Power of evaluation: influencing decision-making for a better and more equal world

2022 IDEAS Conference and Global Assembly 27-29 September 2022

Complexity-driven evaluation: a new paradigm to tackle transformative change

Salah eddine BOUYOUSFI Ph.D

Researcher and evaluator

Moroccan Evaluation Association

Plan

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I. Introduction

**Evaluation not only measure change,
but really shape social change**

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A growing interest in addressing the complexity of evaluating policy implementation (Haarich, 2018)

The use of methods of complexity in evaluation is still not widespread in practice (Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021)

Our ambition

- Exploring approaches and methods in the evaluation field to the complex environment

- How evaluators can manage complexity to reach the transformative change?

II. What do we know about the complexity in the evaluation field?
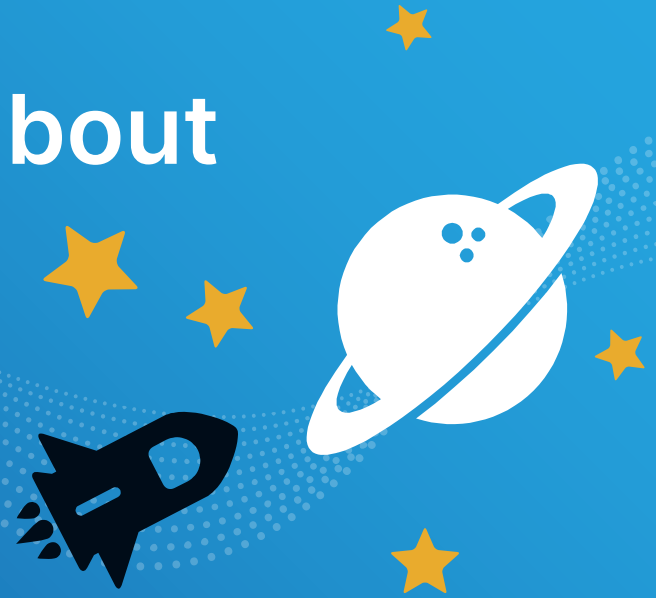
Social system & complexity

Complexity

Complexity expresses the emergent, unpredictable, and nonlinear nature of associations between actions and outcomes (Glouberman & Zimmerman, 2002).

Social system

The intervention functioning in complex social systems is shaped by interactions among various changing actors (Keshavarz N, Nutbeam D, Rowling L & Freidoon, 2010).

Complex intervention

Complex intervention emphasizes identifying uncertainties and the role of context in modeling the dynamic relationships between implementation, mechanisms, and context (Moore et al., 2019).
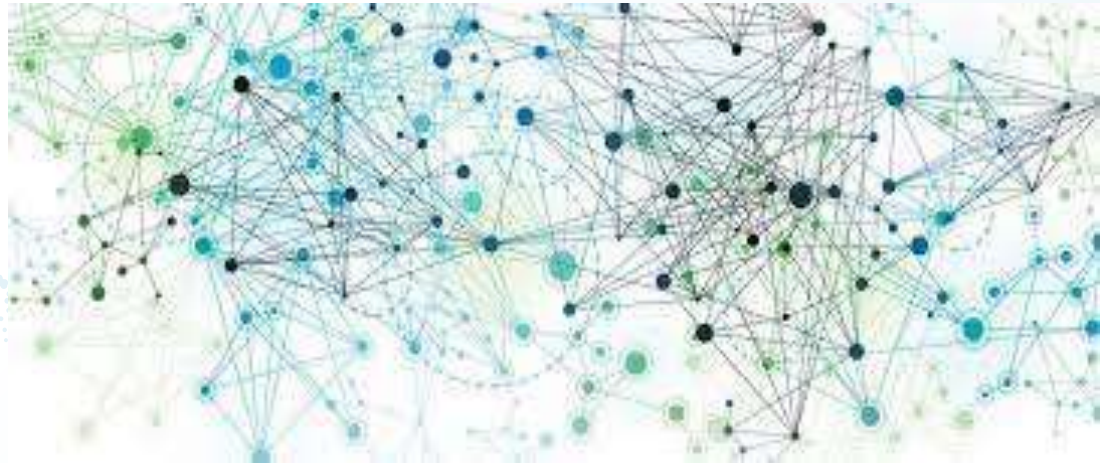
The concept of complexity in the evaluation field

To make change evaluation should integrate the dynamic character of a program to deal with context, politics, and complexity issues (Aston et al., 2022)

The evaluation process complexity
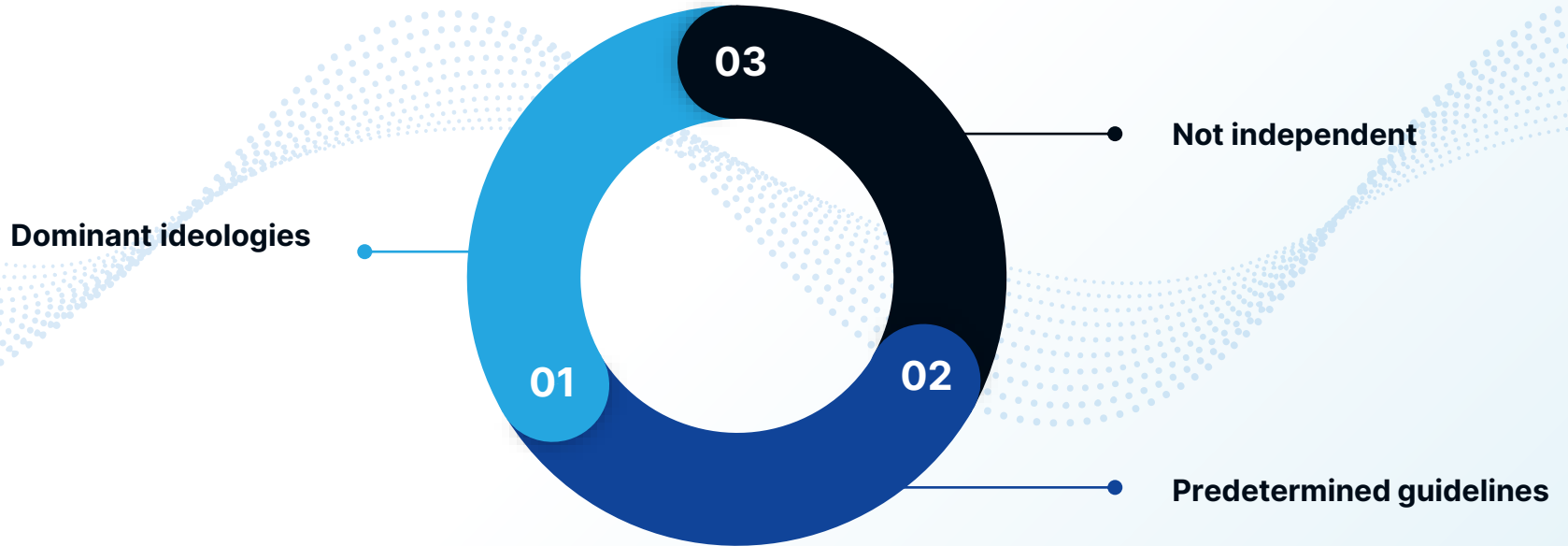
Methodology

Politics

II. What do we know about the complexity in the evaluation field?

II.1. Limitation of the evaluation methodology to deal with complexity

Evaluation does not contribute sufficiently to transformative social change

03 — Not independent

Dominant ideologies — **01**

02 — Predetermined guidelines

Mathison (2018)

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Evaluation as an establishment-oriented practice

Bureacracy

Merged into bureaucratic and administrative practices (Schwandt, 2017)

Influence

Decision-makers and bureaucrats are likely to be the most influential stakeholders during the evaluation process (Eckhard & Jankauskas, 2019).

Settlement-based methods

Methodological fundamentalism neglects cultural and socio-political pluralism (Moore et al., 2019).

Social transformative interventions are distinguished by unpredictability (Chandler et al., 2016)

Evaluation misses unintended outcomes and offers only partial truth by

Settlement-based methods that capture only predetermined objectives miss unintended outcomes (Moore et al., 2019).

The field of evaluation suffers from a kind of reductionism to deal with complexity

The quantification reduces complex interactions and experiences

(Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021)

Randomized trials fail to understand social change

The complex systems need a deeper understanding of unraveling intervention mechanisms and their relation to the context that statistical hypothesis-testing methods cannot do (Oliver et al., 2020)).
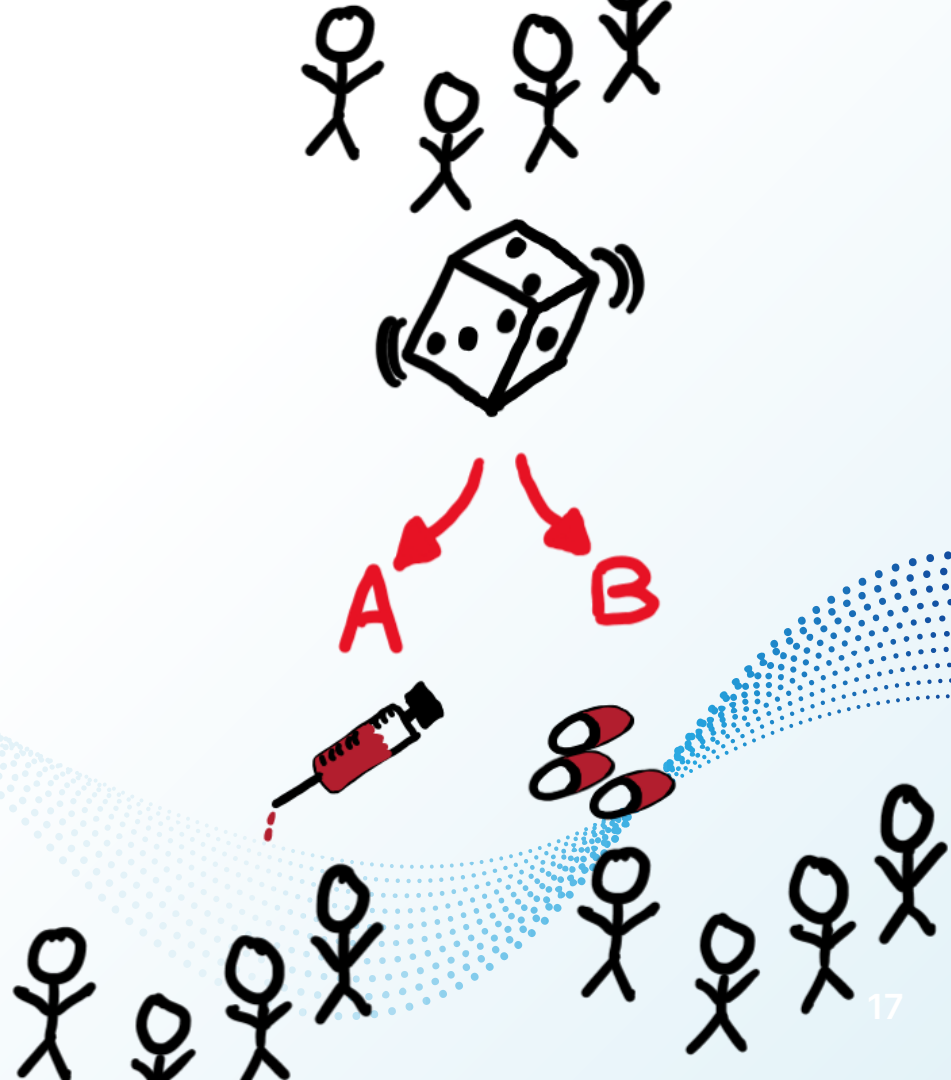
Methodological concerns : to link program theory to program outcomes

Uncertainty

A system with multi-level environments

Understanding unintended consequences improve policy design and implementation in complex systems (Oliver et al., 2020).

II. What do we know about the complexity in the evaluation field?

II.2. Evaluation in Politics

Decision-makers need evaluation-oriented problem-solving to handle the complexity and diversity of interests and values (Norris, 2005).

Defensive mechanisms are hampered when evaluations threaten the status quo in hierarchical organizations working with rigid norms and beliefs (Matheson, 2007).

This paradox adds complexity to an evaluation in a political context

Politicians try to control the evaluation process

Political power influences the evaluation's design and implementation (Azzam, 2010).

Governments think it is politically safe to control evaluation content and process (Norris, 2005)

The political influence on the evaluation process

Agenda-setting powers, staff, and budgetary resources, access to evaluation results, and evaluators (Eckhard & Jankauskas, 2019).

Evaluators' autonomy is tackled by ...

Negotiating the evaluation process

The volatile political environments

Political ideology

The hostile political environments

Political agenda

The threats to independence
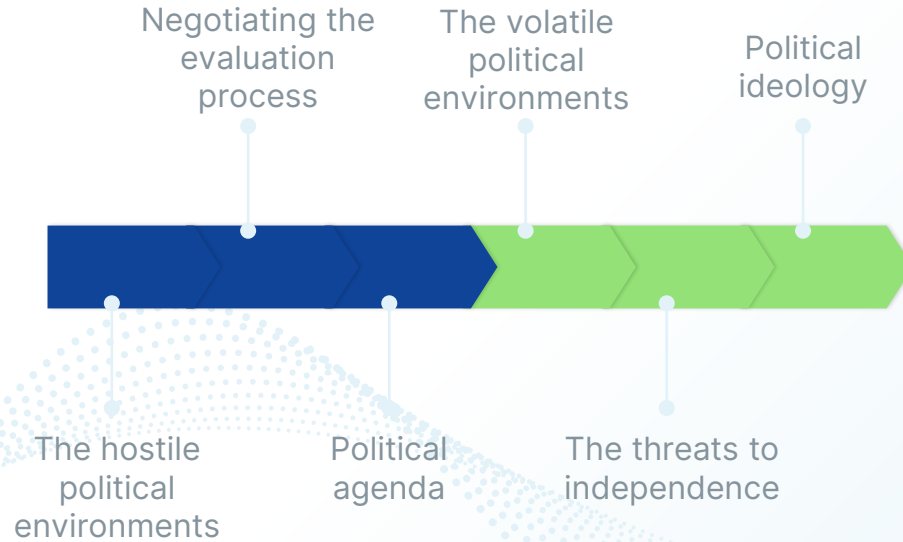
(Chelimsky, 1995)

III. How do evaluation theory and practice cope with complexity?

Evaluating complex interventions built on multi-actors requires substantial evaluation approaches (Haarich, 2018).

Challenges to evaluate complex multi-levels intervention

Network diversity

Adaptiveness and rules

Blurred boundaries

Behavior and collective results

(Haarich, 2018)

Evaluation can cope with complexity by using alternative reasoning that underlies social intervention

Adaptive and flexible evaluation design

Participatory approaches

Systems approach

Evaluator as a change agent

CHANGE

III. How do evaluation theory and practice cope with complexity?

III.1. Adaptability as a Fundamental Approach to Handle Complexity in Evaluation

Adaptation and innovation as a fundamental approach for evaluation…

- ✓ Frontier research

- ✓ Open dialogue between commissioners and evaluators

- ✓ Flexible evaluation contract

- ✓ Adaptive research design

(Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021).

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Generative logic and relevance rather than the nature of the methods

Appropriate theory of change and real-time feedback to account for program design and implementation to power relations and social reality (Aston et al., 2022).

Evaluators should consider different perspectives to depict system complexity deeply, and use an adaptive and flexible design (Haarich, 2018).

MORE DELIBERATION

To understand **unintended consequences**, evaluators can use pluralistic and adaptative methods by using more deliberation during evaluation processes (Oliver et al., 2020).

III. How do evaluation theory and practice cope with complexity?

III.2. Recognizing stakeholders' plurality in Participatory evaluation

Recognizing stakeholders' plurality to deal with complexity

1 **Political power**

Fashions methods, findings, and transformational change

2 **Evaluators**

Value the generative method that recognizes stakeholders' plurality

3 **Evaluation results**

Clear as possible

Promote learning and capacity building

Increase the evaluation utility

(Haarich, 2018)

How to get the most prominent explanations about how an intervention has provided social change?

Engaging with the weakest stakeholder's views

(Silver, 2021)

Participatory parity to evaluation theory and practice reveals injustice and finds solutions through empowerment

(Stame, 2018)

Evaluation policy must use a participatory approach by adopting the bottom-up methodology

(Silver, 2021)

III. How do evaluation theory and practice cope with complexity?

III.3. Using Innovation in Methods to Address the Evaluation Complexity

The explanatory approaches

Innovation Vs Reductionism

Reductionism

The evaluation suffers from a kind of reductionism to deal with complexity rather than detailed analysis and reflection (Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021).

Mixed methods

Building and testing theories about the functioning of complex social systems

(Moore et al., 2019)

Adopting plurality in producing knowledge to reduce the predominance of quantitative approaches

(Stame, 2018)

Plurality

Adopting a heuristic approach and not making separate questions about different outcomes and the context (Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021).

Heuristic approach

The system approaches to unraveling complex policy evaluation

Intervention as an open system interacting with other systems

A promoting alternative to the top-down approaches

A better understanding of policy implementation

To scrutinize the interrelations of a system's components

The theory-based evaluation as an application of the systems approaches,

(Caffrey & Munro, 2017)

Further alternatives to deal with complexity to tackle transformative change

The theoretically eclectic approach — (Deane et al., 2020)

Applying organizational institutional theory — (Dahler-Larsen, 2012)

Principals, intermediaries, and Agents — (Porter, 2016)

Knowledge brokering — (Olejniczak, 2017)
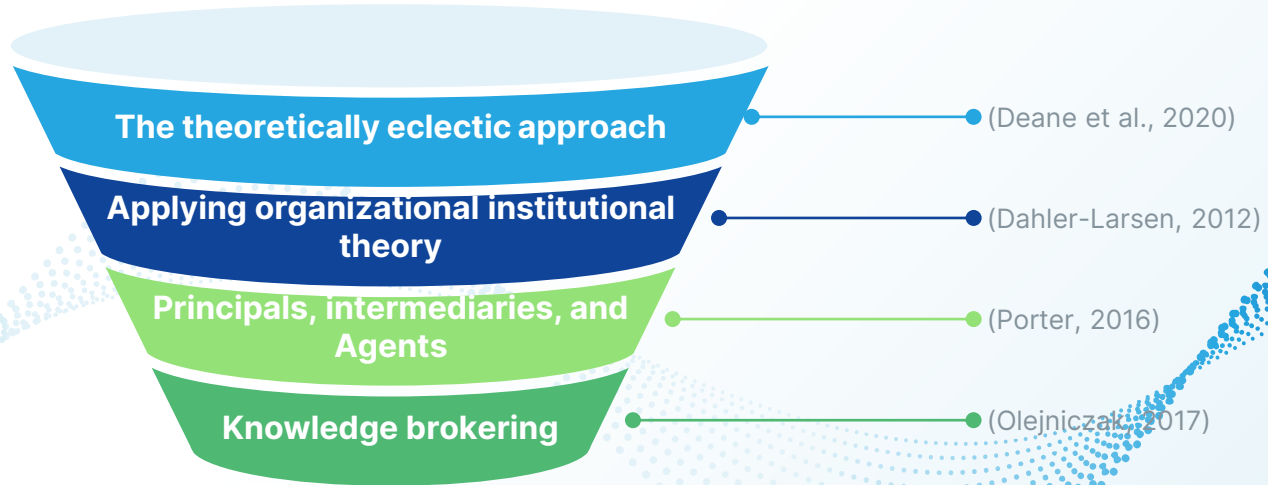
III. How do evaluation theory and practice cope with complexity?

III.4. Evaluator Role as a Change Agent

Change Agent

The evaluator's role is **FUNDAMENTAL** as a change agent working in complex political environments

Research/truth — Practice/action
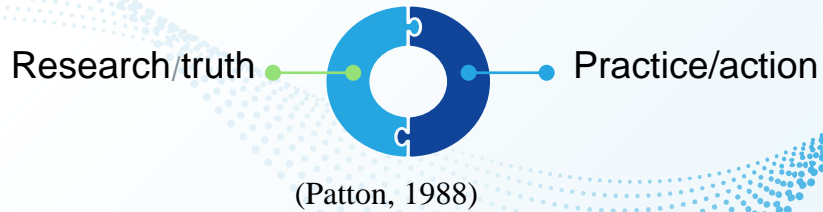
(Patton, 1988)

📌 Evaluators seem to fit their findings to predominant stakeholders (Picciotto, 2016).

📌 The evaluator can contribute independently and ethically to political ramifications (Patton, 1988).

📌 Evaluators should secure their independence from political interference and disseminate credible and defensible evaluation reports (Chelimsky, 1995).

IV. HOW TO ENCOMPASS THE ISSUE OF EVALUATION COMPLEXITY WITHIN AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK?

Complexity-driven evaluation framework…

Complexity-driven evaluation framework

A complex system's lens shape evaluation design and methods (Morell et al., 2010)

The systems approach (Caffrey & Munro, 2017).

1

Bottom-up methodology (Carlsson, 2000).

3

Using knowledge brokering (Cooper, 2013)

5

Evaluator as a change agent using Truth-telling approach (Kuntz, 2015).

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Adaptive research design (Barbrook-Johnson et al., 2021; Aston et al., 2022; Haarich, 2018).

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The principal-agent concepts (Picciotto, 2015)

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Applying organizational theory (Dahler-Larsen, 2012)

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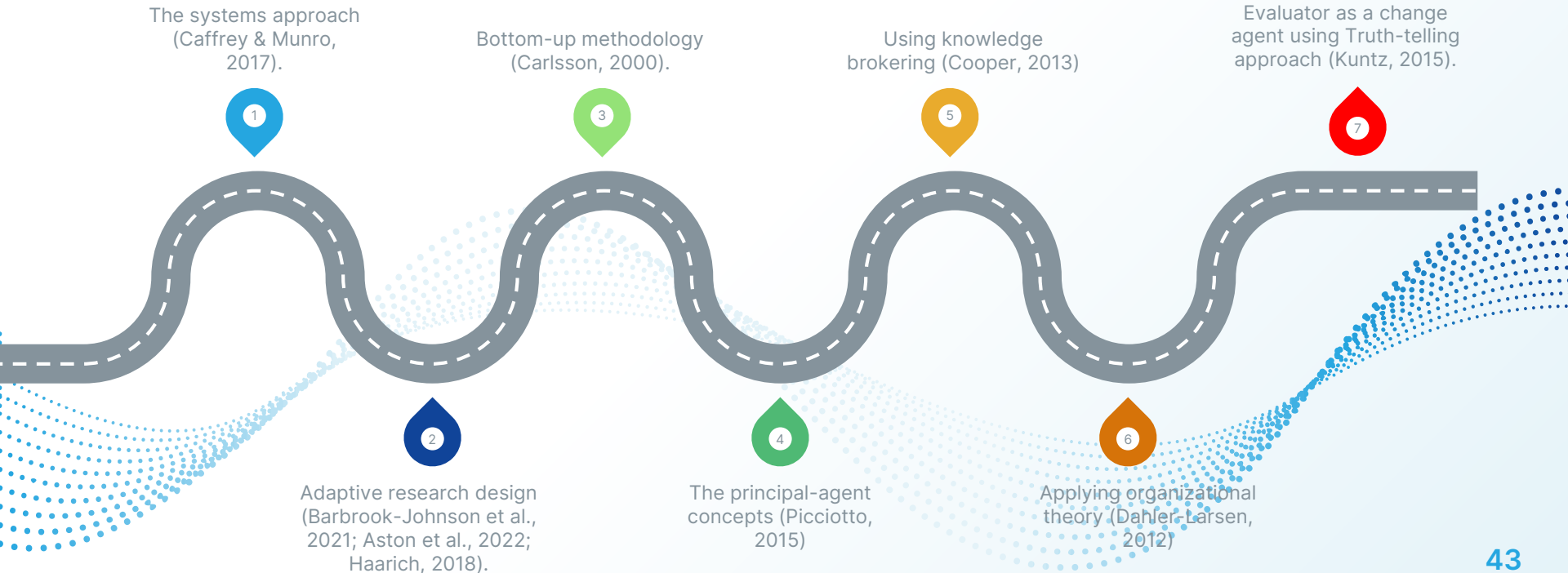
Complexity-driven evaluation framework

Evaluation should be conducted by the complexity rather than methods

Change Agent

Decision making

Evaluator

Contracting

Commissioning entity

Evaluation design and methods

System approach
Adaptability
Plurality of methods
Participatory
Organizational theory
Public interest criteria

Findings

Disseminating
Truth-telling

Feedback

Intervention as an open system...

Principal

Social intervention

Agent

Beneficiaries

Administration Knowledge brokers

Adopted from (Picciotto, 2016), the tricky rectangle of evaluation governance

Agent: program manager, the institution in charge of implementation

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V. CONCLUSION

- *The **complexity-driven evaluation** framework aims to guide evaluators in conducting evaluations in a **complex and multi-level environment**.*

- *It suggests applying the **systems approach** based on **principal-agent concepts** as a conceptual framework. The proposed framework enfaces a deep analysis of intervention **interaction** within a whole system to tackle **transformative change**.*

- *It adopts a **participatory** approach to understanding stakeholders' views and power to lead to more trustworthy findings and integrate more **organizational theory** to explore the complexity of the problem the program is trying to resolve.*

Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at
s.bouyousfi@evalconsulting.ma