



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# Systems Approaches for Organizational Development at USAID

**American Evaluation Association 2018**

**November 1, 8:00-9:00am (session #1906)**

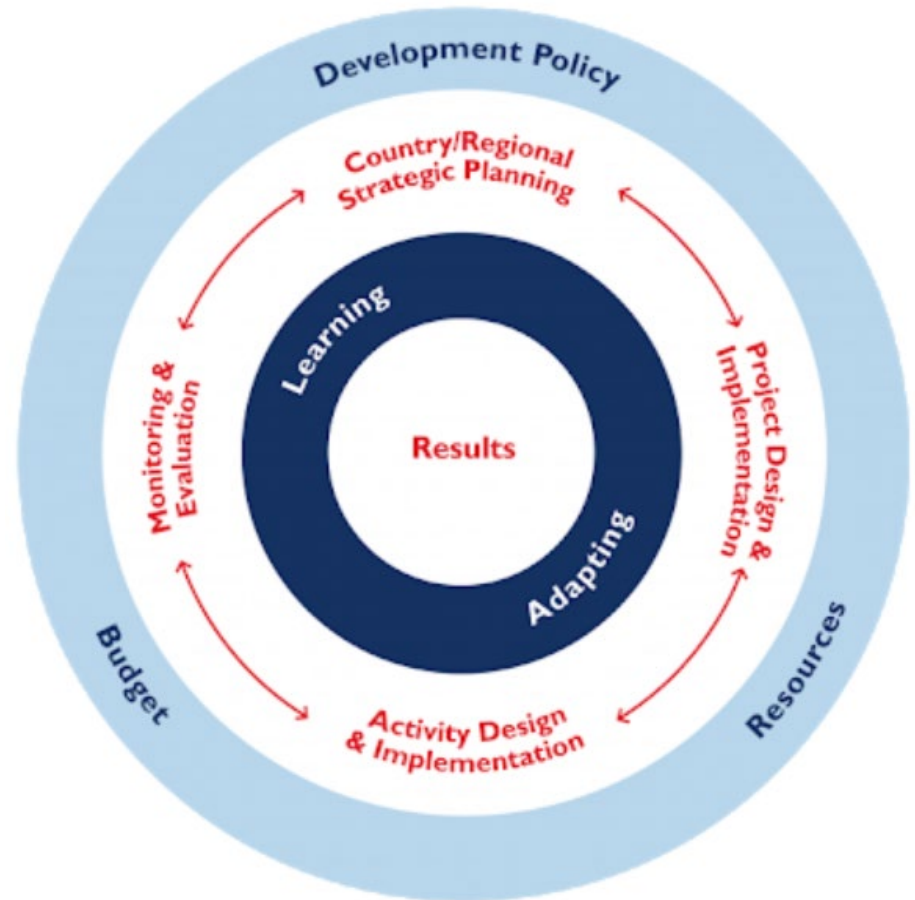
**Hilton Veterans Meeting Room A**

**DISCLAIMER:** The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



# MECap Overview

- USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) provides guidance and builds staff capacity to implement the Program Cycle.
- The Program Cycle is USAID's operational model for **planning, delivering, assessing and adapting programming**.
- MECap supports PPL's guidance and capacity development efforts.



# MECap Overview

- MECap's broad mandate
- In support of organizational capacity development
- Respond to capacity development requests throughout USAID
- Activities and products tailored to each request





# MECap Overview

MECap supports organizational capacity development through:

## **Fellowships**

- 49+ mid/senior placements around the globe
- Each fellow implements a scope tailored to the placement office
- Fellows paired with coaches and specialized support from a core team
- Collaboration and learning between Fellows actively encouraged



# MECap Overview

MECap supports organizational capacity development through:

## Clinics

- To date, 5 clinics reached 95 Mission-based staff and partners in 27 Missions
- Coaches provide tailored TA in a group setting
- Mission teams work on a self-selected task or deliverable (MEL Plan, evaluation SOW)
- Cross-team sessions facilitate peer-to-peer exchange



# Meet the presenters

- **Tonya Giannoni**, PhD, Chief of Party of USAID's Expanding M&E Capacities task order (MECap)
- **Kristin Saarlax**, ScD, MPH, Senior M&E Advisor with MECap
- **Heather Britt**, Senior M&E Specialist with MECap and Co-Chair of the Systems in Evaluation TIG





# Systems Thinking for Organizational Development in Complex Adaptive Systems

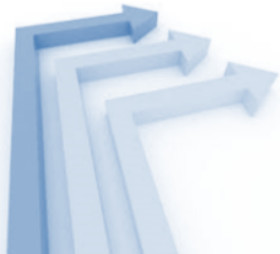
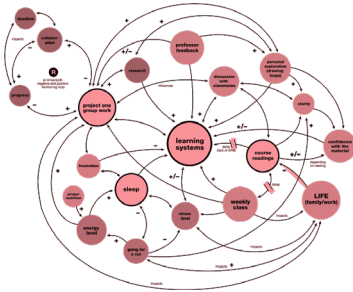
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**Heather Britt**

Sr M&E Specialist

MECap, Social Solutions  
International

# Panel Overview



- **Presentation 1:** How systems thinking equips MECap to contribute to capacity outcomes in a complex adaptive system.
- **Presentation 2:** How MECap implements 3 approaches to inform fellowships and clinics
  - Outcome harvesting (OH)
  - Social network analysis (SNA)
  - Success case method (SCM)
- **Presentation 3:** How MECap and USAID use findings.



# Why use a systems lens?





# MECap's work is complex

- Implement tasks on demand
- Respond to requests from 60+ offices
- Deliver tailored activities and products
- Co-create and co-deliver with client offices
- Manage adaptively

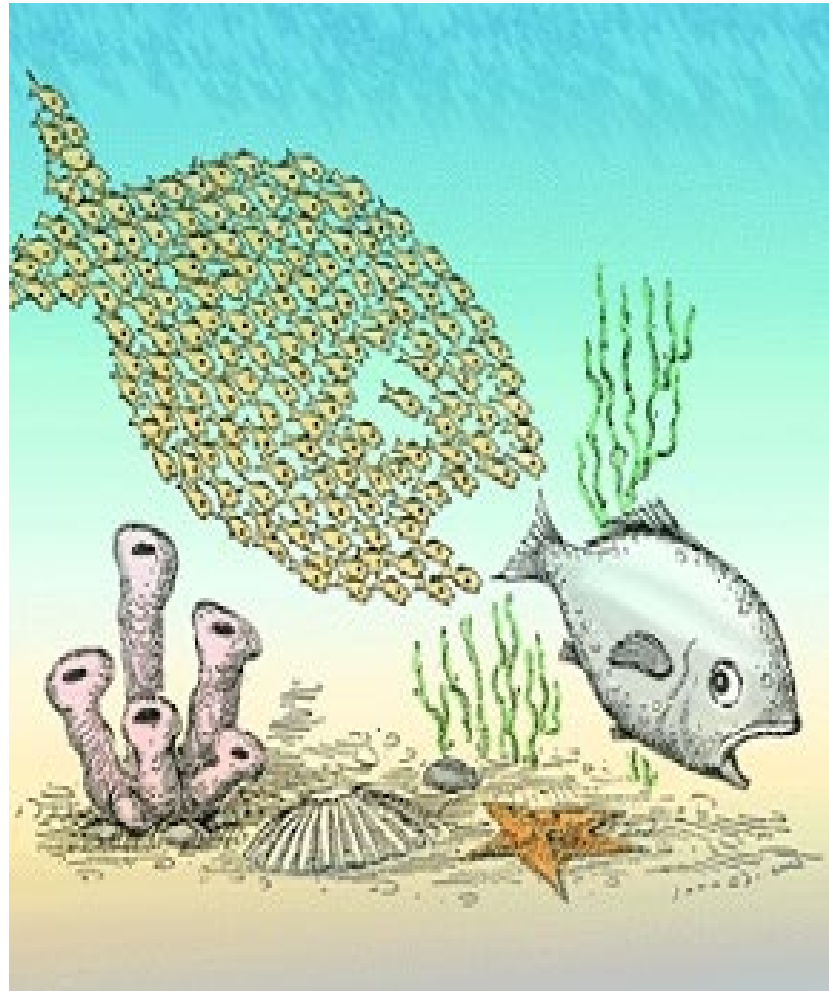


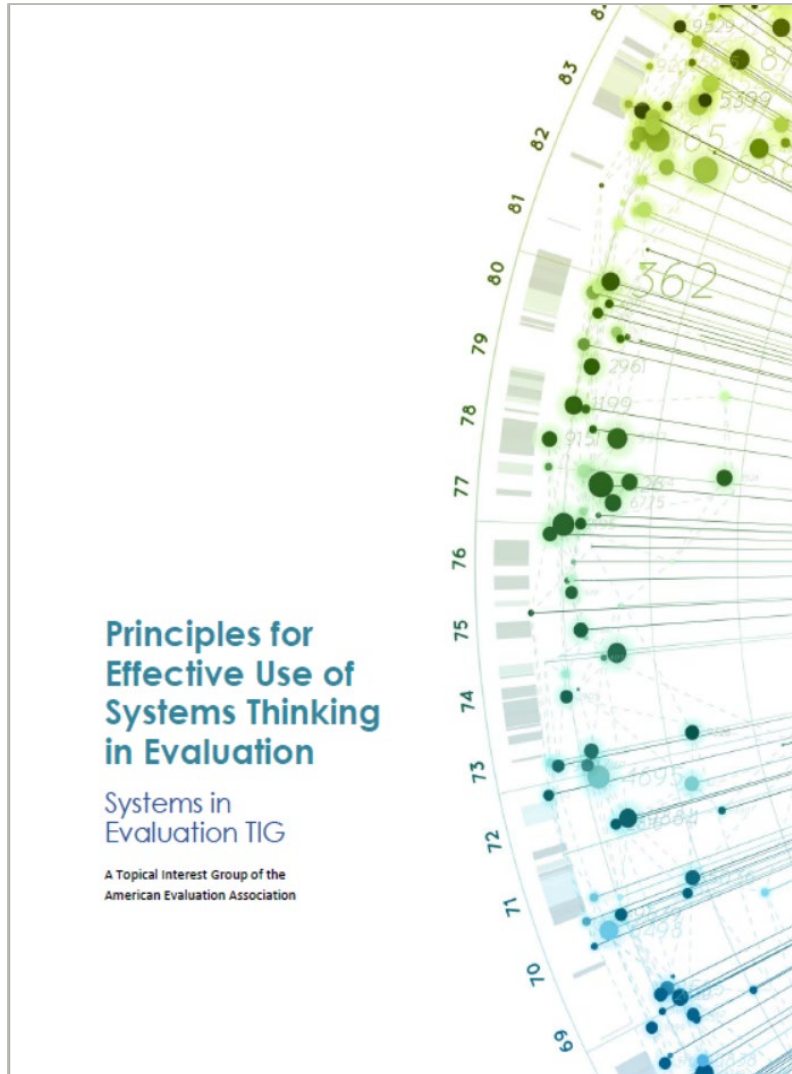


Less like this....



More like this....

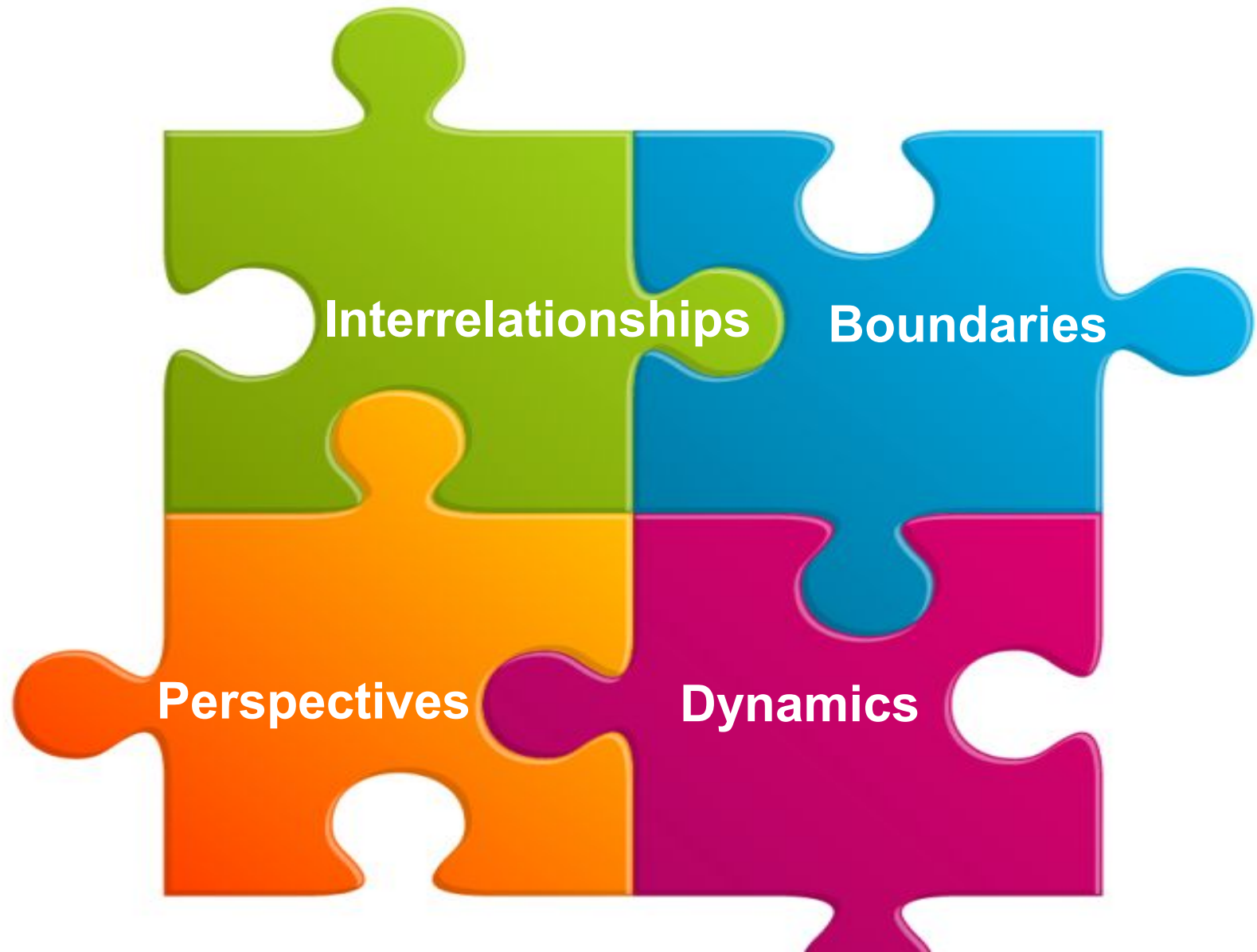




View the evaluation situation through the lens of systems thinking.



Apply 4 systems principles in integrated ways.





# Interrelationships: Connections between people, things and ideas







## Interrelationships in practice

Considering *interrelationships* helps MECap to respond to each unique capacity development opportunity.

- Engage different **stakeholders (who?)**
- Requires different **capacity development approaches (how?)**
- Draw on different **resources (what?)**



## Approaches (how?)

- Fellows
- Training/coaching
- Peer-to-peer exchange
- Support champions
- Provide incentives & spotlight good practice
- Inform operational guidance
- Clarify processes
- Develop tools

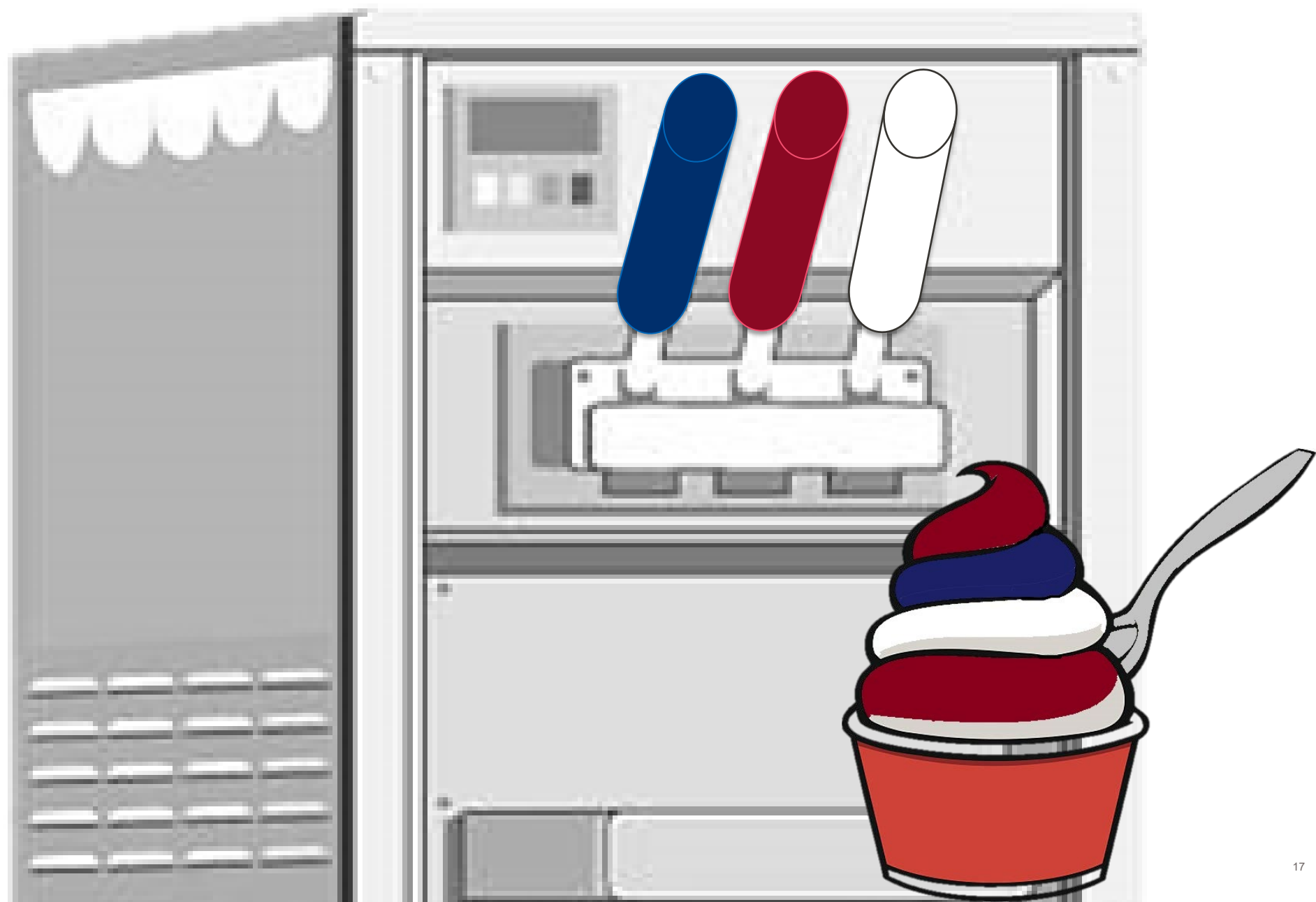
## Capacity Development Opportunity

## Resources (what?)

- Funds
- Expertise
- Influence/encouragement
- Time/attention

## Stakeholders (who?)

- USAID Bureaus and offices
- USAID functional groups and communities of practice
- MEL service providers
- Implementing partners





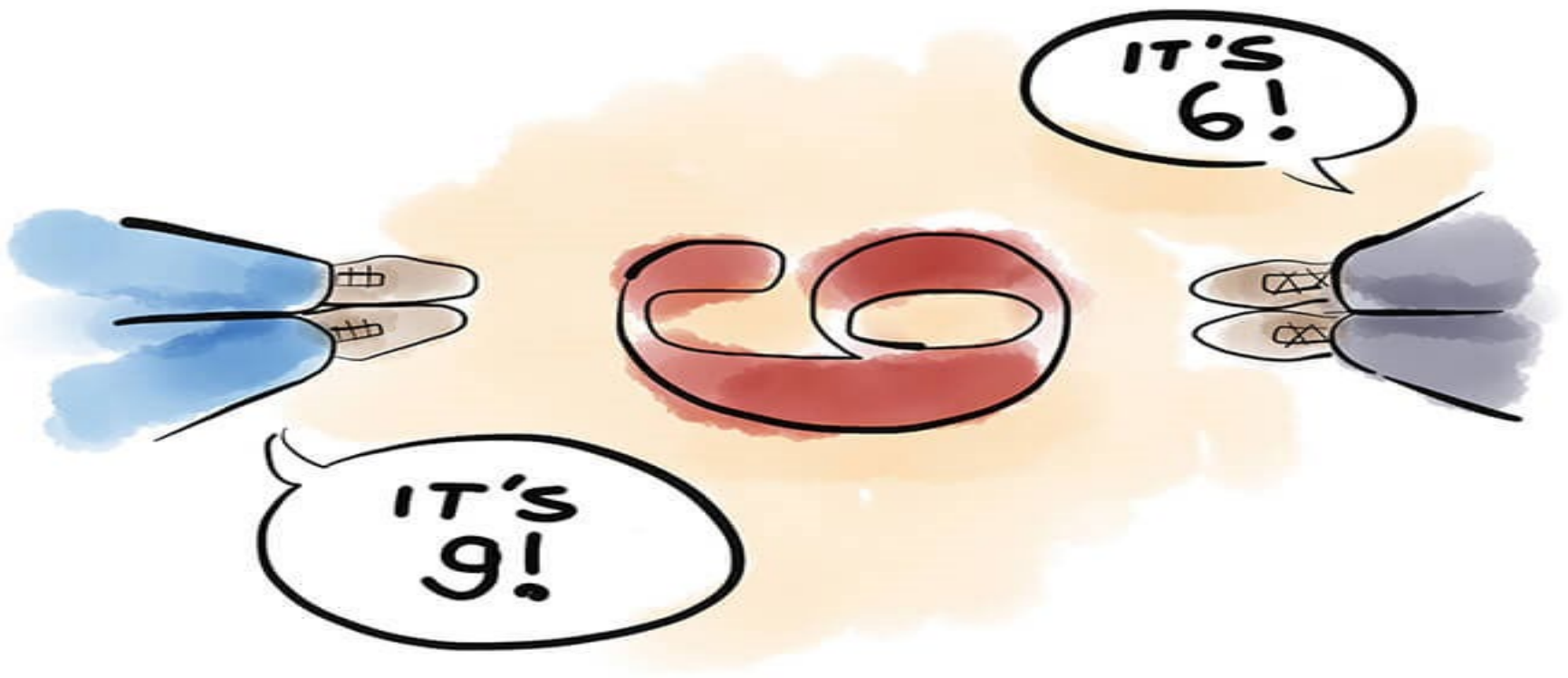
# Perspectives: How people understand and act





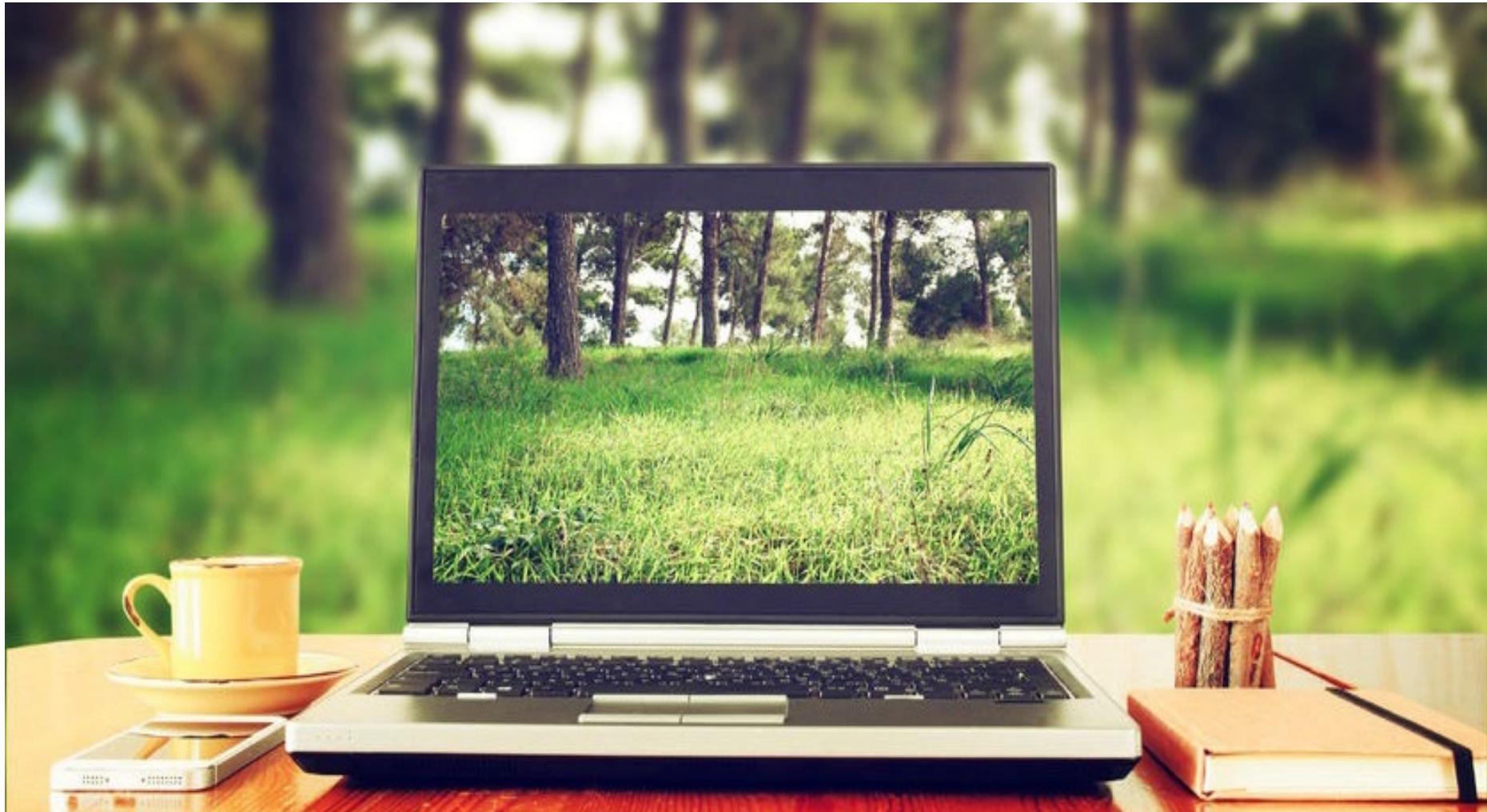
## Perspectives in practice

Considering *perspectives* helps MECap to meet the unique and evolving capacity needs of each of the 60+ offices it serves.





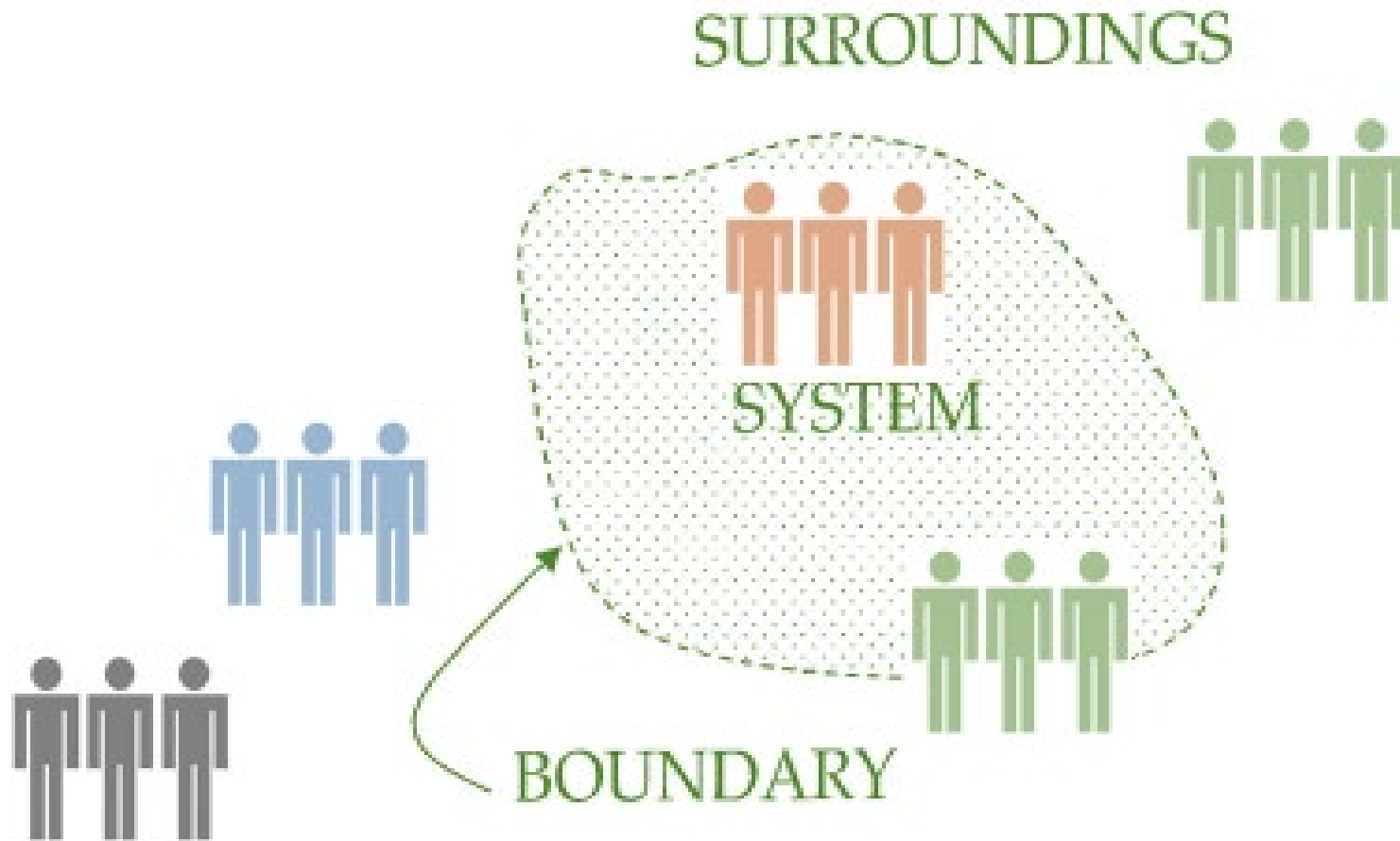
# Perspectives: Fellows focus on the unique and evolving needs/opportunities in each placement







# Boundaries: Deciding what is in/outside a system





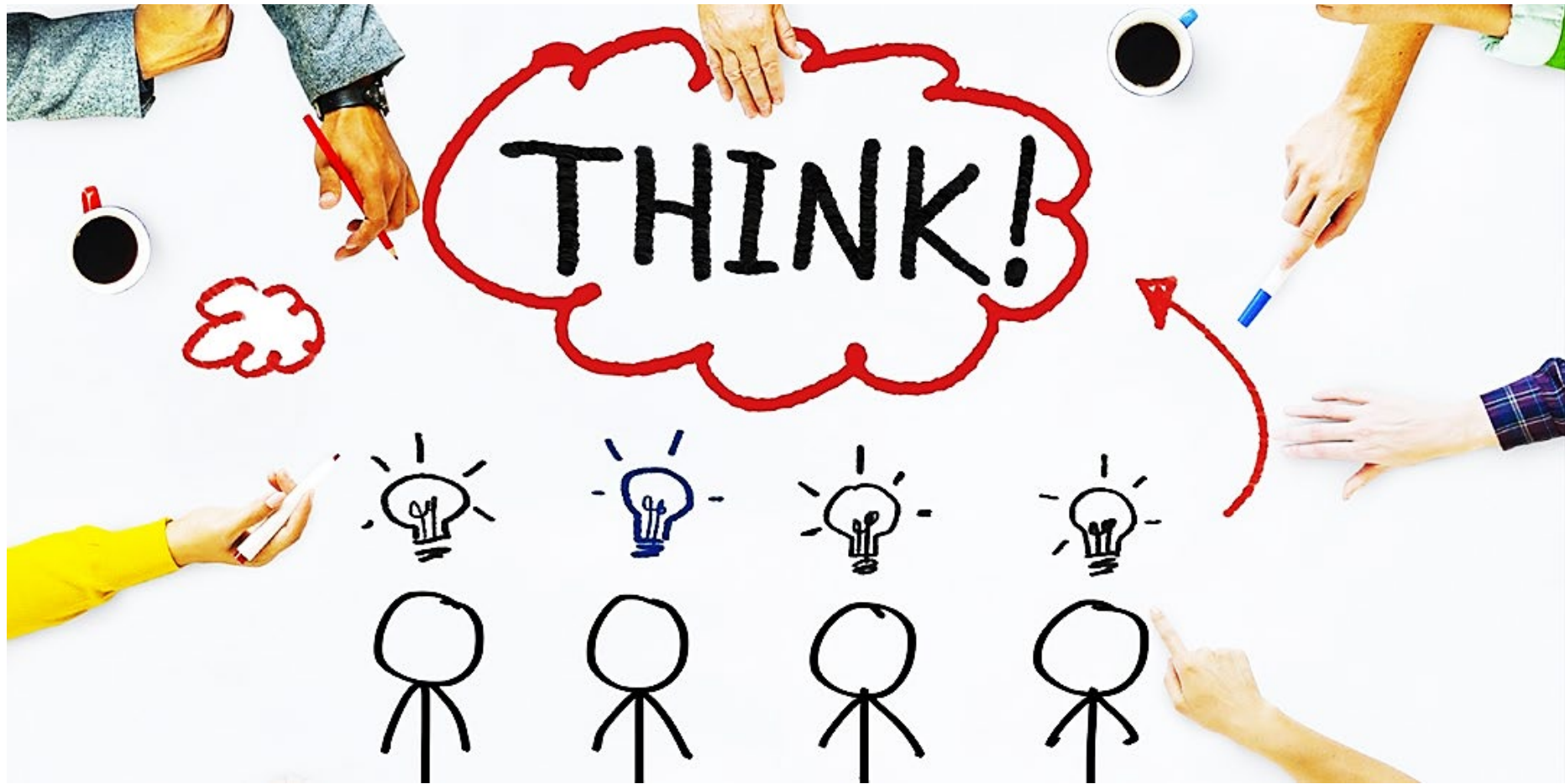
## Boundaries in practice

Considering *boundaries* helps MECap to negotiate stakeholder engagement of each capacity development opportunity.

Who should be involved and how to ensure sustainable outcomes?



# Clinic co-design: negotiating purpose, content and participants





# Dynamics: Patterns of change within a system







## Dynamics in practice

Considering *dynamics* helps MECap to achieve and capture emergent outcomes.



# Emergent & intended outcomes are equally important



SIPRESS


*"How am I supposed to think about consequences before they happen?"*

***How am I  
supposed to  
think about  
consequences  
before they  
happen?***





# Systems thinking informs practice in MECap



Leverage resources from in/outside  
each office to achieve  
outcomes.

**Interrelationships**

Involve the right  
stakeholders to ensure  
that capacity development  
gains are sustained.

**Boundaries**

Outcomes represent the priorities  
of the USAID office and  
PPL.

**Perspectives**

Planned and emergent  
outcomes are both  
Important.

**Dynamics**



# Systems thinking informs evaluation in MECap





# Applying a Systems Lens to Designing MECap Evaluation Approaches

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**Kris Saarlas**

Sr M&E Advisor

USAID's MECap, Social Solutions International

# Evaluating the Fellows Program

- **Unique aspects of MECap Fellows program**
  - Cohort model—Fellows start at different times and may rotate to new placements within the agency during their fellowship
  - Placement aligns to needs of USAID mission/office and varies in scope and duration
- **Two main purposes for evaluating:**
  - Manage the Fellows' placements to achieve good outcomes (formative)
  - Demonstrate outcomes to USAID (summative)
- **Data collection on progress through monthly reports**
  - this yielded tons of reports, but data quality is mixed
  - In search of better data, we
    - refined our questions, and
    - sought out more useful methods

# Systems thinking informs evaluation in MECap



# Evaluation Questions: Fellows Program

## Systems Lens

- A single Fellow is insufficient to lead to sustained capacity results in a USAID office (boundaries).
- Fellows leverage resources from in/outside each office to achieve outcomes (interrelationships).
- Outcomes represent the priorities of the USAID office and PPL (perspectives).
- Planned and emergent outcomes are both important (complex dynamics).

## Evaluation Questions

- What are the outcomes (predicted and emergent) of Fellows capacity building efforts in USAID offices?
- What factors in USAID offices help/hinder positive outcomes of Fellows' capacity building efforts?
- How does collaboration among Fellows, MECap core staff and other offices contribute to these outcomes?

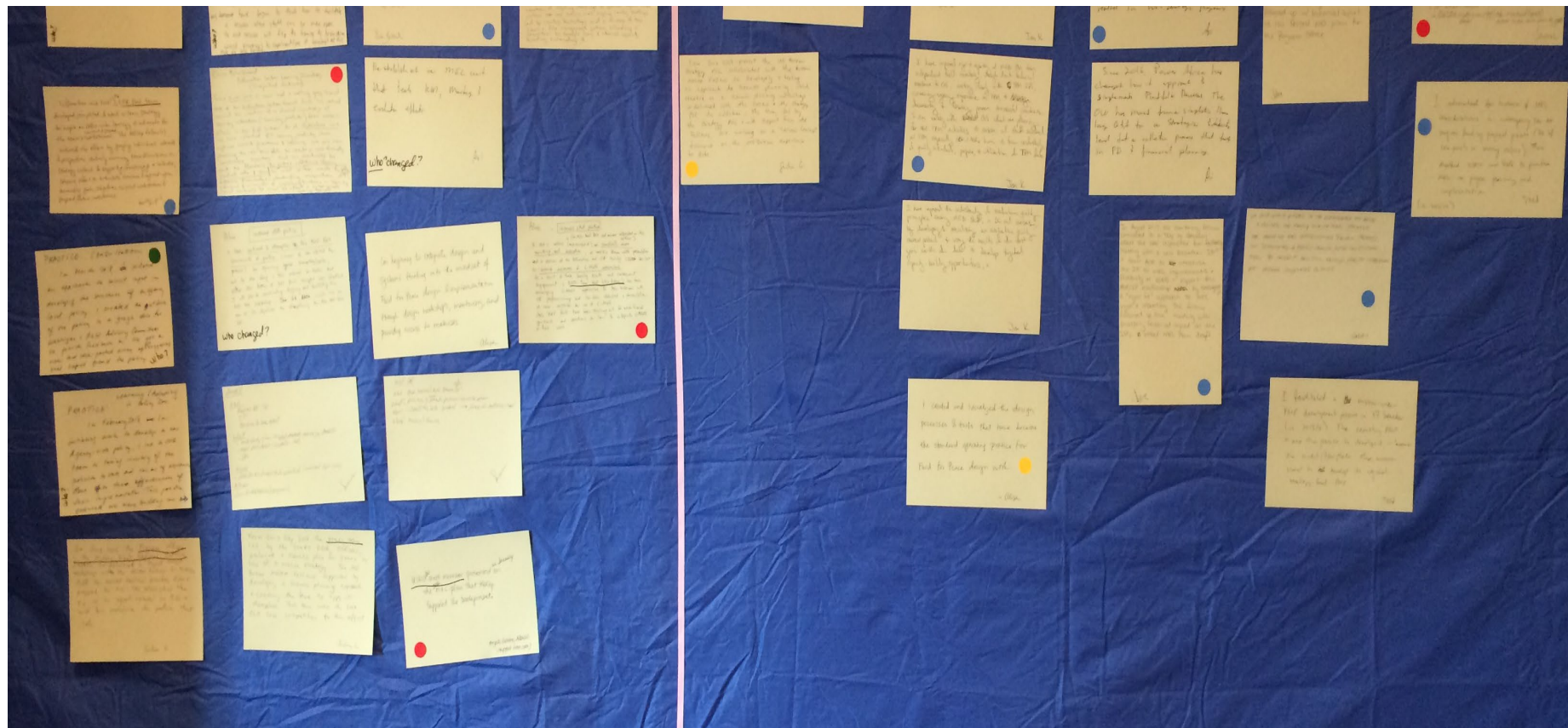


# Evaluation Approaches: Fellows Program

- **Outcomes: Outcome Harvesting (OH)**
  - Document Fellows' planned and emergent outcomes on capacity building across Program Cycle
  - Identify enabling and hindering factors, entry points, Fellow's contribution on the outcome
- **Collaboration/Inter-relationships: Social Network Analysis (SNA)**
  - Provide information frequency and intensity of collaboration and the inter-relationships among Fellows, core staff and USAID staff
  - Triangulate OH data—describe if and how collaboration contributes to outcomes

# Outcome Harvesting--Implementation

- Outcomes harvested from Fellows in workshop setting
- Outcome descriptions refined remotely with core team support
- Verification of all “final” outcome descriptions



# Outcome Harvest--ongoing

## STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

### INTEGRATING MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES INTO TOOL FOR INTERAGENCY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

**OUTCOME:** In May 2016, Department of State/Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) and USAID/Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) integrated M&E into new Statement of Interest (SOI) instructions and an SOI review rubric. This rubric was used by WHA and USAID/LAC bureau reviewers during the 2017 interagency process for awarding up to \$50 million for programs implemented by U.S. Government (USG) agencies in support of the USG-wide Central America Strategy. Specifically, the rubric allocated 20 of 100 points for the proposed M&E plan linked to the proposed program. State/WHA and USAID/LAC SOI reviewers were instructed to assess the quality of the proposed M&E plan, thus affecting overall scoring and funding decision making.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Including M&E plans in the Central America Strategy SOI instructions and the review rubric fostered consideration of M&E in interagency funding decisions of up to \$50 million. For both funded and non-funded programs, the SOI review rubric reinforced M&E as an important part of program design and implementation, particularly for USG agencies or offices with little or no experience with M&E planning. For the agencies whose SOIs/proposals were funded, the M&E plan requirement created space for constructive feedback on the M&E plans, as well as a briefing session on good monitoring practices.

Ultimately, this is expected to create an enabling environment for higher quality monitoring data for results tracking and reporting.

**MECAP CONTRIBUTION:** The Fellow advocated for inclusion of the M&E plan requirement and assessment criteria in the Central America Strategy SOI scoring rubric. He did this by providing technical guidance, including drafting instructions to proposing USG agencies for submitting the M&E plan and the M&E portion of the SOI scoring rubric. The Fellow reviewed and scored M&E plans included in the SOIs/proposals and provided constructive feedback, via State/WHA, on funded agencies' M&E plans. Finally, the Fellow designed and led two briefing sessions on good monitoring practices for staff from USG agencies with funded programs. Several other MECap Fellows and other MECap staff supported the Fellow informally by providing encouragement and acting as a sounding board.

The contact for this outcome is Todd Anderson, who has been placed with the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean since July 2015.

- Many emerging outcomes collected
- Some verified and published outcomes
- On-going identification, refinement and verification

# Lessons Learned: Outcome Harvesting



- Outcome descriptions must be detailed even for internal audiences
  - Because of USAID's size and diversity, the reader may lack knowledge of context required to understand outcome
- Verification required because audiences distant from outcomes
- Analysis – similar to case study research
  - Individually rich cases, but harvest lacks patterns possible with larger sample and outside perspective
- Continuous “harvesting” process is time intensive
  - Monthly identification of new outcomes, tracking and refinement of planned and emergent ones

# Measuring Collaboration



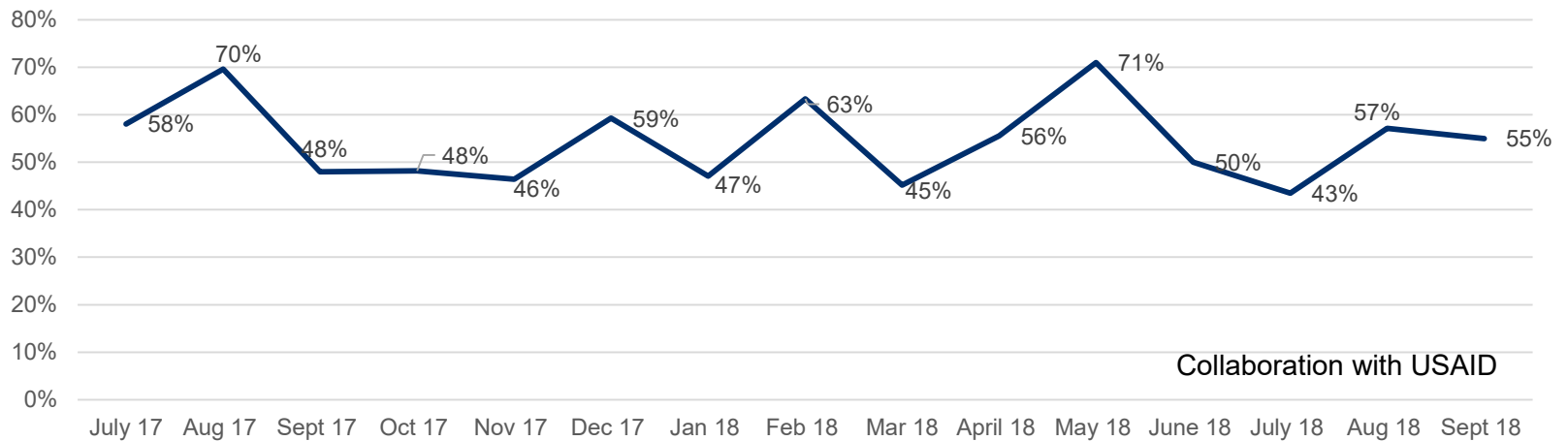
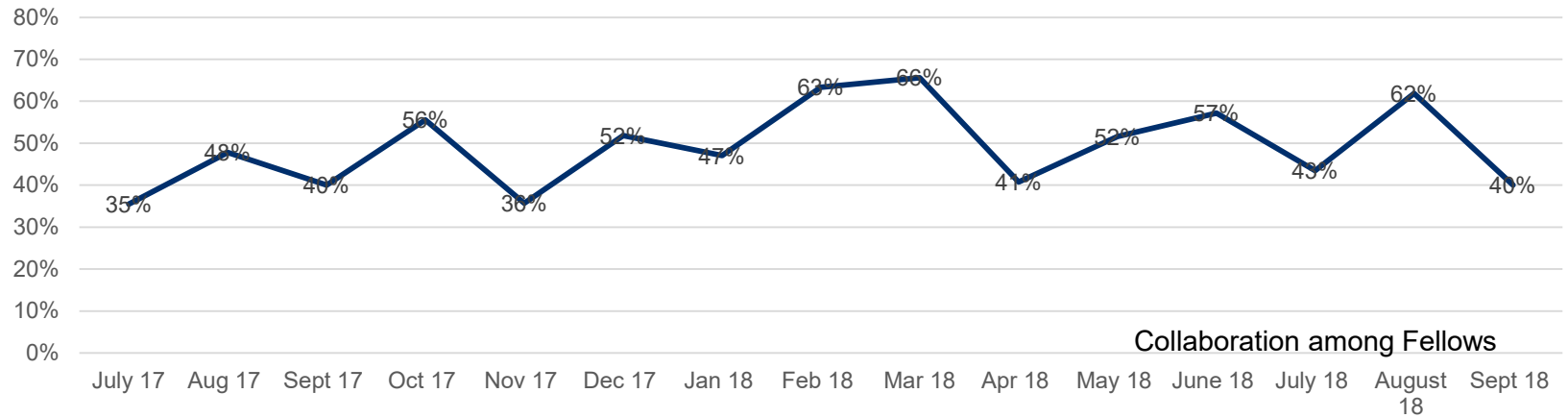
## Collaboration Questions on Fellow's monthly report

- Did you collaborate or engage with another MECap Fellow this month?
  - If yes, please briefly describe what prompted you to collaborate and what happened as a result.
- Did you collaborate or engage with other missions or office this month?
  - If yes, please briefly describe how you collaborated and what happened as a result.





# Fellows Reported Collaboration (July 2017 to September 2018)



# Examples of Collaboration

- Shared examples of monitoring plan templates.
- Reviewed an evaluation SOW and provided advice on the design.
- Co-created workshop materials.
- Discussed opportunities for project design and MEL teams to collaborate that would increase data utilization for project design.
- Shared best practices between USAID missions on ways to measure the impact of learning. Collaboration strengthened the design of a new project.

# Collaboration Lesson Learned

## **Data quality varies on collaboration questions**

- Excellent level of response for the “yes or no” questions.
- Open-ended, descriptive questions often insufficient detail on who and how they collaborated and the result.
- Definition of “collaboration” varies greatly –talking, sharing, working together, co-creation.

## **SNA may not be best method to answer our questions**

- Current data from monthly reports inadequate for SNA so new survey required.
- Added value of SNA vs level of effort?

## **Contribution of collaboration and relationships to outcomes difficult to analyze**

# Evaluating Clinics

- **Unique aspects of clinics:**
  - Designed based on participants needs vs standardized curriculum
  - Practical, hands-on skill building—new/refined M&E practices in mission
  - Facilitator/participant ratio high; facilitators play coach role
- **Two purposes for evaluating clinics:**
  - What are the most effective models for clinics that support application of skills?
  - Have skills gained during clinics been applied on the job and contributed to improved practices?
- **Africa Evaluation Clinic**—5 day, product-oriented workshop held in Addis Ababa Feb 5-9, 2018 with 33 participants from 19 missions

# Systems thinking informs evaluation in MECap





# Clinic Evaluation Questions

## Working hypotheses

- A single clinic is insufficient to lead to sustained capacity results in a Mission **(boundaries)**.
- Clinic facilitators leverage resources from in/outside each Mission to achieve outcomes **(interrelationships)**.
- Outcomes represent the priorities of the Mission/OU **(perspectives)**.
- Planned and emergent outcomes are both important **(complex dynamics)**.

## Evaluation Questions

- Are participants practicing knowledge and skills taught in clinics?
- What factors promote/inhibit the practice of skills in participants' work settings?
- When participants practice skills gained in clinics, what have been the outcomes for their Mission?

# Clinic Evaluation: Success Case Method

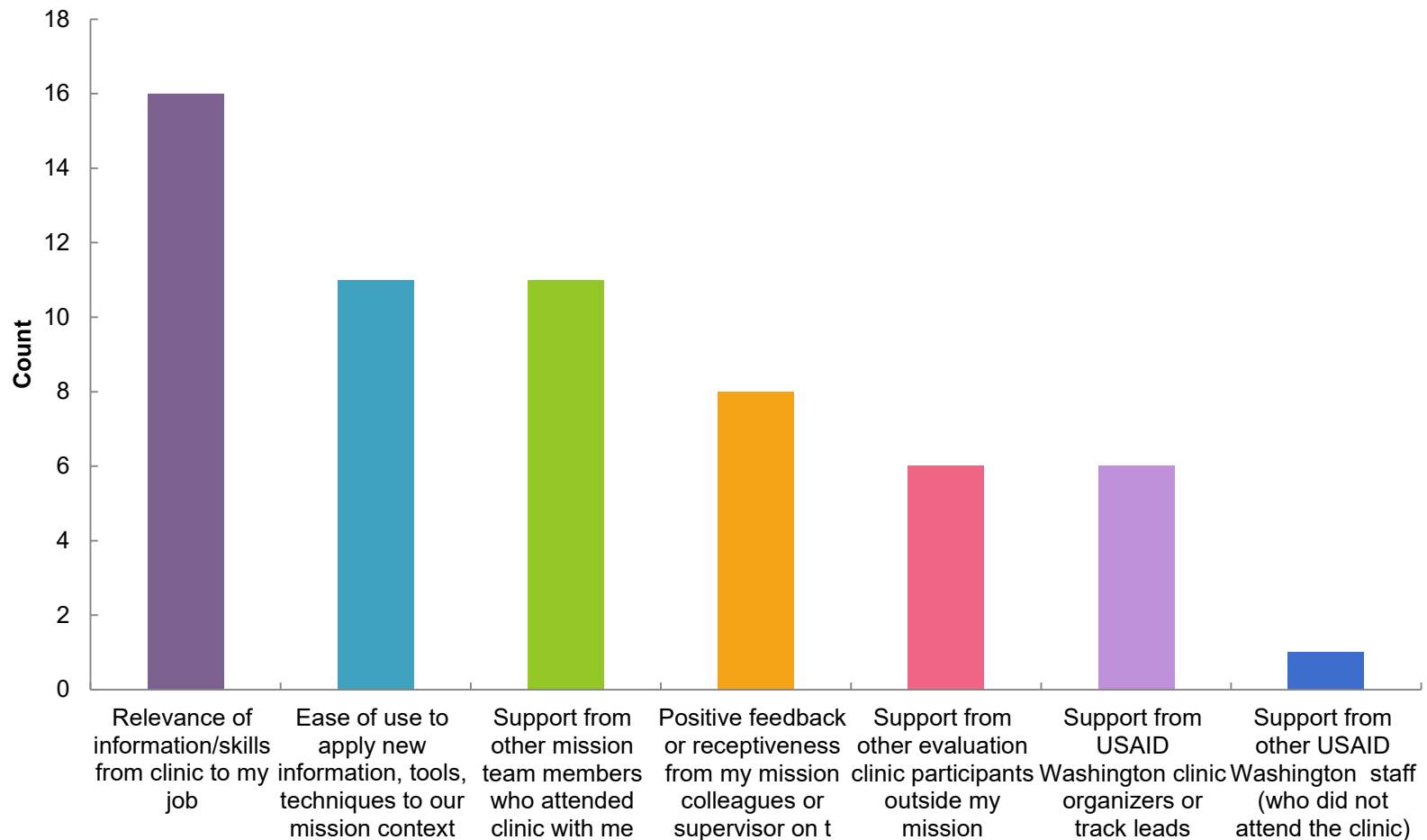
- Involves identifying the most (and least) successful cases in a program and examining them in detail.
  - This approach was developed by Robert Brinkerhoff to assess the impact of organizational interventions, such as training and coaching
- Captures both intended and emergent outcomes and enabling/challenging factors to the application of skills.
- It is a useful approach to document stories of impact and understand role of context in applying new/refined evaluation practices.

# SCM Implementation

- 6 months post Africa clinic: Administered on-line (survey gizmo) questionnaire to all participants.
- 18 of 33 (55%) response rate to written survey
- Identified 6 likely success cases from respondents
- Conducted 3 interviews and have 3 planned post AEA
- Began preliminary analysis



# Factors that have supported your use of skills and knowledge gained in the clinic are the following



# Lessons Learned: Success Case Method



- Written survey yielded high quality data about application of skills and initial outcomes.
- Low response rate of 55% to written survey makes it difficult to identify success cases—don't know if non-responders were more or less successful than responders.
- 20 min interview validates written response, probe for enabling and hindering factors and contextual factors.
- Interviews of “success cases” slow/difficult to schedule.
- Uncertain about 6 month follow up being insufficient to show outcomes. Additional follow up at 12 months?

## In summary...

- Systems perspective helped expand our thinking about evaluation questions and approaches.
- Measuring emergent outcomes with Fellows program and Clinics challenging and requires flexibility and focused efforts/time.
- Initial findings are being used for adaptive management and learning.





# Systems Approaches inform Program Management

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**Tonya Giannoni**

Chief of Party

USAID's MECap, Social Solutions International

# Who's using the data? For what purposes?

## **Fellows Program (OH+SNA)**

- Core staff who are immersed in information about outcomes and collaboration as they provide technical support and oversight to Fellows, and make decisions about extensions.
- Increase rigor and build on previous informal efforts.
- Prioritize placements and what we share/communicate.
- Set aside time and resources (walk the talk)
- Answer larger questions about organizational capacity development

# Who's using the data? For what purposes?

## Clinics formative evaluation (SCM)

- USAID staff who make decisions about how to build capacity
- MECap staff designing and delivering clinics
- Increase rigor and build on previous informal efforts.





# Fellows: Updating Working Hypotheses

## Original

A single Fellow is insufficient to lead to sustained capacity results in a Mission (**boundaries**).

## No hypothesis

Fellows implement the negotiated SOW as defined at the time of placement.

Fellows focus on capacity building efforts outlined in the negotiated SOW.

## Updated

No change

Fellows leverage resources from in/outside their USAID office to achieve outcomes (**interrelationships**).

Outcomes represent the priorities of the Mission/Office (**perspectives**).

Planned and emergent outcomes are both important (**dynamics**).



# Fellows: Inform Actions in Implementation

## **Outcome Harvest**

### What?

- Capture outcomes that were not included in the SOW, update and inform decisions about extending placements.

### How?

- Fellows use the information shared during outcome harvest workshop to be more strategic in their actions.
- Other Fellows learn how to identify 'entry points' and leverage resources in their own placements.
- MECap core utilizes information to share proactively with Fellows facing similar challenges.

## **Social Network Analysis**

### What?

- Understand Fellow collaboration in order to align corporate communication channels.

### How?

- Identify the role of interrelationships in organizational change (for learning)

# Clinics: Updating Working Hypotheses

## Original

A single clinic is insufficient to lead to sustained capacity results in a Mission (**boundaries**).

Participants practice what is learned during the workshop with limited success.  
(**interrelationships**).

Outcomes represent the priorities of the Mission/OU  
(**perspectives**).

Clinic objectives align to prospective outcomes.

## Updated

No change

Factor in the offices of the participants help or hinder the practice of new skills.

No change

Planned and emergent outcomes are both important (**dynamics**).

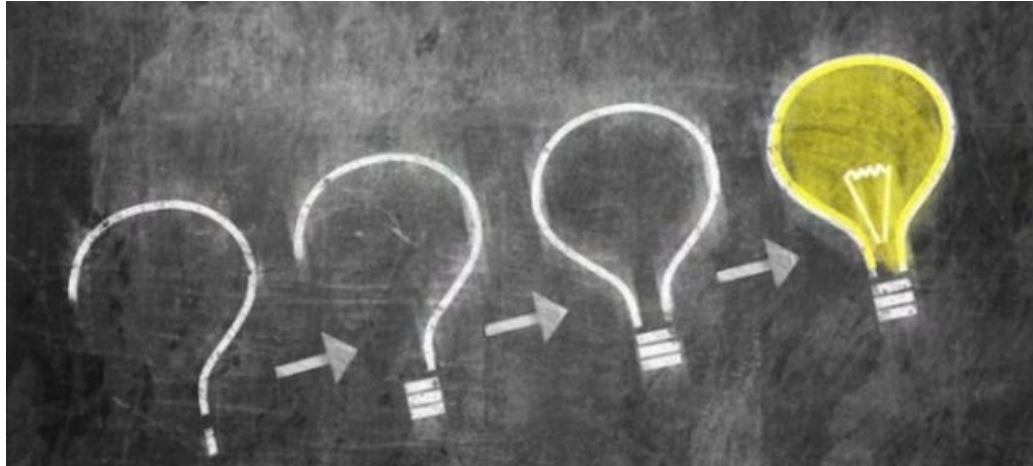


## Future use



- Synthesize across the two work streams to identify common enabling factors for achieving MEL capacity in offices.
- Share with others engaging in similar organizational capacity development efforts to identify windows of opportunities to strengthen Program Cycle practice.

# What have we learned



- Conducting system-informed approaches improves the quality of data and builds on what we are doing informally.
- There are **pros and cons to internal evaluation**

## Pros:

Users understand the context

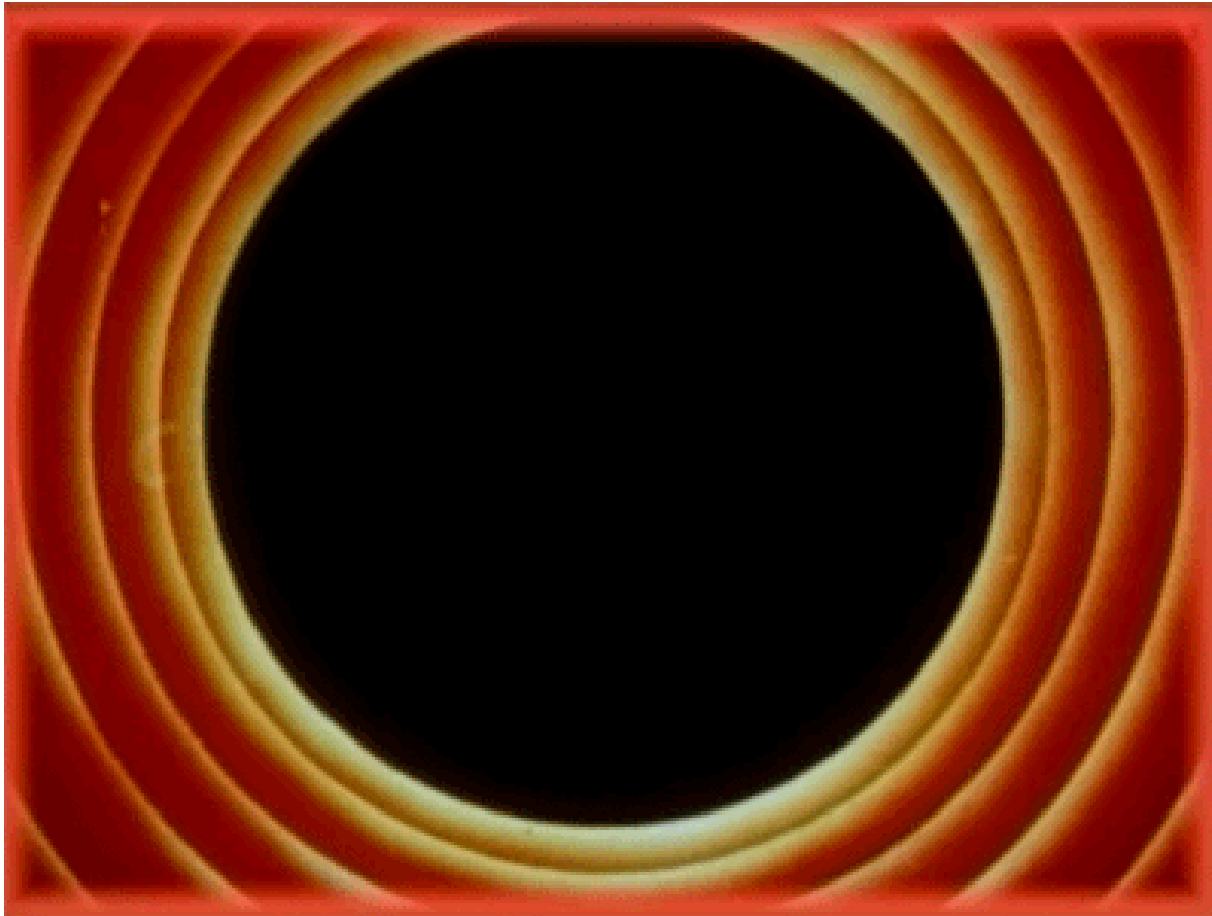
Immediate and ongoing use

## Cons:

Setting aside time and resources  
(walking the talk)

Analysis: getting out of the weeds  
to see the larger patterns

## Closing – review main points of panel



# Contact Information

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