So what? Implications for practice
- Now what? Application discussion

Session Goals

- Examine how evaluation involvement, use, and influence can differ when people are engaged across multiple sites

- Review the basics of UFE and PE

- Distinguish between participation and involvement in multisite settings

- Discuss how to increase the impact of multisite evaluations

- Brainstorm solutions to multisite evaluation involvement and use challenges

Think about your own evaluation experiences. . .

THREE-STEP INTERVIEW

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Question

Think of a time when people truly used an evaluation that you were part of.

– Describe that evaluation.

– What distinguished it from other evaluations in which you have participated?

Our NSF-funded research study

"BEYOND EVALUATION USE"

What This Research Was NOT…

Our study did not focus on the traditional notion of utilization-focused evaluation–

"intended use by intended users"

What Our Research Studied

- What happens to project staff who take part in a large-scale, multisite program evaluation

- Secondary potential users at multiple sites who participate throughout the evaluation process
  - How their involvement potentially leads to use
  - "[Un]intended use by [un]intended users"

Definitions

- <u>Program</u>
  - a major national funding initiative

- <u>Project</u>
  - one of many smaller efforts funded under a single program

- <u>Multisite</u>
  - multiple program sites that participate in the conduct of cross-site evaluation activity (Straw & Herrell, 2002)

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"Beyond Evaluation Use" NSF Programs

Name of Program	Years of Evaluations
Local Systemic Change through Teacher Enhancement (LSC)	1995 – present
Advanced Technological Education (ATE)	1998 - 2005
Collaboratives for Excellence in Teacher Preparation (CETP)	1999 - 2005
Building Evaluation Capacity of STEM Projects: Math Science Partnership Research Evaluation and Technical Assistance Project (MSP-RETA)	2002 – present

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Methods

– Archival Review
– Project Leader and Evaluator Survey
– Interviews
– NSF PI Survey
– Journal Editor Inquiry
– Citation Analysis

Research Limitations

- Difficult to control for the variety of definitions in the field
- Memory issues for participants
- Lack of distinction between *program* and *project* in survey responses
- Sampling challenges and program variation

Research Strengths

- Unusual to receive funding for evaluation research
- Real world program examples
- Different from traditional utilization-focused evaluation focus
- Studied influence on the field and on projects themselves
- Use of varied and innovative methods

What are the ideas this research studied? (What?)

CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING

Overarching Concepts

- Evaluation use/influence
- Involvement
  - Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE)
  - Participatory evaluation (PE)

Traditional Types of Evaluation Use

Type	Use For	Definition: The Use of Knowledge. . .
Instrumental	Action	. . . for making decisions
Conceptual or Enlightenment	Understanding	. . . to better understand a program or policy
Political, Persuasive, or Symbolic	Justification	. . . to support a decision someone has already made or to persuade others to hold a specific opinion

Definitions in "Beyond Evaluation Use"

| Term	Definition
Evaluation use	The purposeful application of evaluation processes, findings, or knowledge to produce an effect
Influence *ON* evaluation	The capacity of an individual to produce effects on an evaluation by direct or indirect means
Influence *OF* evaluation (from Kirkhart, 2000)	The capacity or power of evaluation to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means

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What Is Involvement?

- Not "participation"
- Not "engagement"
- Instead, think about how UFE and PE overlap

Overlap between UFE and PE

UFE

Key people take part throughout the evaluation process

PE
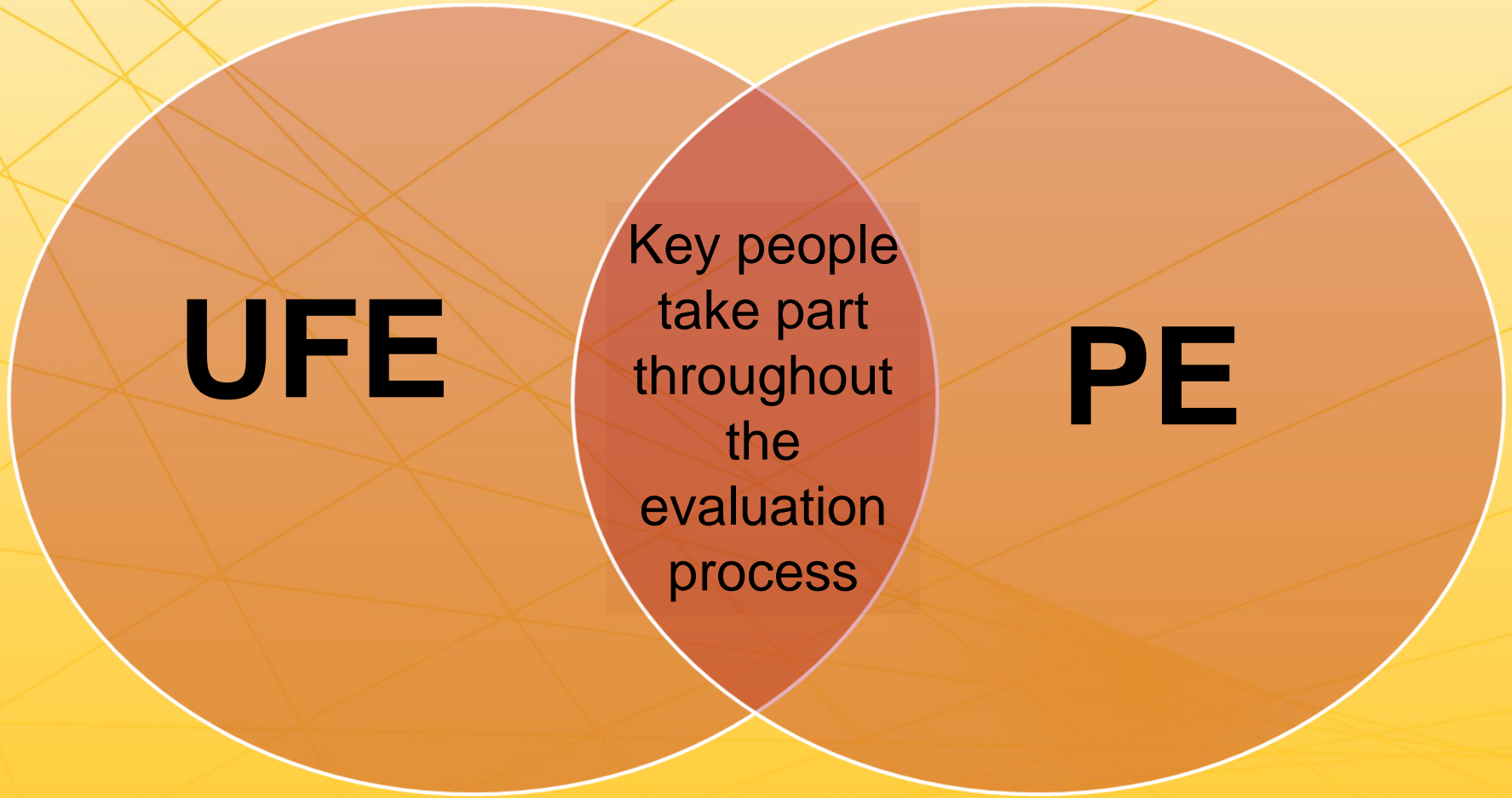
Utilization-focused Evaluation (UFE)

Evaluation done for and with **specific**, ***intended primary users*** for ***specific, intended uses***

-Patton (2008), *Utilization-Focused Evaluation, 4th Edition*

The **PERSONAL FACTOR** in Evaluation

"The presence of

an identifiable individual

or group of people

who personally care

about the evaluation
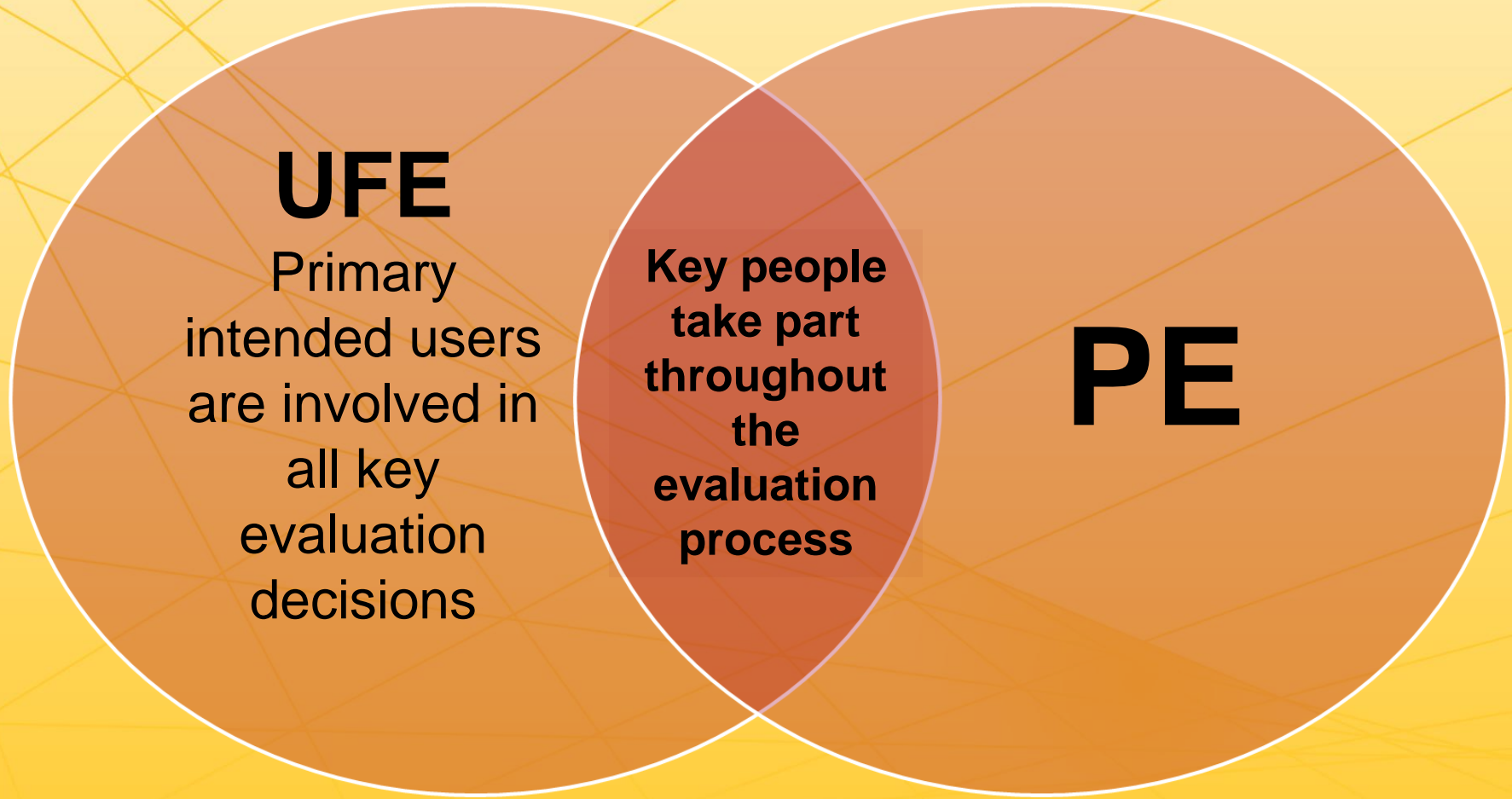
and the findings it generates"

Key Collaboration Points in UFE

- Issues to examine (information primary intended users want/need)
- Methods to use (credibility in context)
- Analysis and interpretation of data
- Recommendations that will be useful

Overlap between UFE and PE

UFE
Primary intended users are involved in all key evaluation decisions

Key people take part throughout the evaluation process

PE

Participatory Evaluation (PE)

Range of definitions

– Active participation throughout all phases in the evaluation process by those with a stake in the program (King,1998)

– Broadening decision-making and problem-solving through systematic inquiry; reallocating power in the production of knowledge and promoting social changes (Cousins & Whitmore,1998)

Principles of PE

- Participants OWN the evaluation
- The evaluator facilitates; participants plan and conduct the study
- People learn evaluation logic and skills as part of the process
- ALL aspects of the evaluation are understandable and meaningful
- Internal self-accountability is valued

(Adapted from Patton, 1997)

Characteristics of PE

1. **Control of the evaluation process** ranges from evaluator to practitioners

2. **Stakeholder selection for participation** ranges from primary users to "all legitimate groups"

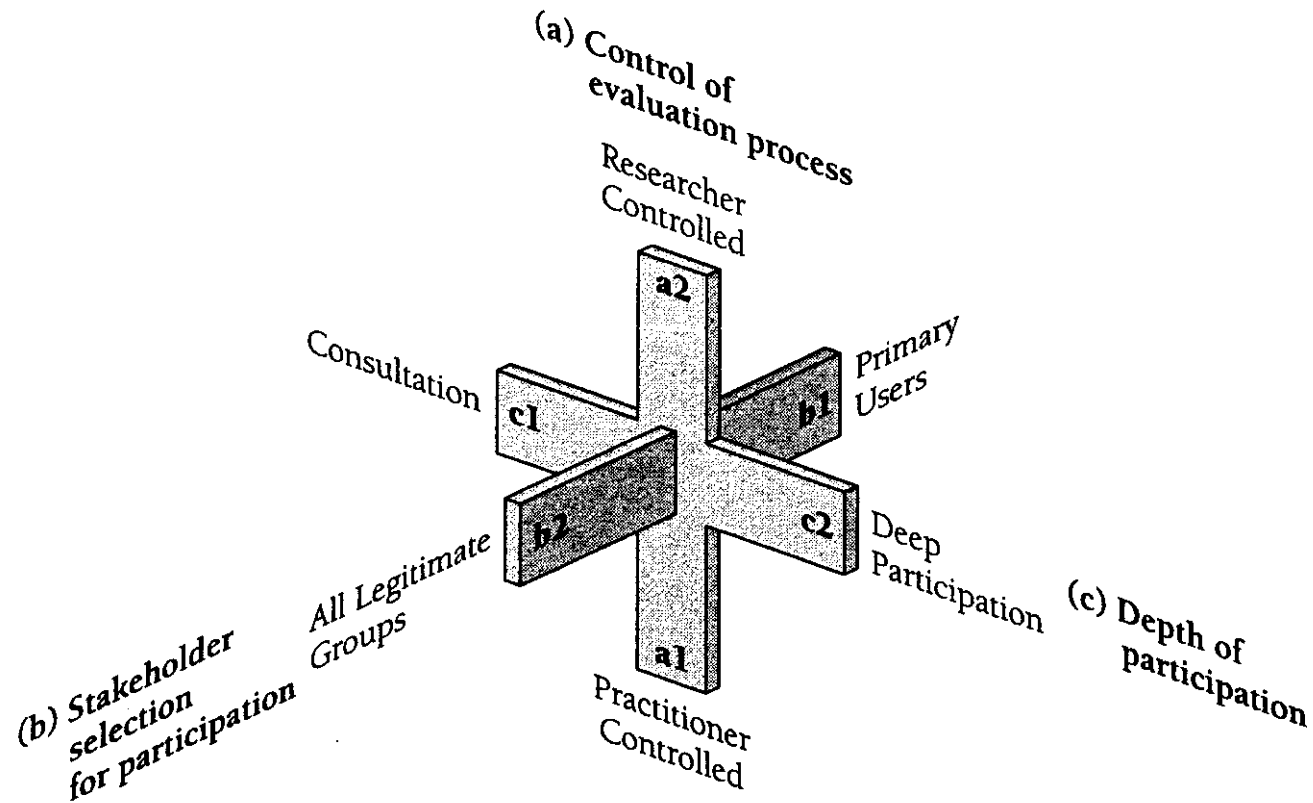3. **Depth of participation** ranges from consultation to deep participation

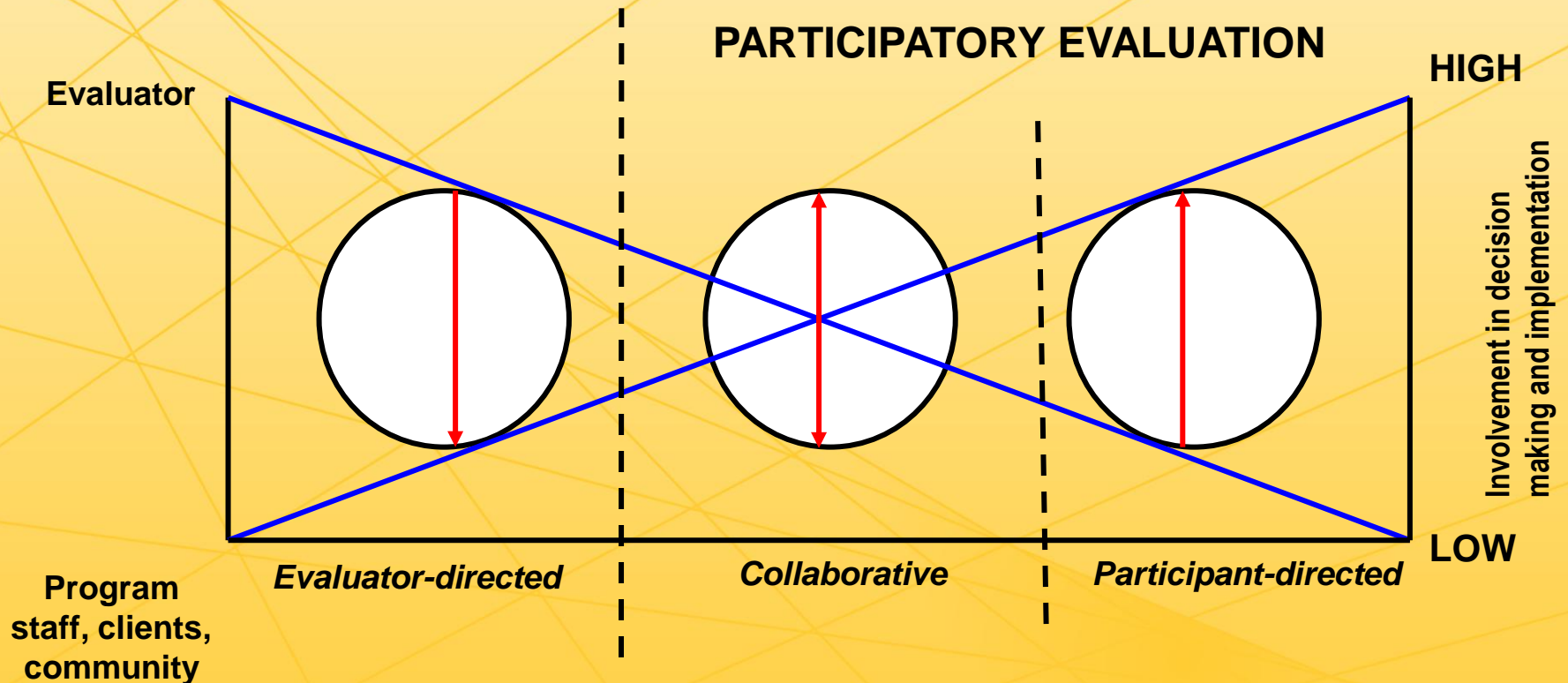(From Cousins & Whitmore, 1998)

Cousins & Whitmore Framework

Figure 1.1. Dimensions of Form in Collaborative Inquiry

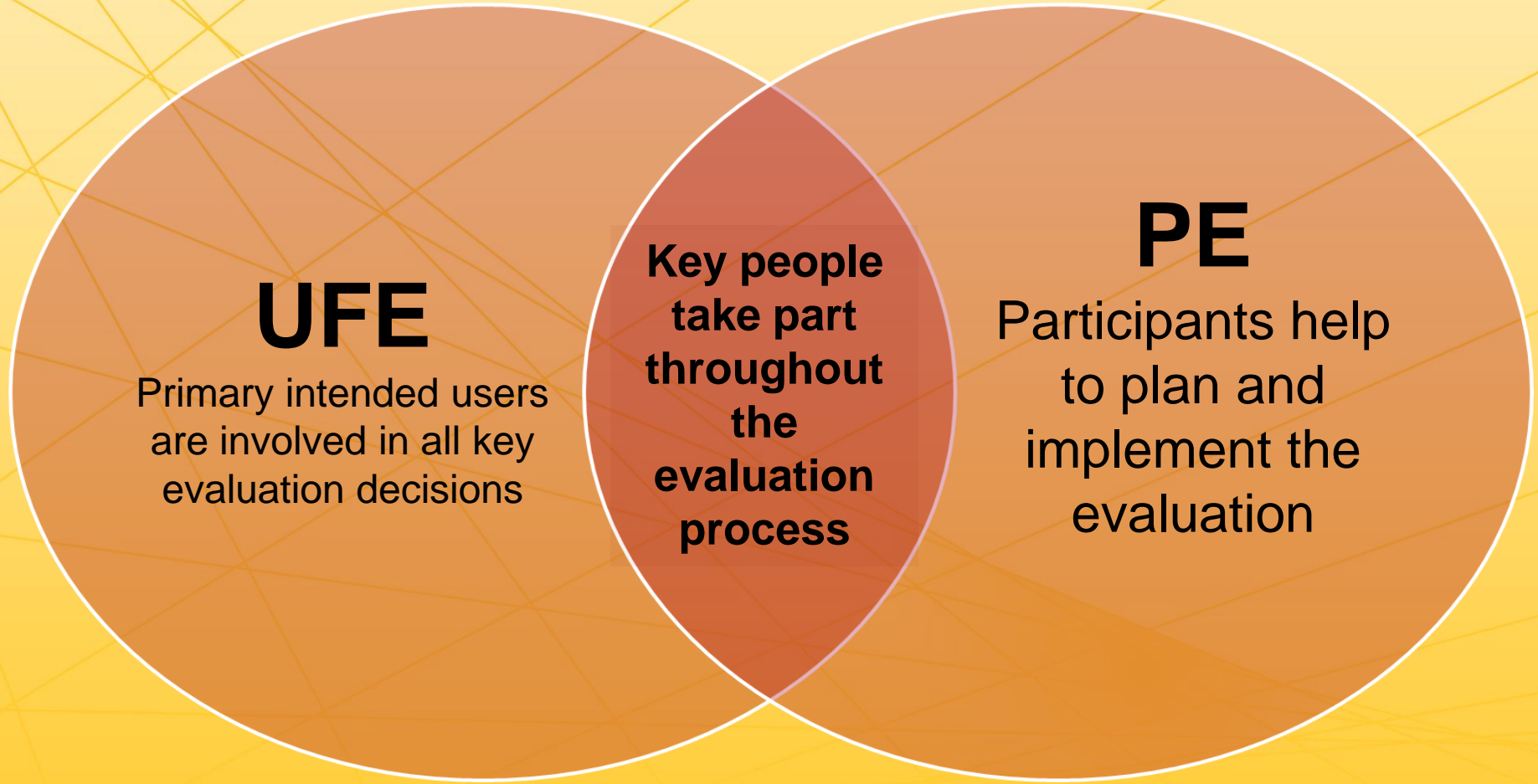# Interactive Evaluation Quotient

Overlap between UFE and PE

UFE
Primary intended users are involved in all key evaluation decisions

Key people take part throughout the evaluation process

PE
Participants help to plan and implement the evaluation

What happens when there are many sites involved in one study?

MULTI-SITE EVALUATIONS

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Challenges of UFE/PE in Multisite Settings

- Projects vary
  - Activities – Goals –
  - Budgets -- Stakeholders

- Projects may be geographically diverse
  - Distance -- Cost

- Programs each have multiple stakeholders so the "project" becomes a key stakeholder (Lawrenz & Huffman, 2003)
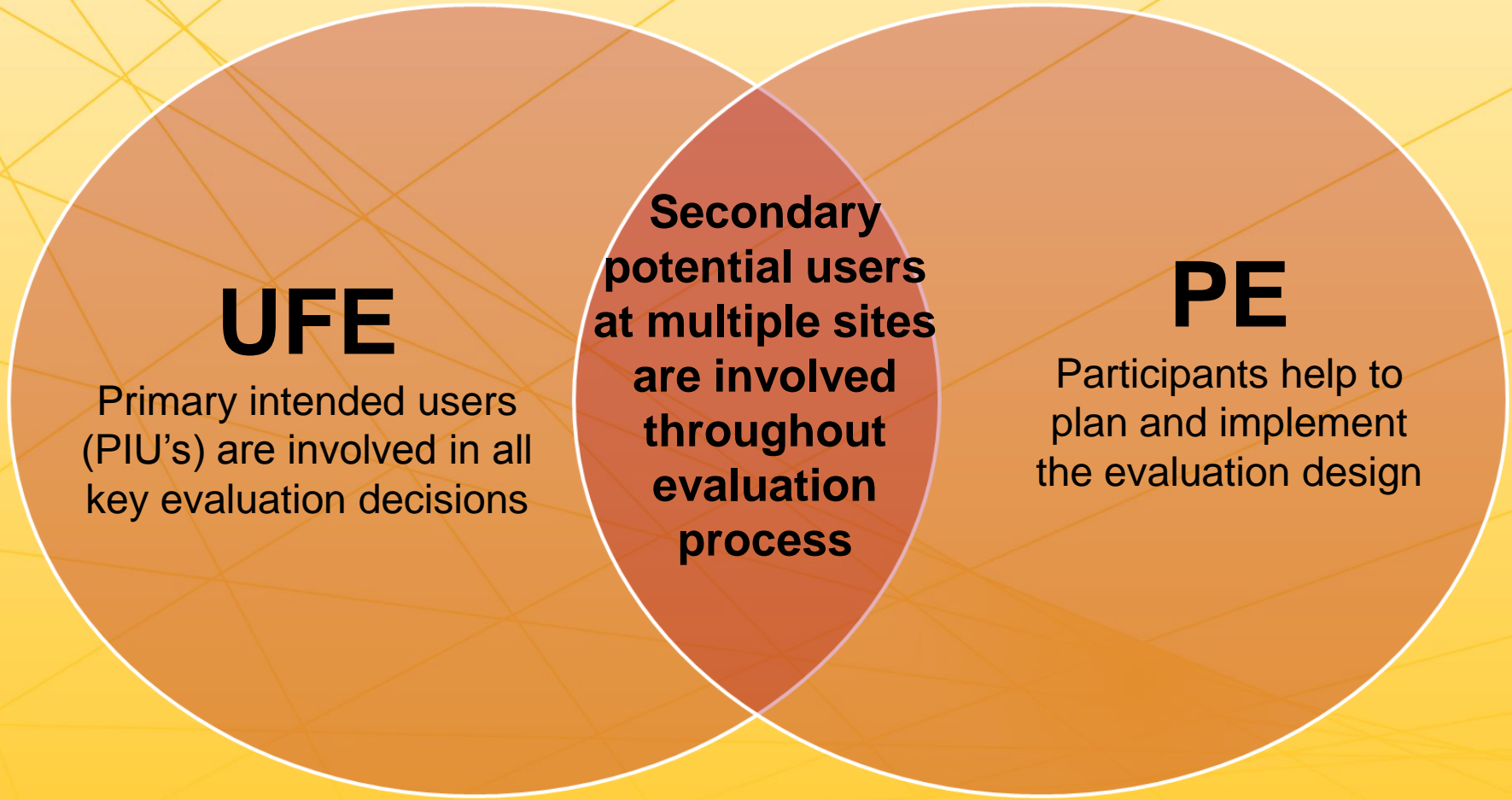
Prediction

How might

UFE and PE play out

in multisite evaluations

(MSE's)?

The Focus of Our Research

UFE

Primary intended users (PIU's) are involved in all key evaluation decisions

Secondary potential users at multiple sites are involved throughout evaluation process

PE

Participants help to plan and implement the evaluation design

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After five years. . . so what?

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

What Our Research Found

- Secondary potential users **did** sometimes feel involved in the program evaluation and **did** sometimes use results

- What fostered feelings of involvement:
  - Meetings of all types; face-to-face best
  - Planning for use
  - The mere act of providing or collecting data

What Fostered Use

- Perception of a high quality evaluation

- Convenience, practicality, and alignment of evaluation materials (e.g., instruments)

- Feeling membership in a community

Remember the three-step interview results?

Implications for Practice

1. Set reasonable expectations for project staff
   - Consider different levels of involvement (depth OR breadth, not both necessarily)
   - Have projects serve as advisors or consultants
   - Have detail work completed by others/ outsiders

2. Address evaluation data concerns
   - Verify understanding of data definitions
   - Check accuracy (Does it make sense?)
   - Consider multiple analyses and interpretations

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Implications for Practice (cont.)

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate

    -- Personal contact matters

4. Interface regularly with the funder
 – Understand the various contexts
 – Garner support for the program evaluation
 – Obtain help to promote involvement and use
 – Represent the projects back to the funder

Implications for Practice (cont.)

5. Recognize life cycles of people, projects, and the program
   – Involve more than one person per project
   – Understand the politics of projects

6. Expect tensions and conflict
   – Between project and program evaluation
   – Among projects (competition)
   – About how best to use resources

Implications for Practice (cont.)

7. Work to build community among projects and between projects/funder
   – Face-to-face interactions
   – Continuous communication
   – Asynchronous electronic communication
   – Be credible to project staff
     • Recognized expertise
     • "Guide on the side" not "sage on the stage"

As you think about these ideas. . .

Questions?

Summary

- Involvement in MSEs is different from participation in single site evaluations

- Involvement does promote use

- There are several ways to foster participants' feelings of involvement

- Communication with participants and funders is critical

For Further Information

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http://cehd.umn.edu/projects/beu/default.html

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