Taking an 'implementation lens'
on research & evaluation

Deborah Ghate

Chief Executive

The Colebrooke Centre

for Evidence and Implementation

What is implementation?

- *Implementation* is the process of putting an idea (new policy, plan or service) into effective practice

- Concerned with '*how*' we deliver services, programmes or interventions rather than '*what*' we deliver

- Concerned with the context, process and quality of delivery, rather than the content

What is implementation science?

- Part of an emerging body of theory and evidence in a growing family of disciplines including *improvement science*, *innovation science*, *systems science*, and *dissemination* and *knowledge mobilisation*

- Highly multi-disciplinary and integrative: draws on a wider range of disciplines: developmental and behavioural sciences, psychological sciences, health and social policy, economics, and business and management studies

- Highly applied & practical: "*science in the service of practice and policy*"

The key learning from implementation science

- Whether we are creating new initiatives, or improving existing ones, it is now widely accepted that *implementation quality is the key to effectiveness*

- The best-designed policies, interventions or programmes won't achieve potential unless they combine effective content with effective **and** high-quality delivery

Key elements of an 'implementation lens'
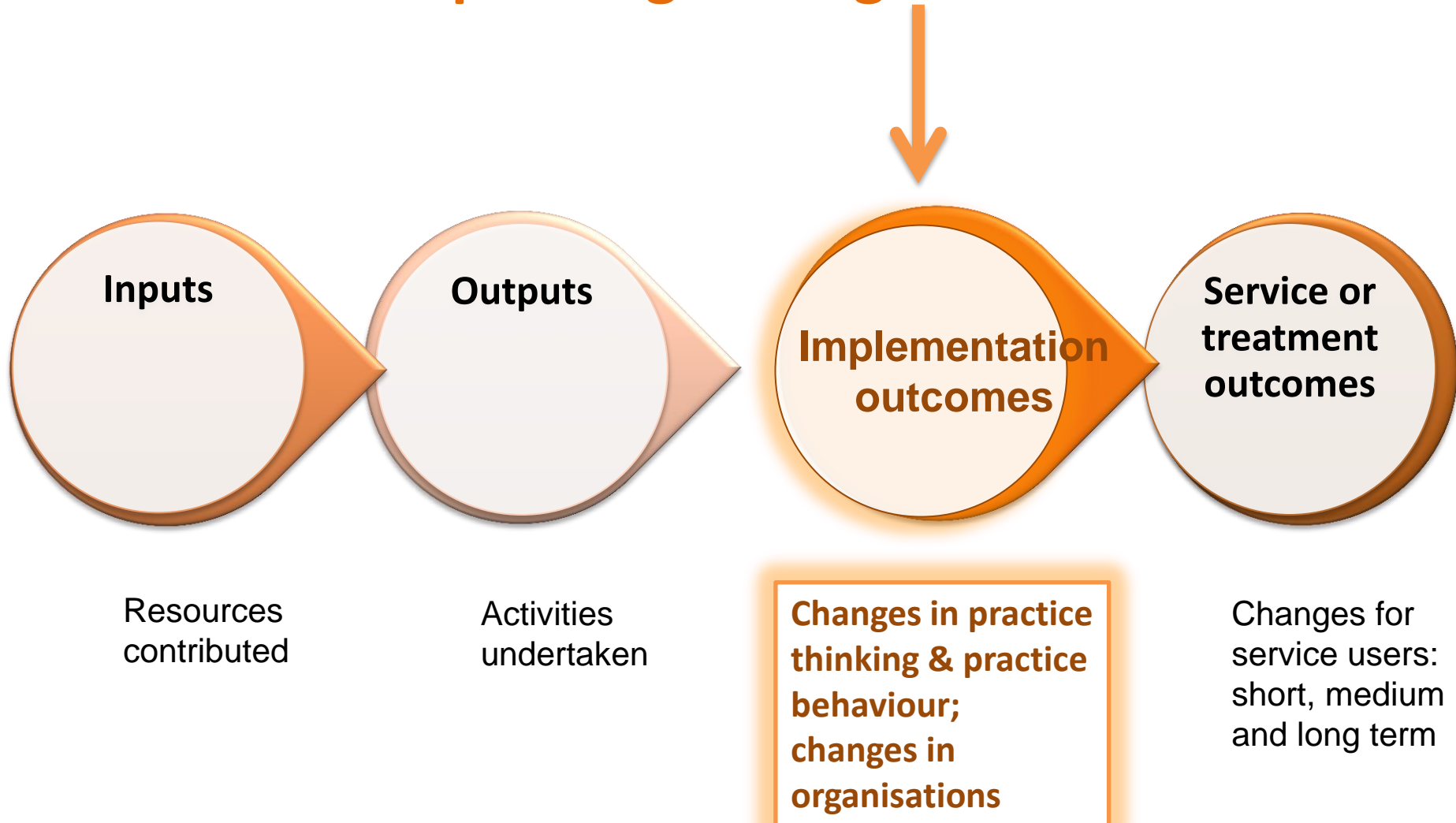## *Things that implementation scientists pay attention to*

- **Systems focus:** '*systems trump programs*' (Is the system ready for change? How does the planned innovation align with existing practice?)

- **Complexity and context**: successful implementation is about sensitivity to context and making '*appropriately adaptive responses*' (<u>not</u> fidelity to a fixed blueprint, come what may)

- **Co-construction** of learning and meaning, evaluators working alongside policy makers, practitioners and implementation support professionals

Key focus of an implementation evaluation
Things that implementation evaluators pay attention to

- **Stages** of implementation: successful implementation proceeds in critical but non-linear stages, which take time (2-4 years)

- **Drivers** of implementation quality: typically identified as at existing at multiple levels – eg: wider system; agencies/organisations; and front line staff

- **Core components** of implementation (disaggregating the 'essential & fixed' from the 'adaptable to context')

- **Implementation outcomes:** expands the typical logic model

Recognising implementation outcomes – expanding the logic model

Inputs

Outputs

Implementation outcomes

Service or treatment outcomes

Resources contributed

Activities undertaken

Changes in practice thinking & practice behaviour; changes in organisations

Changes for service users: short, medium and long term

How is implementation different from dissemination and knowledge transfer?

- It takes 17 years for 14% of original research to make it into practice (Green, 2001 *Am. Journal Health Behaviour*: on health 'best practices')

- Implementation science has shown
  - Dissemination alone *doesn't work* to change behaviour
  - Training alone *doesn't work* to change behaviour

- Active strategies are required: learning from research must be translated into active implementation support for sustained behaviour change

Implications for evaluation?

- *Implementation* ('process', 'formative') research, informed by implementation science, needs to be integral to commissioning and design of outcome ('summative') evaluation

  - Often the design of 'process research' is formulaic rather than thoughtfully constructed around theory about what might influence effective delivery

  - Often the methods of data collection are ad-hoc, lacking in rigour and standardisation

  - Often enquiries are limited to monitoring attendance, and participant satisfaction

  - *"Making the infrastructure visible"*
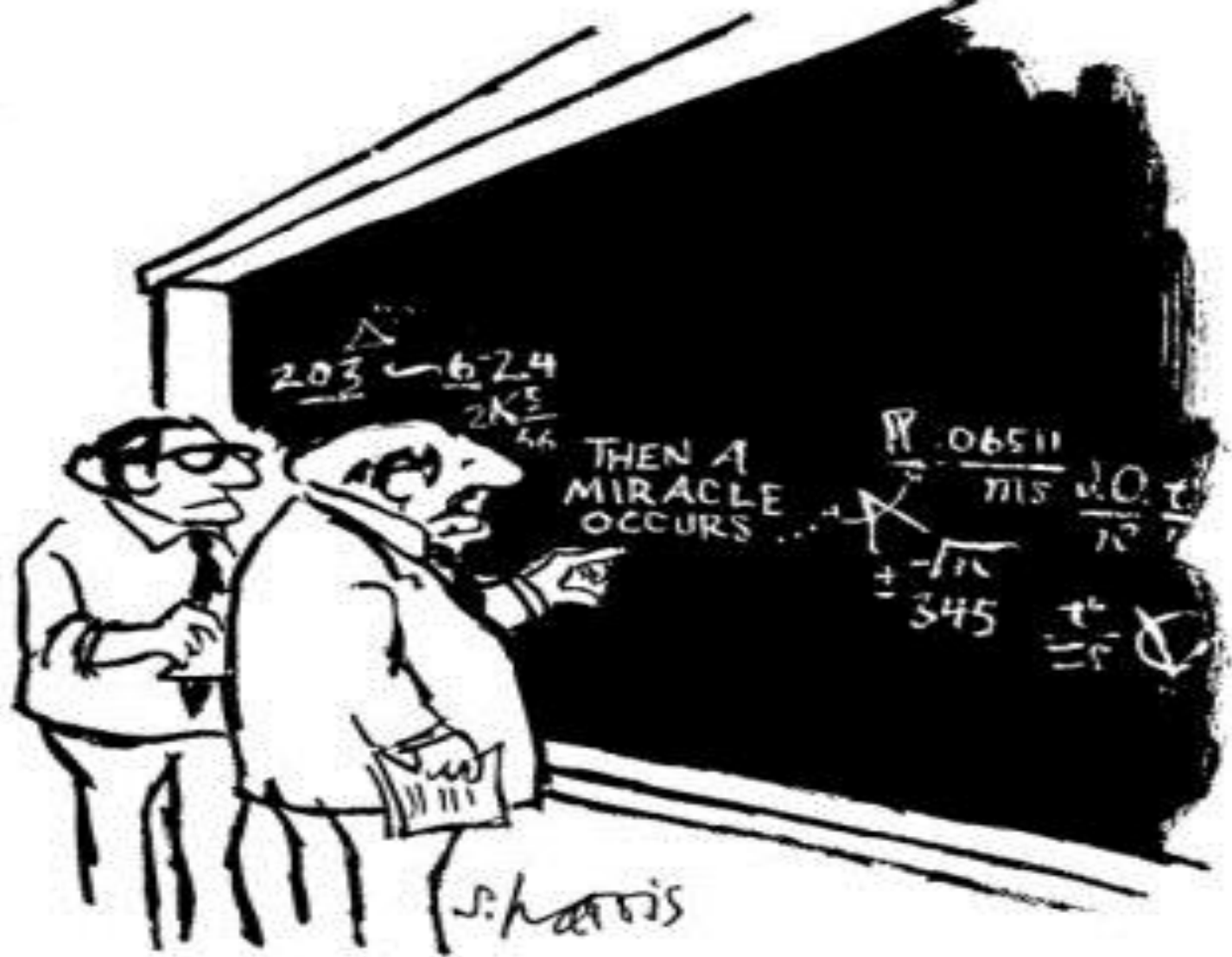
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Implications for evaluation?

- *Implementation* research is essential as a precursor to outcomes evaluation
    - To assess systems readiness for change
    - To assess 'fit' or alignment of proposed innovation with existing business as usual

- An implementation lens creates challenges for use of experimental methods
    - Experimental Method is designed to screen out the 'real world' turbulence of complex adaptive systems…..

Thank you

The Colebrooke Centre
for Evidence and Implementation

55 St John Street

London EC1M 4AN

0203 137 0486

dghate@cevi.org.uk
www.cevi.org.uk