

Reframing evaluation and “frameworks”: Reflecting, learning and adapting practices of social change

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Abstract

Evaluation is a double-edged sword. For those invested in social change, it is vital to evaluate the process and impact of designing. However, traditional positivist approaches can risk harm by magnifying power through the instruments and mechanisms of evaluation, especially when Global North models are unthinkingly applied in the Global South. What is deemed valuable to know – without asking what matters to whom, how, where and when – is an ethical and political concern as it ignores how people are variously situated. This paper argues for building evaluative capacities otherwise. It shares key insights by tracing how an evaluative “framework” was initially codesigned, then iterated and adapted through a transcultural mentoring program for and with women in Australasia. We refrain from emphasising the “framework” but show how it changed as we changed. In so doing, we show ways to foster ongoing adaptation and reflexivity, to catalyse collective evaluative practices as participatory codesign.

Keywords: social impact evaluation, transcultural, feminism, participatory codesign

Introduction: the double-edged sword of evaluation

Evaluating the social impact of design interventions is essential for understanding the role in societal change. Yet evaluation in design including service design (SD) remains nascent (Mihci, 2020; Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2022). Some practitioners and researchers recognise the need to broaden approaches for diverse contexts, but efforts remain fragmented (Foglieni et al., 2018) and Western-centric. Foglieni (2025) distinguishes between evaluating the SD process and assessing service outcomes. The former focuses on measuring the value of SD itself, whereas the latter examines the service value as an outcome of the design process. For example, McKinsey Design Index (Sheppard et. al, 2018) primarily assesses the value SD contributes to innovation, often assuming fixed and bounded contexts. Meanwhile, outcome-oriented models such as the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) measure transactional services and economic return on investment, rather than capturing social value for all stakeholders. These characterise a narrowness that are common to many models of evaluation, raising concerns and a need to reflect lived experiences and knowledges rooted in diverse communities.

The commitment to positivist knowledge and methodologies presents a pervasive barrier for maturing evaluative practices in design. Evaluations stipulated by commissioning authorities are typically conducted at the end, as are approaches like the examples above. These approaches are called *Traditional Evaluation* in social innovation. However, there is a growing disquiet in this community. *Traditional Evaluation* is often determined by funders' agendas (Kah & Akenroye, 2020). This reinforces power structures, potentially sidelining local priorities and burdening communities (Groves & Hinton, 2013). When authorities define processes and outcomes of evaluation, this can threaten social innovation and impact (Lamping et al, 2025). Social innovation is dynamic, multifaceted and long-term in nature, and evaluation needs anchoring in the cultural specificities integral to any community transformation (Brandsen et al., 2016; Cünha, 2022). Authorities also commission designers and researchers, which requires us to be vigilant of our own positionalities and the ways we build our own capacities in evaluative practice.

Allies in participatory design (PD) have emphasised the importance of systematic and explicit evaluation to enhance PD's accountability. Nguyen and colleagues (2024) analysed common patterns in PD in evaluating processes, outputs, outcomes and impact. They affirm that undertaking and sharing systematic evaluation can support deeper awareness of project dynamics and contribute to improving methodologies and practices while assisting transparency and accountability. Yet they too, caution awareness of epistemic, cultural and power differences, especially when researchers in privileged positions look for “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” as a measure that defines “trustworthiness” (ibid, p. 137). Questions about “who” defines “what” as valuable, and “how” things can be known or not, are political and ethical matters when evaluating. These are also key matters in this paper.

Discourses in decolonising evaluation suggest that models for monitoring remain rigid and tethered to Western theories and methodologies (Hui, 2023), thus reinforcing their power. Preference for statistical, “neutral”, and anonymous “data” in evaluative studies stems from the Western Enlightenment, and becomes an epistemic bias towards distant, external, independent and objective view (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). A similar preference remains evident in design research, like double-blind peer-reviews, despite healthy discussions around open, group and de-anonymised reviews that curb ways to avoid alienating knowledges that do not “fit” or conform (Akama et al., 2022a).

Most importantly, aid organisations in the Global North that fund those in the Global South, including parts of Southeast Asia, can magnify disempowerment through evaluation. Evidence from Indigenous scholars and communities in the Global South indicates how discrimination continues because of judgements that their knowledge is inferior, irrelevant and unverifiable (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). Categories predetermined by what funders deem as important and valid, and the methods preferred to produce such evidence, are often built into the conditions of funding. These then become the measures for “success” in social impact. This pattern is problematic when funders’ preferences ignore how communities see and inhabit their worlds. As designers and researchers in supporting social innovation, we need to learn to build evaluative capacities integrated with communities’ participatory co-designing. This takes time, adaptation and reflexivity. We reflect on this maturation in our paper.

This paper invites colleagues accustomed to *Traditional Evaluation* to build their capacities in embracing the diverse knowledge systems and lived experiences that can evade or be ignored by conventional theories. Learning and embracing multiple forms of knowledge – inseparable from different values and worldviews – is also social justice. It is both an ethical and political endeavour. This commitment further magnifies the rationale for expanding evaluative approaches that acknowledge the plurality of knowledges, experiences and ways of being.

As design researchers committed to culturally-grounded, community-led collaboration in Australasia, we were compelled to expand evaluative practices in social innovation to resonate with our values and participatory processes. This paper traces how we adapted and transformed our evaluative practices over six years. We start with an evaluative “blue-flower framework” that co-authors Yoko and Joyce co-designed in 2017 (see fig. 1) with change-makers in Southeast Asia. This “framework” then evolved into a “yellow-flower framework” (see fig. 2) through a women-led 18-month transcultural mentoring program in Asia in 2021-2023.

The contribution highlights the importance of continually co-evolving a culturally grounded evaluative practice to thickly trace social impact dynamics and enable meaningful outcomes in service design. The constancy of our adaptive, relational, evaluative practices offers a case study, which aims to inspire others to chart diverging pathways. The blue- and yellow-flower “frameworks” are handy touchpoints, functioning as a visual tool for facilitating reflexive conversations and eliciting meaningful input from participants. But we caution readers not to isolate or attribute evaluation and social impact to “frameworks” alone. Design research is blinkered in prioritising generalisability and replicability of theories, methods and methodologies. Rather than treating frameworks as replicable tools for transformation, our situated approach purposefully questions and rethinks how we use them. Problematising our “frameworks” within double quotation marks helps tether them to a reflexive praxis. This praxis prompts us to respond more mindfully to the living dynamics of relationships constituted by people who are differently situated.

Practices rooted in cultures and relationships

Our collaborative methodology aims to be reflexive and participatory, underpinned by trust, and relationships (see centre circle in the “frameworks”). Our approach is

grounded in our bodies, kinships and living experiences¹. The co-authors are transcultural by migration, education, upbringing and family. We work across sectors, cultures, languages, hierarchies, geographies and worldviews. We range from established to early career researchers. Reflexively acknowledging heterogeneity is how we live and relate. Through mutual learning and supporting varied ways of working across “thresholds”, attending to divergent intersectional experiences and sensitivities, we embrace care and plurality. We build upon these assets in our work, including the 2021-23 peer mentoring program.

Throughout the transcultural mentoring program we listened to and documented many thoughts, interviews, informal chats, in-person and online huddles. As a geographically dispersed team of eight, we synthesised and analysed this documentation using Miroboards (see fig. 3). This online whiteboard offered an asynchronous space to help the team sense-make and add questions and concerns. In co-authoring this paper, the first (Sarah Kushinsky) and second author (Yoko) led the analysis. The core team offered further critical incisions. Analysis was guided by evaluative questions, *Core Values* and *Principles* in the “frameworks” to identify and draw out the most salient insights for discussion.

Within the substantial documentation collected over two years, many threads indicate how a reflective, learning-based approach to evaluation can enable responsiveness to emerging contexts and foster conditions for social innovation. Due to space, we only explore two indicative stories of adaptation and transformation by demonstrating how we welcomed contributions from program participants, shaping our respective practices.

We focus not on refining the “framework” itself, but on how this work prompted reflexivity in our practices. The stories reveal how the “framework” influenced our approach and the adjustments we made based on participants' feedback and discussions. By sharing both our intentions and the decisions we abandoned, we illustrate how our reflection and learning also matured. This aims to evidence the dynamic and ongoing nature of evaluative practice.

The first iteration: Moving away from dominant conventions

¹ See Akama & Yee 2024; Akama et. al., 2023; Teerapong et. al, 2025; Yee et. al., 2023.

Evaluation is not neutral. It is ethical and political, as it requires incorporating what matters most to people: what they know, how they experience their worlds and share this with others. Expanding ways we evaluate motivated Yoko and Joyce (DESIAP co-founders and two of the co-authors) to co-design a new “framework” with change makers in Southeast Asia in 2017 (see Yee et. al., 2020). We provide a brief background here.

Over three days in Kuala Lumpur, practitioners and researchers from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines shared knowledge and lived experiences in evaluating social impact. DESIAP KL 2017 generated insights, which were then analysed and synthesised with *Developmental Evaluation* (DE) discourses. In contrast to *Traditional Evaluation*, summatively assessed by external experts at a project's conclusion, DE is based on cyclical assessments: an action-oriented learning and reflective process embedded throughout a project's lifecycle (Patton, 2011). DE is widely recognized as suitable for social innovation because it integrates evaluative practices to support social impact (Hill & Vaughan, 2017). This gathering confirmed this, because a participatory approach allows for community co-definition of aims and approaches. An iterative, real-time and adaptive process supports reflection and mutual learning to follow the pace and dynamics of the project, team and community. Feedback and sharing can be timely to welcome a range of knowledge and experiences. In all, this helps shape and adjust the trajectory to be responsive to the dynamic conditions of change.

Subsequently, we followed up with leading funding agencies in Southeast Asia and Australia to co-explore alternative impact evaluation approaches². This further confirmed and further enabled the application of the insights in adjacent contexts. Workshops over 2019 revealed how funding bodies were entrenched in *Traditional Evaluation*, because they lacked know-how for co-designing evaluation approaches with communities. This underscored the need to integrate DE with their participatory approaches.

DESIAP KL 2017 generated an initial “proposition” for evaluating and designing impactful social innovation. This is the “blue-flower framework” (fig. 1). The guiding principles were distilled as *Core Values* (central circle), and *Principles* (outer circles).

² <https://desiap.org/events/impact-and-evaluation-funders-workshop-2019/>

The arrows around the “petals” emphasise the cyclical, ongoing nature. The examples surround the circles to explain how these values or principles are, or can be practiced.

Keys to effective evaluation in designing social innovation

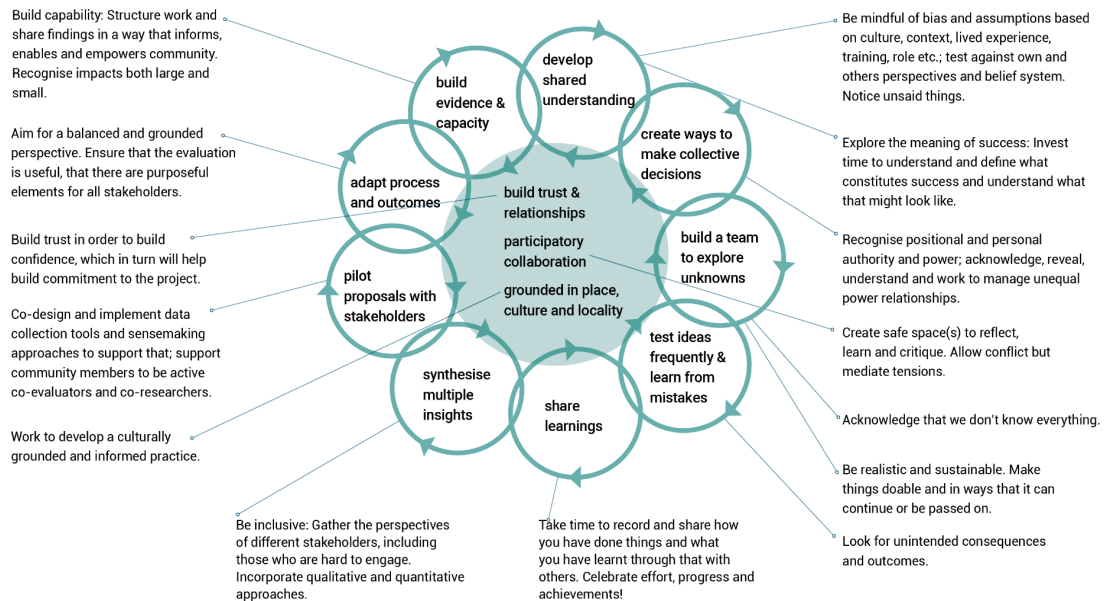


Figure 1. “Blue-flower framework” (Akama et al., 2019)

One caution before we proceed: Yoko and Joyce remain wary of “frameworks”. A “framework” implies replicability and universality, qualities valued in design research due to its dominant epistemology (Evans et al., 2020), which risks overshadowing the diverse positionalities and ways of knowing amongst researchers and participants. We revisit these conundrums under “Discussion” later. By highlighting our concern here, we underscore why this paper focuses on adapting the “framework” and our practices in response to emerging situations.

The second iteration: adapting the “framework” with trusted advisors

We shared the “blue-flower framework” (fig. 1) early in an 18-month transcultural mentoring program for and by women, enabling us to adapt and iterate it in response to circumstances and feedback from our participants. The program, which grew out of a 4-month pilot (see Yee et. al, 2023), aimed to address gender discrimination experienced by women in the Asia-Pacific. We posited that recognising and addressing the intersectional nature of professional women’s development could enable more culturally appropriate support, fostering greater well-being and self-confidence.

The program invited 37 participants, comprising 21 mentors and mentees, 6 Advisory Board (AB) members and 2 guest mentors. This includes the core team of eight (ie, the co-authors of this paper, seven of whom identify as women). All together, we are transcultural with deep lived experiences in Asia-Pacific, and beyond, including in Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong SAR, Australia, Myanmar, the UK, Mexico and Kenya. Some identify as neurodiverse and/or have physical disabilities.

Yoko and Joyce shared how the “blue-flower framework” came to be with the core team. Adjusting examples of practices (outer circle in fig. 1) over many conversations into questions (see fig. 2) was also based on an anticipated theory of change and impact.

Reflecting and sharing our learning (an evolving evaluative process)



Figure 2. Reflecting and learning “yellow-flower framework” (Akama et al., 2022b)

Early drafts of the “yellow-flower framework” were shared with mentors and the Advisory Board (AB). The team's Miroboard traced our reflections, comments, and ongoing input during and post-program (see fig. 3).

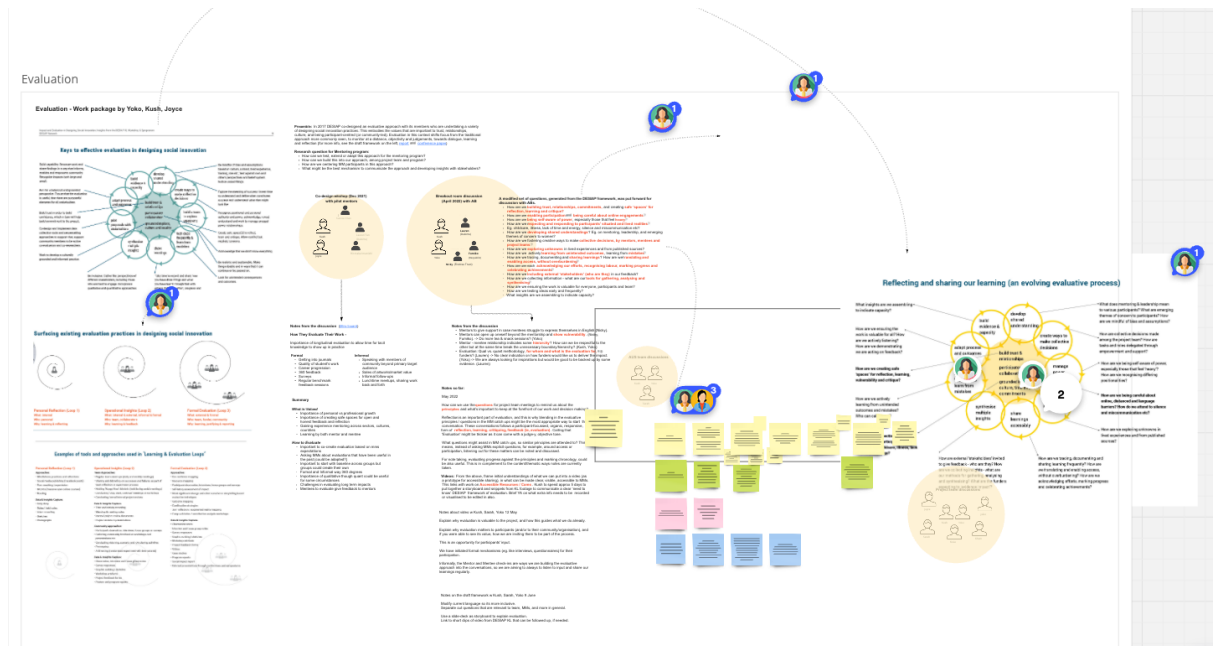


Figure 3. Miroboard traces the development from blue (left) to yellow (right) “framework”

Some mentors and ABs participated in the four-month pilot and have been long-term partners of DESIAP. Many are also acquaintances, colleagues, or peers of the practitioners and researchers involved in DESIAP KL 2017. Positioning these discussions within the broader six-year development indicates deep understanding and how we could foster open, trusted dialogue. Mentors’ candid insights reaffirmed the relevance of the *Core Values* (central circle) and *Principles* (outer circles), with only minor refinements. They helped expand considerations around creating safe spaces for participation, redefining success and failure, and anticipating disengagement. Their contributions improved the clarity and accessibility of early drafts, leading to more precise phrasing of key questions.

***Core Values, Principles* and questions to reflect and learn**

The following questions generated in relation to the *Core Values* and *Principles* were purposefully critical and helped us be accountable. We start with the *Core Values* (central yellow circle):

- **Build trust and relationships:** Communicating the centrality of trust and relationships assisted in being mindful and not taking this for granted. This was sharpened further by the question: *How are we creating safe “spaces” for reflection, learning, vulnerability and critique?*
- **Participatory collaboration:** Building ownership, delegating tasks, inviting input to achieve collective aims together are central. Our collaboration was predominantly online due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. We adapted the questions to attend to virtual and distanced contexts: *How are we being careful about online, distance and language barriers? How do we attend to silence and miscommunication etc?*
- **Grounded in culture, time and commitments:** People including both team members and participants are always situated differently. Recognising that participation took time from women’s professional and personal responsibilities, we asked: *How are we respecting and responding to lived realities? Eg. childcare, illness, lack of time and energy?*

Nine Principles (outer circles) are:

- **Develop shared understanding:** We aim to be mindful of our own and others’ perspectives and expectations. The questions helped to take differences as a common starting point to define what constitutes “success”: *What does mentoring and leadership mean to us collectively? What are emerging themes of concern? How are we mindful of bias and assumptions?*
- **Create ways to make collective decisions:** Attending to differences in roles, capabilities, capacities, expertise and experiences was important, as these shape team dynamics. With two researchers having established DESIAP and new members joining in 2022, these questions helped to guide key moments and activities: *How are collective decisions made? How are tasks and roles delegated through empowerment and support?*
- **Manage power dynamics:** This principle replaced “pilot proposals” with “stakeholders” on the blue-flower diagram because by this stage, we had already run a pilot. Identifying power dynamics as a principle maintains the importance of revealing, acknowledging and understanding authority both

personal and positional, and working to manage the harm that can come from disempowering hierarchies. *How are we being self-aware of power, especially those that feel “heavy”? How are we recognising differing positionalities?*

- **Explore unknowns:** There were many unknowns, especially since the program had new participants joining. We wanted to be explicit about the uncertainties: *How are we exploring unknowns in lived experiences and from published sources?*
- **Share learnings accessibly:** Making the effort to trace and share discoveries that are mindful of barriers such as language differences and time constraints helps to attend to the trans-cultural and -sectoral composition of the participants. *How are we tracing, documenting and sharing learning frequently? How are we translating and enabling access, without overburdening? How are we acknowledging efforts, marking progress and celebrating achievements?*
- **Synthesise multiple insights:** We gathered diverse perspectives from participants, ABs and other people we met along the way. *How are external “stakeholders” invited to give feedback - who are they? How are we collecting insights - what are our methods for gathering, analysing and synthesising? What are the funders expecting to “evidence impact”?*
- **Test ideas frequently and learn from mistakes:** Looking for and attending to unintended consequences and outcomes helps when codesigning data collection tools and sensemaking approaches. *How are we actively learning from unintended outcomes and mistakes? Who can call us out?*
- **Adapt process and outcomes:** Modifying plans and changing decisions in response to continuous feedback is critical. *How are we ensuring the work is valuable for all? How are we actively listening? How are we demonstrating we are acting on feedback?*
- **Build evidence and capacity:** Work is structured and findings are shared in a way that informs, enables and empowers the team and participants. *What insights are we assembling to indicate capacity?*

The term “evaluation” can evoke judgment, so we replaced it with “reflection and learning”. We also translated our resources in Japanese and Thai and shared our team Miroboard to help participants understand the evaluative approach, step-by-step. This aligns with the principle, “*Share learnings accessibly*”. The “yellow-flower framework” featured as a regular touchpoint, for example, a standing agenda in program meetings similar to a “critical friend”. It provided a scaffold for the team’s individual and group reflections, as well as mentor-mentee check-ins and input from AB members. This allowed us to collaboratively reflect and learn in key moments. Towards the program end, the team selected key questions from the diagram as prompts for interviews with participants for further, deeper reflection and insights.

The third iteration: reflection and learning with participants

Next, we select two stories of how evaluation was embedded throughout the program to catalyze continuous learning and reflexive practice.

Evaluating and adapting how we build trust and relationships

Eating together has been a DESIAP “methodology” to acknowledge our cultures and build lasting relationships (Akama & Yee 2024). Gift-giving is a common custom when embarking on new relationships and hoping for an auspicious connection. We wanted to celebrate various cultures in the program and build connections because our engagements were predominantly online. This became the *Gift Exchange*, the first, major phase of the program.

The *Gift Exchange* began with the team sending parcels of drinks and snacks from our respective cultures, within the team and to participants, accompanied by personal stories about their significance. We invited participants to enjoy the treats during online meetings, towards fostering a sense of care and encouraging lighthearted yet intimate conversations, helping us connect more deeply. We then invited the participants to exchange gifts within their mentoring groups of three to four. We suggested gifts that were inexpensive and safe to post, but refrained from specifying items and cost.

However, the early check-ins alerted us that some participants felt pressure and uncertainty around selecting gifts. Our intention to be open and participatory had caused us to neglect other important aspects. What were we missing?

Turning to the principle, “*Test ideas frequently and learn from mistakes*”, and the question, “*How are we actively learning from unintended outcomes and mistakes?*” helped us pause the activity and discuss what we were not seeing. We delved further into complexities of gift-giving as a practice rooted in historical, social and philosophical traditions in different cultures. Expected yet varying cultural norms guide the appropriate level of thought, value and symbolism that goes into selecting a gift. These norms steer the roles that the gift-giver and receiver play and prompt how the receiver reciprocates. These interconnected social obligations are important to consider, since not doing so could place unnecessary emotional burden on the receiver (Schrift, 2014).

The participants didn’t know each other well when we invited them to exchange gifts. Furthermore, hierarchy is important in gift-giving in many cultures. For example, gifts exchanged between individuals of different social standings may require careful consideration to avoid any perceived disrespect or imbalance (Mullis, 2008). Reflecting on the principle, “*Managing power dynamics*” and the question “*How are we recognising differing positionalities*” prompted us to be more mindful of younger mentees, who may have been concerned to not offend their mentors.

We responded by extending the *Gifts Exchange* period and repeatedly assured participants that they could join as and when they felt comfortable. Many did just that. Some groups waited until they felt better acquainted, so they could select more meaningful, personal gifts. Others wove the *Gift Exchange* into their mentoring activity, to make, learn and be inspired by each others’ creativity.

This adjustment made the *Gift Exchange* a participatory activity, strengthening trust and relationships within the program. It became a recurring highlight, as participants shared photos of gifts being made, sent, or received on our social media channel. This speaks to: “*How are we acknowledging efforts, marking progress and celebrating achievements?*” These shared moments became delightful gifts themselves, thickening connections and celebrating the flourishing of relationships.

Evaluating and adapting how we build “capacity”

Building capacity is often a key goal of social innovation initiatives (Alijani et al, 2016). Our program was no exception. We aimed to foster leadership development in mentees based on individual needs and strengths. However, rather than emphasising training and skills-building, we prioritised relationships, focusing on creating conditions of trust, care and generosity that would naturally support growth. Thus some mentees built confidence in their unique competencies, while others felt more able to self-advocate. We witnessed agency and awareness emerging. For example, mentee Y from Malaysia struggled with her career because of her age and gender, but the program gave her the confidence to believe in herself: *“...it definitely changed how I approach things because I was given so much freedom to ... chart my own path.”*

In evaluating “capacity”, the “framework” prompted us to question, *“What are we trying to sharpen and pay attention to?”*, and *“What insights are we assembling to indicate capacity?”* This enabled critical examination of how the team and participants define and perceive capacity. We could miss significant aspects by focussing on evident actions such as the ability to do or understand something, or gaining promotion. Instead, the reflections prompted by the questions helped us look beyond surface-level changes to recognise deeper, internal shifts in beliefs and values as meaningful indicators of growth.

As the program gathered momentum, KoLe, Kush and Khem (core team and co-authors) began to spot these shifts in our meeting notes and recordings of team and mentor check-ins. Other fleeting instances of our engagements with the participants on social media were also included. This followed the principle, *“Synthesise multiple insights”* to respond to the question, *“How are we tracing, documenting and sharing learning frequently?”*

Earlier in the program, during a mentor check-in, Australian mentor L expressed concerns about supporting a Thai mentee due to cultural and language differences. Two key activities followed. First, the mentee took the initiative to invite a friend into the circle to assist with Thai-English translation. Over time, this friend’s presence proved invaluable in communication and helping the mentee feel more at ease. This proactive step demonstrated the mentee’s capacity to problem-solve. Second, as the group dynamic transitioned, J, the other mentee, played an active role, which L later

acknowledged: “...there were many moments where you (J) were providing advice and guidance to them in a way that I simply could not have. Because you just had a much more nuanced understanding of a very kind of particular cultural thing she was referencing about the way things work.” This example highlights how mentors and mentees alike harnessed their assets to support one another and to develop unexpected capacities.

As similar patterns emerged, we began to see mentoring as a process of distributed, collective capacity-building rather than solely focusing on individual mentee development. The question, “How are we ensuring the work is valuable for all?” also helped to expand our perspective. Collaborative evaluations with mentors also revealed how the program influenced their own practice. One mentor, M, reflected, “I feel like I'm getting as much back, definitely, as I'm giving”. This mentor, who works as an arts developer and manager in Australia, shared how her interactions with mentees deepened her understanding of artists and their creative practices, insights she later applied to her work.

Transcultural group mentoring was a new experience for many. We put considerable effort into matching needs and experience by prioritising mentees’ stated preferences and expectations. The focus on mentees gradually broadened as we continuously listened, observed, reflected and learnt together. Questions like, “How are we actively listening? How are we recognising differing positionalities?”, helped us recognise that mentors and the program team, too, were building confidence at a different pace, gaining knowledge in various ways, and learning ways to apply, adapt and problem-solve.

Evaluating and adapting how we build “capacity” also requires us to abandon expected tasks and outcomes. We initially hoped that mentees would build agency and confidence to begin mentoring others in their workplace or community towards the end of the program. Again through the check-ins, we noticed they did not feel ready. In the spirit of “Adapting process and outcomes” and “How are we demonstrating we are acting on feedback?”, we assured mentees that we supported and trusted each circle to learn and grow at their own pace.

From an external “framework” to a collective practice

As mentioned earlier, building evaluative capacities that are integrated with co-designing requires time and adaptation. This has been true for our team as well, thus the paper traces our journey over six years. So far, we have outlined how the “framework” iterated and, in turn, how it helped to shape and transform our practices. Next, we summarise what these practices enabled in contributing to the program’s social impact.

Our reflections were often guided by the key questions in the “framework”. Their specificity helped us critically examine our experiences, both individually and collectively, deepening our insights and shaping real-time adaptations. The open-ended nature of the questions minimised the risk that we would flatten complexities or apply quick fixes. They catalysed reflection and learning, giving us confidence to adjust pace, direction, and outcomes while remaining true to our *Core Values* and *Principles*. Importantly, they prompted us to notice and welcome diverse perspectives rooted in our differing positionalities.

The emphasis we place on the “framework” might imply dependency. This was not the case. Because we had embedded time and process for reflective learning from the outset, it became part of the program’s fabric and rhythm for the team and participants. Mentors particularly appreciated how doing so sustained support in the program and enriched their own mentoring approaches.

The same applies to our *Core Values*. Naming them explicitly helped orient those new to DESIAP and reinforced our shared commitments. They also serve as a reminder when we witness actions or behaviours that contradict them. Writing or diagramming values does not guarantee their presence, importance or consensus. They require careful navigation through feeling and observing, and living one value may unintentionally encroach on another. For example, substantial thought went into formulating the mentoring clusters, but due to unforeseen misalignments in time, energy and chemistry some mentor-mentee relationships dissolved, leading to a reconfiguration of the clusters. This additional anecdote reinforces that “Building Trust and Relationships” is an ongoing effort requiring constant attention.

These two stories and the additional examples illustrate how ongoing reflection and learning kept us anchored in our values, ensuring they were embodied. As trust and

relationships strengthened between the team and participants, our collective confidence in navigating uncertainties grew.

A conundrum for SD: to be or not to be a framework...

We hope we have accounted for the way we co-designed, iterated and adapted our evaluative, reflexive practice through incorporating and responding to cultural and community-specific conditions. Being at odds with how most SD research prefers to conclude and contribute, we refrain from summarising the “usefulness” of the “framework” or persuading others to “apply” it. This is not to deny the value of *our* “framework” in *our* program, in which it was practical, actionable, and fit for purpose. However, overemphasising this as having ensured program success would be misleading and unethical. A framework does not possess inherent power and agency. In participatory co-design a framework only works when it is accompanied by reflexivity around how, when, why it is used and by whom, and by knowing where it came from and what happens afterwards. We hope to have convinced readers that “frameworks” can only work through constant adaptation, reshaping, embodiment and enacting in-situ.

We end with this caution because SD practice has often relied on tools, methods and frameworks to make the messiness of co-designing legible, tangible and repeatable (Akama & Prendiville, 2013). Frameworks will always oversimplify complex dynamics and conditions, and thus require vigilance. Valuing knowledge that is presented as detachable or transportable is a situated epistemic stance in its own right, as stated earlier in this paper, and only one of many epistemic positions.

To build evaluative practices in (service) design and research, we invite others to co-design, iterate and adapt ways of scaffolding learning and reflexivity that work for themselves, their team and their participants. As we did in DESIAP KL 2017, this could begin by identifying *Core Values* and *Principles* that can foster the conditions and infrastructures of collaboration. These can be extended to include questions that address the complexities of change, such as those we generated later. Throughout this work, allowing for iteration or abandonment of these scaffolds when required is crucial. Viewing them as “living” accompaniments helps to remain true to the emergent uncertainties of social change.

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