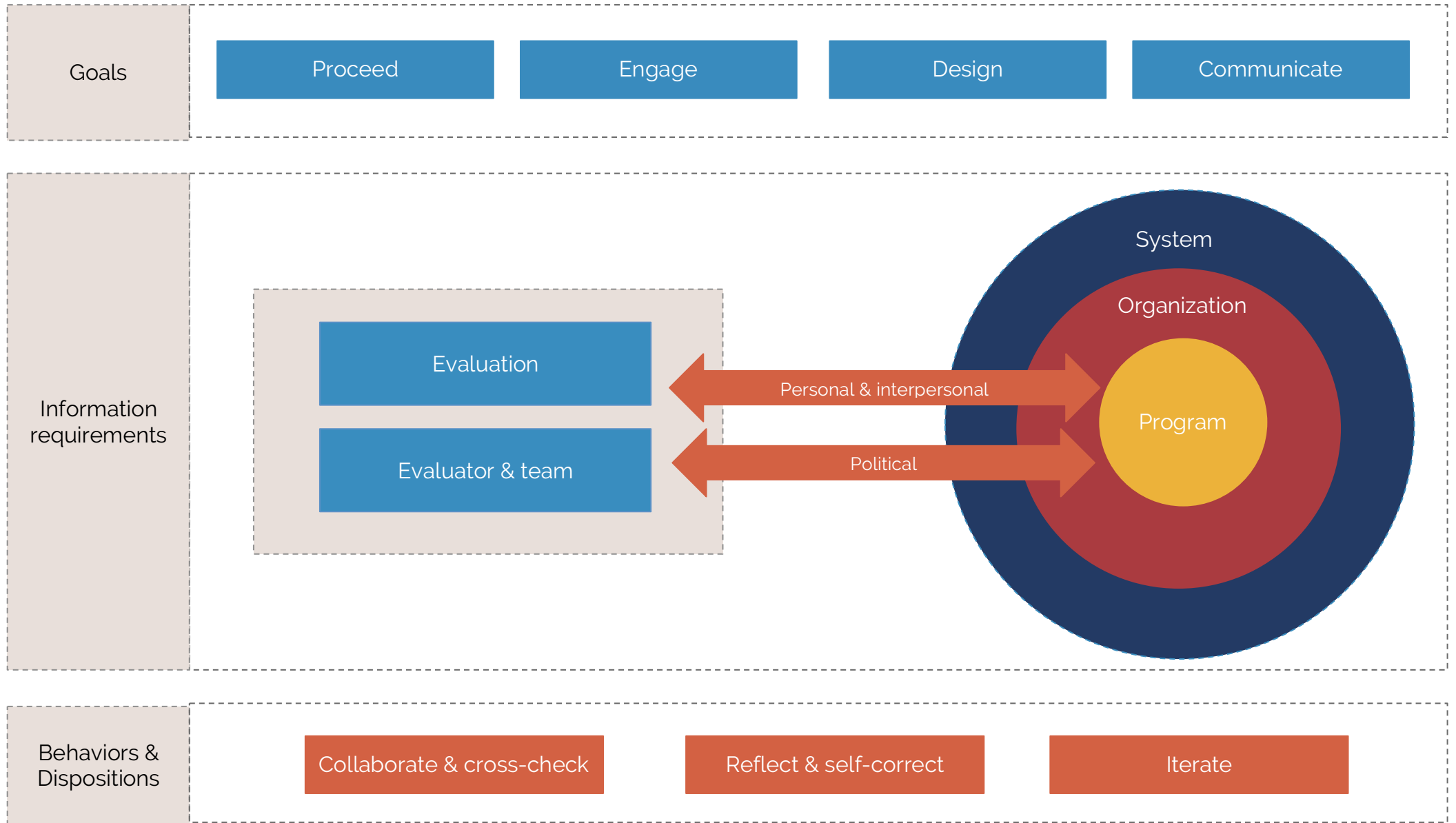


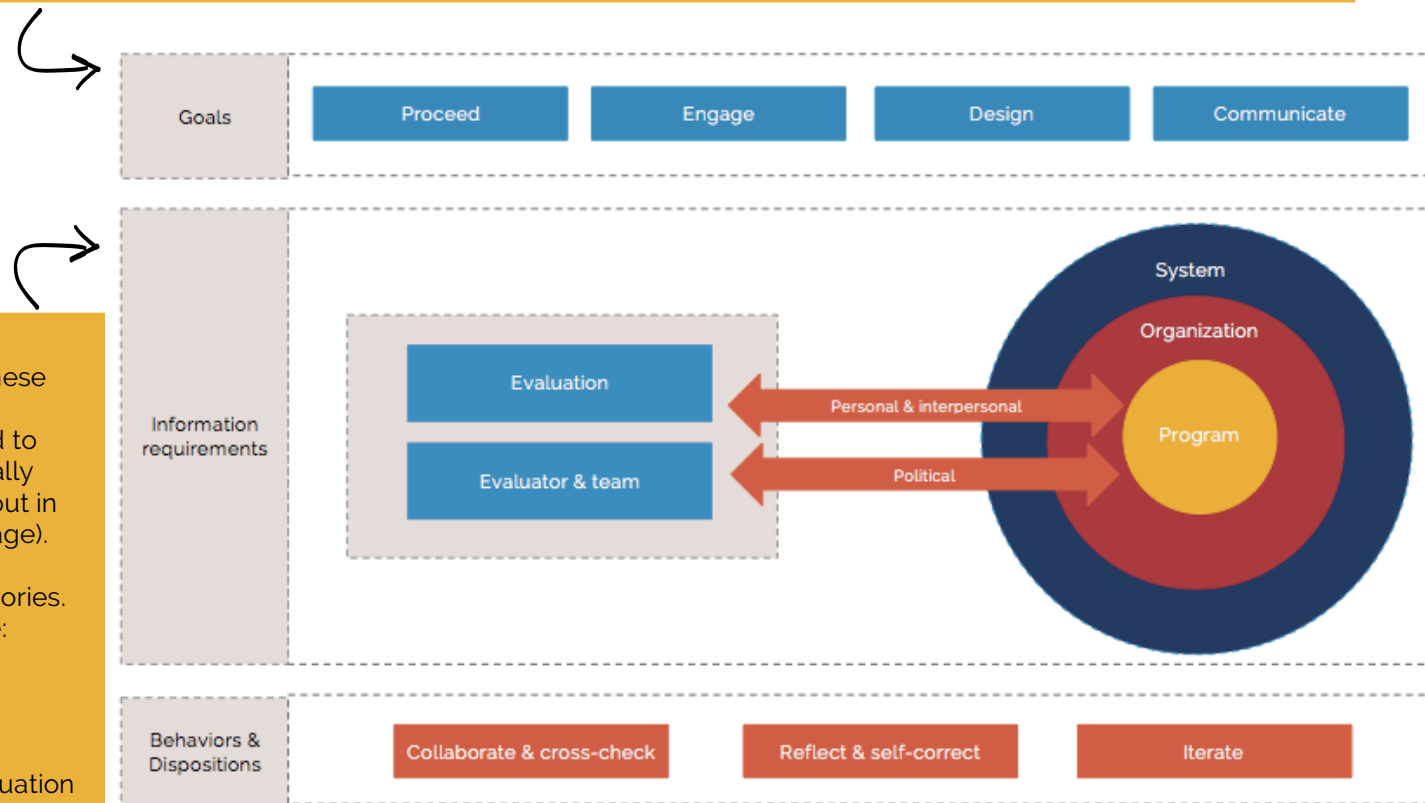
Framework for Situation Awareness in Program Evaluation



What does this mean?

Goals: Situation awareness is **goal dependent**. That is, information requirements become more or less important depending on your goal. Interviews with expert evaluators suggest evaluators use their understanding of evaluation contexts to pursue 4 common goals:

1. Determining whether to **proceed** with the evaluation
2. **Engaging** stakeholders to build and maintain commitment to the evaluation
3. Identifying (and executing) a feasible and credible evaluation **design**
4. **Communicating** findings with influence.



Information requirements:

These are the pieces of information you need to know to be situationally aware. They are set out in the checklist (next page).

They fall into 6 categories. Characteristics of the:

1. Evaluation
2. Program
3. Organization
4. System
5. Evaluator & evaluation team.

Common across all these categories are information requirements relating to:

6. The personal, interpersonal, and
7. Political dimensions of the evaluation.

Behaviors & Dispositions: Good situation awareness requires more than information alone. To build and maintain situation awareness, evaluators also need to:

1. **Collaborate** with stakeholders and **cross-check** their understanding to build a shared understanding of the evaluation context
2. **Reflect** on their own understanding of the evaluation context, acknowledge that they will frequently be wrong, and **self-correct** when that inevitably occurs
3. **Iteratively** assess the evaluation environment, making situation awareness an ongoing search for understanding.

Framework for Situation Awareness in Program Evaluation

Evaluation characteristics

Purpose: Why is the evaluation being done? Why now?

- Intended use:** How will the evaluation be used? For example, is it being conducted for accountability, learning, or development purposes?
- Decision:** What decisions (if any) will the evaluation inform? When will this decision be made? Has the decision been made already?
- Intended users:** Who is the evaluation for? Who are its intended users?
- Stake:** How much is at stake in this evaluation? Is it a high stakes evaluation (e.g. program closure, highly publicized) or a low stakes evaluation?

Practicalities: Under what constraints will this evaluation occur?

- Timeline:** What is the timeline for the evaluation? What deadlines, if any, are in place?
- Budget:** What is the evaluation budget?
- Structure:** What are the reporting/accountability structures for the evaluation? Are they simple & clearly understood or complex & unclear?
- Scope:** Is the scope of the evaluation clearly defined or is it somewhat vague and amorphous?

Program characteristics

Program: What is the program?

- Goals:** What are the program goals?
- Activities:** How is the program delivered?
- Target audience:** Who receives the program? Who is expected to benefit from the program?
- Physical setting:** What is the program's physical setting? E.g, is the program run in a school, a correctional facility? Is the location well kept?
- Developmental stage:** At what stage of development is the program? Is it still under development, being piloted or is it a mature program?
- Evaluability:** Is the program coherent enough to be evaluated? Are the outcomes clear, commonly understood and logical?
- Scale:** How big is the program? Is it a large scale or a small scale program?
- Complexity:** How complex is the program and its outcomes?
- Controversy:** How controversial are the program goals and activities?
- Consistency:** How consistent are stakeholders' views about what the program does?
- Evidence-base:** How strong is the evidence base for this intervention? Has it been done before or is it trying something new and innovative?
- History:** How did the program come about? Are there any important historical events that have shaped its development?
- Culture:** What cultural, ethnic or religious history or protocols influence the program and its participants?

Organization characteristics

Culture & climate: What are the values, beliefs and attitudes that shape behavior in this organization?

- Power**: Who is in charge? How are decisions made and who makes these decisions? Are these top down or collaborative processes?
- Openness**: How open are people (including leaders) to diverse views?
- Supportiveness**: How much do leaders support program staff? How much do staff support each other?

Program staff: Who are the people delivering the program?

- Turnover**: How much staff turnover is there in this organization?
- Capacity**: What is the organization's capacity to deliver the program? How experienced are program staff?
- Constraints**: What constraints do staff (and leaders) work under? What challenges do they experience, day-to-day?

Evaluation capacity: Where does the evaluation fit within the broader organizational context?

- Evaluation capabilities**: How much experience do staff have commissioning or conducting evaluation? Can they support the evaluation?
- Prior experiences**: What have been the organization's prior experiences with evaluation? Have they been positive or negative?
- Evaluation culture**: How is evaluation viewed within the organization? As an accountability tool or an opportunity for learning? Is there any resistance to evaluation?
- Leadership commitment**: How much does the organization's leadership support evaluation? How committed are they to this evaluation?
- Evaluation systems**: What systems are in place for evaluation? How embedded is this evaluation with the rest of the organization?
- Data collection**: What data is currently being collected by the organization? What is the quality of that data? Have there been any other relevant evaluations previously undertaken?
- Prior use**: How have people used findings from previous research or evaluation? How do they use data now?

System characteristics

System: What is happening around the program that could affect the program?

- Program dependencies**: What other individuals, groups or institutions does this program depend on? Are they undergoing any change?
- Policy & legislation**: What broader structures, policies or legislation affect this program? Are they undergoing any change?
- Evaluation dependencies**: What other individuals, groups or institutions will the evaluation depend on, particularly for data collection?
- Evaluation contribution**: What does the evaluation have to offer individuals, groups or institutions in the broader system? What risks might it pose for the broader system?

Personal & interpersonal characteristics

People: Who are the people involved in or affected by the program and the evaluation?

- Funder/s:** Who is paying for the evaluation? Who is funding the program?
- Requestor:** Who initially asked for the evaluation?
- Decision makers:** Who makes decision/s about the program or organization? Who will make the decision that this evaluation will inform?
- Personal factor:** Is there someone who genuinely cares about the evaluation and its findings?
- Liaisons:** Who will you liaise with during the evaluation and what are their connections to the other actors?

Perspectives: What perspectives do these people bring to the evaluation?

- Role:** What role do these people play in the program? Are they in a position of influence with respect to the program or the evaluation?
- Fears:** What, if anything, are they afraid of in relation to this evaluation? What news don't they want to hear?
- Interests:** What is their level of interest in the evaluation? What, more broadly, are their social, political, personal and economic interests? What might they stand to gain from particular findings?
- Motivations:** What motivates this person? What are their intentions for the program, institution, their career? What are their personal & professional goals? How might this evaluation help serve those goals?
- Paradigms:** What is their paradigmatic orientation? What are their views on what counts as credible evidence?
- Values:** What does this person value? What counts as 'good' for this person?
- Attention span:** What is their attention span? What time constraints are they under?
- Maintenance:** How high maintenance is this person? How often will they need to hear from you? What type of contact do they need?
- Reporting up:** Who does this person report up to? How often do they need to report up to that person?
- Accessibility:** Will staff, key informants and other stakeholders be available/accessible to participate throughout the evaluation?
- Communication channels:** What are your stakeholders' preferred communication methods? What communication products are required?
- Honesty:** Are your stakeholders being up front and honest?

Expectations: What are these peoples' expectations about the evaluation?

- Results:** What does this person expect the evaluation results to say? Do they have strong pre-disposed views for or against the program? Are they expecting positive or negative findings?
- Timeframe:** What are this person's expectations about the evaluation timeframe?
- Design & analysis:** What are this person's expectations about the sophistication of the study and the data/analysis? Are they expecting more than can be feasibly delivered?

Relationships: What are the relationships between various people, groups and institutions?

- Personalities:** Is there anyone with a 'big' or volatile personality?
- Connections:** Where are there strong, trusting relationships among your stakeholders? Where are there contentious relationships? Who appears to be the 'go to' person? Who, if anyone, has strong connections to people in power?

Political characteristics

Politics: What political dynamics are at play in this evaluation?

- Winners & losers:** Who (i.e. what people, institutions or organizations) stands to gain from positive/negative findings? Who stands to lose?
- Political ties:** Is this evaluation closely tied to a particular individual with political clout?

Evaluator characteristics

Self: What is the evaluator bringing to this evaluation?

- Capabilities - self:** What are your capabilities in relation to the needs of this evaluation? Consider the full range of relevant competencies, including technical and interpersonal skills as well as cultural competency and relevant dispositions.
- Biases:** What assumptions or biases do you have about the program and the people, groups or institutions associated with it?
- Heuristics:** What mental shortcuts do you use to classify evaluation situations? What do you overlook and what might you be missing now?
- Comfort:** Are you comfortable working in this program environment? Are you willing to follow any formal or informal rules that may apply?
- Timing:** How long does it take you to perform the tasks required for this evaluation?

Team: How does your evaluation team work?

- Capabilities - team:** What are your team's capabilities in relation to the needs of this evaluation? Consider the full range of evaluator competencies, including technical and interpersonal skills as well as cultural competency and relevant dispositions.
- Structure and dynamics:** How is your team structured? Who in your evaluation team makes the decisions and has oversight over the evaluation? Are roles clearly defined within your team? Is there a positive team culture?
- Resourcing:** What time and resources will my team require to conduct the evaluation within its set parameters?