



European Foundation
for the Improvement
of Living and Working
Conditions

The tripartite EU Agency providing knowledge
to assist in the development of better social,
employment and work-related policies

Balancing 'relevance' and 'rigour' in Eurofound's evaluation practice -

A conversation between 'evaluation commissioner' and
'evaluator' voices. Reflections after 10 years experience

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Objectives of this presentation

1. Sharing our learning from a 10+ year journey of evaluation practice in Eurofound
2. How we learn(ed) to strike the balance between 'rigour' and 'relevance' in our practice

'All professional practitioners experience a version of the **dilemma of rigour and relevance** and they respond to it in one of several ways...'

Schoen, D (1987) *'Educating the Reflective Practitioner'*

Reflective practice – a conceptual model - applied to our evaluation practice

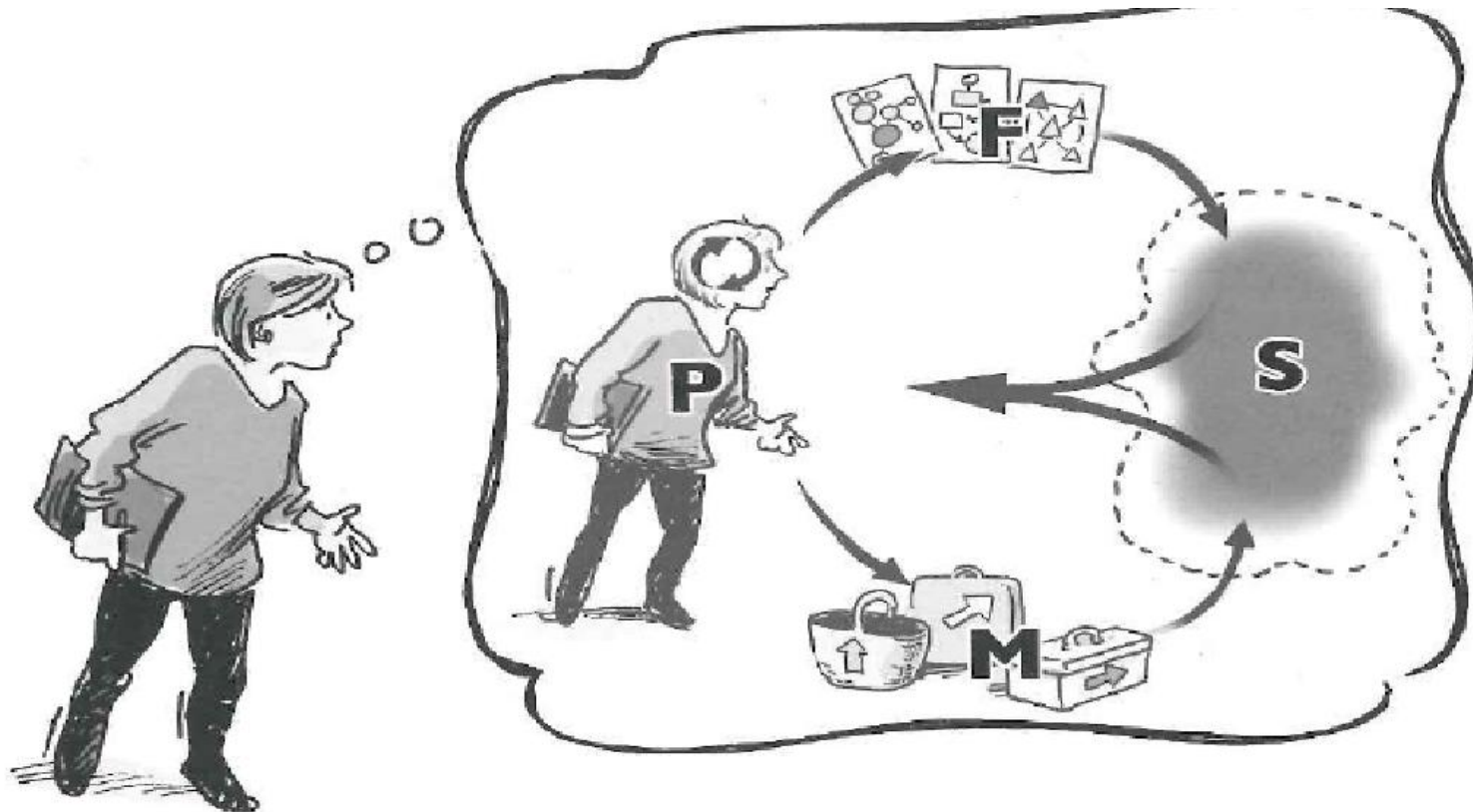
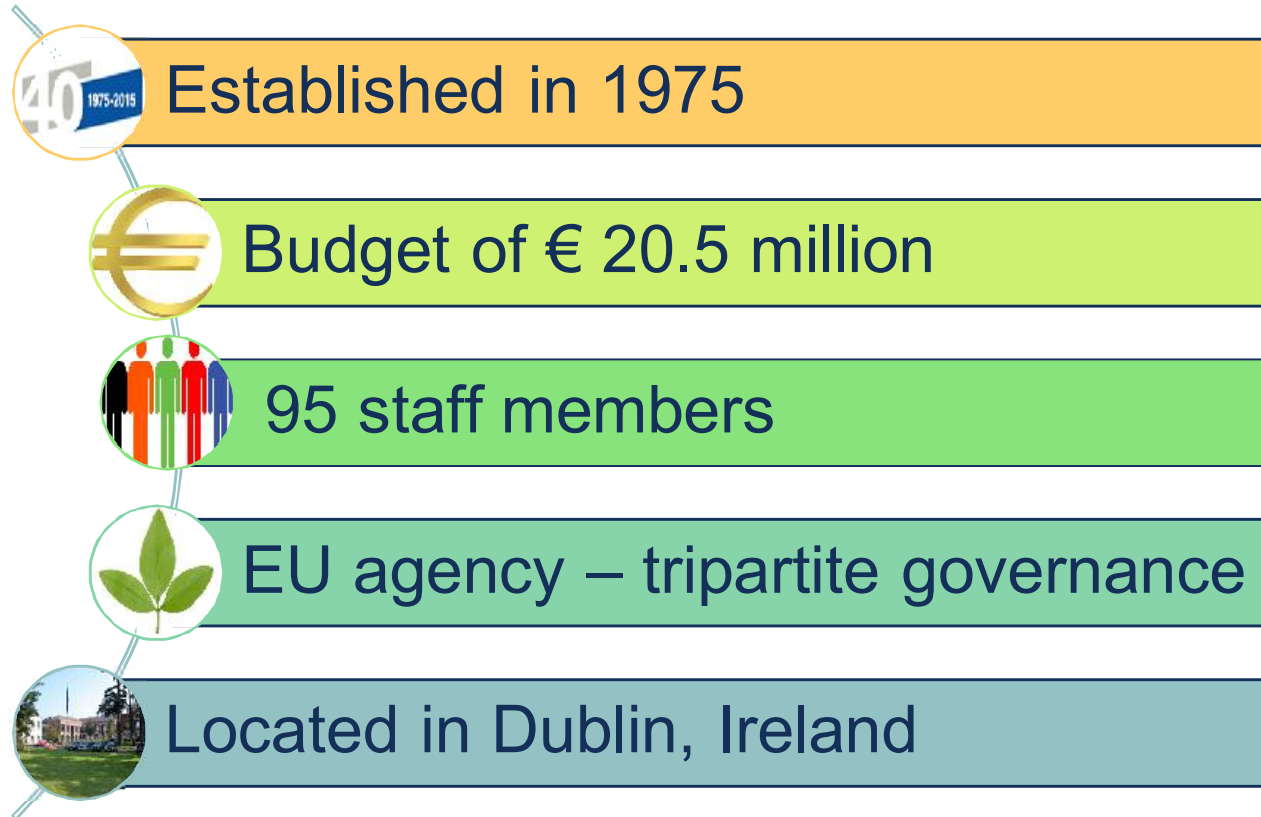


Figure 2.3 A conceptual model which can be applied to many forms of practice – researching, policy making, leading, etc. – comprising a person thinking about a ‘real world situation’ in which a person or practitioner P – who may be the same as the person who is thinking – engaging with a situation S with a framework of ideas F and a method M (Source: Ison, 2010)

About Eurofound – the basic facts



European
Foundation for the
Improvement of
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Eurofound's mission

to provide

scientifically sound, unbiased, timely and policy relevant knowledge

to assist in
the development of

better social, employment and work-related policies

Why does Eurofound do evaluations?

Because we have to!
Regulatory
requirement to
evaluate.

'Rigour'

And because we
want to... 'good
management' - We
took the initiative!

'Relevance'

How did our evaluation journey evolve so far?



External
Effective-
ness
review

2001-2007: stand-alone ex-post agency evaluations

2009-2012: Multiannual evaluation programme

2013-2016: Further integrated multiannual evaluation programme and policy

2017-2020: Evaluation policy and programme adapted to changed regulatory landscape

Single instances

Programme

Integration

Adaptation

In practice: How do we decide what to evaluate, when and why?

- Stipulated by Financial Regulation

- Defined in evaluation policy

- Criteria

- Process

- Relevance for the organisation and management

- Close interaction with programme development and implementation

'Horses for courses' - how and who conducts the evaluation?

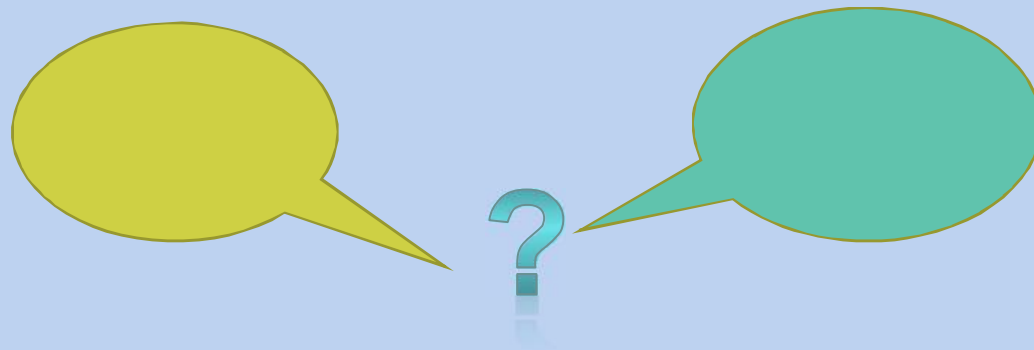
- Internal evaluator?
- External evaluator?
- 'hybrid' evaluation team?
- 'Embedded evaluation'?



Developing 'terms of reference' for an evaluation

- Who wants to know what and why?
- Asking the 'right' evaluation questions
 - 'right' – for whom?

- Top-down
- Bottom-up

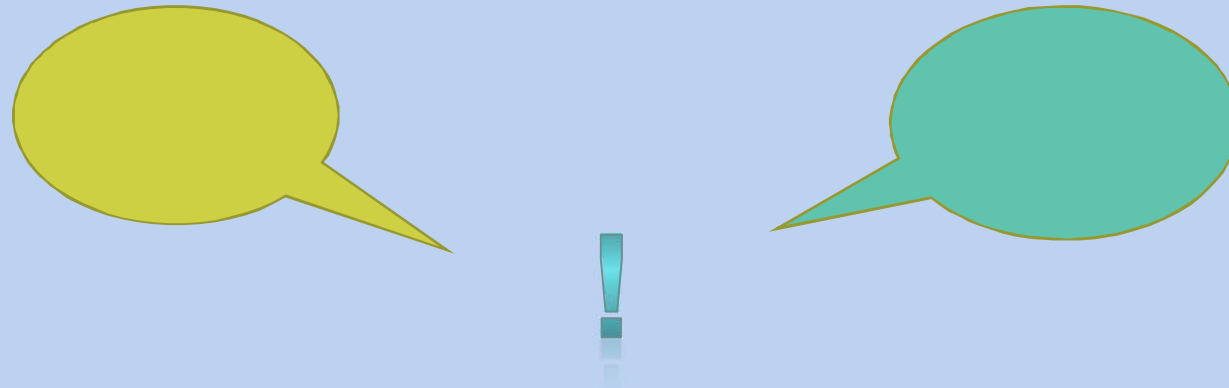


- Who is involved?
- How do we strike the balance?

Conclusions: So what? And then?

- How do we arrive at robust, yet meaningful conclusions?
- How do we ensure evaluation use and actions taken?

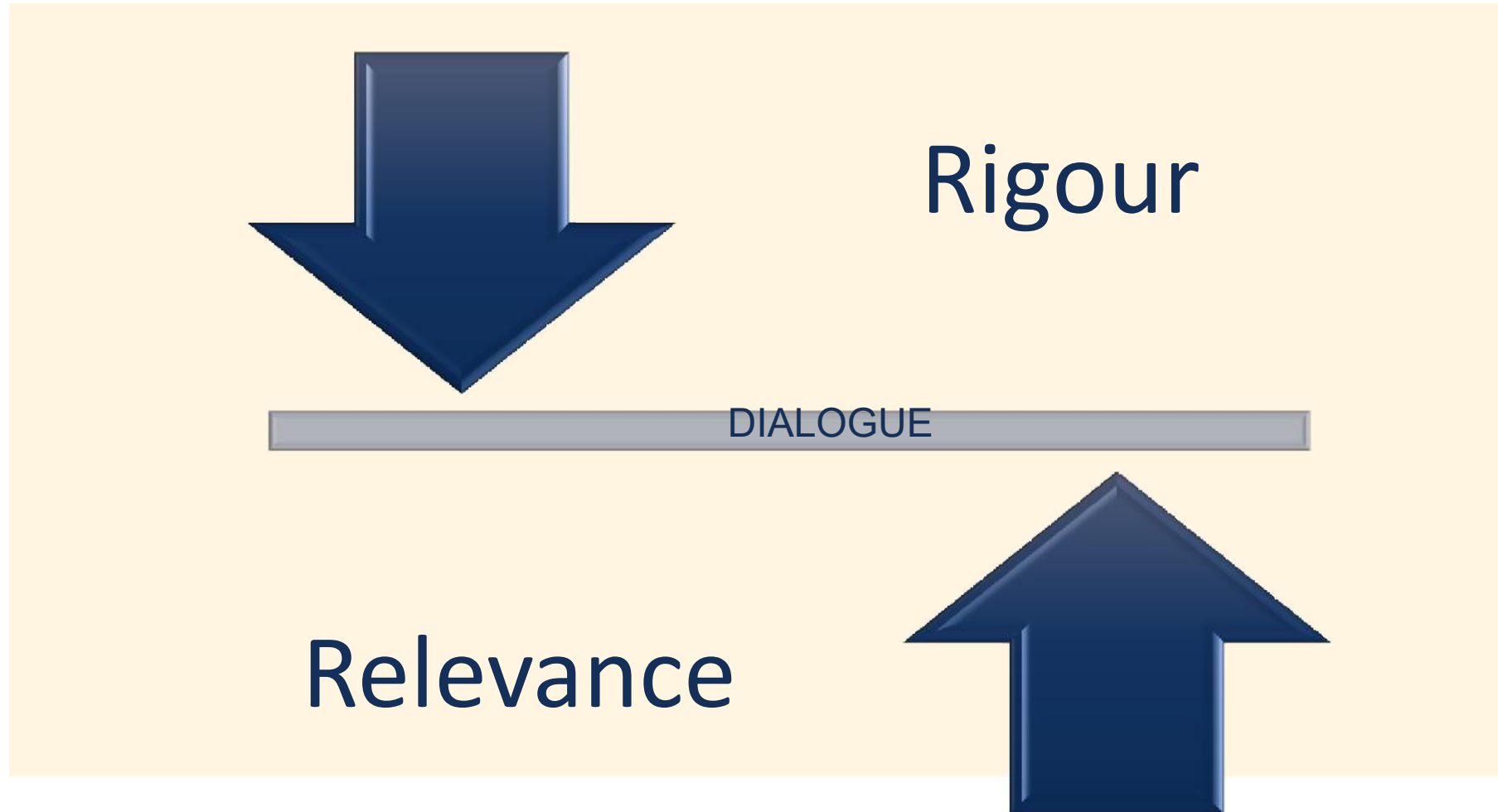
Different approaches with different results



After 10+ years of practice – what did we learn?



Rigour vs Relevance => Balance requires dialogue



Some inspiration: Reynolds, M (2015): Evaluation-in-practice as ‘triadic interplay’

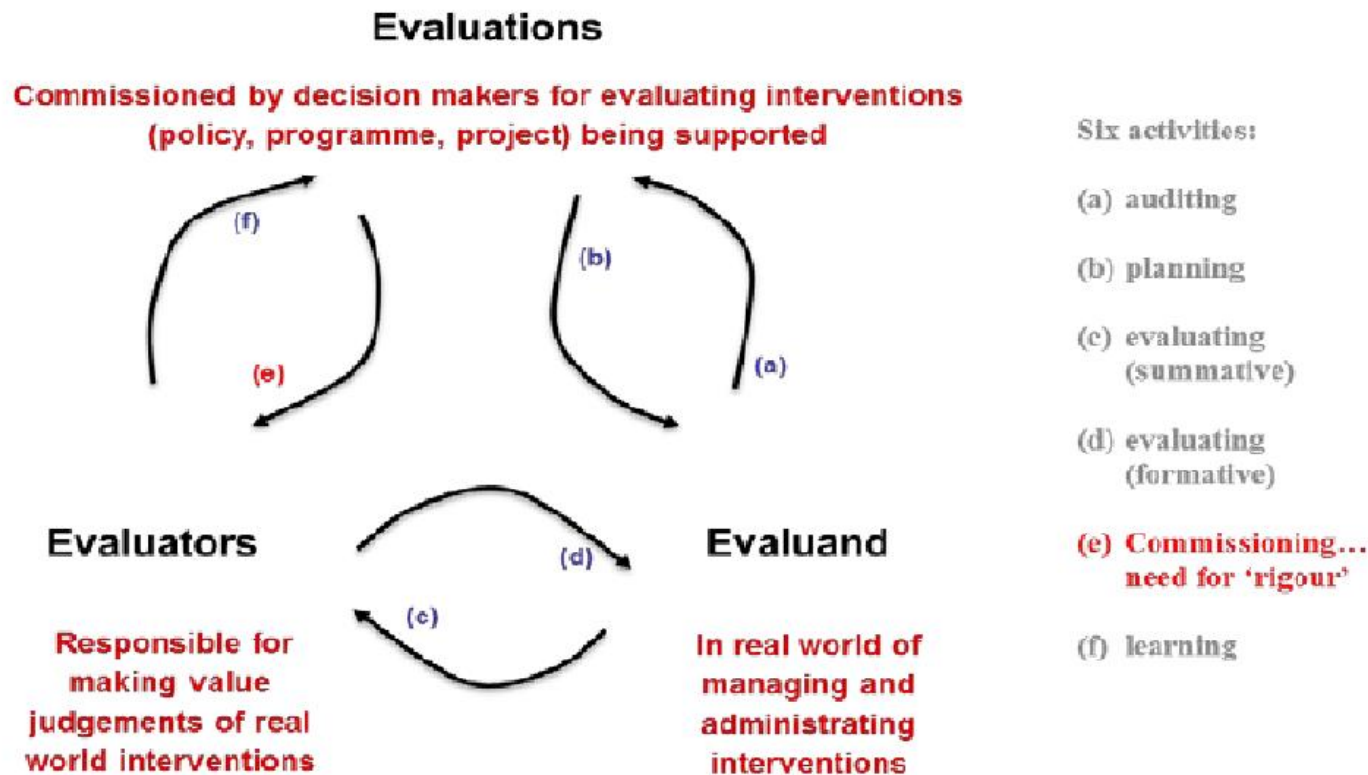
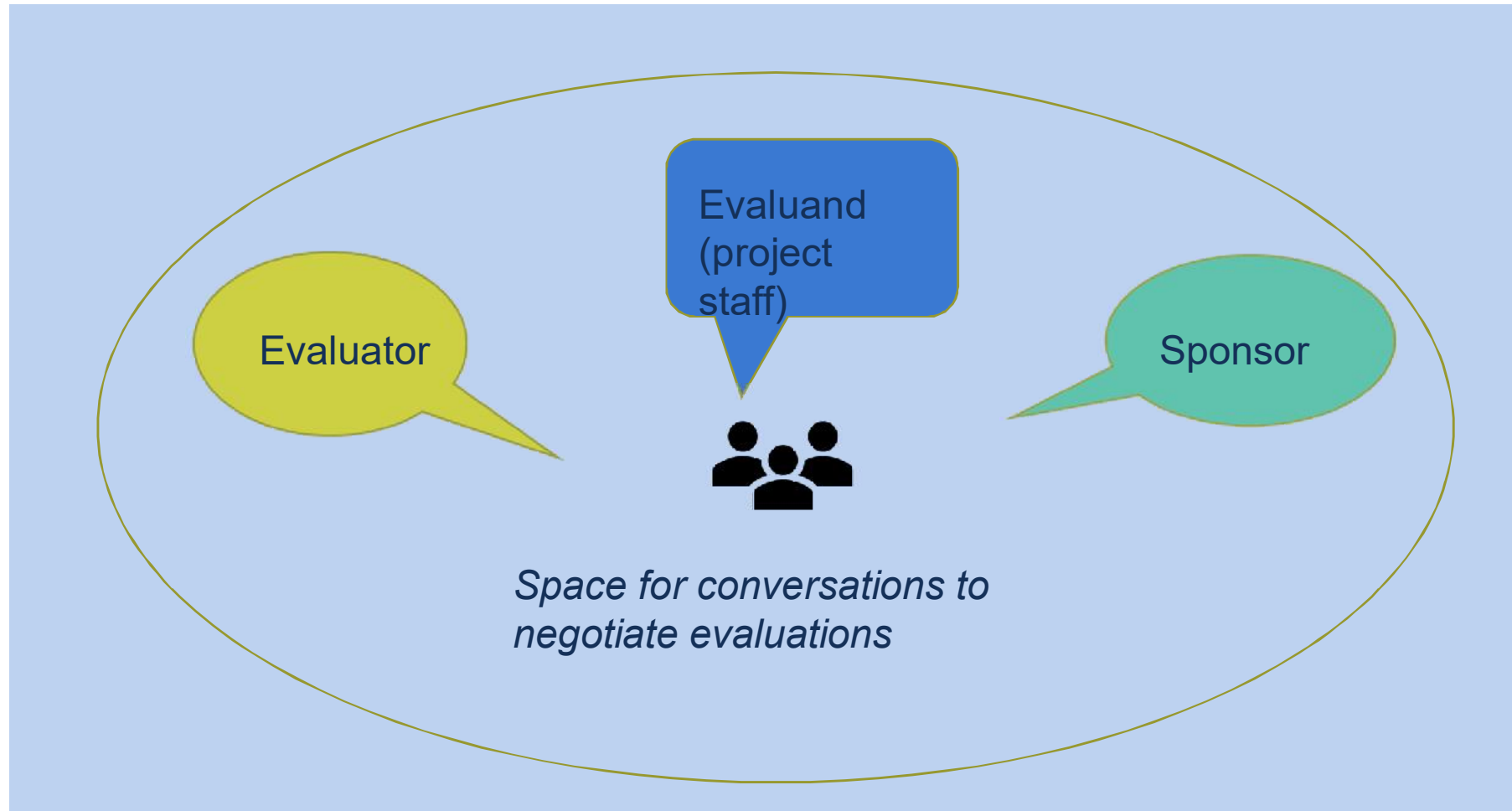


Fig. 1 Evaluation-in-practice involving six key activities
(adapted from Reynolds, 2015 p.75)

Eurofound's application of 'evaluation triadic interplay'?



Evaluation at Eurofound – an ongoing journey....

