



# Keep it simple without being stupid

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# The KISS Principle

- Origins in the 1960s US Navy and aircraft engineer Kelly Johnson: *“most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated.”*
- *“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”*  
Leonardo da Vinci
- *“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler”* Albert Einstein\*
- *“K.I.S.S. Keep it Simple Stupid. Great advice, hurts my feelings every time.”* The Office

# My Simple Question...

How do we '*keep it simple*' in evaluation but not '*too simple*' (i.e. stupid)?

# Session Outline

How do we '*keep it simple*' in evaluation but not '*too simple*' (i.e. stupid)?

1. What is '*it*' in the context of evaluation? I.e. using and presenting evidence.
2. What do we mean by '*simple*'? I.e. compared to complicated and complex
3. What is '*too simple*'?
4. Common challenges and solutions
5. Experiences of the group for points 1-4

# 1. What do we want to keep simple?

Potential aspects:

- Area of study – intervention/program/policy
- Evaluation design and methods – RCT, theory-based, quasi-experimental
- Research processes, planning and project management
- Presenting evaluations and communicating findings
- Overall understanding of evaluation

## 2. What do we mean by simple?

Theory-based evaluation:

- Simple, complicated and complex
- Zimmerman (2001): simple situations have both agreement and certainty, complicated situations have one of these, complex situations have neither
- Glouberman & Zimmerman (2002): Three examples of following a recipe (simple), sending a rocket to the moon (complicated) and raising a child (complex)

## 2. What do we mean by simple?

Evaluation rubrics – Davidson (2014):

- Three themes
  - Reasoning, not methods
  - Measurable ≠ important
  - Simple, but not simplistic
- High level evaluation questions → rubrics and evaluative reasoning → clear, succinct reporting

## 2. What do we mean by simple?

Presenting evaluations and findings:

- ‘The role of evaluation in influencing decisions and policy-making’
  - Outlining and explaining evaluation methods. I.e. logic models and outcome mapping
  - Sharing evaluation findings. I.e. clear reports and presentations
- Informing elevator conversations



# 3. What is too simple?

Potential barriers/factors affecting simple methods:

- Requirements of the commissioner
- External validity
- Internal validity
- Strategic context
- Additionality
- Scalability
- Unintended consequences

# 3. What is too simple?

Presenting evaluations and findings:

- Vaughan & Buss (1998) reporting: keep it simple, but not simplistic
- Potential barriers/enablers for simple messaging:
  - subject knowledge of the users / audience
  - evaluation culture and capacity
  - suitability of communication tools and devices

# 4. Common challenges and solutions

## Designing methods:

- Theory or utility
- Linear processes or agile approach
- Metrics and measures
- Selecting a primary focus / restricting scope
- Engaging evaluation users / buy-in for methods

# 4. Common challenges and solutions

Presenting evaluations and findings:

- Explaining evaluation terms and concepts
- Selecting visual tools – logic models and outcome mapping
- Reporting precision, clarity and structure
- Engaging evaluation users
- Short messages = simple?

# Selected Examples

- Setting manageable outline requirements for commissioned evaluations
- Designing modest methods for evaluation survey research
- Presenting evaluation findings where less is more

# Recap

How do we '*keep it simple*' in evaluation but not '*too simple*' (i.e. stupid)?

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3. What is '*too simple*'?
4. Common challenges and solutions
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Any further thoughts, please get in touch!

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