

Evaluating Collective Impact: Six Simple Rules

By Mark Cabaj

May 23, 2014



Mark Cabaj

Here to There

CONSULTING INC

9540-145 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, CA
T5N 2W8

P: 780-451-8984

F: 78-447-4246

E: Mark@here2there.ca

Context

Collective Impact

The Spark: Collective Impact Article in Stanford Social Innovation Review



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Collective Impact

Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations.

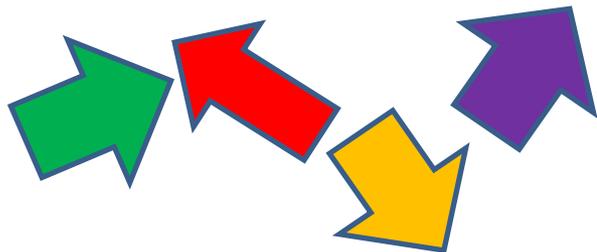
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From Isolated Impact to Collective Impact

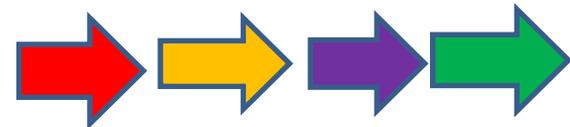
Isolated Impact

- Funders select **individual grantees**
- Organizations **work separately**
- Evaluation attempts to **isolate** a particular organization's impact
- Large scale change is assumed to depend on **scaling organizations**
- Corporate and government sectors are often **disconnected** from foundations and non-profits.

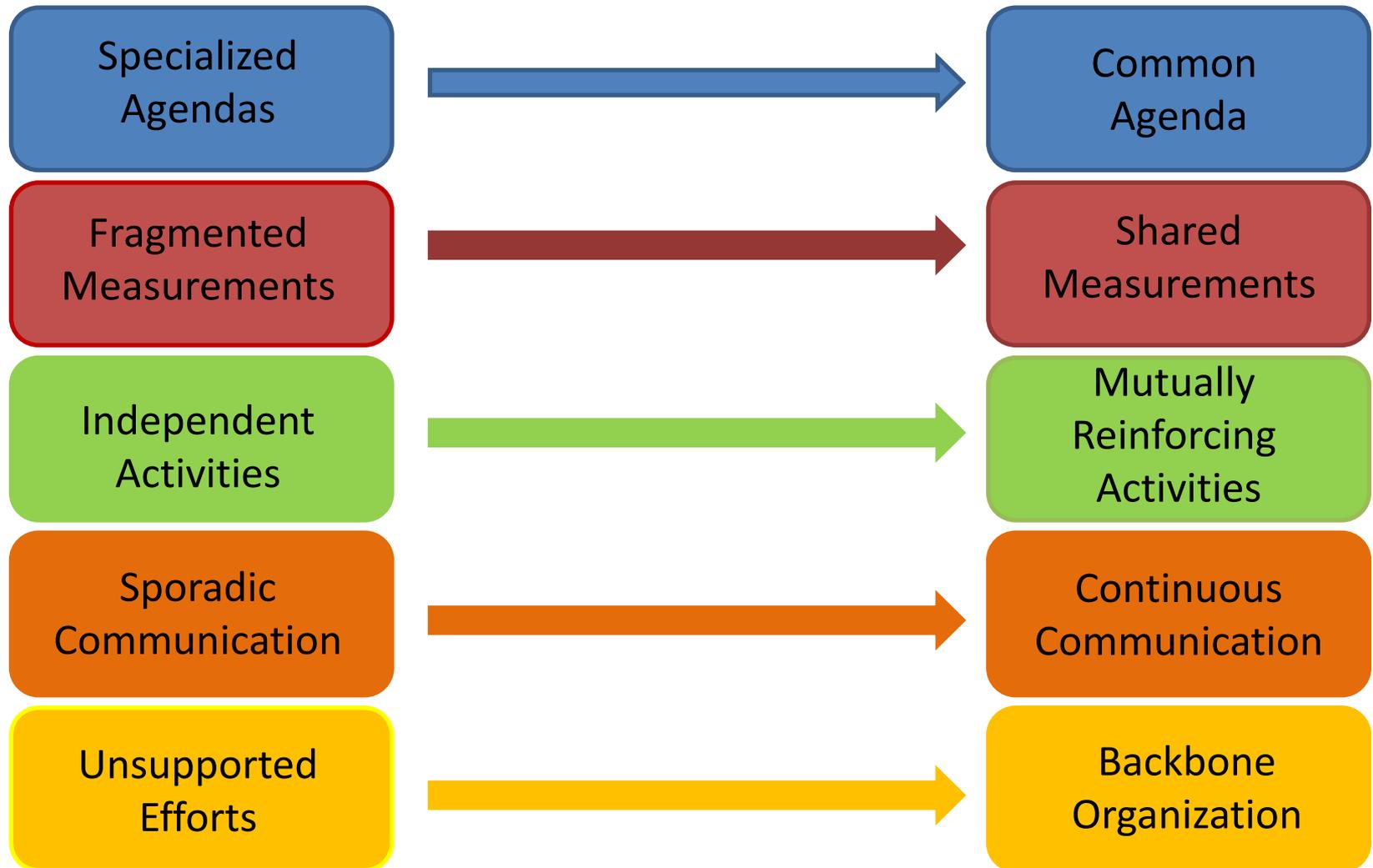


Collective Impact

- Funders understand that social problems – and their solutions – arise from **multiple interacting factors**
- **Cross-sector alignment** with government, nonprofit, philanthropic and corporate sectors as partners
- Organizations **actively coordinating their actions** and sharing lessons learned
- All working toward the **same goal** and measuring the same things



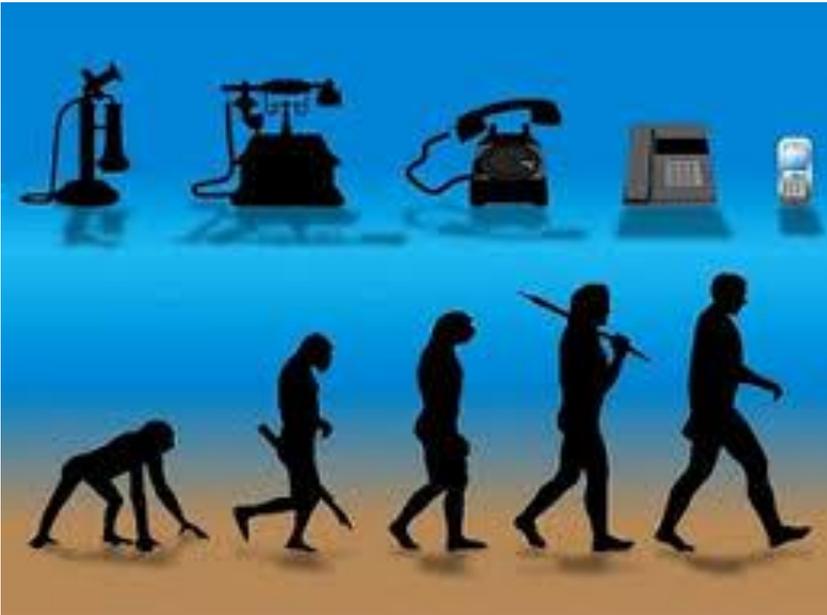
Five Conditions for Collective Impact



Six Simple Rules

... and counting.

Challenge: Evolving Strategy



- Traditional evaluation works best when people work with clear goals, well developed theories of change and fixed measures of success - and keep these stable over time.
- All CI goals and strategies often emerge over time -- and often take radical shifts.

Comparing Two Evaluation Paradigms

TRADITIONAL EVALUATION

Renders definitive judgments of success or failure

Measures success against pre-determined goals

Positions evaluator outside to assure independence & objectivity

Accountability to control and locate blame for failures

Designs the evaluation based on linear cause-effect logic models

COMPLEXITY-BASED\DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

Provides feedback, generates learning, supports/affirms change in direction

Develops new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge & evolve

Positions evaluation as an internal function integrated into action & ongoing interpretive processes

Learns to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what's unfolding to respond strategically

Designs the evaluation to capture system dynamics, interdependencies, and emergent interconnections



Challenge: Different Pieces



- Traditional evaluation tends to focus on a few, relatively simple, units of analysis.
- Most CI efforts have a large number of moving pieces and/or units of analysis.

Simple Rule #1

Embrace a strategic learning approach to evaluation.

- Make informing strategy – not reporting to funders or testing policy experiments – the primary aim of evaluation activities.
- Emphasize ‘real-time’ feedback and robust sense-making to help social innovators make timely, data-based, decisions to develop and adapt their strategy.
- Start with a simple and ‘roughly right’ evaluation design and measures and be prepared to adapt them to co-evolve with the emerging strategy.

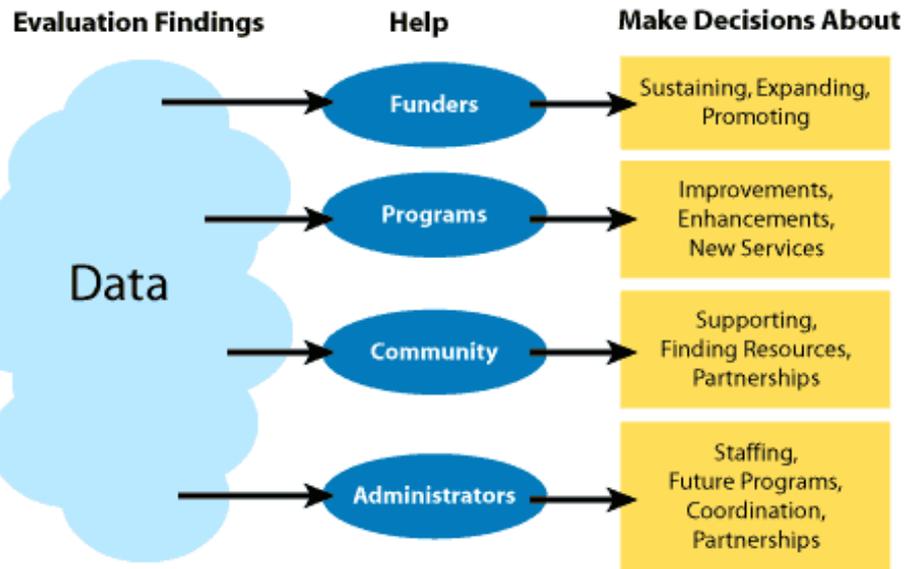
Simple Rule #2

Be clear about the unit of analysis in the assessment.

Example Evaluation Domains

Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent are we manifesting the five conditions of collective impact (e.g. mutually reinforcing activities)?• What is working well, for whom, in what context and why?
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the various interventions in our CI efforts?• What is working for who, in what context, and why?
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the most significant results from our work?• To what extent are we addressing the 'systems' underlying complex issues?• What are the cumulative results of our work?
Theory of Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are we learning about the nature of the complex issues we are trying to address and how to address them?• What are the implications for our expected outcomes and theory of change?

Challenge: Diversity of Needs



- Traditional evaluation 'often' emphasizes developing one clear and shared evaluation framework.
- Collective Impact efforts have multiple moving parts, with different users with different evaluation needs.

Simple Rule #3

Employ
Multiple Users
and Multiple
Designs

- Develop an evaluation scope of work to identify who needs what information, when, for what purpose, packaged in what way, and when.
- Settle on evaluation priorities based on that assessment – you can't evaluate it all.
- Design multiple – sometimes overlapping – evaluation processes for different users.

Example: School-Agency Collaboration

Stream 3: Summative Decisions

Provincial Funder

City Funder

School System

Ongoing

2009

2010

2011

2012

Stream 2: Dev. Evaluation of Overall Collaboration

Ongoing

May-June

May-June

May-June

12-16
School Sites

12-16
School Sites

12-16
School Sites

**Stream 1: Site-Based
Dev/Form Evaluation**

Challenge: Shared Measurements



- *Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.*
- Kania and Kramer. Collective Impact. 2011. Stanford Social Innovation Review

Simple Rule #4

Proceed with shared measurement, but do so carefully.

Shared Measurement ...

... is critical but not essential to productive action,

... can limit strategic thinking,

... requires systems change,

... is time consuming and expensive,

... might sometimes get in the way of action.

The case for shared measurement is strong, but proceed carefully.

Challenge: Unanticipated Outcomes



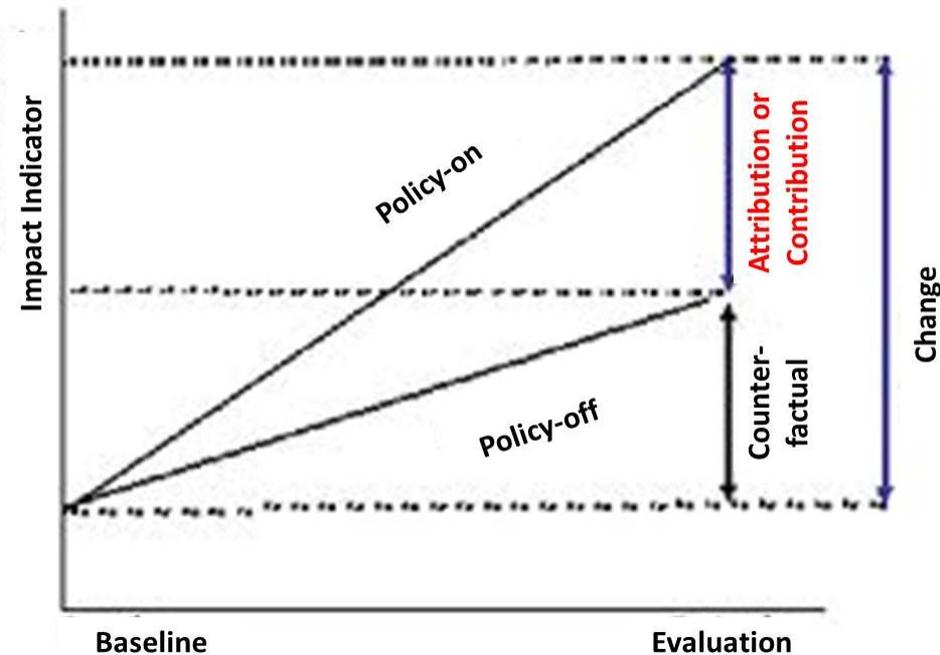
- Traditional evaluation emphasizes tracking progress towards desired outcomes.
- All interventions into a complex system generate a splatter of effects – many of which are unanticipated.

Simple Rule #5

Seek to capture anticipated and unanticipated effects of your work.

- Use post-pre budgets in an addition to a pre-post budgets so people can “chase” emergent outcomes retrospectively.
- Employ participatory “wide net” methodologies to capture outcomes: e.g. outcome harvesting, most-significant change.
- Focus one part of the measurement on assessing “goal attainment” while the other surfaces and elaborates on “what has changed”?

Challenge: Attribution



At

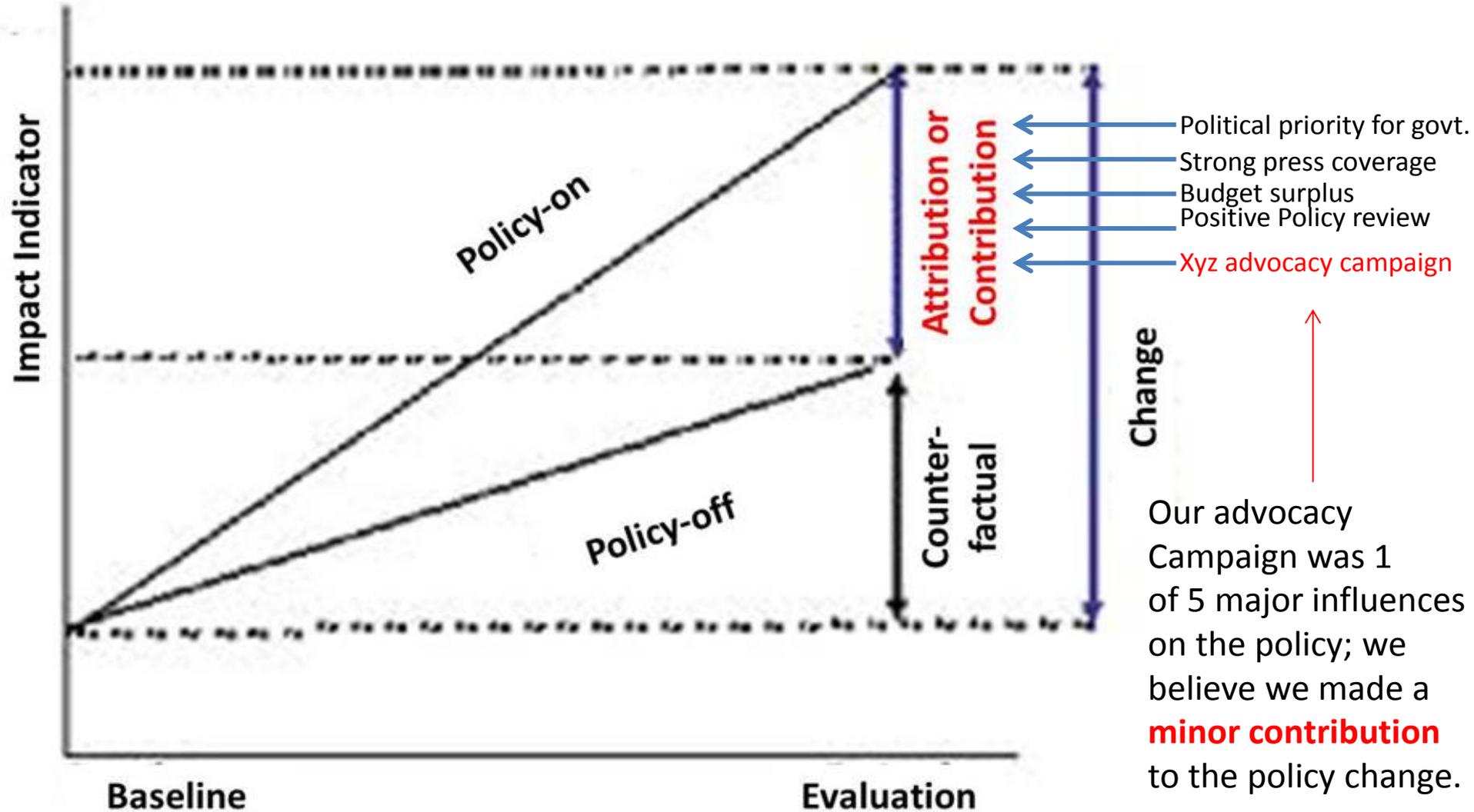
- Traditional evaluation seeks to establish a clear link between innovation activities and results.
- The activities and effects of interventions into a complex system are often only “one” factor contributing to observed changes.

Simple Rule #6

Seek to get a rough sense of contribution to observed changes rather than a definition account of attribution.

- Formally acknowledge the ‘attribution and contribution’ challenge.
- Use contribution methodology to identify all the other likely contributions to observed changes.
- Develop a rough weighting or rating of a group’s activities to observed changes.

Example



Questions

Questions



Resources

Resources

- The Philanthropist – May 2015 Special Issue on Collective Impact
<http://thephilanthropist.ca/index.php/phil>
- Collective Impact Forum – Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact -
<http://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/>
- Tamarack – Collective Impact Resources and Community of Practice – www.tamarackcci.ca

Tamarack Learning Communities




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