From *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*
by Michael Quinn Patton (2012, Sage)

Summary and Conclusion

I opened the preface of this book with reference to Janus, the Roman god depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions. The two directions I wanted to evoke were (1) linear step-by-step progression and (2) complex dynamic and nonlinear interactions. First then, throughout this book I have presented utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE) as a series of steps.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation Steps

Step 1.	Assess and build program and organizational readiness for utilization-focused evaluation
Step 2.	Assess and enhance evaluator readiness and competence to undertake a utilization-focused evaluation
Step 3.	Identify, organize, and engage primary intended users
Step 4.	Situation analysis conducted jointly with primary intended users
Step 5.	Identify and prioritize primary intended uses by determining priority purposes
Step 6.	Consider and build in process uses if and as appropriate
Step 7.	Focus priority evaluation questions
Step 8.	Check that fundamental areas for evaluation inquiry are being adequately addressed
Step 9.	Determine what intervention model or theory of change is being evaluated
Step 10.	Negotiate appropriate methods to generate credible findings that support intended use by intended users
Step 11.	Make sure intended users understand potential methods controversies and their implications
Step 12.	Simulate use of findings

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Step 13.	Gather data with ongoing attention to use
Step 14.	Organize and present the data for interpretation and use by primary intended users
Step 15.	Prepare an evaluation report to facilitate use and disseminate significant findings to expand influence
Step 16.	Follow up with primary intended users to facilitate and enhance use
Step 17.	Metaevaluation of use: Be accountable, learn, and improve

Complete U-FE Checklist

This concluding chapter presents the full, detailed 17-step utilization-focused checklist that describes the primary tasks and major facilitation challenges of each step. That is followed, on p. 426, with a final and complete complex dynamic systems graphic depicting the interactions and interdependencies among the steps. These are the Janus-like two faces of U-FE, looking in opposite directions, but also looking at the same thing. Each alternative and contrasting depiction of the U-FE process is accurate yet distorted in some ways. The checklist steps portray an overly linear and sequential process but can be helpful in proposing, planning, and managing a utilization-focused evaluation and understanding the work involved in fulfilling each step. The complex dynamic systems graphic shows the interdependencies and interactions among the steps but can feel overwhelming in its complexity. Use the one that works for you and your personality type, or use both together, or each in turn. And, along the way, engage in some reflective practice on your uses and preferences.

Controlled Folly and Use

There's another sense in which the dual perspectives of Janus are relevant to utilization-focused evaluation: namely, by approaching use with a sense of controlled folly.

The sorcerer Don Juan, teaching anthropologist Carlos Castenada (1971) the *Yaqui Way of Knowledge,* introduced him to the idea of *controlled folly.* Controlled folly is quintessential Janus, acting within two perspectives at once and, in so doing, embracing paradox. One perspective is control. The other is chaos. In Don Juan's teaching, controlled folly required acting at every moment as if you are in complete control of your life while simultaneously knowing at the deepest level of knowing that our actions are all folly because larger forces are at work over which we ultimately have no control. What does this have to do with utilization-focused evaluation?

In my 2009 Claremont debate with Michael Scriven (Patton & Scriven, 2010), he worried about assigning blame for whether an evaluation gets used. It isn't automatically the evaluator's fault if use doesn't occur, he insisted. Many factors come into play, including resistant program managers, mistaken interpretations (misuse), and decision-maker incorrigibility, so . . .

> It's really important to be prepared to insulate the evaluator from unfair criticism due to nonuse when that's unfair criticism. If there's the slightest grounds for it being fair criticism, for example, that the report is full of technical jargon that you didn't need to use, or should have been translated, or that the authors keep getting off into academic sidetracks about the interesting issues that are not really relevant to the need of the decision maker—then, of course, the blame must fall on them. But if the mistake was not made at your point, and you wrote a highly usable set of recommendations and evaluations, and it wasn't used through somebody else making a mistake—that's not your fault. (p. 31)

Teachers worry about being blamed for low achievement when it's really parents' fault. Police worry about being blamed for crimes committed by repeat offenders when it's really judges' fault for not imposing harsher sentences. Doctors worry about being blamed for deaths—and sued—when it's really the patient's fault, or the blame resides with inadequate knowledge, or underfunded research, or hospital rules, or the unfairness of life. And evaluators worry about being blamed about nonuse when it's really the intended users' fault for not acting on the findings, actions that lie well beyond the evaluator's control. I hear this regularly from participants in utilization-focused evaluation workshops. "There's only so much we can do."

But this isn't about blaming, or escaping blame. It's about doing the best we can in an uncertain world. Utilization-focused evaluation comes with no guarantees. Far from it. The odds are often stacked against use. Many factors affect use, most of them out of the evaluator's control. Utilization-focused evaluation is just trying to improve the odds a bit, tilt the scale in the direction of greater and more meaningful use. So what does controlled folly have to do with this?

"There's only so much we can do." True enough. Then do that—and do it ferociously. Controlled folly points us to acting as if we are in control even when we know we aren't. Integrity lies in doing all we can do. Sorcerer, jester, and, yes, evaluator Don Juan asserts:

A person of knowledge chooses any act, and acts it out as if what is done matters, so when the action is fulfilled, peace follows. The utilization-focused evaluator acts as if what is done, when it is well done, with a focus on use, will lead to use, so when the evaluation is completed, peace follows.

Peace be with you.

In that spirit, I leave you with this thought from my philosophical alter ego, Halcolm:

A society that aspires to greatness will ultimately
be known by how it values evaluation—and evaluators.

UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION CHECKLIST

17 Steps to Evaluations That Are Useful—and Actually Used

Each chapter describes a step in utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE). This checklist provides a summary of the steps. The checklist has two columns. Primary *U-FE tasks* are in the column on the left. Because of the emphasis on facilitation in U-FE, particular facilitation challenges are identified in the column on the right. Basic premises are presented for each step to provide a context for the primary tasks and special facilitation challenges.

Step 1. Assess and build program and organizational readiness for utilization-focused evaluation	
Premises: • Programs and organizations that are ready to seriously engage in evaluation are more likely to participate in ways that enhance use. • Use is more likely if key people who will be involved in and affected by the evaluation become interested in evidence-based reality testing, evaluative thinking, and use.	**Premises:** • The U-FE evaluator must engage those involved in an evaluation in ways that will deepen their understanding of evaluation and commitment to use. • Evaluability assessment includes examining if the program and organizational cultures are receptive to and ready for evaluation.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Assess the commitment of those commissioning and funding the evaluation to doing useful evaluation.	Explaining U-FE and assessing readiness for evaluation generally and U-FE specifically
❑ Assess the evaluation context: ✓ Review important documents and interview key stakeholders. ✓ Conduct a baseline assessment of past evaluation use. ✓ Find out current perceptions about evaluation.	• Conducting individual and/or focus group interviews to get baseline information • Building trust for honest discussions about how evaluation is viewed
❑ When ready to engage, plan a launch workshop that will involve key stakeholders to both assess and build readiness for evaluation.	• Agreeing on what diverse stakeholders to involve in the launch workshop • Planning the launch workshop to deepen the commitment to reality testing and use

✓ Work with key stakeholders to launch the evaluation. ✓ Make the launch workshop an opportunity to further assess readiness for evaluation as well as enhance readiness.	• Creating a positive vision for evaluation and assessing incentives for and barriers to engaging in evaluation • Generating specific norms to guide the evaluation process • Other exercises that build capacity to engage in evaluation (See Menu 1.1.)
❑ Introduce the standards for evaluation as the framework within which the evaluation will be conducted (Joint Committee, 2010).	• Explaining the evaluation standards and their relevance to this evaluation • Facilitating the group to add their own norms for the evaluation
❑ Based on the initial experience working with key stakeholders, assess what needs to be done next to further enhance readiness, build capacity, and move the evaluation forward.	• Planning, negotiating, and facilitating the commitment of key stakeholders to move forward with evaluation • Generating commitment to strengthen evaluation capacity, as needed
Step 2. Assess and enhance evaluator readiness and competence to undertake a utilization-focused evaluation	
Premise: Facilitating and conducting a utilization-focused evaluation requires a particular philosophy and special skills.	**Premise:** Evaluation facilitators need to know their strengths and limitations and develop the skills needed to facilitate utilization-focused evaluations.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Assess the *evaluator's* essential competencies: 1. Professional practice knowledge 2. Systematic inquiry skills 3. Situation analysis skills 4. Project management skills 5. Reflective practice competence 6. Interpersonal competence 7. Cultural competence	• As an evaluator, being rigorously reflexive about your strengths and weaknesses • In working with primary intended users, being forthright about those strengths and weaknesses • Engaging in ongoing professional development to build on strengths and reduce weaknesses
❑ Assess the match between the *evaluator's commitment* and the likely challenges of the situation.	Matching the evaluator's competencies with what is needed to work effectively with a particular group of primary intended users, evaluation situation, and set of challenges

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❑ Assess the match between the *evaluator's substantive knowledge* and what will be needed in the evaluation.	Demonstrating sufficient substantive knowledge of the program being evaluated to have credibility with key stakeholders and be able to facilitate discussions on substantive issues
❑ Adapt the evaluation as the process unfolds.	Working with primary intended users in an active-reactive-interactive-adaptive style
❑ Assess whether a single evaluator or a team is needed, and the combination of competencies that will be needed in a team approach.	Working together as a team offers opportunity for mutual support and greater diversity of competencies brought to the evaluation but adds the complication of integrating team members into an effective working group
❑ Assure that the evaluators are prepared to have their effectiveness judged by the use of the evaluation by primary intended users.	Keeping the whole evaluation process focused on the outcome of intended use by intended users
Step 3. Identify, organize, and engage primary intended users	
Premise: Identifying, organizing, and engaging primary intended users optimizes the *personal factor,* which emphasizes that an evaluation is more likely to be used if intended users are involved in ways they find meaningful, feel ownership of the evaluation, find the questions relevant, and care about the findings. Primary intended users are people who have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation.	**Premise:** The U-FE facilitator has a stake in evaluation use and therefore an interest in identifying and working with primary intended users to enhance use.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Find and involve primary intended users who are: ✓ Interested ✓ Knowledgeable ✓ Open ✓ Connected to important stakeholder constituencies ✓ Credible ✓ Teachable ✓ Committed and available for interaction throughout the evaluation process	• Determining real interest; building interest as needed; sustaining interest throughout the U-FE process • Determining knowledge of users; increasing knowledge as needed • Facilitating an evaluation climate of openness • Working with primary intended users to examine stakeholder connections and their implications for use • Building and sustaining credibility of the evaluation working group made up of primary intended users

	• Outlining and facilitating a process that intended users want to be part of and will commit to
❑ Explain the role of primary intended users throughout the evaluation process.	Helping primary intended users understand and commit to a utilization-focused evaluation
❑ Organize primary intended users into a working group for decision making and involvement.	Facilitating group identity, trust, and willingness to work together to plan the evaluation and negotiate key issues that will affect the evaluation's credibility and use
❑ Involve intended users throughout all steps of the U-FE process.	Building and enhancing the capacity of primary intended users to prioritize evaluation questions, make good design decisions, interpret data, and follow through to get findings used
❑ Monitor ongoing availability, interest, and participation of primary intended users to keep the process energized and anticipate turnover of primary intended users.	• Getting feedback about how intended users are experiencing the U-FE process • At the first indication of turnover, assessing the implications and planning to replace any primary intended users
❑ Orient any new intended users added to the evaluation working group along the way.	Facilitating understanding, commitment, and buy-in by new intended users added to the working group. In some cases, this may involve tweaking the design or data collection plan to incorporate and show responsiveness to their priority concerns.
Step 4. Situation analysis conducted jointly with primary intended users	
Premises: • Evaluation use is people- and context-dependent. • Use is likely to be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account and is adapted to crucial situational factors.	**Premises:** • The evaluator has responsibility to work with primary intended users to identify, assess, understand, and act on situational factors that may affect use. • Situation analysis is ongoing.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Examine the program's prior experiences with evaluation and other factors that are important to understand the situation and context. (See Exhibits 4.1, 4.4, and 4.5.)	Working with intended users to identify and strategize about critical factors that can affect the priority questions, evaluation design, and evaluation use
❑ Identify factors that may support and facilitate use. (Force field analysis, Exhibits 4.2 and 4.3)	Distinguishing and strategizing about enabling factors that may enhance use

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❑ Look for possible barriers or resistance to use. (Force field analysis, Exhibits 4.2 and 4.3)	Looking honestly for and assessing potential barriers to use
❑ Get clear about resources available for evaluation.	Including in the budget resources beyond analysis and reporting to facilitate use
❑ Identify any upcoming decisions, deadlines, or time lines that the evaluation should meet to be useful.	Being realistic about time lines; knowing about and meeting critical deadlines
❑ Assess leadership support for and openness to the evaluation.	Engaging leadership in a way that makes the evaluation meaningful and relevant (See Exhibit 4.7.)
❑ Understand the political context for the evaluation, and calculate how political factors may affect use.	Including attention to and being sophisticated about both potential uses and potential misuses of the evaluation politically
❑ Assess the implications for use of the evaluator's location internal or external to the program being evaluated; assess how internal-external combinations might enhance use. (See Exhibit 4.6.)	Assessing factors that can affect the evaluation's credibility and relevance, and therefore utility, like the advantages and disadvantages of internal and external evaluator locations and combinations
❑ Assess the appropriate evaluation team composition to ensure needed expertise, credibility, and cultural competence.	Finding the right mix of team members that can work together to produce a high-quality, useful evaluation
❑ Attend to both: ✓ Tasks that must be completed, and ✓ Relationship dynamics that support getting tasks done.	Finding and facilitating an appropriate balance between tasks and relationships (outcomes and process)
❑ Risk analysis: Assess ✓ idea risks, ✓ implementation risks, and ✓ evidence risks. (See Exhibit 4.8.)	Developing *contingency thinking* to be able to anticipate risks, identify risks as they emerge, and respond to challenges as they develop
❑ Continue assessing the evaluation knowledge, commitment, and experiences of primary intended users.	Building into the evaluation process opportunities to increase the capacity, knowledge, and commitment of primary intended users
❑ *Steps 1 to 4 interim outcomes check and complex systems interconnections review.*	• Understanding and taking into account system dynamics and interrelationships as the evaluation unfolds

Overall situation analysis: ✓ How good is the match between the evaluation team's capacity, the organization's readiness and evaluation needs, and the primary intended user's readiness to move forward with the evaluation?	• Being attentive to and adapting to complex system dynamics as they emerge • Staying active-reactive-interactive-adaptive throughout the evaluation
Step 5. Identify and prioritize primary intended uses by determining priority purposes	
Premise: *Intended use by primary intended users* is the U-FE goal. Use flows from clarity about purpose.	**Premise:** The menu of evaluation options should be reviewed, screened, and prioritized by primary intended users to clarify the primary purposes and uses of the evaluation.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Review alternative purpose options with primary intended users.	Helping primary intended users understand evaluation purpose options and the importance of prioritizing the evaluation's purpose
✓ Consider how evaluation could contribute to **program improvement.**	Guiding primary intended users in reviewing potential formative evaluation uses
✓ Consider how summative evaluation judgments could contribute to **making major decisions** about the program.	Guiding primary intended users in reviewing summative evaluation opportunities to inform major decisions based on judgments of merit, worth, and significance
✓ Consider **accountability** uses.	Guiding users in assessing oversight and compliance issues, and the accountability context for the evaluation
✓ Consider **monitoring** uses.	Guiding users in examining the relationship between monitoring and evaluation
✓ Consider **developmental** uses.	Guiding users in distinguishing developmental evaluation from other uses, especially program improvement (i.e., the difference between improvement and *development*)
✓ Consider how evaluation could contribute by **generating knowledge.**	Guiding primary intended users in considering the possibility of using evaluation to generate lessons learned and evidence-based practices that might apply beyond the program being evaluated

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❑ Prioritize the evaluation's purpose.	• Working with primary intended users to establish priorities and resolve conflicts over competing purposes, avoiding ambiguity or confusion about priorities • Avoiding the temptation to dabble in a little bit of everything
Step 6. Consider and build in process uses if and as appropriate	
Premise: The processes undertaken in how an evaluation is conducted have impacts on those involved with the evaluation.	**Premise:** The menu of *process use* options should be reviewed, screened, and prioritized by primary intended users to determine any appropriate process uses of the evaluation.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Review alternative process use options with primary intended users.	Helping primary intended users understand process use options and the potential importance of process uses as intentional, thereby adding value to the evaluation
✓ Consider how **evaluative thinking might be infused into the organization culture** as part of doing the evaluation.	Guiding primary intended users in reviewing potential program and organizational culture impacts of evaluation, and whether to enhance and make then intentional
✓ Consider how the way in which the evaluation is conducted and who is involved **can enhance shared understandings.**	Guiding primary intended users in considering communication issues and areas where shared understandings could be enhanced through involvement in the evaluation process
✓ Consider possibilities for using evaluation processes to **support and reinforce the program intervention.**	Examining the potential interaction effects between how the evaluation is conducted, including how data are gathered, and attaining the desired outcomes of the intervention
✓ Consider **potential instrumentation effects and reactivity** as process uses to be made explicit and enhanced.	Facilitating examination of the potential effects of measurement as exemplified in the adage: "what gets measured gets done"
✓ Consider how the evaluation might be conducted in ways that **increase skills, knowledge, confidence, self-determination, and a sense of ownership** among those	Guiding users in considering evaluation approaches that are participatory, collaborative, empowering, inclusive, and democratic-deliberative in which evaluation processes have the goal of building

involved in the evaluation, included the program's staff and intended beneficiaries.	capacity, enhancing skills, and giving voice to those whose voices are less often heard
✓ Consider how evaluation could contribute to **program and organizational development.**	Considering the option of the evaluator becoming part of a development team involved in innovation and ongoing adaptation based on developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011)
❑ Review concerns, cautions, controversies, costs, and potential positive and negative effects of making process use a priority in the evaluation.	• Guiding users through the controversies surrounding various types of process uses • Examining potential pluses and minuses, including potential effects on the evaluation's credibility • Reviewing time and cost implications
❑ Examine the relationship and interconnections between potential process uses and findings use (Step 5).	Facilitating a complex systems understanding of how process uses and findings uses may be interconnected, interactive, and mutually interdependent
❑ Prioritize any intended process uses of the evaluation and plan for their incorporation into the design and conduct of the evaluation.	Having reviewed process options, work with primary intended users to establish priorities; resolve conflicts over competing purposes; avoid dabbling in a little bit of everything; avoid ambiguity or confusion about priorities.
Step 7. Focus priority evaluation questions	
Premise: No evaluation can look at everything. Priorities have to be determined. Focusing is the process for establishing priorities.	**Premise:** The menu of options for specifically focusing the evaluation should be reviewed, screened, and prioritized by primary intended users to determine their priorities.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Apply criteria for good utilization-focused evaluation questions: ✓ Questions can be answered sufficiently well to inform understanding and support action. ✓ Questions can be answered in a timely manner and at reasonable cost. ✓ Data can be brought to bear on the questions; that is, they aren't primarily philosophical, religious, or moral questions.	Helping primary intended users create a culture of inquiry and learning: • Facilitating discussion of the connections between asking questions, getting answers, and taking action • Guiding primary intended users in considering resource and time line realities • Guiding users in understanding what kinds of questions can and cannot be answered with data

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✓ The answer is not predetermined by the phrasing or framing of the question. ✓ The primary intended users want the question answered; they have identified it as important and can say why. ✓ The answer is actionable; intended users can indicate how they would use the answer to the question for future decision making and action.	• Guiding users in being open to genuine empirical inquiry: aiming to learn and find out rather than prove predetermined ideas or bias the results • Guiding users in surfacing what they care most about, what is most relevant • Guiding primary intended users in keeping intended use by intended users at the forefront of their focusing process
✓ Listen carefully to the priority concerns of primary intended users to help them identify important questions.	• Staying tuned into the concerns of primary intended users and not letting the evaluator's interest dominate or control the priority-setting process
✓ Connect priority questions to the intended purpose and uses of the evaluation to assure that they match.	• Facilitating a review of the interconnections between primary intended uses (Step 5) and specific, more detailed evaluation questions
✓ Offer a menu of focus options. (See Menu 7.1.)	• Doing a reasonably thorough review of options without overwhelming intended users
Step 8. Check that fundamental areas for evaluation inquiry are being adequately addressed	
Premise: Implementation, outcomes, and attribution questions are fundamental.	**Premise:** Evaluators should be sure that primary intended users have considered the issues and options involved in evaluating program implementation, outcomes, and attribution.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Consider options for implementation evaluation that address the question: What happens in the program? ✓ Effort and input evaluation ✓ Process evaluation ✓ Component evaluation ✓ Treatment specification and intervention dosage	Helping primary intended users determine what implementation evaluation questions should have priority given the stage of the program's development, the priority decisions the evaluation will inform, and the resources available for evaluation
❑ Consider options for *outcomes* evaluation to answer the questions: ✓ What results from the program?	Facilitation challenges include: • Evaluability assessment: Are the program's goals sufficiently specific, measurable,

✓ How are participants changed, if at all, as a result of program participation? ✓ To what extent are the program's goals achieved? ✓ What unanticipated outcomes occur? ✓ To what extent are participants' needs met by the program?	achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) to be ready for evaluation of outcomes? • Determining which outcomes among the many a program may have are the priority for evaluation; what outcomes evaluation questions will yield the most useful findings? • Completing the utilization-focused evaluation framework for outcomes evaluation that differentiates target subgroup, desired outcome, outcome indicator, data collection, performance target, and intended use of the outcomes data
❑ Determine the importance and relative priority of the attribution issue: To what extent can outcomes be attributed to the program intervention?	Helping primary intended users understand the conceptual and methodological issues involved in asking questions about causality and generating credible evidence to support judgments about attribution
Step 9. Determine what intervention model or theory of change is being evaluated	
Premises: A program or intervention can usefully be conceptualized as a model or theory which describes how intended outcomes will be produced. Evaluation can include testing the model or theory.	**Premises:** Evaluators should be sure that primary intended users have considered the issues and options involved in evaluating the program's model or theory of change. How a theory of change is conceptualized will have important implications for how the evaluation is designed and conducted.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Determine if logic modeling or theory of change work will provide an important and useful framework for the evaluation.	• Helping intended users understand the purposes of a logic model or theory of change for evaluation • Explaining the differences between a logic model and theory of change • Assessing the costs and benefits of using a logic model or theory of change to frame the evaluation
❑ Consider options for conceptualizing a program or intervention, or different elements of a program or change initiative: ✓ A linear logic model ✓ A map of systems relationships ✓ A complex adaptive system	Helping primary intended users understand and engage the differences among different conceptual approaches: logic models, systems thinking, and complex adaptive systems

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❑ Appropriately match the evaluation design and measurement approach to how the program or intervention is conceptualized, understanding that linear logic models, systems maps, and complex nonlinear conceptualizations of interventions have both conceptual and methodological implications.	Facilitation challenges involve helping intended users understand the implications of conceptualizing the intervention in different ways: • Designing an evaluation to test causal attribution hypotheses by specifying a linear model in which the connections are clear, logical, sequential, plausible—and *testable* • Creating a meaningful systems map that provides insights into relationships and constitutes a baseline of systems interrelationships for purposes of evaluation • Generating shared understandings around the evaluation implications of complex situations characterized by high uncertainty about how to produce desired outcomes, high disagreement among key stakeholders about what to do, and unpredictable and uncontrollable causality
Step 10. Negotiate appropriate methods to generate credible findings that support intended use by intended users	
Premises: The evaluation should be designed to lead to useful findings. Methods should be selected and the evaluation designed to support and achieve intended use by primary intended users.	**Premises:** Involving primary intended users in methods decisions increases their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used and deepens their understanding of data collection decisions, which supports the commitment to use the resultant findings.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Select methods to answer users' priority questions so that the results obtained will be credible to primary intended users.	Making sure that primary intended users play an active role in reviewing methods to examine their appropriateness and credibility
❑ Assure that the proposed methods and measurements are: ✓ Appropriate ✓ Practical ✓ Cost-effective ✓ Ethical	❑ Taking time to think through methods choices and their implications with intended users

❑ Assure that the results obtained from the chosen methods will be able to be used as intended.	Finding the right level of engagement with intended users, the "sweet spot," neither overly technical, nor overly simplistic
❑ Negotiate trade-offs between design and methods ideals and what can actually be implemented given inevitable constraints of resources and time.	• Negotiating criteria for methodological quality and what constitutes credible evidence among key stakeholders • Making the evaluator's own stake in a quality evaluation explicit and part of the negotiations without allowing the evaluator to become the unilateral decision maker about methods
❑ Identify and attend to threats to data quality, credibility, and utility.	Helping intended users consider the implications for use of methods and measurement decisions
❑ Adapt methods in response to changing conditions as the evaluation unfolds, dealing with the emergent dynamics of actual fieldwork.	Keeping primary intended users engaged with and informed about necessary changes and adaptations in methods as the evaluation unfolds
Step 11. Make sure intended users understand potential methods controversies and their implications	
Premises: The methodological gold standard is methodological appropriateness. Appropriate methods are those that answer users' priority questions. Involving intended users in methods decisions means that evaluators and intended users need to understand paradigm-based methods debates and their implications for the credibility and utility of a particular evaluation.	**Premises:** Evaluators need to be able to facilitate choices that are appropriate to a particular evaluation's purpose. This means educating primary stakeholders about the legitimate options available, the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches, the potential advantages and costs of using multiple and mixed methods, and the controversies that surround such choices.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Select methods appropriate to the questions being asked.	Making sure that methods are selected jointly by primary intended users and the evaluator(s) based on appropriateness
❑ Discuss with intended users relevant methods debates that affect the methods choices in a particular evaluation, if appropriate and helpful to support decision making about methods. Issues to consider include: ✓ Quantitative versus qualitative data	• Helping primary intended users understand and consider how broader methodological debates may affect the credibility and utility of the particular evaluation being designed • Keeping the discussion about methodological debates practical and useful rather than academic and pedantic

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✓ The Gold Standard Debate (experimental versus nonexperimental designs) ✓ Randomization versus naturally occurring and purpose sampling approaches ✓ Internal versus external validity as a design priority ✓ Generalizations versus context-sensitive extrapolations ✓ Pragmatism versus methodological purity	• Resolving conflicts that may occur among primary intended users on different sides of the issue • Offering a paradigm of choices based on methodological appropriateness given users' priority questions and intended uses of findings
Step 12. Simulate use of findings	
Premise: Before data are collected, a simulation of potential use done with fabricated findings is real enough to provide a meaningful learning experience for primary intended users.	**Premise:** It's important to move discussions of use from the abstract to the concrete, and a simulation of use based on fabricated data helps do that.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Fabricate findings based on the proposed design and measures of implementation and outcomes.	Fabricating realistic findings that show varying results and offer good grist for simulated interaction among primary intended users.
❑ Guide primary intended users in interpreting the potential (fabricated) findings.	Helping primary intended users take the simulation seriously so that they can use the experience to improve design and be better prepared for real use of findings
❑ Interpret the simulation experience to determine if any design changes, revisions, or additions to the data collection would likely increase utility.	Taking time to do this final, critical check and make final design and measurement revisions before data collection
❑ As a final step before data collection, have primary intended users make an explicit decision to proceed with the evaluation given likely costs and expected uses.	• Assuring that primary intended users feel ownership of the design and measures • Helping primary intended users seriously ask: Given expected costs and intended uses, *is the evaluation worth doing?*
Step 13. Gather data with ongoing attention to use	
Premise: Data collection should be managed with use in mind.	**Premise:** It's important to keep primary intended users informed and involved throughout all stages of the process, including data collection.

Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Effectively manage data collection to ensure data quality and evaluation credibility.	• Staying on top of data collection problems and taking corrective steps before small issues become major ones • Being transparent with intended users about how data collection is unfolding and alerting them to any important deviations from the planned design
❑ Effectively implement any agreed-on participatory approaches to data collection that build capacity and support process uses.	• Working with, training and coaching nonresearchers in the basics of data collection • Ensuring quality data when using nonresearchers for data collection • Keeping primary intended users informed about issues that emerge in participatory data collection processes
❑ Keep primary intended users informed about how things are going in data collection.	• Providing just enough information to maintain interest without getting intended users bogged down in too much detail • Meeting diverse interest and needs as different key stakeholders may want different amounts of information along the way • Avoiding inappropriate micromanaging by primary intended users
❑ Offer appropriate feedback to those providing data; for example ✓ Let interviewees know that their responses are helpful. ✓ Provide program staff and leadership with a debriefing of site visits and evaluation observations.	• Providing feedback to enhance data collection without inappropriately affecting responses or evaluation credibility • Alleviating inappropriate anxiety among those providing data or among program staff receiving early feedback about the evaluation findings • Finding the right amount and nature of timely feedback to offer
❑ Report emergent and interim findings to primary intended users to keep them interested and engaged. ✓ Avoid surprises through early alerts about results. ✓ Match the nature and frequency of interim reports to the purpose, time line of the evaluation, and duration of data collection.	• Ensuring that interim findings are treated as interim and therefore not disseminated • Maintaining the confidentiality of interim findings reported • Providing enough feedback to maintain interest but not so much as to be annoying or intrusive

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❑ Watch for and deal with turnover in primary intended users. ✓ Bring replacement key stakeholders up to date quickly. ✓ Connect new intended users with those involved all along the way. ✓ Facilitate understanding, engagement, and buy-in among any new primary intended users.	• Integrating new key stakeholders into an ongoing group of primary intended users • Taking into account the potentially divergent views and different priorities of a new primary intended user when data collection is already under way
Step 14: Organize and present the data for interpretation and use by primary intended users	
Premises: • Findings should be organized and presented to facilitate use by primary intended users. • Analysis, interpretation, judgment, and recommendations should be distinguished.	**Premise:** Facilitating data interpretation among primary intended users increases their understanding of the findings, their sense of ownership of the evaluation, and their commitment to use the findings.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Organize data to be understandable and relevant to primary intended users. ✓ Organize the findings to answer priority questions. ✓ Keep presentations simple and understandable. ✓ Provide balance. ✓ Be clear about definitions. ✓ Make comparisons carefully and appropriately. ✓ Decide what is significant. ✓ Be sure that major claims are supported by rigorous evidence. ✓ Distinguish facts from opinion.	• Organizing the raw data into an understandable and usable format that addresses and illuminates priority evaluation questions • Keeping the initial interactions focused on what the data reveal before moving into interpretations and judgments
❑ Actively involve users in interpreting findings. ✓ Triangulate evaluation findings with research findings. ✓ Consider and compare alternative interpretations and explanations.	• Helping users distinguish between findings and interpretations • Working with users to think about what is significant and consider alternative explanations for the findings before drawing definitive conclusions • Taking time to fully engage the findings before generating action recommendations

❑ Actively involve users in making evaluative judgments. ✓ Be clear about the values that undergird judgments.	Helping users distinguish between interpretations and judgments, and making explicit the *values* on which judgments are made
❑ Actively involve users in generating recommendations, if appropriate and expected. ✓ Distinguish different kinds of recommendations. ✓ Discuss the costs, benefits, and challenges of implementing recommendations. ✓ Focus on actions within the control of intended users and those they can influence.	• Helping users distinguish between findings, interpretations, judgments, and recommendations • Making sure that recommendations follow from and are supported by the findings • Allowing time to do a good job on recommendations
❑ Examine the findings and their implications from various perspectives.	• Offering opportunities and taking the time to reflect on the analytical process and learn from it • Helping users distinguish varying degrees of certainty in the findings • Being open and explicit about data strengths and limitations
Step 15: Prepare an evaluation report to facilitate use and disseminate significant findings to expand influence	
Premise: Different kinds and formats of reports are needed for different evaluation purposes. Reports should be focused on serving priority intended uses of primary intended users.	**Premise:** Working with primary intended users to review reporting and dissemination options increases the likelihood of appropriate and meaningful use as well as the possibility of wider influence.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Determine what kinds of reporting formats, styles, and venues are appropriate. ✓ Consider both formal written reports and less formal oral reports. ✓ Adapt different report approaches for different audiences and uses. ✓ Focus the report on answering priority questions and providing the evidence for those answers. ✓ Be prepared to help users maintain balance and deal with "negative" findings.	• Helping primary intended users calculate the comparative costs and uses of various evaluation reporting approaches • Involving primary intended users in some reporting opportunities • Strategizing with intended users about creative ways of reporting findings that may enhance their utility • Facilitating openness to learning from and appropriately using "negative" findings

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❑ Deliver reports in time to affect important decisions.	Managing the tension between in-depth involvement of intended users and getting the report done on time
❑ Decide if the findings merit wider dissemination. ✓ Consider both formal and informal pathways for dissemination. ✓ Be alert to unanticipated pathways of influence that emerge as use and dissemination processes unfold.	• Helping users distinguish between use and dissemination • Keeping users engaged as dissemination unfolds so that emergent opportunities can be grasped as appropriate
Step 16. Follow up with primary intended users to facilitate and enhance use	
Premise: The report is ***not*** the end of the evaluation. Use is enhanced by following up and working with primary intended users to apply the findings and implement recommendations.	**Premise:** Facilitating use includes follow-up with primary intended users to support taking action on findings and monitoring what happens to recommendations.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Plan for follow-up. Develop a follow-up plan with primary intended users.	Helping primary intended users calculate the comparative benefits and uses of various follow-up possibilities
❑ Budget for follow-up.	Encouraging primary intended users to find adequate time and resources to do a good job of following up findings to enhance use. This involves both user and evaluator time and resources.
❑ Proactively pursue utilization: ✓ Adapt findings for different audiences. ✓ Keep findings in front of those who can use them. ✓ Watch for emergent opportunities to reinforce the relevance of findings. ✓ Deal with resistance. ✓ Watch for and guard against misuse.	• Helping users make strategic choices about where to focus follow-up efforts • Keeping users engaged after the report has been disseminated • Being a champion for use of the findings without becoming perceived as a champion for the program
❑ Look for opportunities to add to the evaluation. ✓ Opportunities may arise to add data to answer emergent or previously unanswered questions.	Helping primary intended users and other stakeholders see evaluation as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event or moment-in-time report. Findings often give rise to new questions.

✓ Longer-term follow-up of program participants may become more valued and important to see if short-term outcomes are maintained over time. ✓ Designing an evaluation for the next stage of the program may emerge as an opportunity.	Questions considered less important at an earlier time can take on new importance once findings have emerged.
Step 17: Metaevaluation of use: Be accountable, learn, and improve	
Premises: • Metaevaluation is a professional obligation of evaluators. • Utilization-focused metaevaluation places particular emphasis on an evaluation's utility *and* actual use.	**Premise:** To be meaningful and useful, metaevaluation must be undertaken seriously and systematically, with time devoted to it.
Primary tasks	*Evaluation facilitation challenges*
❑ Determine the primary intended users for the metaevaluation.	Determining primary intended users: The primary intended users of an evaluation may, or may not, be the same as the primary intended users for the metaevaluation.
❑ Determine the primary purpose and uses of the metaevaluation.	Distinguishing accountability purposes from learning uses, and distinguishing internal metaevaluation from external metaevaluation
❑ Determine the primary standards and criteria to be applied in the metaevaluation. ✓ Joint Committee Standards (2010) ✓ DAC standards for development evaluation (OECD, 2010)	Distinguishing potential utility and usability from actual use. Metaevaluation of potential utility may occur earlier than metaevaluation of actual use.
❑ Budget time and resources for the metaevaluation.	Taking time to do a good job of metaevaluation. This involves time and resources from both intended users and evaluators.
❑ Follow the steps for conducting a utilization-focused evaluation in conducting the utilization-focused metaevaluation.	• Helping users make strategic choices about where to focus follow-up efforts • Keeping users engaged after the report has been disseminated • Being a champion for use of the findings without becoming perceived as a champion for the program

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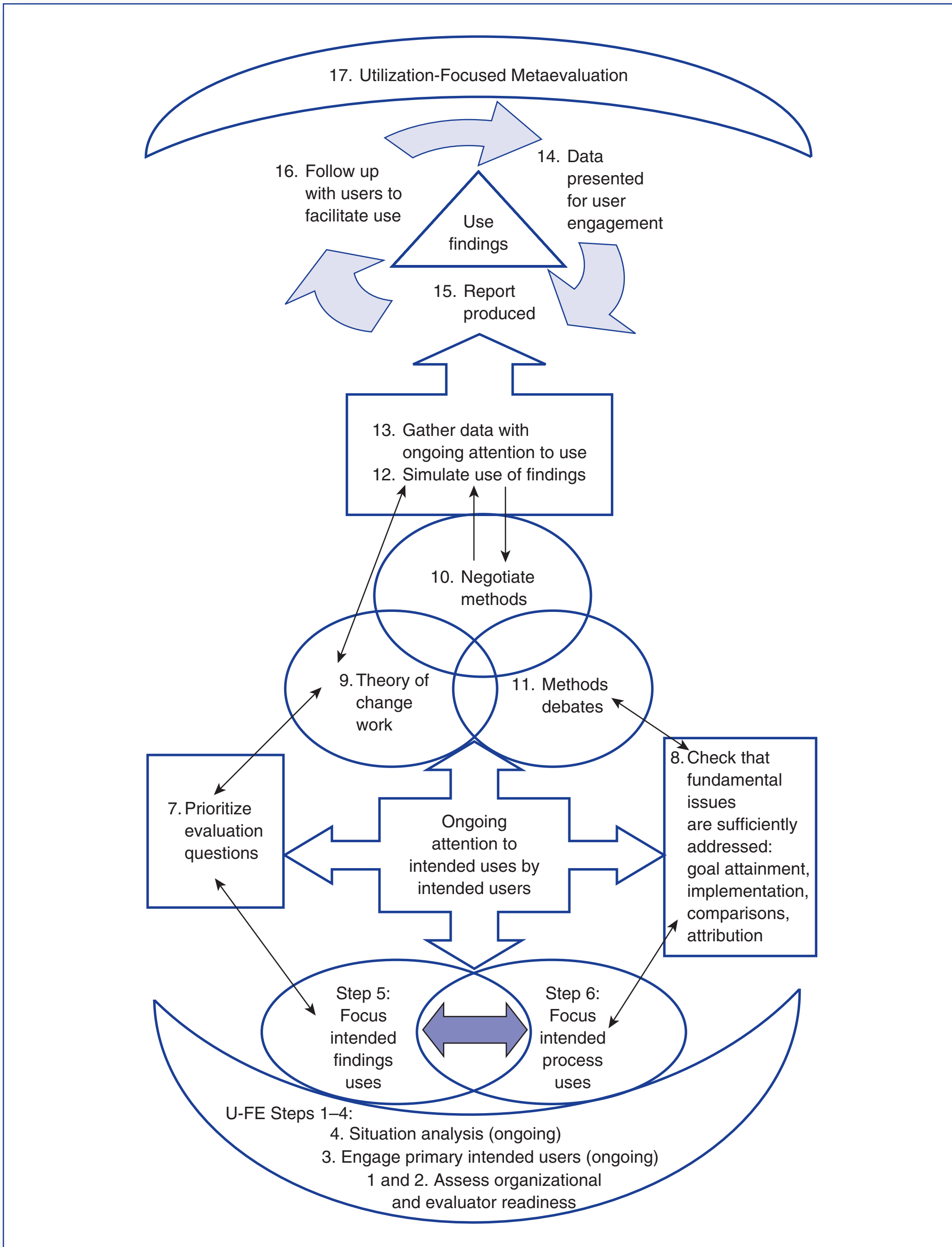
❑ Engage in systematic reflective practice about the evaluation, its processes and uses, with primary intended users.	• Involving the evaluation's primary intended users in reflective practice as a metaevaluation exercise to further enhance their own capacities, provide feedback to the evaluator to deepen his or her own reflective practice, and bring closure to the evaluation process
❑ Engage in personal reflective practice to support ongoing professional development. ✓ Reflect on what went well, and not so well, throughout the evaluation. ✓ Assess your essential competencies and skills as an evaluator. ✓ Use what you learn to improve your practice and increase use.	• Following up evaluations to learn what worked and didn't work, what was useful and not useful. • Committing time to serious reflective practice and learning for ongoing professional development

U-FE COMPLEX DYNAMIC AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS GRAPHIC: INTERACTIONS AMONG ALL 17 STEPS

As noted throughout this book and at the beginning of this chapter, the steps in the U-FE checklist are necessarily linear and sequential. One step comes before the next. But the actual utilization-focused evaluation process unfolds as a complex, dynamic, and iterative system of relationships with the various elements and steps interacting. Actions lead to reactions, interactions, feedback loops, and adaptations. To depict utilization-focused evaluation as a complex dynamic and adaptive system, this graphic on the next page (and which also appears on the inside front cover) depicts the interactions and interdependencies among the steps of the checklist, a reminder of the complex nonlinear dynamics of real-world utilization-focused evaluation practice and engagement.


17. Utilization-Focused Metaevaluation
16. Follow up with users to facilitate use
Use findings
14. Data presented for user engagement
15. Report produced
13. Gather data with ongoing attention to use
12. Simulate use of findings
10. Negotiate methods
9. Theory of change work
11. Methods debates
7. Prioritize evaluation questions
Ongoing attention to intended uses by intended users
8. Check that fundamental issues are sufficiently addressed: goal attainment, implementation, comparisons, attribution
Step 5: Focus intended findings uses
Step 6: Focus intended process uses
U-FE Steps 1–4:
4. Situation analysis (ongoing)
3. Engage primary intended users (ongoing)
1 and 2. Assess organizational and evaluator readiness