

Title: Towards Systemic Evaluation as Collaborative Praxis: A Practical Introduction To Three Principles Applied To Evaluation Practice Based On Systems Thinking In Practice (STiP)

1. For the Abstract (excerpt from the Call for Offers)

Course title: Towards systemic evaluation as collaborative praxis: A practical introduction to three principles applied to evaluation practice based on Systems Thinking in Practice (STiP)

Facilitators, Names and affiliations:

1. **Barbara Schmidt-Abbey,**
The Open University, UK
2. **Dr. Martin Reynolds,**
The Open University, UK

Target level: Introductory to intermediate.

Prerequisites for participants:

No prerequisites in systems thinking expected, but participants should have some experience in designing, commissioning or carrying out evaluations.

The training will draw on participants own existing skill sets and experiential areas of practice as points of departure for exploring a number of relevant systems thinking tools of utility for evaluation as a practice area.

Target Number; minimum and maximum number of participants: min. 12 – max 30 participants (20-25 participants optimum).

Summarised Workshop Content (650 words max.)

- **Rationale:** why this workshop now (e.g. relationship to current debates/issues in evaluation today)

The EES 2024 conference theme "[Better Together: collaborative thought and action for better evaluation](#)" recognizes the need to "*re-frame how evaluation is understood, implemented, and used*" in the light of ongoing polycrises, big transformational changes and growing uncertainty and anxiety. From this background, there is growing acceptance for the need for a 'new normal' in our professional practising, which includes the evaluation profession. Developmental evaluation, systemic evaluation, 'post-normal' evaluation and other innovative and transformative approaches to evaluation indicate that the Zeitgeist requires systems thinking to become embedded in evaluation practice. Responding to this need, there now is a dedicated and growing Thematic Working Group (TWG8) within the EES on '[Systems approaches for evaluation](#)' which provides a forum for evaluation practitioners to advance such approaches and to develop broader capacity to embrace systems approaches in

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evaluation. However, there are many systems approaches, and it can be daunting for evaluation professionals to know where to begin.

This workshop aims to offer a practical introduction to just three simple principles of systems thinking in practice (STiP) for crafting systems thinking in *evaluation* practice.

- **Workshop Purpose / Objectives:**

This workshop introduces practical ways to embark on a journey towards systemic evaluation through three principles of systems thinking, applied to evaluation practice:

- relational thinking in evaluation practice
- perspective thinking in evaluation practice
- adaptive thinking in evaluation practice.

These principles are derived from the triadic STiP framework: understanding interrelationships, engaging with multiple perspectives, and reflecting on boundary judgements – as developed by one of the facilitators through the [Open University postgraduate programme on STiP](#).

The workshop is structured around these three principles. For each of these principles, there will be a basic introduction to each of them, and participants will work to apply them in practice applied to a practical evaluation-related case study, using some practical hands-on tools and techniques.

1. **Relational thinking** (c.2 hours): diagramming techniques (influence mapping, conversation mapping) to surface systemic issues & understandings around a particular theme (situation of interest).
2. **Perspective thinking** (c.3 hours divided either side of lunch): simple modelling exercises of situation of interest to evaluate what 'is' the situation and what 'ought' to be an appropriate transformation.
3. **Adaptive thinking** (c.2 hours): Boundary critique, arriving at judgements of 'fact' and 'value' using 'boundary' judgements (examining feasibility and desirability) in adaptation to changing circumstances.

- **Learning Objectives:**

Through engaging with the workshop, participants will be better able to:

1. understand and utilise three principles of systems thinking and to apply them in practice in an evaluation context;

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2. understand and practice the use of some concrete diagramming and modelling techniques and tools hands-on, applied to a practical case study;
3. reflect on their action through journaling;
4. confidently approach any evaluation situation through application of the three principles and advance their own developing capability towards systemic evaluation practice.

- **Overview of Interactive Delivery Methods/Activities:**

The workshop is designed as an interplay between plenary, groupwork, and individual journaling. (Journaling is an important element to capture and document their learning and reflection on each of the themes covered in the day).

Group work will be done based on a case study, to be chosen by participants themselves, but with backup suggestions prepared and provided by facilitators.

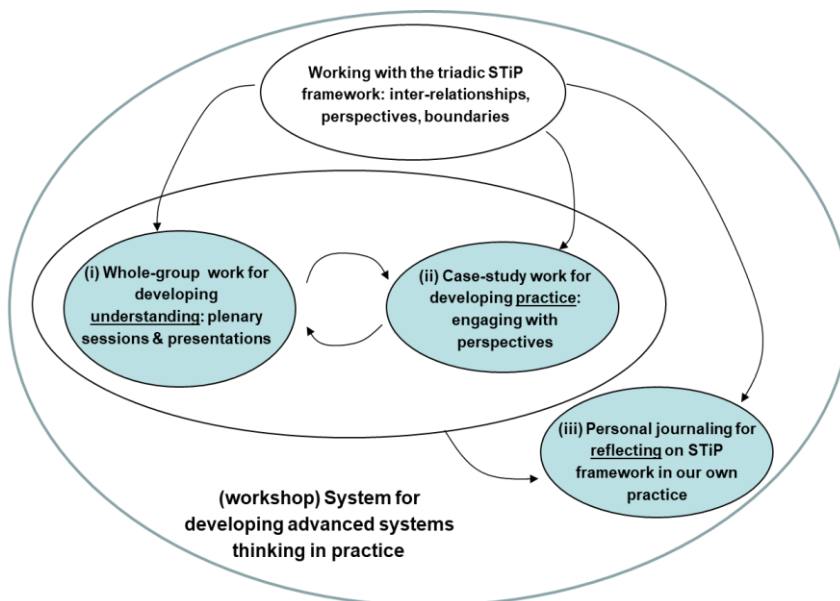


Fig.1 Generic activity model of three core workshop activities associated with each of the three phases of the workshop