

Sport England Local Delivery Pilots

National Evaluation and Learning Partnership

Explanatory frameworks and programme theories

pt3

Winter 2023

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

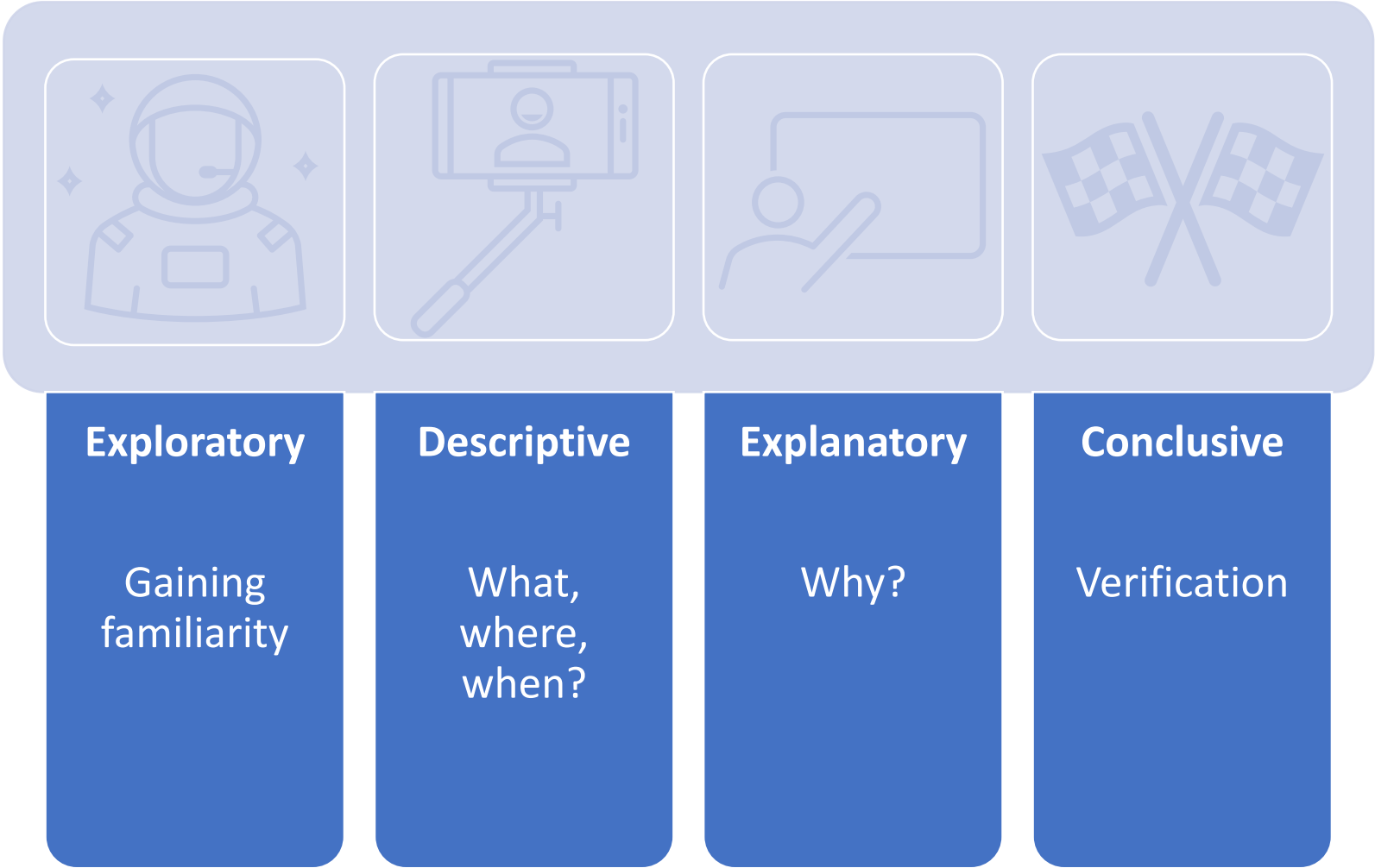


substance.



What can we know about complex systems, how can we know it:

Basic evaluation or research design



What do we mean by explanatory frameworks?

- Explanatory frameworks are created to help understand complex events and situations
- They are neither true nor false but judged by their usefulness for a particular purpose. They are a representation.



Clarke, K. A., & Primo, D. M. (2012). *A model discipline: Political science and the logic of representations*. Oxford University Press.

What do we mean by explanatory accounts or programme theories?

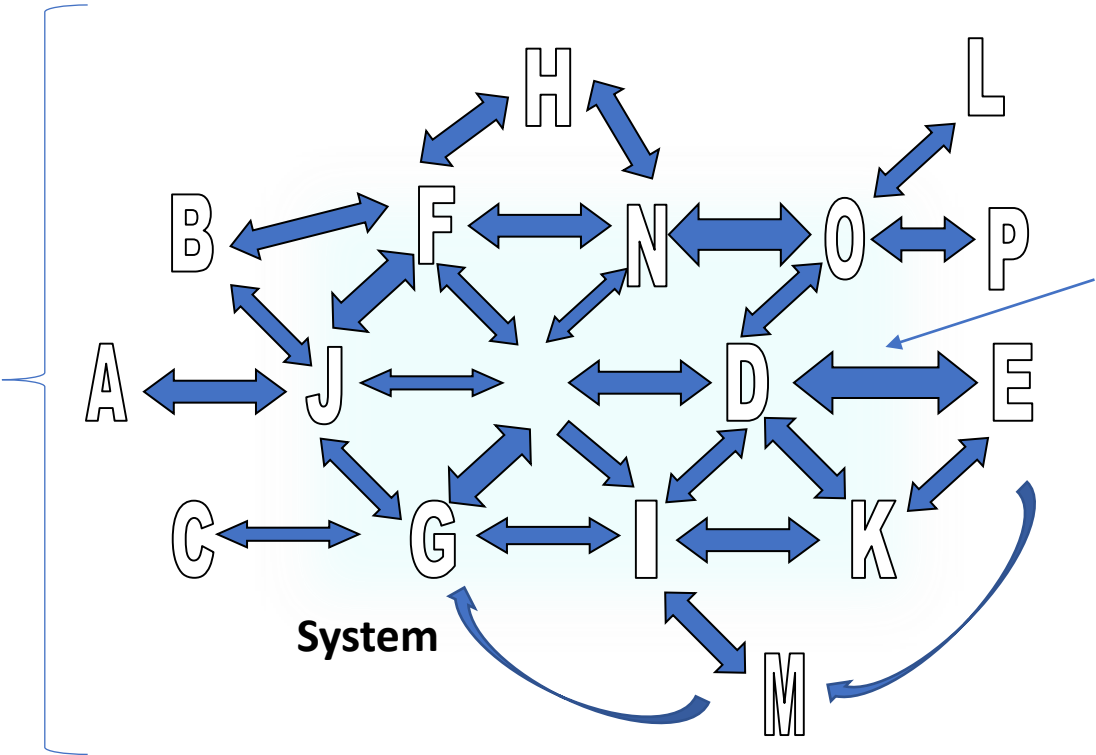
- Explanatory frameworks may provide an abstract picture of relevant domains but don't provide the explanations of how change happens
- Programme theories or explanatory accounts outline the specific idea about how a programme causes the intended or observed outcomes.
- In complex systems programme theories may be developed across and between multiple layers (e.g. individual, interpersonal, organisational)
- Combined these may be called theories of transformation.

Shearn K, Allmark P, Piercy H, Hirst J. Building Realist Program Theory for Large Complex and Messy Interventions. International Journal of Qualitative Methods. December 2017. doi:10.1177/1609406917741796

Punton, M.; Vogel, I. and Lloyd, R. (2016) Reflections from a Realist Evaluation in Progress: Scaling Ladders and Stitching Theory, CDI Practice Paper 18, Brighton: IDS

What makes a good explanatory framework? What makes a good programme theory?

Framework
Sufficiently 'inclusive'
Supports transfer of meaning
Separates individual components (parts)
Unifies components into a coherent model (whole)
Adaptability



Programme theory/explanatory account
Detailed causal theory
Configurational
Testable