



## RESPONSE TO COMMENTARY

### Exploring the utility of a 'PRAXIS' evaluation framework in capturing transformation: a tool for all seasons?

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I am pleased that the paper has provoked such a discursive and critical commentary. However, what I have not been able to achieve is opportunity to reflect with my co-authors before responding to what I see as three key critical questions being raised. Therefore, please accept this as a personal response from my experiences of using and working with PRAXIS evaluation.

**1:** *How PRAXIS can account for the different dimensions of timeliness in evaluation research alongside its stated intentions of contributing to organisational transformation?*

What I have experienced with using PRAXIS evaluation is that facilitating disparate groups of stakeholders, (whether service commissioners, clinicians, service users, carers )through the PRAXIS mnemonic tool, I have found they very quickly engage in a process of articulating, exploring and challenging each other's values, concepts, theoretical understandings and viewpoints. This very process for some is transformational, as firmly held ontology are stripped back to expose assumptions and perceptions as potential blockages for further transformative change whether at individual, team or organisational level. This aspect of the PRAXIS mnemonic tool's versatility is reported in the paper, but I do wish to emphasise, it is perhaps the skilled facilitation of the process itself that may well be the transformative ingredient, rather than the PRAXIS mnemonic. However, working through the six elements of PRAXIS does provide a transparent and systematic approach to exploring personal values and beliefs, whilst at the same time enabling teams to build an evaluation approach to a project

**2:** *How would 'researchers' know when to use or not to use PRAXIS as an approach?*

'A man for all Seasons: A play of Sir Thomas More' (Bolt, 1957) has been used as an influence in the title of this paper. The play itself is perhaps most familiar to people as a film that depicts the dilemma faced by Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII. Thomas More refused to sign an oath accepting Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragorn was null and void, which led to England becoming isolated from the Catholic Church. The play exposes through dialogue considerable layers of beliefs, political opinion, relationships, diplomacy and integrity (not to mention martyrdom, but that's not what I am trying to explain here!). What the PRAXIS evaluation framework offers is an ability, through using the mnemonic tool, to begin to reveal, expose and explore the many complex layers of social interaction where there is transformational intent. How people take this forward into a project, or in their own personal activity, is the responsibility of each individual. Personally, I am not concerned whether PRAXIS best sits with action research, appreciative inquiry, collective inquiry, or which particular evaluation approach. What I am concerned with however, is being able to offer people the chance to critically consider their situation and to be well informed enough to make what Scwandt (2000) calls 'wise judgements'. It does not stop there, working with PRAXIS evaluation also requires recognition that these judgements have consequences on how a person then interacts and

engages with others. There is a risk that if we attempt to rationalise PRAXIS into a kind of technical mastery, then we are at risk of dismissing responsibility to ourselves, and others, of the necessity to continually reflect, refine and revise our practices.

*Praxis is a form of human activity that has to do with the conduct of one's life and affairs as a member of society. ...This is neither technical nor a cognitive capacity that one has at one's disposal, but rather is bound up with the kind of person that one is and is becoming. .... This kind of knowledge is variously referred to as deliberative excellence, practical wisdom, or practical reason. .... the aims of evaluative activity here is to make wise judgement .... the result of this evaluation is a particular way of being toward and interacting with clients, conceiving of their needs, regarding them as persons of a particular kind, and grappling with the question, are we doing the right thing and doing it well? (Schwandt, 2000: pp 217-8)*

**3: How the authors intend to further theoretically develop their ideas and approach?**

I totally agree that PRAXIS evaluation has not achieved many 'outings' in and across the changing seasons, but its utility across health care contexts is continually being explored. I have begun to see evidence of PRAXIS evaluation being used in education fields and across other disciplines through conference presentations and email debate. Further publications are planned on how PRAXIS is being used more information and people work with PRAXIS. Seeking funding to further test, refine and critically explore its value, despite opportunity becoming scarce, is a route we (speaking on behalf of my co-authors) are keen to undertake. This paper is a first attempt to share our work to date, and the level of excitement working with PRAXIS evaluation has brought. Ongoing debate through individual and collective response to the paper and the commentary will I hope continue to further reveal both the complexity and provocative-ness of working with PRAXIS evaluation.

**References**

- Bolt, R. (1957) *A man for all seasons: a play of Sir Thomas More*. Modern Classics. Paperback  
Schwindt, T. A. (2000) Meta-analysis and everyday life: the good, the bad and the ugly. *American Journal of Evaluation*. Vol 21. pp 213-219

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