

# Mixed methods research:

Evaluation and realist thinking in creative health

## Outline of this seminar

- Why evaluating complex work is challenging
- Overview of common evaluation approaches
- Introduction to Realist Synthesis
- Group activity

## Learning objectives

- Understanding of mixed methods evaluation
- Critical reflection on measurement tools
- Identifying mechanisms in creative health work
- Using realist thinking to explain variation

# Evaluating messy work

## Thinking points

- Have you ever evaluated something complex?
- What made it difficult?
- What did evaluation capture well?
- What did it miss?
- What shaped/ motivated the evaluation (funders, time, data expectations)

# WEMWBS

Warwick Edinburgh Mental  
Wellbeing Scale

- Questionnaire used to measure positive mental wellbeing
- 14 items; one overall wellbeing score
  - *Positive feelings*
  - *Psychological functioning*
  - *Relationships and social wellbeing*
  - *Meaning and personal growth*
- Strengths: validated and recognised by commissioners; tracks changes over time
- Limitations: little insight into mechanisms; may miss contextual nuance; not always accurate

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/1477-7525-5-63>

# UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures

- Visual toolkit designed for museum/ heritage settings
- Participatory and accessible
- Captures experiential wellbeing
  - Strengths: Context sensitive; inclusive; useful for creative evaluation
  - Limitations: Less comparable across sectors; still outcome focussed

<https://culturehealthresearch.wordpress.com/ucl-museum-wellbeing-measures/>

# 5 Ways to Wellbeing



- Developed by the charity Mind
- 5 Ways to wellbeing: Connecting with others; Get active; Take notice; Learn; Give
- Framework describing behaviours linked to wellbeing, often used in programme design and reflection
  - Strengths: Simple, practice-friendly, helps define outcomes
  - Limitations: Not a measurement tool; can be applied superficially

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

# PERMA

- **P**ositive emotion; **E**ngagement; **R**elationships; **M**eaning; **A**ccomplishment
- Positive psychology framework developed by Dr Martin Seligman
- Idea is to use these to cultivate a flourishing life, rather than reducing negative experiences
  - Strengths: Holistic model; Mechanism-adjacent (meaning, relationships); useful for theory of change work
  - Limitations: Broad and difficult to capture

<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/learn-more/perma-theory-well-being-and-perma-workshops>

# AESOP

Arts Enterprise with a Social Purpose

- Arts and health evaluation framework
- Links practice, research and theory
- Supports programme development
  - Strengths: Structured; encourages mixed methods; sector specific
  - Limitations: Requires interpretation; not a single measure

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25544860/>

# Public Health England evaluation framework

- Mixed methods approach to arts and health
- Emphasises implementation and outcomes
- Supports cross sector evidence
  - Strengths: Systems perspective; Commissioner relevance; Theory driven
  - Limitations: Resource intensive

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-for-health-and-wellbeing-an-evaluation-framework>

# Thematic Analysis

- Qualitative method for identifying patterns in experience
- Common in creative health research
- Often reveals mechanisms
  - Strengths: Flexible, mechanism detection, captures lived experience
  - Limitations: Requires rigour/ specialist knowledge, not always commissioner friendly, can become descriptive

<http://creativeandcredible.co.uk>

# Art Observation

- Observational methods capturing interaction and atmosphere
- Documents facilitation and participation
- Records context
  - Strengths: Context rich, reveals relational processes
  - Limitations: Interpretation heavy; specialist knowledge required

<http://creativeandcredible.co.uk/category/approaches-to-evaluation/>

# Photovoice

- Community led photography methodology
- Surfaces meaning and perspective
- Supports participatory evaluation
  - Strengths: Empowering; reveals hidden mechanisms; addresses inequality
  - Limitation: Time intensive; analysis is complex

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9158980/>

# Feedback letters

- Narrative micro-feedback from participants
- Captures immediate experience
- Often used in arts settings
  - Strengths: Low burden, rich insight, early mechanism signals
  - Limitations: Hard to aggregate

<http://creativeandcredible.co.uk/category/approaches-to-evaluation/>

# Theory of Change

- How we think change happens
- Describes pathways from activities to outcomes
- Made assumptions explicit
- Identifies mechanisms and context
- Guides what to measure and how
  - Strengths: Clarifies how change is expected to happen; makes assumptions explicit; guides evaluation design; supports collaboration across disciplines; helps explain variation
  - Limitations: Can oversimplify complex processes; can become static; may reflect funder logic rather than lived experience; hard to capture emergent change

<https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/>

# Putting evaluation tools together

- Frameworks → what matters
- Measures → what's changed
- Qualitative/ creative methods → how change happened

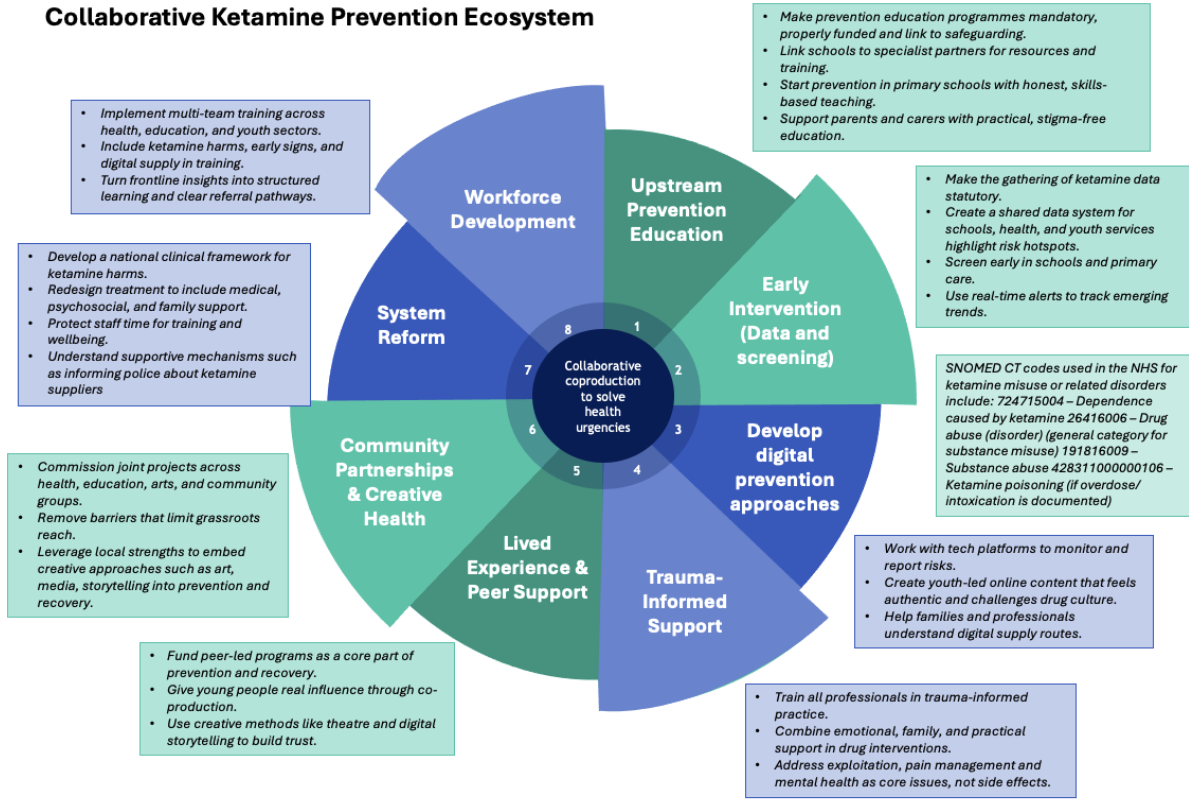
A mixed methods approach enables explanation.

# Realist Synthesis

- Theory-driven review approach
- Explains how interventions work differently
- Uses Context–Mechanism–Outcome patterns
- Builds transferable learning
- Key question

*What works, for whom, in what contexts, and why?*

## Collaborative Ketamine Prevention Ecosystem



## Group activity: Groups of 3-4

- Public Health Lancashire are releasing funds for a two-year intervention programme: £500,000
- You must reduce the number of young people under the age of 18 taking up ketamine
- You must use creative health strategies
- How do you design the programme, evaluate it using mixed methods, and ensure the scalability of the programme?
- How can you comment on *why* the programme might work?
- Use the prevention ecosystem shown here
- Use between 1-3 methodologies discussed today