Queen's University Belfast

Quality Outcomes in

Youth Mentoring

Outcomes and Evaluation – Cautionary Reflections from a South African Experience

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I aim to share reflections and stimulate discussion on:

How evaluations can help establish and develop programmes but can also prove irrelevant and unhelpful

Especially if purpose and method
process and outcomes
are treated as distinct

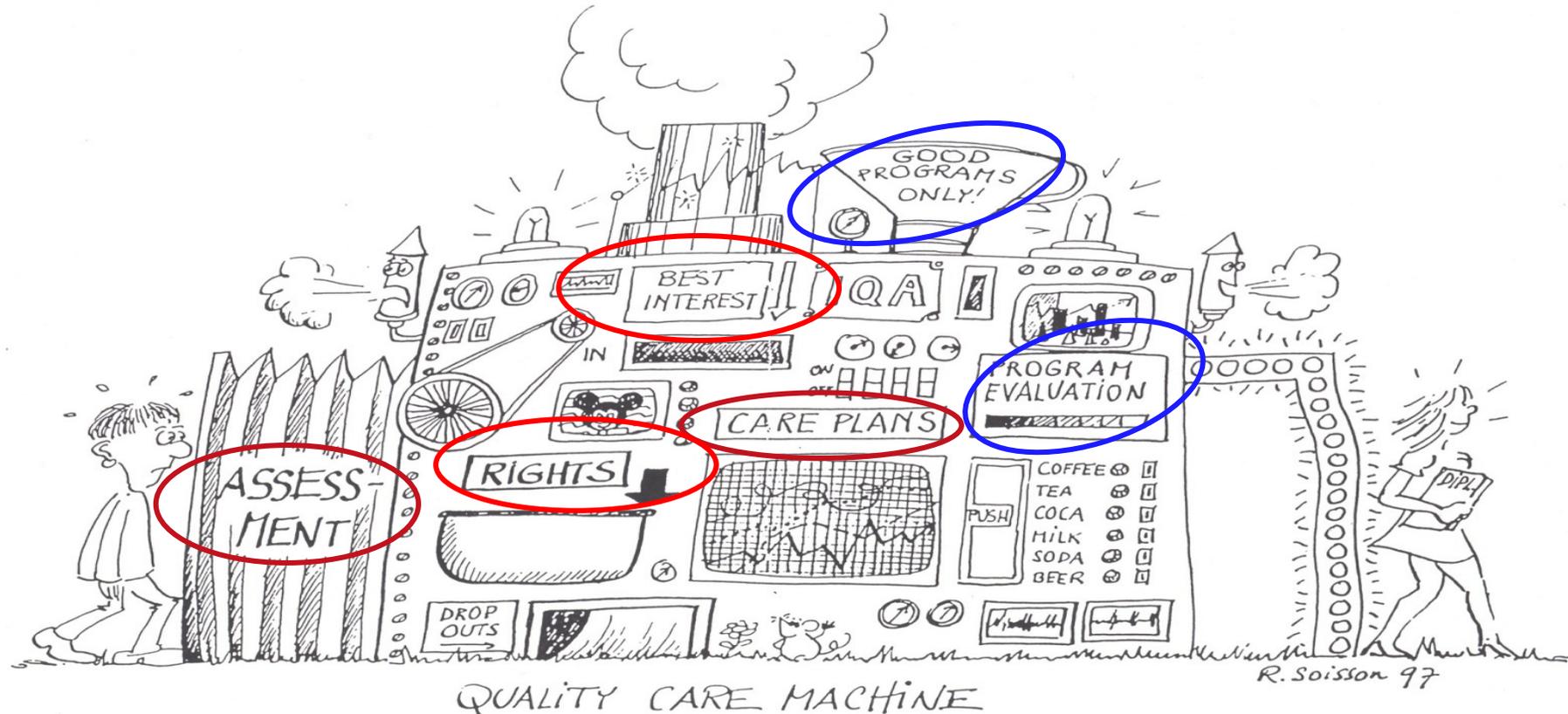As illustration: a mentoring scheme for care leavers in Cape Town

Or to put it another way …

- **Raise questions about the whole idea of 'outcomes' driven psycho-social the 'wand'**

- **Suggest an alternative which embraces the 'wickedness' in the lives of both those who benefit from and those who deliver programmes**

QUALITY CARE MACHINE

R. Soisson 97

Discourse: "an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations ... that is produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices ... through which meaning is given to physical and social realities"

Hajer quoted by Katy Hayward, QUB

Evaluation cycle as virtuous circle are the desired outcomes being achieved
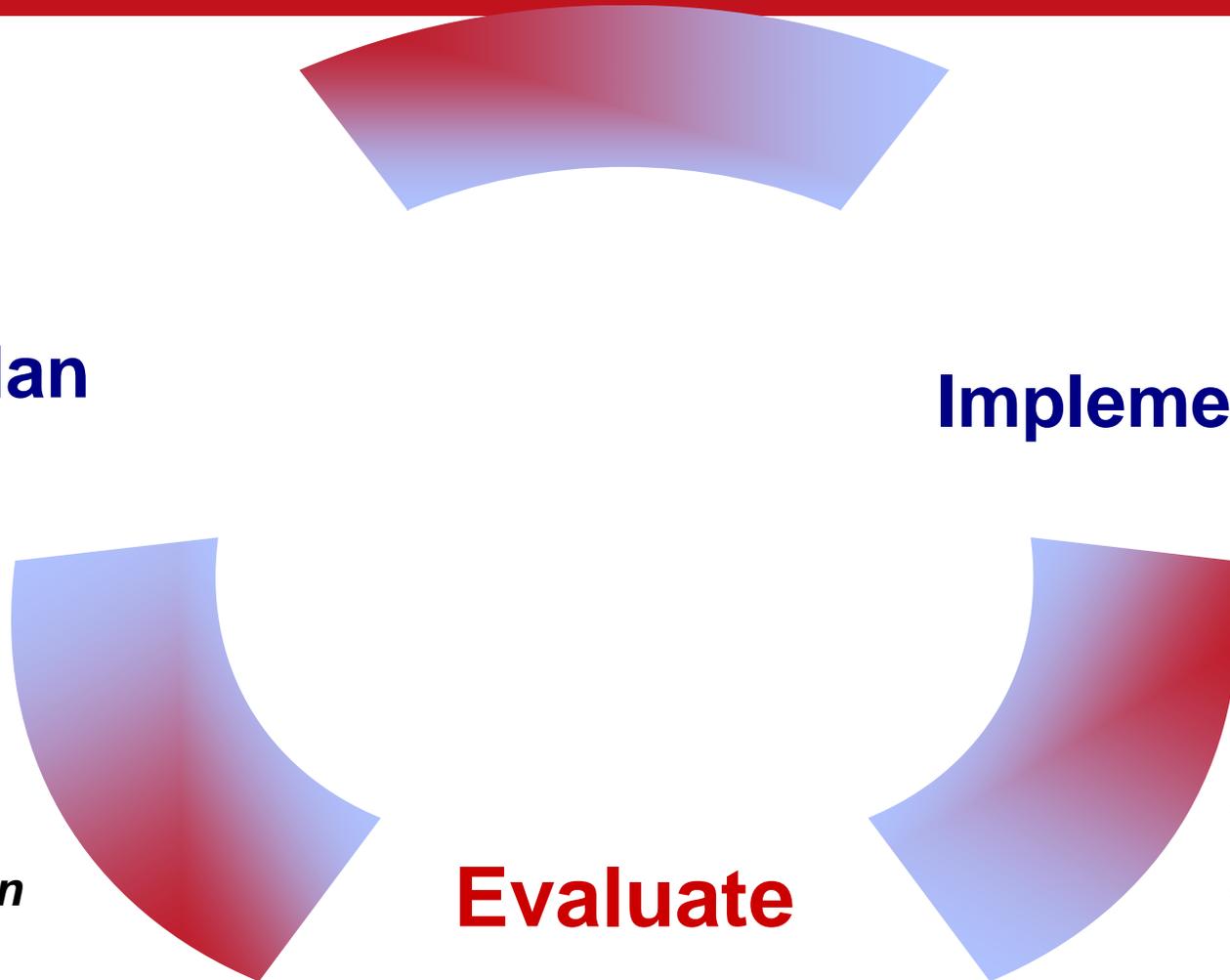
Evaluator's question:

Plan

Implement

Evaluate

- *Purpose*
- *Area of investigation*

- *Methodologies*
- *Procedures*

Wheel of frustration
evaluators and evaluated

for both

the 'wickedness'

Plan

New overarching policy
New priorities

Commissioner leaves
Disagreement about findings/methods
Staffing problems
Implement
Political sensitivities
Budget Cut
New needs identified

Evaluate
Identification of outcomes
Access problems
Blunt instruments
Sample size
Control groups

'SA-YES' Today

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI1cbxetDNc

Personal frustration as an evaluator:
young people leaving out of home care – what works ?
lessons for Cape Town mentoring project ?

Systematic review in support of NICE/SCIE programme guidance on improving the physical and emotional health and well being outcomes for Looked After children and young people (2010). From 171 potentially relevant papers, 7 were included (6 US + 1 UK)

- **Similar messages from earlier US reviews**

  (Collins 2001, Lemon et al 2005, Montgomery et al 2006)

- **Few formal evaluations exist**

- **Support services may have a beneficial effect (education, employment, parenthood, housing)**

- **Urgent need for rigorous design and evaluations**

- **Importance of assessing the needs of different group of LAC**

  http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH28/SupportingEvidence

What we know about mentoring and care leaving ?
Yes but, maybe to SA YES

Requires:

- selection of mentors/mentees

- quality of interpersonal relationships (including with carers)

- synchronised with cultural expectations

- supportive policy environment

"The existing empirical literature on the conditions associated with effective formal youth mentoring relationships and the potential for harm in their absence should give us pause, as meeting conditions may be especially challenging when working with transitioning youth" Spencer et al (2010) *Social Work* 55(3) 225-234

Evaluations as part of a process

- consultation - conversations
- inspiration – US Evidence Based Project
- clarification – undergraduate projects (overview description / logic model / views of stakeholders / alumni needs / strategic direction)
- modification – routine information collection for each phase in the annual cycle
- Evaluation ?

Relationship focus
:from closed to opens systems thinking
: from 'logic models' to 'theories of change'
: from implementation to engagement

Shifts task from matching needs to services (technical) to providing resources to enhance capacity to cope (relational)
developmental change over time (past/present/future)

- **Social systems**
- **Functionalist**
- **Deterministic**
- **Management of outcomes**

➢ **Social, political and economic ecology**
➢ **Past, present and future**
➢ **Consensus and conflict**
➢ **Power plays**
➢ **Unintended consequences**
➢ **Quality of relationships**

Evaluator's questions:
What's going on ?
Whose side am I on ?

An hypothesis about what is going on:

"It is helpful to think about youth transitions in general and leaving care in particular <u>not as the achievement of a set of completed outcomes</u> for a phase of the lifecycle,

but as an <u>ongoing developmental process of coping</u>

in <u>acceptable and unacceptable ways</u> with the changing physical, psychological and social circumstances of <u>uneven and fragmented transitions</u> ...

Linked with chronological age but more dependent on

<u>levels of formal and informal support</u>,

<u>structures of opportunity</u> and <u>personal agency</u>"

Pinkerton J (2011) 'Constructing a global understanding of the social ecology of leaving out of home care' *Children and Youth Services Review 23, 12,*

What all that adds up to is that I'm in favour of a rather more relaxed view of evaluations

Outcomes, evaluation and the technocratic management discourse

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