

Practice what you preach: Towards a theory of using program theory in evaluation

Dr. Jan U. Hense

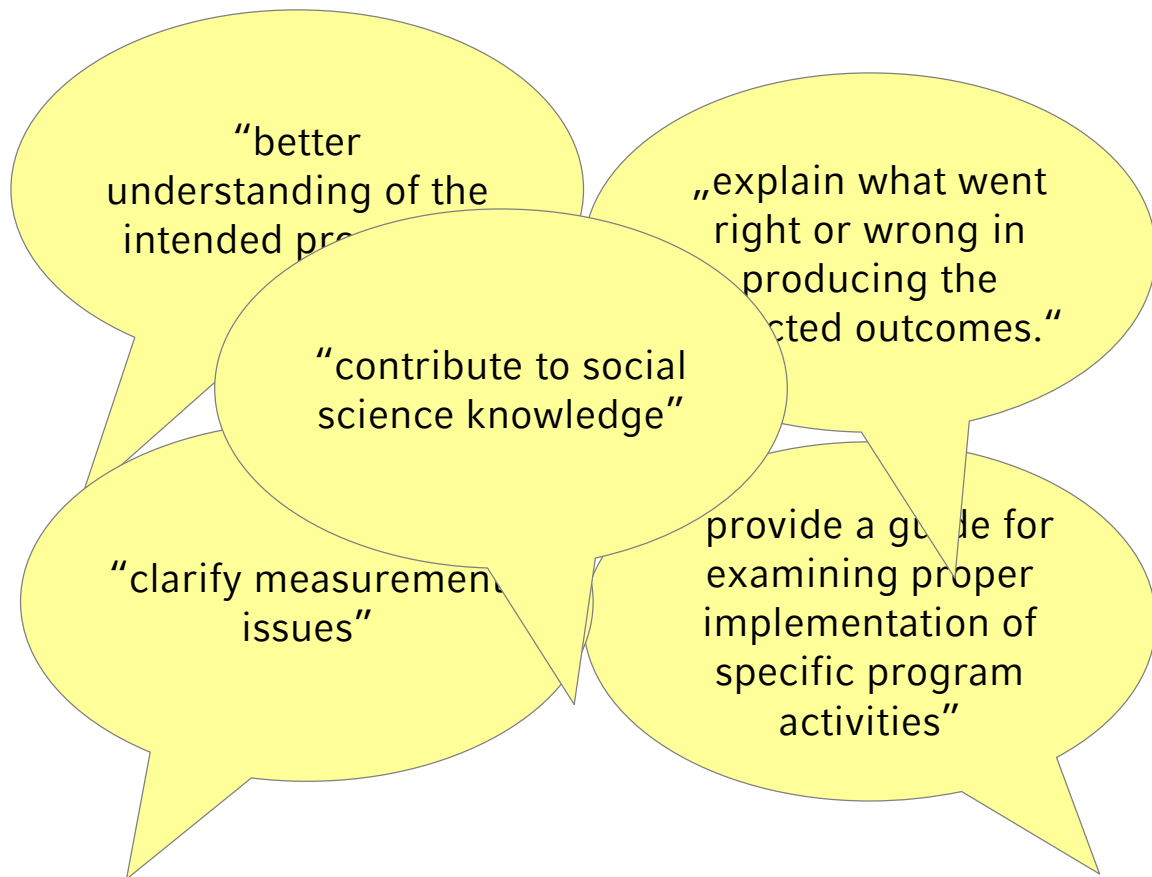
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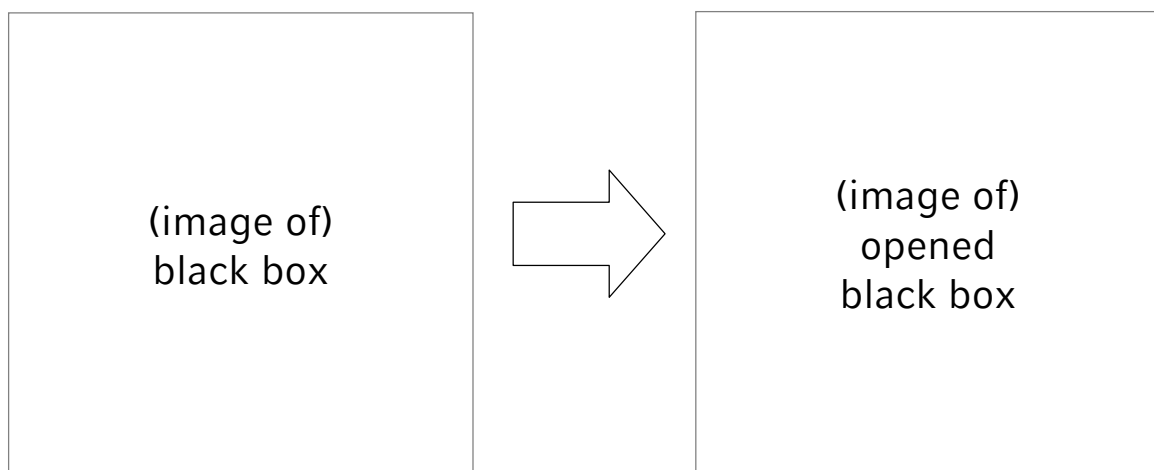
The notion of using program theory in evaluation
has gone mainstream.

(images of)
Monographs on logic models & program theory
and text books with references to
logic models & program theory



Goal:

Better understand
how the use of program theory
can contribute to better evaluation



A four step approach

1. Collect alleged functions and effects of using program theory (hypotheses).
2. Reframe these hypotheses within a process model of evaluation.
3. Link each hypothesis to a general model of evaluation influence.
4. Make explicit the underlying logic of each hypothesis by specifying their program theory.

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black box

A four step approach

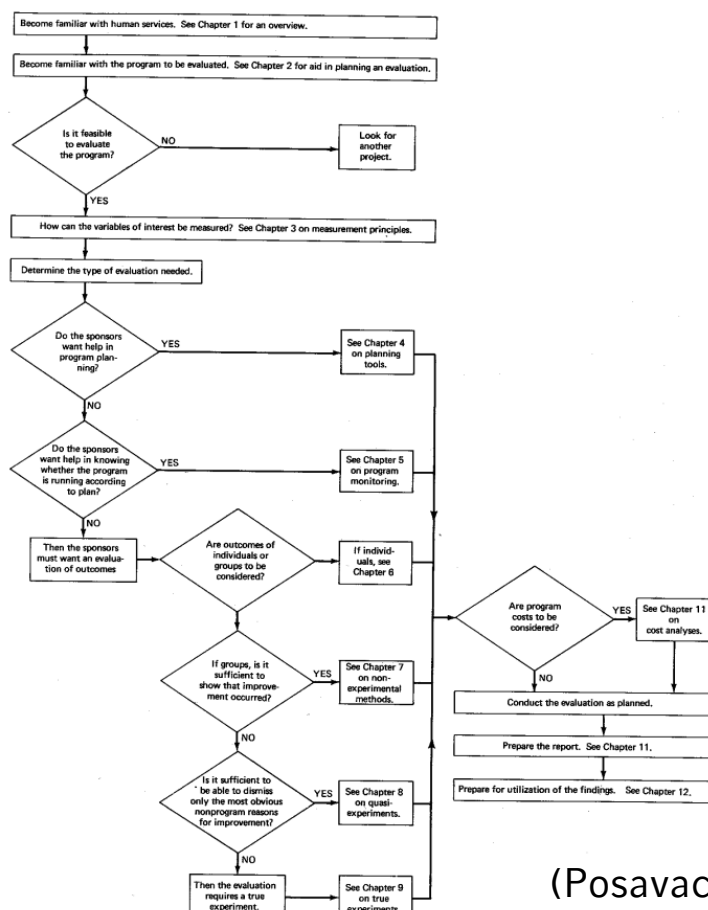
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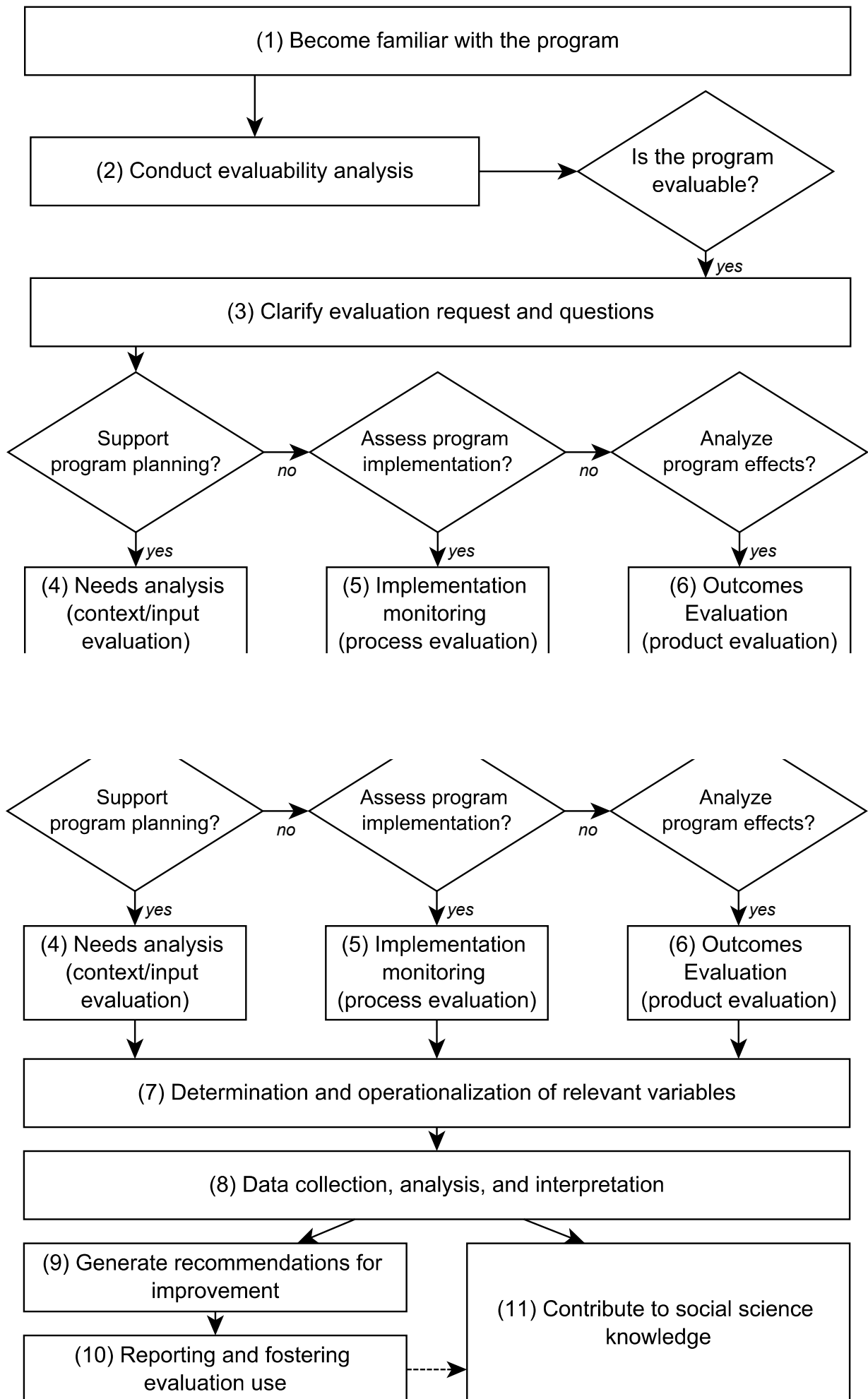
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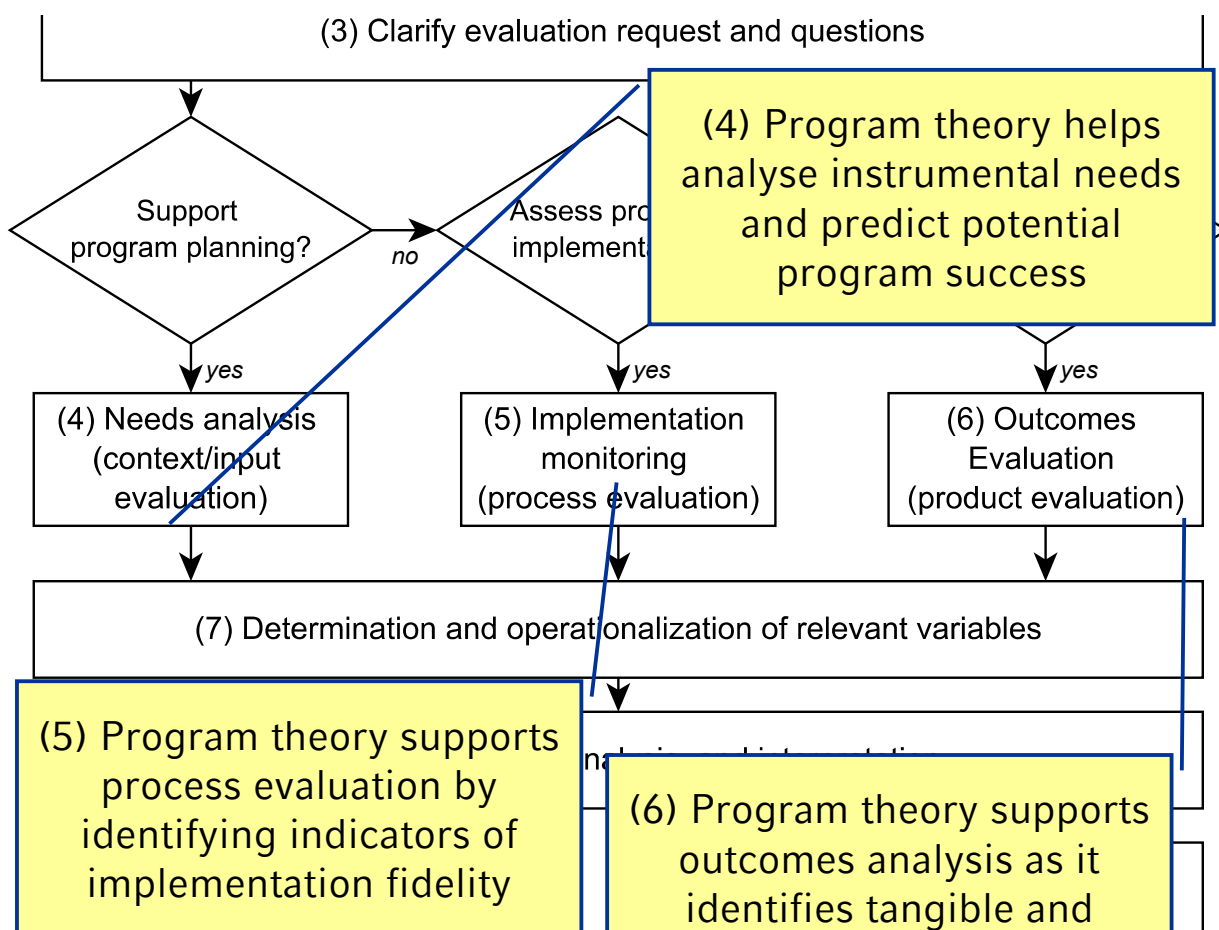
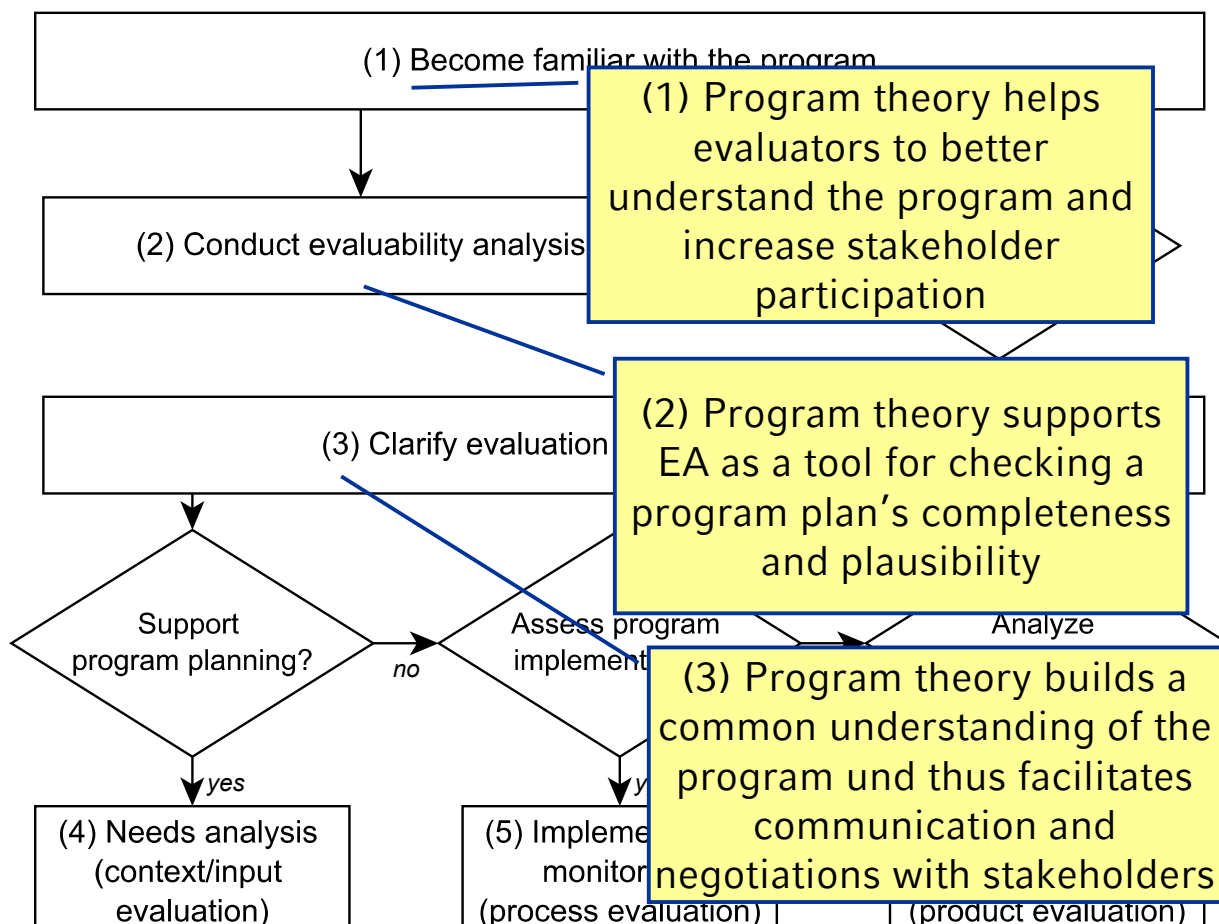
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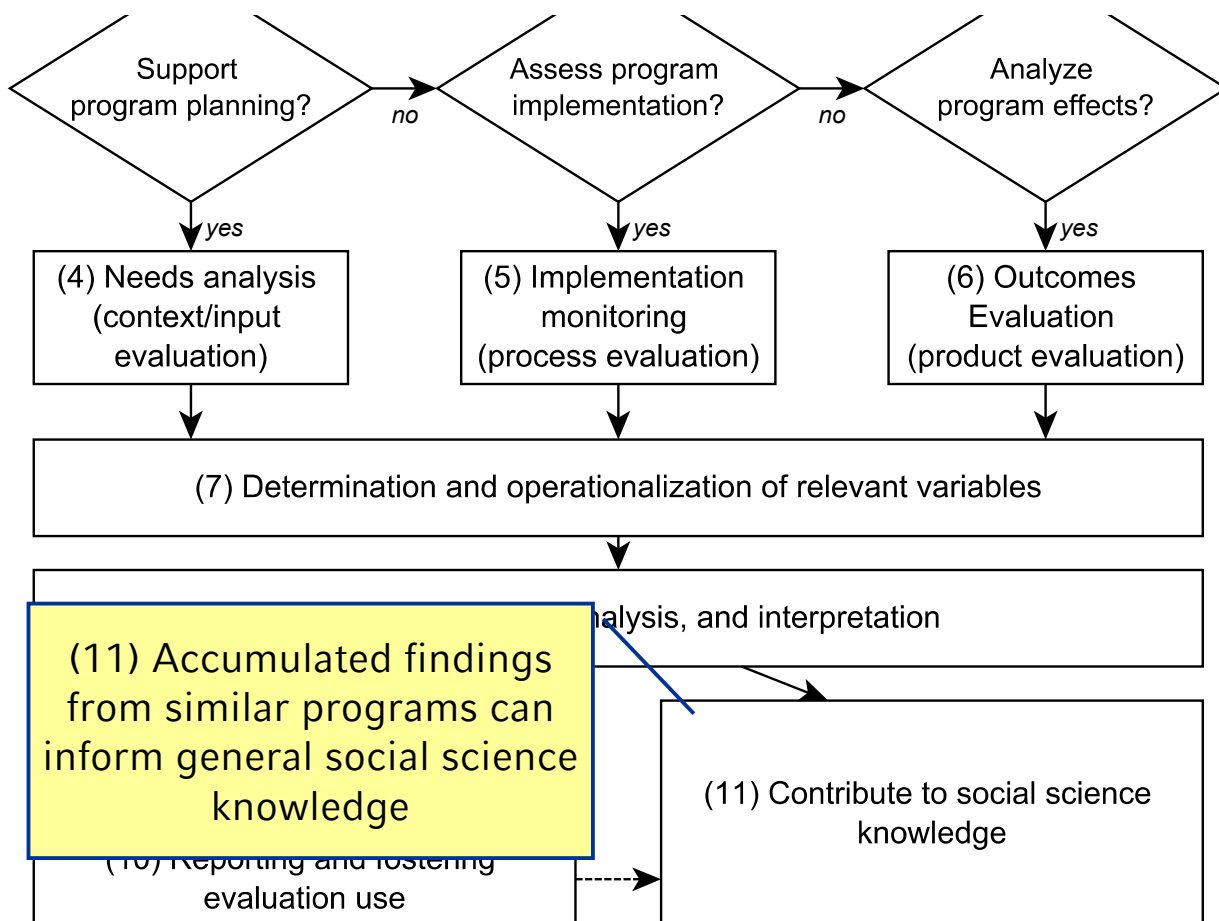
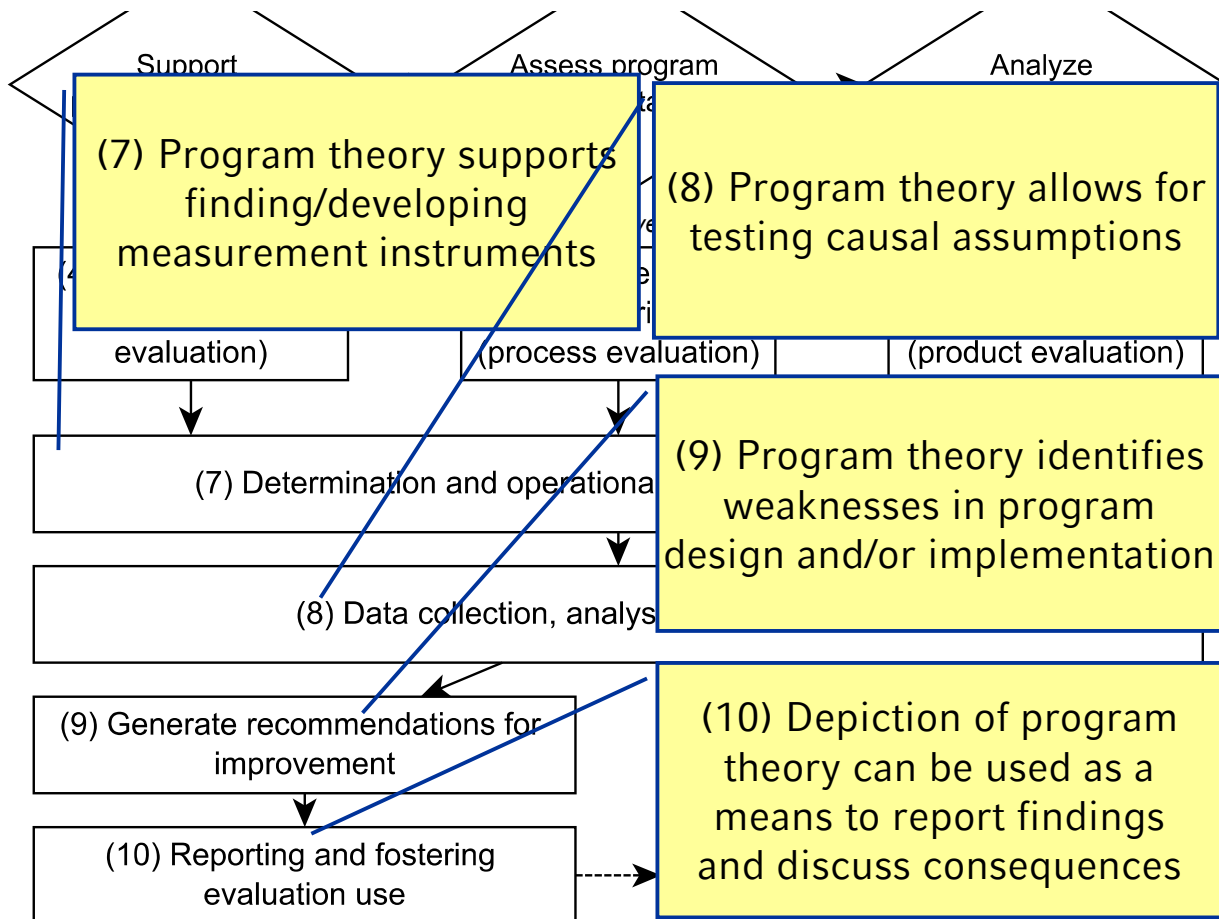
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(Posavac & Carey, 1980, p. xvi)





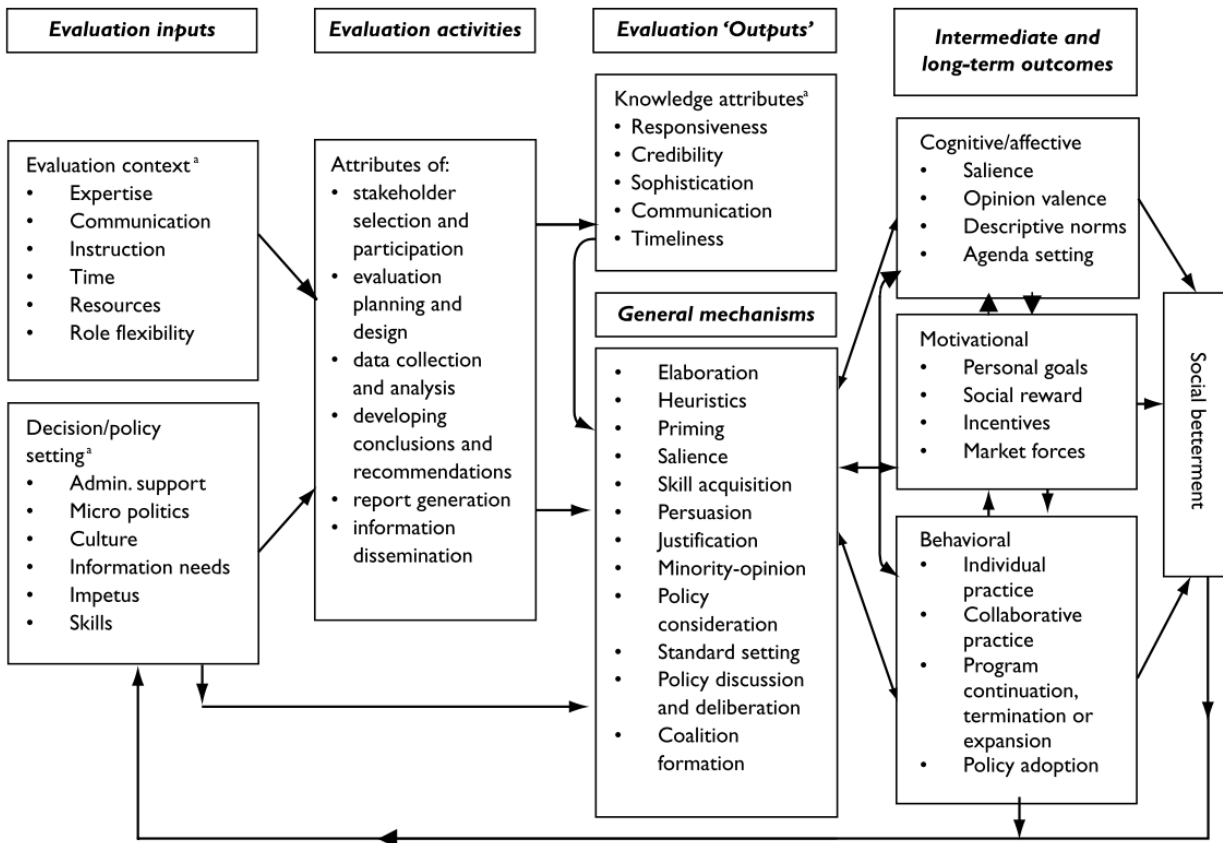


- (1) Program theory helps evaluators to better understand the program and increase stakeholder participation
- (2) Program theory supports EA as a tool for checking a program plan's completeness and plausibility
- (3) Program theory builds a common understanding of the program and thus facilitates communication and negotiations with stakeholders
- (4) Program theory helps analyse instrumental needs and predict potential program success
- (5) Program theory supports process evaluation by identifying indicators of implementation fidelity
- (6) Program theory supports outcomes analysis as it identifies tangible and intangible outcomes
- (7) Program theory supports finding/developing measurement instruments
- (8) Program theory allows for testing causal assumptions
- (9) Program theory identifies weaknesses in program design and/or implementation
- (10) Depiction of program theory can be used as a means to report findings and discuss consequences
- (11) Accumulated findings from similar programs can inform general social science knowledge

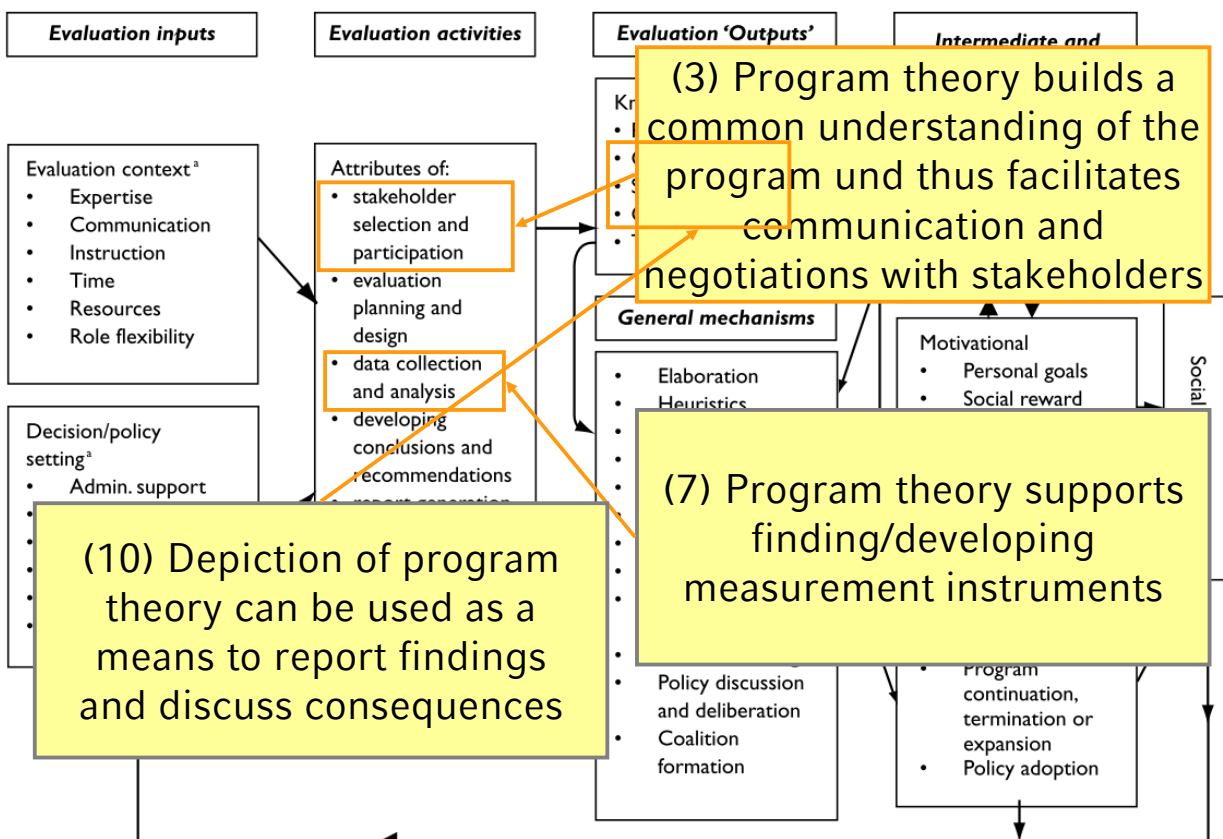
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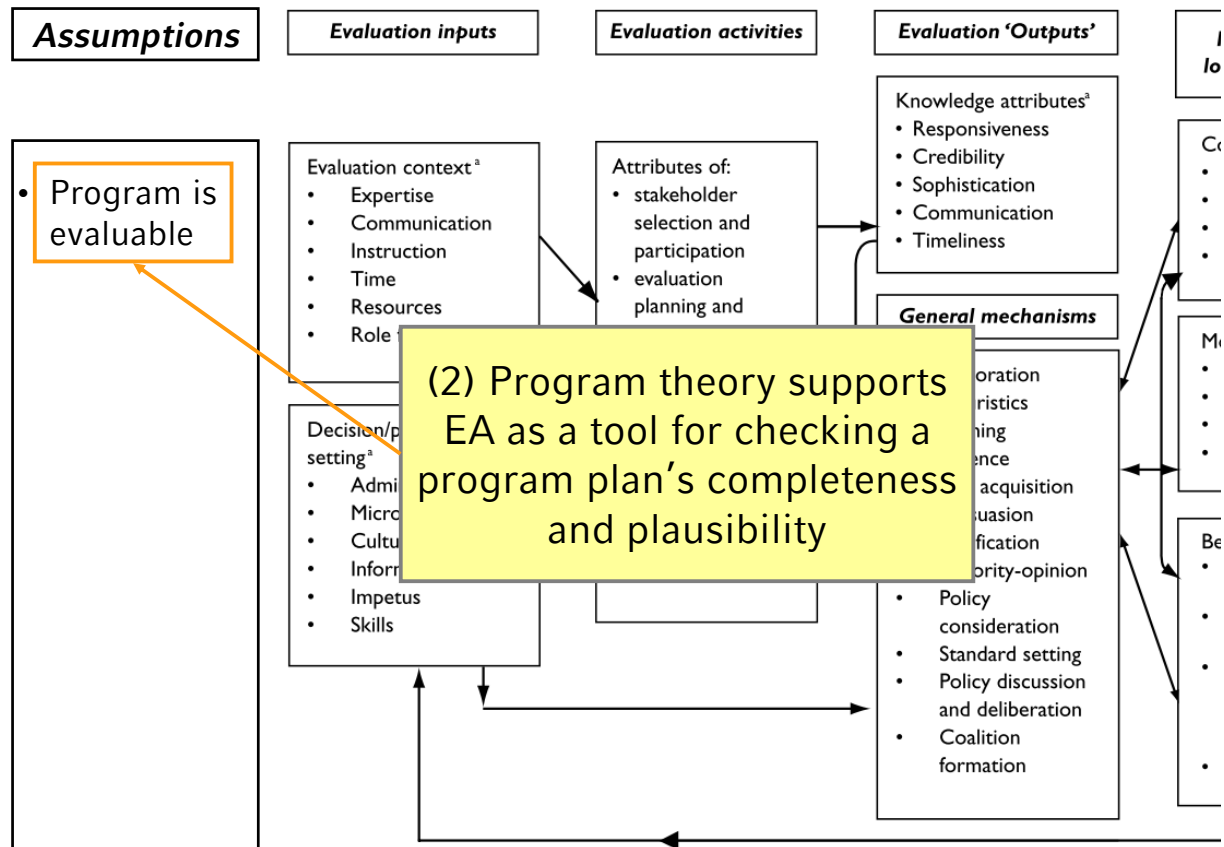
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Mark & Henry (2004, p. 46)



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Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes	Impact
▪ Evaluator competencies ▪ Time ▪ Financial resources ▪ Stakeholders' willingness for collaboration	▪ Stakeholder collaboration ▪ Draft program theory ▪ Resolve conflicting views	▪ Program theory	▪ Evaluators' understanding of program ▪ Stakeholder participation and identification ▪ (precondition for further hypotheses is fulfilled)	▪ Better evaluation leading to social betterment

(1) Program theory helps evaluators to better understand the program and increase stakeholder participation

Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes	Impact
▪ Published evaluation reports of similar programs with comparable program theories	▪ Accumulation of findings	▪ Common results ▪ Confirmation or rejection of theory	▪ Increased knowledge ▪ Scientific progress	▪ social betterment

(11) Accumulated findings from similar programs can inform general social science knowledge

A four step approach

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Applications

- Analysis of causal assumptions implicit in claims of the merits of using program theory
 - Plausibility analysis
 - Use of existing empirical evidence
 - New empirical research
- Framework for evaluation practice
 - At which stages can we use program theory for which purposes?
 - Will the potential benefits justify the effort?

Take away messages

- Program theory has become the Swiss army knife of evaluation.
 - No more baggaging (Davidson, 2006)
- We have to take more care in better justifying our prescriptive evaluation approaches.
 - more elaborate theory
 - more empirical research
- Possible side effects for evaluation theory development might emerge.

Mark, M. M., & Henry, G. T. (2004). The mechanisms and outcomes of evaluation influence. *Evaluation*, 10(1), 35–57.

Posavac, E. J., & Carey, R. G. (1980). *Program evaluation. Methods and case studies*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.