

Overcoming the challenges of evaluating services that support young people affected by sexual exploitation: A realist approach

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The International Centre

- Committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international context.
- Achieved through:
 - academic rigour and research excellence
 - collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
 - meaning and ethical engagement of children and young people

Workshop outline

- Introductions
- Some challenges in evaluating CSE services
- Introducing the realist approach
- Making use of evaluation
- Exercise
- Wrapping up

Challenges of evaluation?

- Understanding purpose
- Engaging participants
- Building in time, money and prioritising evaluation activities
- Getting the data
- Drawing conclusions – expectations that evaluation can tell us ‘what works’
- Making good use of evaluation

Challenges of evaluation: specific to CSE

- Measuring risk/harm – over-reliance on proxy indicators
- Conflation of risk and harm may mean that there is a gulf between what is ‘known’ to professionals and YP’s experiences of exploitation
- YP’s low recognition of abuse might impact their willingness to engage
- Challenges of linking outputs to outcomes – attribution and underpinning interventions with theories of change
- Short term measurements and a lack of longitudinal research means we may not view long term outcomes including re-referral
- Whose voices drive evaluation? Incorporating user perspectives
- Cumulating knowledge from single studies

Four uses of evaluation

- **Symbolic use** – providing the rationale for action or inaction, reinforce a policy position or reassure commissioners (Mark and Henry, 2004)
- **Instrumental use** - where action occurs directly as a result of evaluation e.g. regarding continuation of a programme, expansion, revision or termination (Preskill & Caracelli, 1997)

Four uses of evaluation (ctd)

- **Conceptual use** – learning that emerges from a programme e.g.... regarding its participants, its operation or its outcomes (Weiss, 1977)
- **Process use** – the learning or activities that may occur through the engagement of participants in the research process (rather than from the findings *per se*) (Patton, 1997)

Making evaluation meaningful

“Use is the link between the day-to-day work of evaluation, on the one hand and those activities that could actually improve the lives of programme participants and society on the other.”

- Informing practice
- Being attentive to the experiences of those at the heart of the system

Mark and Henry, 2004. p.35.

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Realistic Evaluation

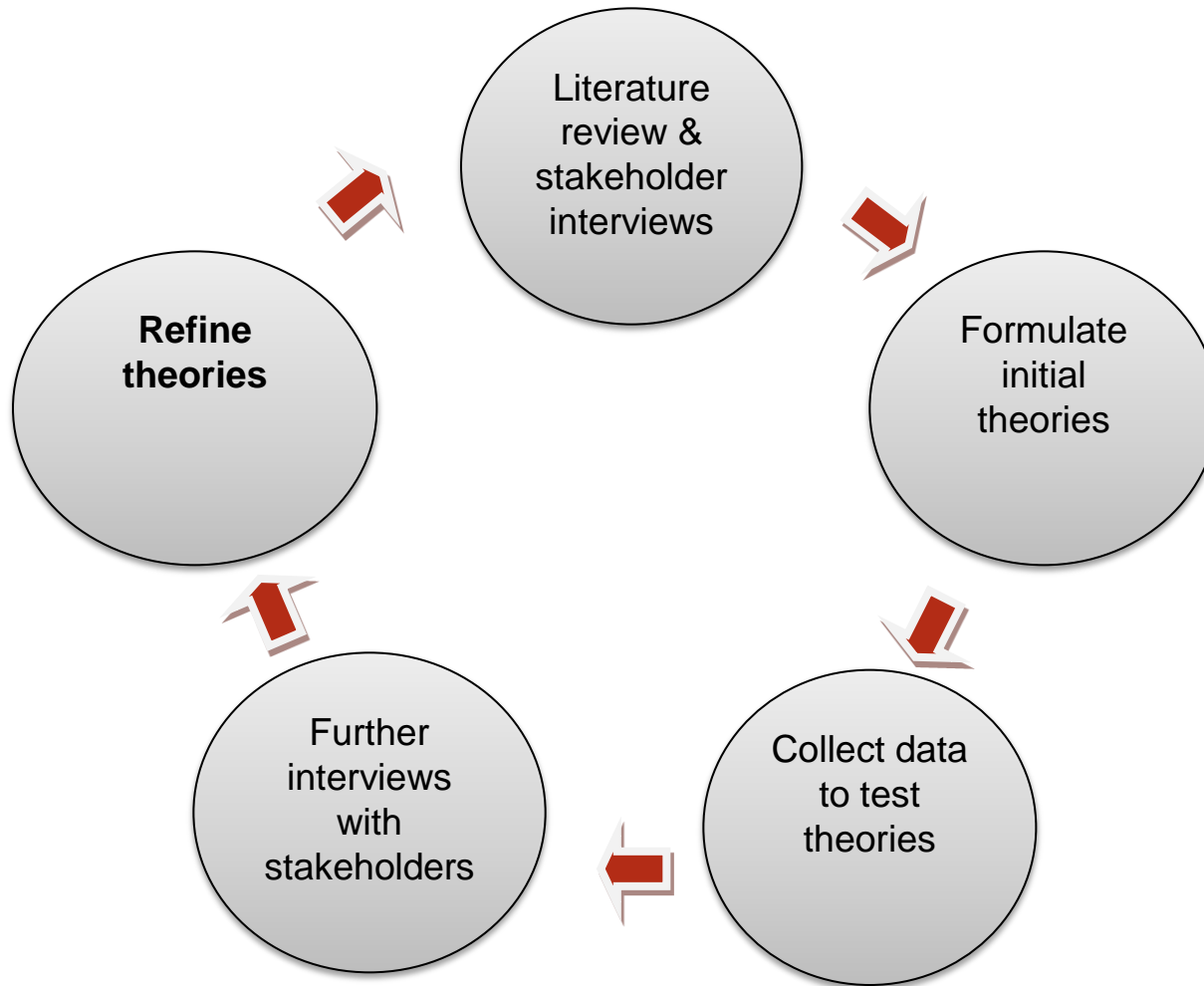
Ray Pawson & Nick Tilley

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Realist evaluation

- Is a form of theory based evaluation (not evidence led)
- Looks at why reality unfolds as it does and why the same intervention has different outputs and outcomes in different contexts
- Therefore engages with complexity and challenges the nature of evidence
- *Asks what works, for who in what circumstances and why*
- Enables us to draw on wider learning in the field in order to develop and refine theory in order to cumulate knowledge

The realist evaluation cycle



Characteristics of the Realist Evaluation cycle

- It starts with theory
- It focusses on practitioner wisdom and the experiences of young people and service users
- It is (should be!) a respectful, honest, and collaborative approach

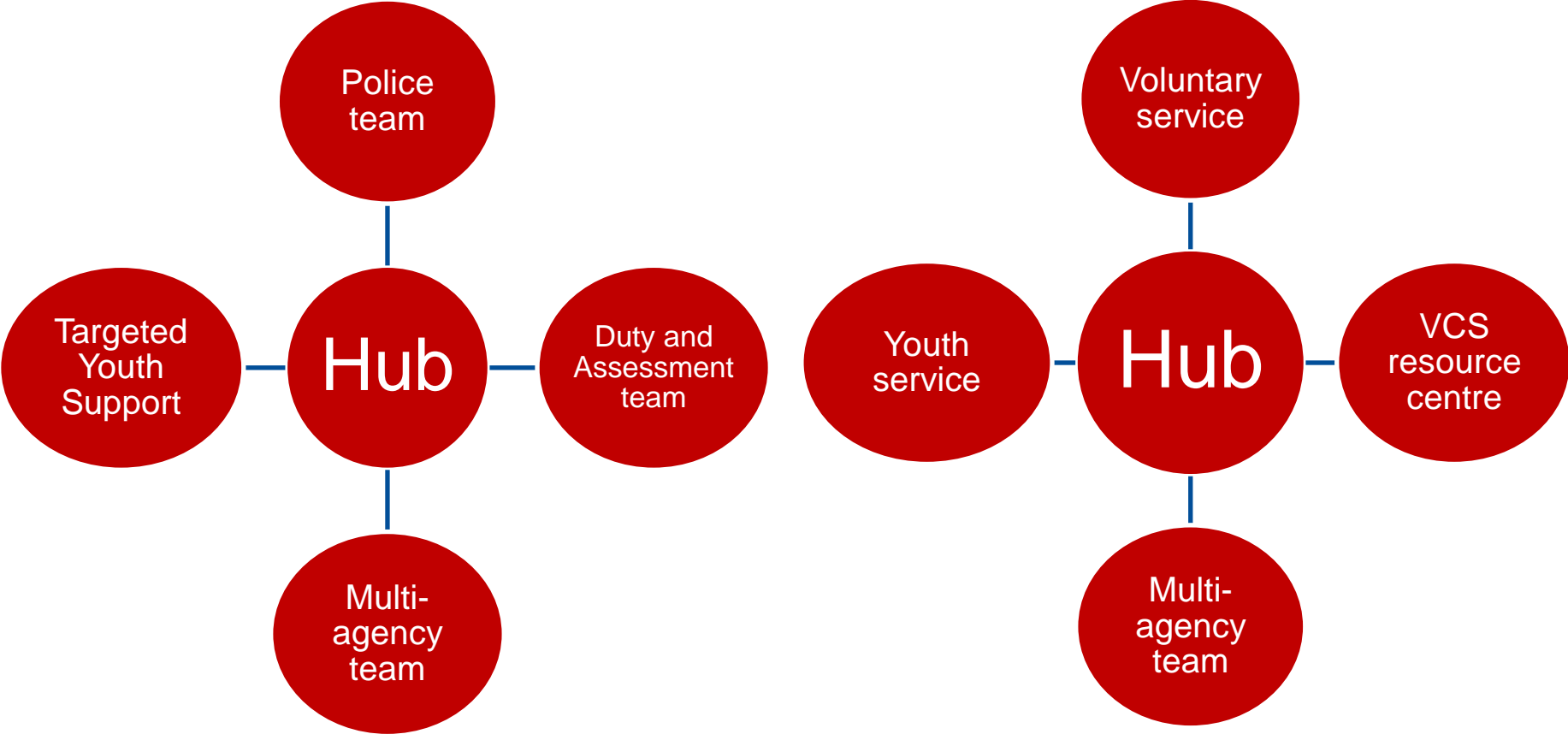
Example: Hub and Spoke evaluation

- Evaluation of the 'Hub and Spoke' model for addressing CSE
- Different *stages*, reflecting the realist evaluation cycle
- Different *sources* of data collection, reflecting the realist evaluation approach

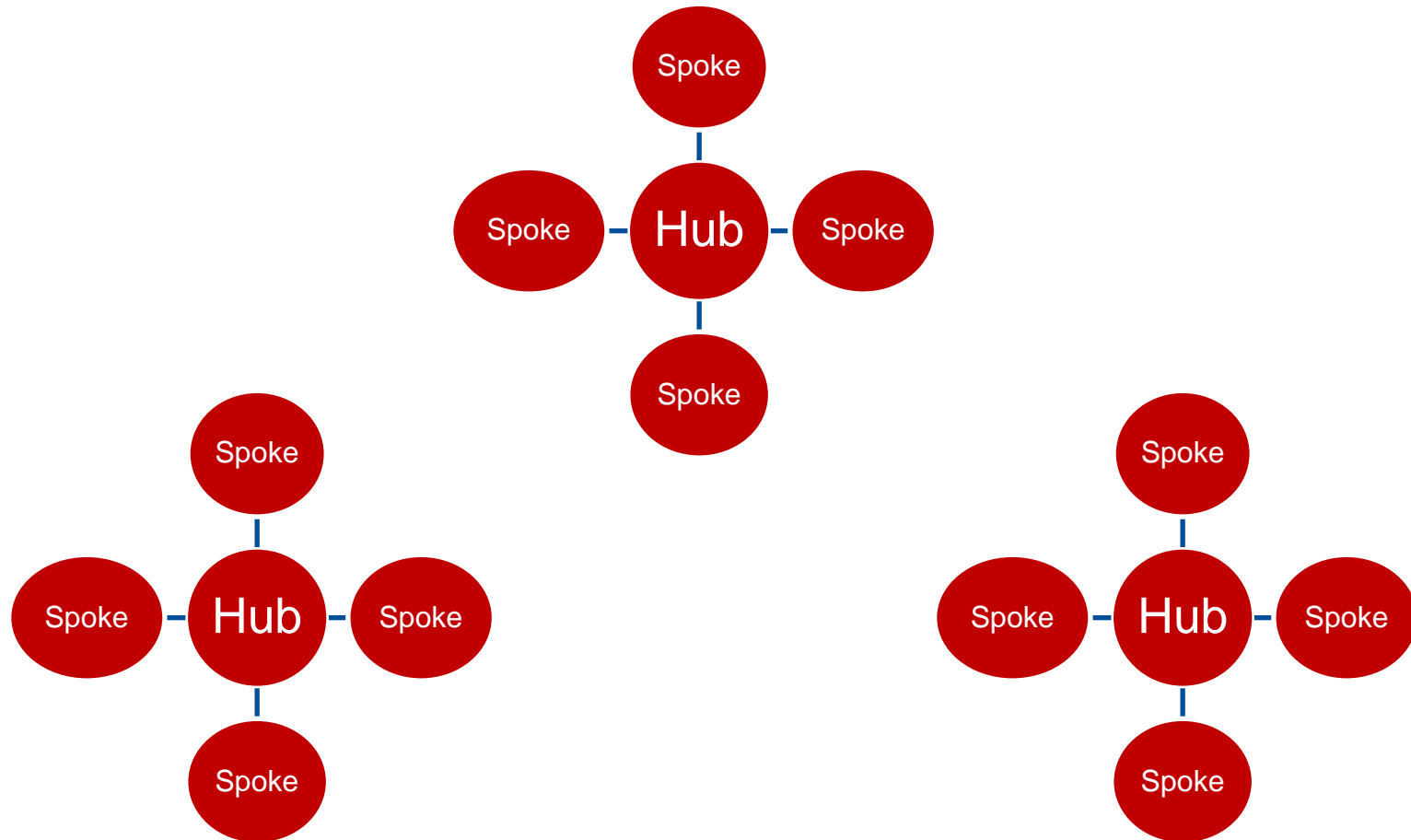
Realist evaluation: methods and approaches

- Mixed methods
- Triangulation of data
- Focus on testing and refining theories
- Aims to identify CMOs (contexts, mechanisms and outcomes – more in a minute!)
- *to identify what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why (Pawson and Tilley, 1997)*

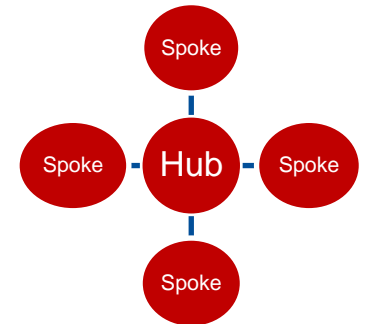
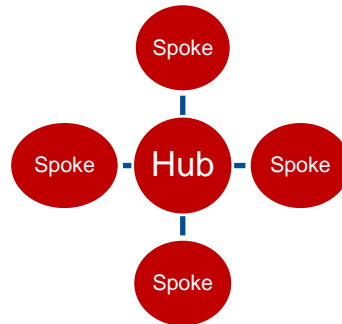
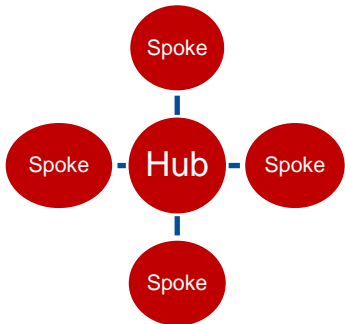
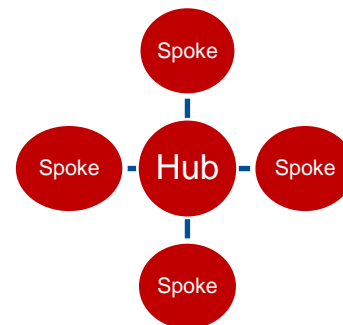
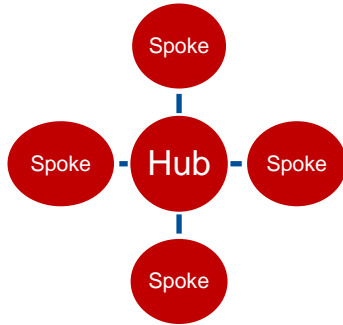
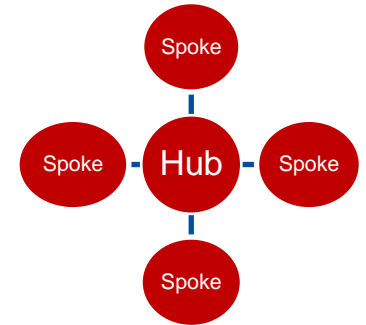
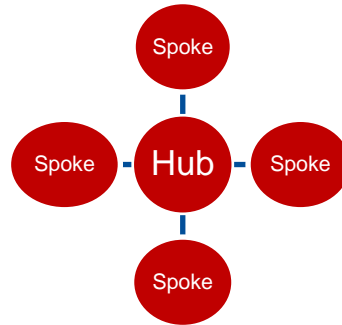
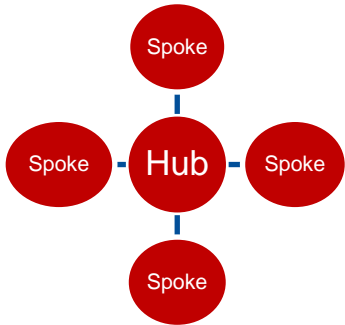
The Hub and Spoke model



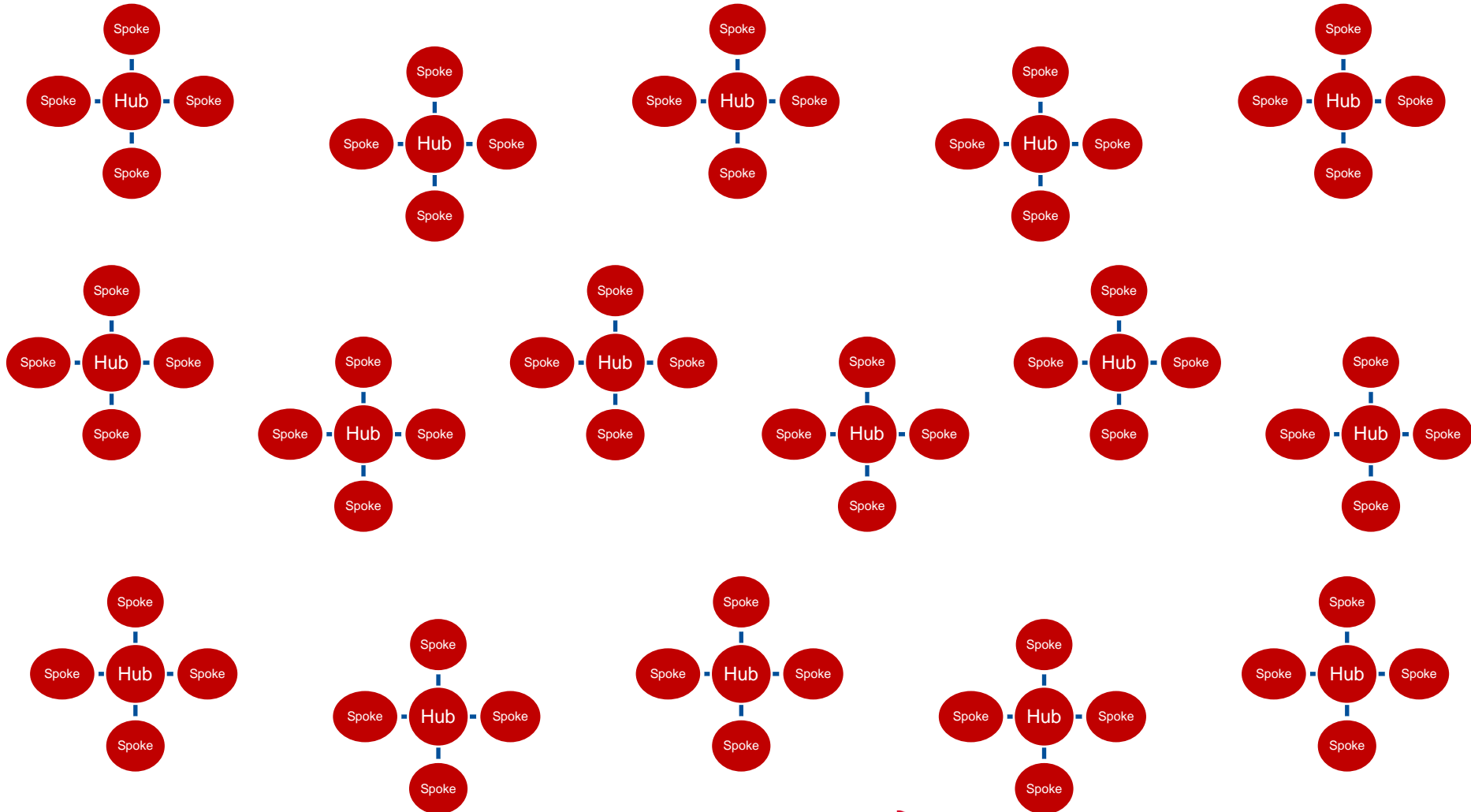
Year 1: developing theories - 3 services



Year 2: testing theories – 8 services



Year 3: Refining theories – 16 services



Outcome: Spoke workers retain a distinctive identity and role focussed on CSE

Expertise and resources

Theory 1 Where Hubs and Spokes are part of a national VCO, spoke workers can channel knowledge, resources and expertise in order to improve local responses to CSE

Theory 2 The independence of the H&S services means that spoke workers can bring challenge and new perspectives in order to improve local service responses to CSE

Voluntary sector methods

Theory 3 The voluntary sector independence brings alternative ways of working with young people in order to improve local service responses

The importance of context

“Programmes or interventions are never introduced into neutral spaces – context is key”

(Pawson and Tilley, 1997)

Exercise

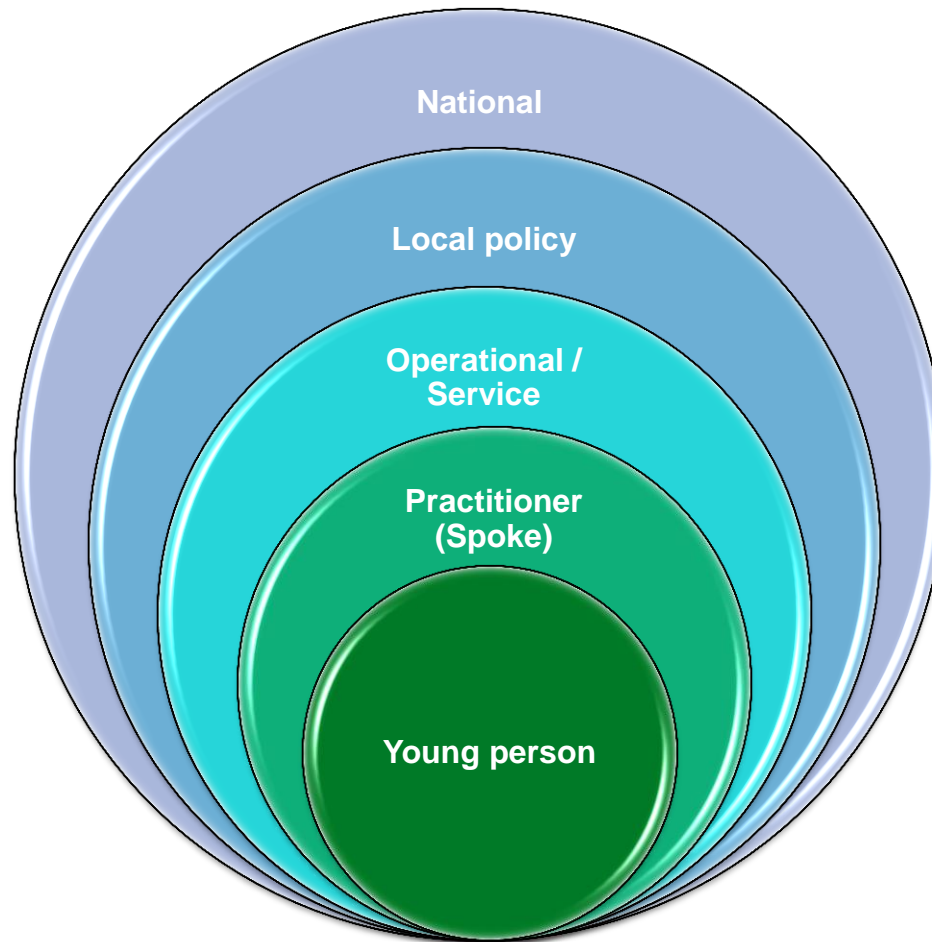
Think about a new initiative that was introduced into your organization. How did it play out? (e.g. Embraced? Resisted? Ignored?)

What kinds of contextual factors were influencing the way that you/others responded to the change being introduced?

Context

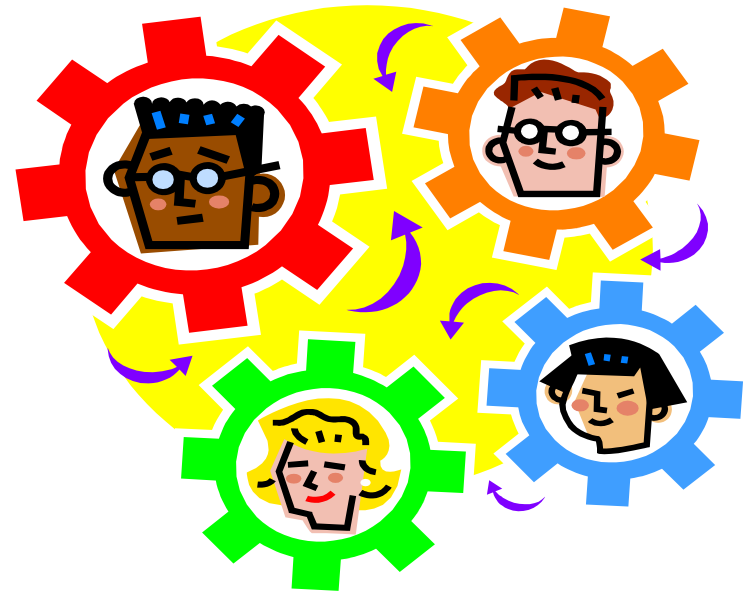
- All programmes have an idea about how change is meant to happen, but whether programmes are successful in activating ‘change mechanisms’ depends on contexts (C)
- Pre-existing features of localities into which programmes are introduced – places, people, processes, period.
- They are always multiple
- Some will support programme theory and others won’t – so *there will always be winners and losers*

Contextual framework for Hub and Spoke



The importance of volition

“It is not programmes that work or don’t work...rather it is the subjects choosing to act on these resources that determine whether the programme works”



(Pawson and Tilley, 1997)

Mechanisms

- Describe what it is about programmes and interventions that bring about any effects.
- Programmes usually offer new resources – material, social, emotional etc.
- How people act on these is known as the programme ‘mechanism’ – they may ‘ponder’, ‘enter’, ‘support’, ‘go along with’, ‘undermine’, ‘sabotage’, ‘hide behind’ etc.
- Mechanisms often work behind the scenes
- They are always multiple

Theory 1

Where Hubs and Spokes are part of a national VCO **(C)**, spoke workers can channel knowledge, resources and expertise **(M)** in order to improve local responses to CSE **(O)**

Theory 2

The independence of the H&S services **(C)** means that spoke workers can bring challenge and new perspectives **(M)** in order to improve local service responses to CSE **(O)**

Theory 3

The voluntary sector independence **(C)** brings alternative ways of working with young people **(M)** in order to improve local service responses **(O)**

CMOs in the context of child sexual exploitation services

Context	Mechanism	Outcome?
Context - Reluctance of young people affected by CSE to engage in support services	Persistence of project workers (for example, through assertive outreach) – eventually persuades young people that someone is investing in them.	Young person accepts support
Context - Non recognition of abuse	The <i>recognition</i> of their peers as being exploited (for example, through group work) – may help young people to better understand their own situation.	Young person exits exploitative relationship

Summary

- If ‘What works?’ is the wrong question, RE suggests we ask ‘What works for whom, in what circumstances?’
- Assumes that because of context there will always be winners and losers. Change mechanisms will only be activated for some people
- We need to look for a complex footprint of outcomes – some intended, some not.
- RE provides a framework to account for the complex realities in which we try to safeguard children

Lessons

- Utilise service user/practitioner wisdom in designing programs
- Make explicit how and why you think an intervention works
- Work to overcome barriers to YPs voices being heard
- Ensure outcomes account for what we know about CSE
- Make sure evaluations generate real learning
- Be honest about their limitations

Finally...

- What does all this mean for you?
- How might a realist evaluation approach be useful for you, in your work?
- Questions and discussion

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