

Whinges, Apples, and Evidence: Lenses of Value to Improve Use

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Title

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Abstract

This call for papers sought insights into what we mean by *use*, how evidence is created for different audiences, and how different roles conceptualise its use. We believe that, to provide insights, it is *useful* to start with a whinge.

Information providers express frustration when their evidence is overlooked: “Why won't anyone use our ‘good’ evidence?” Leaders and decision-makers feel that the available evidence does not align with the real problems they seek to address: “The evidence you've given me doesn't fit the shape of the problem I'm actually trying to solve”. These whinges are real and valid, and must be listened to. They are emotional signals that provide a window into what we value. Knowing what matters to each of us helps us decide what is useful.

In this paper, we posit that evidence is like apples: different kinds are valuable to different people in different situations, and that determines usefulness. Rather than framing evidence use as the problem to be solved through infrastructure, resourcing, knowledge translation, engagement and research quality, we suggest reframing use as evaluative, as a question of value. Using a multidisciplinary critical interpretive synthesis of the evaluative judgement literature combined with empirical interviews, we identified six interconnected Lenses of Value related to good/useful evidence: Time and Temporality, Situatedness, Purpose, Pathways, Perspective and Positionality and Emotions. These lenses make the implicit value behind useful evidence visible. The framework provides information providers, leaders, and decision-makers with a way to explore how each may conceptualise the use of evidence. By making these tensions visible, we make them more navigable. Just as different apples serve different purposes, different evidence fulfil different needs. Recognising which apple matters in a specific situation for a particular individual is crucial to developing genuinely useful evidence.

Introduction: The whinge.

For decades, researchers, forecasters and evaluators have been asking the same frustrated question: “Why won't anyone use our ‘good’ evidence? We made such nice [insert appropriate piece of evidence here – data, forecast, research, report] for you; why aren’t you using it?” In these roles, we invest enormous amounts of time, resources and energy in generating rigorous, carefully designed inquiries. We follow ethics guidelines, develop protocols, collect data, analyse findings, and write beautifully crafted articles and reports. And yet, our work might get cited in passing, or worse, sit on a shelf and fail to shape the decisions it was meant to inform.

The whinge also comes from the leadership and decision-maker side. There it sounds like “I asked for useful evidence; why did you give me this?” As leaders, we are balancing competing (and sometimes hostile) stakeholder demands, working against tight timelines, navigating political constraints, needing to make a decision *now*, a decision that holds real consequences. And when things go wrong (and they might), we are the ones held accountable. “The evidence you've given me doesn't fit the shape of the problem I'm actually trying to solve.”

As authors, we have been on both sides. We know both whinges are valid, both sides are frustrated, and together they point to invisible evaluative judgements made by both parties. If we accept that people constantly, automatically, and unconsciously place value on things (Gargani and King 2024), then we must acknowledge what counts as *good*, *important* or *useful* is in the eyes of whoever is looking at it. This applies to apples and evidence, but we’ll start with apples to illustrate – their use is simpler!

Apples come in types, e.g., Granny Smith, Honeycrisp, Pink Lady and Gala. Now imagine I ask you: “What is a useful apple?” This question cannot be answered without more information. Not because we do not know about apples, but because *useful* is an evaluative concept, and naming something *useful* is an evaluative judgement. We are not simply describing an apple as red (Hare 1952, p. 52). To be evaluative means to describe something’s *value*. While *value* resists a neat definition (Smith 1995; House and Howe 1999; Papadopoulos and Urton 2012), a practical starting point is that value is what *matters*. It is what matters to whom, in a particular context (Gargani and King 2024), and we would add, as will be discussed later, for what time and temporality, situation, purpose, pathway, perspective and positionality, and emotions.

So, with apples, what is the value of an apple? What matters in an apple? What is a useful apple? Let's start with purpose. Useful for what? Useful according to what criteria? Useful for eating fresh? Honeycrisp. Useful for baking? Granny Smith. Useful for storage? Cortland. Useful for appearance? Pink Lady. There is no useful apple in general. There are only useful apples for a specific purpose, according to specific criteria. And whose perspective on the criteria for useful apples counts? When a baker decides what apple to use, they do not ask, "What is a useful apple?" They ask, "What apple is useful for this purpose?" And the answer depends on many dimensions: the purpose the apple will serve in what they are trying to make (apple pie, sauce, cider, to eat fresh) and the characteristics that matter for that purpose (tartness, firmness, appearance), the perspective of the user (person looking in the fruit bowl for a snack, expert baker, or home cook), the time and timing available (when it must happen and if they have 30 minutes or three days), the place and space where it will happen (a commercial kitchen or a fire pit) and the circumstance and context constraints they face (budget, availability, fellow chefs, feeding 5 or 50 people, and what else is happening, etc)? Using apples makes these requirements obvious. Yet with evidence, we have inverted the logic.

The issue is not that leaders and decision-makers do not care, that researchers, forecasters and evaluators are out of touch or that the evidence is bad (although sometimes all three can be true). The issue is that instead of asking, "What is *useful* evidence for *this* decision, for *these* people who have *this* perspective, at *this* time and moment, given *these* constraints?" we ask, "What is *useful* evidence?" and then may assume the rest will be understood and shared. We produce rigorous, high-quality, well-designed studies. We assume our view of useful is the same as everyone else's view of useful. We assume that good equals quality, and quality equals usefulness and then become frustrated when the good, high-quality evidence we have produced is glanced at, ignored, forgotten or used in ways we never intended. So, what would happen if we treated evidence like apples?

The Solution. The whinge is valid, so now what?

People are increasingly acknowledging and examining what constitutes usefulness (Parkhurst 2016; Rickinson et al. 2022). Parkhurst (2016) argues that "to improve the use of evidence in policy requires an explicit engagement with the question of what constitutes better use from a political perspective" (p.170). Academics have approached usefulness primarily by focusing on removing barriers. Oliver & Boaz (2019) document substantial investment to improve evidence use by removing barriers and improving infrastructure and institutional resourcing,

communication and knowledge translation, relationships and stakeholder engagement and research quality. These solutions dominate thinking about improving evidence use.

Rather than framing evidence use as a problem to be solved, our research demonstrates that that different people have different perspectives on what is useful. In this paper, we argue that *useful* is an evaluative judgement, and approach it from an evaluation perspective. Evaluation is a transdiscipline concerned with the systematic process of determining something's value (Scriven 1991, 2007; House and Howe 1999), usually by answering the question 'What does good look like?' for the item being evaluated (Author, 2026; Author, 2026). In plain language: what matters about this item in these circumstances? Evidence will not be used if people do not judge it as *matter*ing to them. But what matters to evidence providers may not matter to leaders. Below, we share insights from a multidisciplinary critical interpretive synthesis of literature and a small empirical study examining how people make evaluative judgements. We combine the findings into a framework that makes the pathways to valuing evidence visible, to advance the use of evidence more broadly.

Method

This paper draws together findings from a critical interpretive synthesis of the evaluative judgement literature across disciplines and a small empirical investigation into how evaluative judgements are made in practice. Our overarching guiding research question was: how do people make evaluative judgements?

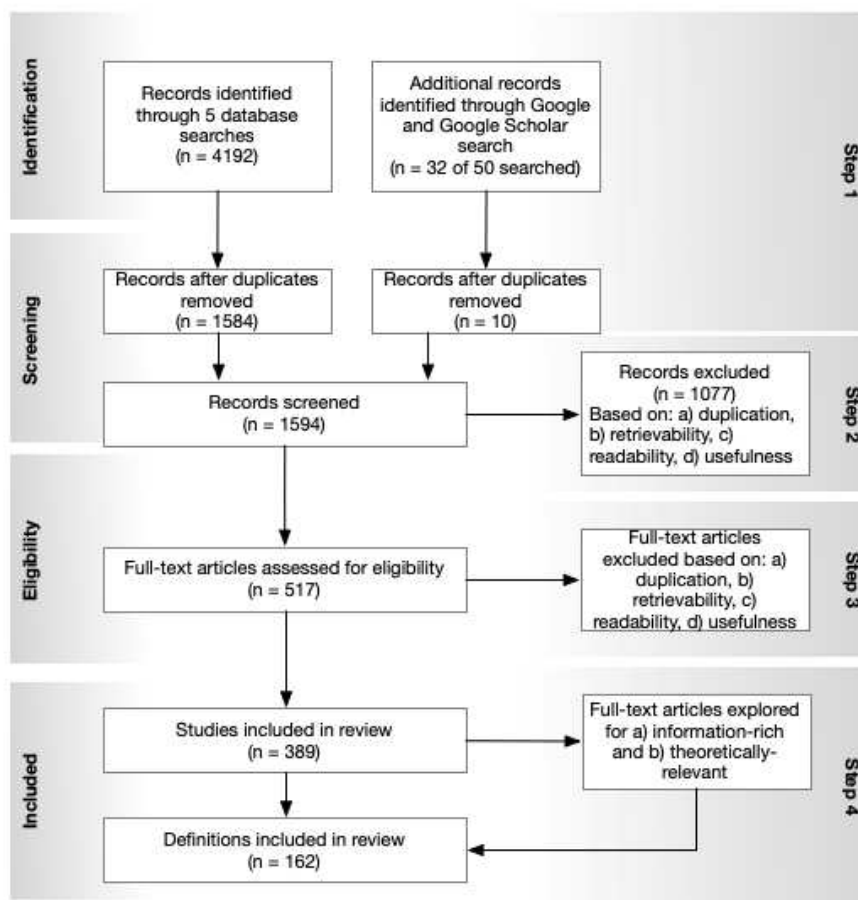
Literature Review

Critical interpretive synthesis draws on grounded theory and qualitative inquiry to examine a diverse body of evidence and document styles, allowing themes based on insights and interpretation to emerge (Dixon-Woods et al. 2006; Moat et al. 2013). We deemed critical interpretive synthesis appropriate, as it handles heterogeneous evidence and is suited to conceptual development and exploration rather than summarising data (Dixon-Woods 2006). This review was not meant to be comprehensive or purely summative, but rather to be "rich in relevance" (Moat et al. 2013, p. 608). Several compass questions guided the critical interpretive synthesis: 1) What is an evaluative judgement? 2) What is the process of making an evaluative judgement? 3) Why are evaluative judgements (in decision-making) important? We used a conventional, structured, systematic review methodology that transitioned to an inductive approach (Dixon-Woods et al. 2006). We maintained an audit trail to support the

analysis and synthesis. The search strategy (Figure 1) involved identifying explicit definitions of evaluative judgements across disciplines.

In Step 1, five databases (EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage, Scopus, and Web of Science) were searched for journals, books, chapters, theses, and dissertations. Over 4,000 records were identified; after removing duplicates within and between databases, 1,584 articles remained. These were imported into MAXQDA for analysis. Grey literature was explored via Google and Google Scholar, scanning the first five pages (50 entries) without date restrictions. Articles lacking the term "evaluative judgement" or its variants, or not in English, were excluded. In Step 2, titles, abstracts, and search results in MAXQDA were examined to assess *quality* based on duplication, retrievability, readability, and relevance. Articles meeting all criteria progressed to Step 3, with their full texts imported into MAXQDA. Out of 1,594 articles, 517 were selected for full-text review. In Step 3, full texts and webpages were assessed using the same criteria. Those meeting all four criteria moved to Step 4, with 389 articles deemed relevant.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for literature selection



In Step 4, we conducted an inductive analysis and synthesis using MAXQDA's manual search and AI features. We employed MAXQDA's text search and auto-code with a +1 sentence context around the term "evaluative judgement" in plural form, including British/American spellings, to extract definitions efficiently. Manual search was used for articles where the search function was unavailable, such as photocopies. MAXQDA generated paragraphs containing the keyword, which were briefly reviewed across all 389 articles. We also cross-checked findings with MAXQDA's AI search, prompting "statements in the document that provided a definition of evaluative judgements." From 57 articles, 243 segments were retrieved, many of which aligned with our predefined codes.

The extracted paragraphs defining evaluative judgements from 389 articles were assessed for 1) *information richness* and 2) *theoretical relevance*. *Information richness* referred to content that enhanced understanding of evaluative judgements. It was defined as being "especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al. 2015, p. 534). Descriptions had to explicitly use the term *evaluative judgement* (British/American spelling, singular/plural) rather than similar terms such as *evaluative statement* or *conclusion*. *Theoretical relevance* indicated a paragraph's importance for shaping a framework, assessed by the "content and utility of findings" and its "likely contribution to theory development" (Barnett-Page and Thomas 2009, p. 65). We applied this criterion of *information richness* and *theoretical relevance* to the 389 articles reviewed; 162 contained rich and relevant descriptions of evaluative judgements. A thematic analysis was then conducted across the 162 definitions. This analysis subsequently informed the direction and interview questions in the empirical study.

Empirical Study

We undertook a small Australian-based empirical study to explore how people make evaluative judgements about strategicⁱ decision-making inputs, such as forward-looking information (e.g., forecasts), evaluative concepts (e.g., *safe, beautiful, essential*), and who we should listen to (e.g., whose voices matter). We asked 15 not-for-profit leaders, information providers and people in fields where evaluative judgements are prominent in the academic literatureⁱⁱ to share how they make evaluative judgements through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participants were based in Australia. This project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England, Australia (Approval No. HE23-033).

Our study was exploratory, using a qualitative approach within an interpretivist and social constructivist paradigm. This theoretical foundation was deemed most suitable because valuing and evaluative judgements can be viewed as social constructs (Papadopoulos and Urton, 2012). We invited participants to talk “as if they were their own ethnographers...” (Heuts and Mol 2013, p. 128). We provided participants with an interview guide. During these conversations, we asked a series of questions, including four pertinent to usefulness (Table 1). We asked about participants’ general approach to making evaluative judgements, then their approach to strategic, forward-looking information, and how they decided whether the information they received or provided was *good* or *important*. We asked about evaluative concepts, who they listened to and why. The findings are inevitably context-dependent.

Table 1. Sample questions from the interview guide

Evaluative judgement Practice(s)	Question to information receivers e.g. leaders, decision-makers	Question to information providers e.g. forecaster, researcher, analyst	Questions to Experts in Fields where evaluative judgements are prominent in the literature
General	Next, I’d like to ask you about the process you go through to judge whether something has ‘value’. For the following question, I’d like to think about the term ‘value’ broadly - how good, of worth or important something is. The ‘something’ might be an object, person, process, policy, program, food, performance or event. For this question, I’d like you to ‘think aloud’ when you respond to this question. Research suggests that we get a great deal of information if we ask people to think aloud as they talk through their working process. All you have to do is speak any thoughts that come into your head. It may be a bit awkward, but it becomes easier. If you forget, I will remind you. To practice speaking aloud, could you multiply 2 times 10. I’d like to hear what you’re thinking. Could you please talk through a professional situation where you had to judge how ‘good’ something was, whether it had merit or was of quality, not whether it was morally good or bad? Can you first describe the ‘something’ that you judged – the something can be anything, a policy, program, event, person, food or performance – and how you judged its ‘goodness or quality’? Could you please provide another example of a different nature, this time focused on ‘importance’? Could you please talk through a professional situation where you had to judge how important something was, whether something is prioritised, cared for, or significant? Can you first describe the ‘something’ and then how you judged its ‘importance’?		
– Strategic Forward-Looking Information	A little while ago you requested information to inform a strategic decision. You are about to receive a	You’ve been asked to provide a document or verbal information to an	Think about a situation in your professional life where you have had to make a strategic or

	document or verbal information from an adviser. The information contains forward-looking strategic information like a forecast, prediction or advice which might help make the strategic decision. “How do you decide what information you need? How do you decide if the strategic forward-looking information in that document is “good” information? How do you decide it is “important” information? Please talk out loud about the process you would go through. Feel free to use examples.	NFP leader. This advice will contain forward-looking information like a forecast, prediction or advice on an upcoming strategic piece of work. How do you decide what information to present to the leader or decision-maker? How do you determine that your information is “good”? How do you decide it is “important” information? Please talk out loud about the process you would go through. Feel free to use examples.	critical decision about something that requires information or input from others or where you have had to provide advice. * Describe how you judge the value of strategic forward-looking information such as forecasts, predictions and advice. In other words, how do you determine whether the information you receive (or the information you provide) is good or important? Feel free to draw upon examples.
– Strategic Evaluative Concepts	During the pandemic in Australia, we saw confusion around the term “essential” in relation to “essential workers”. This strategic evaluative term shaped public policy, organisational approaches and people’s behaviour across Australia. In the health system, health professionals talk about ‘normal’ birth, ‘normal’ blood pressure and ‘normal’ breathing, yet it’s been reported that this type of language can leave service users feeling like they are “abnormal”(1) In 2020, Rio Tinto dynamited the Juukan Gorge Caves, sacred places for the local Indigenous people. The interim report of the inquiry into its destruction suggested that the “significance of the rock shelters was ignored...” (p.5) and that “insufficient value” was placed, “on the preservation of Indigenous culture and heritage...” (2) and instead economic value was prioritised. In other industries, we might talk about a “beautiful” artwork, “inappropriate” donations, “unsafe” practices, a “good” tomato or an “informative” forecast. * Can you recall a time in your workplace when there was confusion or disagreement around a strategic evaluative concept? Step me through the situation, what happened and the consequences if any. 1) Warman, J. (2021). Re:birth. How language influences our thoughts and actions, The Magazine of the Royal College of Midwives, Sept, p.14-23. https://www.rcm.org.uk/media/5638/mid-sept21-full-lrc.pdf 2) Turner, R (2020). Juukan Gorge won't be the last priceless record of human history to be legally destroyed by mining, ABC News https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-11/juukan-gorge-aboriginal-heritage-site-just-one-of-many-destroyed/12337562		

– People’s Voices	Activities often involve multiple stakeholders or voices. These voices can be complementary or conflicting. For example: in 2020, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s independent report revealed a poor gymnastics culture in Australia. A culture that included systemic risk factors for child abuse and neglect, misconduct, bullying, abuse, sexual harassment and assault towards athletes. While the report valued the voices of children, young people and families, the report revealed a culture that prioritised others' voices. * You are involved in a strategic project involving multiple people’s views and voices. How do you judge whose voice (and hence whose information) to listen to? Whose voice is ‘good’? Whose voice is ‘important’? Step me through a situation and what you did. Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). Change the Routine: Report on the Independent Review into Gymnastics in Australia. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission Retrieved from: https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/change-routine-report-independent-review-gymnastics
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In our interviews, we deliberately chose the word "information" over "evidence" because it more accurately highlights the distinction between raw data and the interpretive process of judgement. This choice underscores the critical evaluative decisions that the term "evidence" often conceals. We also opted for the terms "*good*" and "*important*" instead of "*useful*" or "*relevant*." These terms are considered thick because they carry specific purposes, functions, and contexts (Tappolet and Rossi 2016), making them both descriptive and evaluative (Cassani and Colombo 2026). In contrast, "*good*" and "*important*" are broad, purely evaluative or normative terms that indicate that something matters without detailing how (Tappolet and Rossi 2016; Cassani and Colombo 2026). Using these terms aligned participants with a broader evaluative perspective, avoiding the imposition of a potentially predetermined concept. For this paper, we translate these terms, *good* and *important*, into usefulness because ultimately, if something is not valuable to someone, it is not useful to them in some way.

We recruited participants via LinkedIn, organisational websites, and the researcher team’s professional network. The semi-structured interviews were recorded via Zoom and ran for 60–90 minutes. Our sampling was purposive (Palinkas et al. 2015) to allow in-depth investigation of evaluative judgements and reflect similar studies into judgements of value (Hurteau and Williams 2014).

We conducted a two-phase analysis. Phase 1 involved an inductive analysis, generating initial codes (open and axial) through in-depth reading of the data. We adopted a semantic focus, identifying explicit or surface-level meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84). Phase 2 involved a

theoretical thematic analysis of the transcripts. This type of analysis went beyond descriptions and semantics to explore the “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84).

Participants

Over 25 hours of data were collected from 15 participants (10 female and 5 male). Participants self-reported their titles, roles and which category they aligned with (leader, information provider or expert), 5 identified as leaders, 8 as information providers, and 7 as experts in a field where evaluative judgement was prominent in the literature. Table 2 provides a summary of participants’ titles and industries.

Table 2. Summary of participants’ titles, roles, industries and fields

	Leaders	Information Providers	Experts
Summary of Roles and Titles	Board Member Business Owner CEO Chairperson Company Secretary Director Company Member of Ministerial Advisory Council	Business Partner Data Analyst Behavioural Scientist Business Owner Committee Member Consultant Executive and Career Coach Podcaster Psychologist	Artist Teacher Excavation Director Heritage Consultant Manager University Senior Executive Instructor / Trainer
Summary of Industries and Fields	Allied Health Community Safety Community Aged Care Conflict and Disasters Consumer Products Domestic Violence Early Childhood Federal Police Health Hospitality	Communication Indigenous Cultural Support Data Management Development Health Humanitarian Marketing Performing Arts Environmental Science Information Technology	Cyber Security Film and Theatre Health Higher Education Historical Archaeology Human Behaviour Journalism Military Psychological Science Secondary Education Media and Journalism

Integration of Literature and Empirical Study

The integration of the critical interpretive synthesis and the empirical study was developed iteratively. Our aim was to go “beyond the content of original studies to achieve a higher level of interpretation” (Lachal et al. 2017, p. 7). The critical interpretive synthesis initially provided a conceptual framework for understanding evaluative judgements from a multidisciplinary perspective. These insights then guided the design of the empirical study. The integration was not one-way: a conceptual scaffold from the literature was expanded through interviews and then refined. We identified themes from each study that helped us better understand the

phenomenon, enabling deeper comprehension (Lachal et al. 2017, p. 7). We present the findings using that integration.

Findings: Lenses of Value

Lenses of Value, or ways to view what is of value, emerged from the integration of the literature and empirical findings. These describe the ways that leaders, information providers, and experts judge what matters, that is, what is *good* or *important*. Participants applied these lenses when both providing and receiving information. Analysis revealed these six lenses: time and temporality, situatedness, purpose, pathway, perspectives and positionality and emotions. These lenses shaped what counted as valuable at a particular *time and temporality*, in a particular *situation*, from a particular *perspective and positionality*, for a particular *purpose*, *along* a particular *pathway*. In the following section, we explore each theme in turn, connecting participant insights to the literature, and conclude with a framework for how these themes may interact and help explain different people's views (whinges!) of what is of value, particularly in relation to useful evidence.

Time and Temporality

Participants judged information as valuable when its timing, such as when it was provided, and the temporal horizon against which outcomes would be assessed, aligned with the context in which decisions were being made. Leaders and information providers described time at two levels: practical *time* (clock- and calendar-based limitations) and relational *temporality* (how time is valued and experienced). Taken at face value, *time* was a specific moment that mattered, such as a day or date. Time was considered objective and measurable. Participants spoke about deadlines mattering a great deal when decisions had to be made. *Temporality*, however, was the way time was judged and therefore experienced. It was about giving time meaning and was expressed through relational dimensions. What might be the right time for one person might be the wrong time for another. Or what was the right decision at one moment in time, was the incorrect decision with hindsight. One not-for-profit leader spoke about the pandemic, noting that while they may not have had perfect information at the time, they needed to make quick, evaluative judgements about the *best* course of action to ensure services could continue. They acknowledged, however, that with hindsight and a longer time horizon, some choices may not have been the best course of action, but that many in leadership positions were doing what they thought was best with the information they had at the time (Participant

002). This reflection acknowledges the lens of a *temporal window* or *time horizon*, in which *success* (an evaluative judgement) looks different now than in the future.

Time and *Temporality* considerations are crucial when assessing the usefulness of evidence because the value of information can hinge on its timing. The relationship between time and decision-making is well-documented in the academic literature (Ariely and Zakay 2001; Johansen et al. 2025). Ranyard, Crozier, and Svenson (1997) emphasise perspectives similar to those of our participants, including the notion that decisions require time, and can be future-oriented or revisited long after they are made (p. 165). Evidence that arrives too late misses the opportunity to influence decisions and is therefore deemed unhelpful, regardless of its quality. Conversely, information that aligns with the decision-making timeframe can be pivotal, guiding actions and shaping outcomes. Recognising the importance of timing underscores why time and temporality are key factors in valuing information.

From our experience, timing often causes friction between leaders and information providers. For leaders, deadlines, delays, and misaligned schedules render evidence useless. For providers, when deadlines are unrealistic, shift unexpectedly or are poorly communicated, frustration grows. People also perceive time differently: some view it as fluid, others as fixed; some prioritise speed, while others value careful consideration. What feels urgent to one person may seem relaxed to another. A leader may focus on evidence of long-term systemic change, while a donor may seek quarterly impact metrics. The same evidence, but with different time frames. These diverse perceptions of time are present in all types of organisations, government, business, or non-profit. They influence how information is valued and must be recognised by both leaders and information providers to ensure that evidence is useful.

Situatedness

Situatedness emerged as a multidimensional lens through which participants judged the value of information. Milieu shaped information value. Participants acknowledged that meaning and value are interpreted with an eye to context (Participant 005). “Context is part of the value” (Participant 012). *Situatedness* was composed of four general themes, which we have called place and space, and circumstance and context.

Place and Space emerged as complementary ways of thinking about what mattered. Place was considered the concrete, physical, situated location of an object or action. Space was considered the gaps, proximity, or negative area between objects or actions. One expert, an archaeologist, provided a helpful example of how the place and space of a bottle (a piece of evidence) in a trench shape its value. When a bottle is found in a sealed place, it is considered useful because it can be examined in its place (where it is physically buried) and in relation to other objects that might have been deposited with that bottle, including their proximity to the bottle. An archaeologist can then “understand the environment in which it was deposited, the time scale in which it was deposited...it has a lot more value to us from a research perspective” (Participant 012).

Circumstance and Context were the proximal and distal lenses through which people thought about what mattered. Circumstances were seen as the immediate observable conditions. Context was the broader interpretive frame that gave the circumstance meaning. Leaders emphasised that information providers needed to understand the specific circumstances of the organisation and the broader context. For instance, one leader (Participant 002) described how they moved between circumstances and context. They described how their requests for information and how they judged the value of the information they received were determined by the circumstances (for example, who was in the room, what was happening internally in their organisation) and what was happening in the broader social context. With regard to this broader social context, one leader (Participant 002) used the PESTEL framework (which stands for political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors (Johnson et al. 2005) to help assess the information they received.

Context is a critical factor in the possible use of evidence. Context is not simply a monolithic backdrop but rather a meaning-shaping influence. It comes from the Latin *contexere*, which means to “weave together” or “to connect” (Butzer 1980, p. 418). It is the extra information around something or someone that helps one understand something. The challenge is that while evidence is contextually bound, it is individually interpreted and particularised within that context. In evidence-based policy, there is a growing recognition that we must acknowledge and work within different decision-making objectives across different contexts. The challenge is not developing more evidence but rather creating methods to identify, interpret, and apply evidence across these varied contexts (Dobrow et al. 2006). This requires linking evidence to

specific policy objectives and questions, rather than treating evidence as universally applicable.

Leaders and information providers may interpret context differently; what's salient to one may not be to the other. A leader might focus on immediate organisational factors such as budget, timeline, and staff capacity, while an information provider may consider the broader scientific or methodological background. These differing perspectives can cause friction. Evidence that seems useful to researchers might seem useless to a leader based on their lived experience of that context. Since context shapes what is seen as useful evidence, it is important to clarify how each person understands it. Without this explicit understanding, evidence might be dismissed as irrelevant or misused.

Purpose

Purpose shapes information value. Understanding what is trying to be achieved and why it matters fundamentally frames which information is valued and considered useful. Participants recognised three drives of purpose: goals, needs and outputs. Goals being, does something have to be achieved? Needs being, does something have to be met? Outputs being, does something have to be produced? Participants recognised that goals, needs and outputs placed different lenses over and shaped what matters. Participants judged information as valuable when it advanced what they or others were trying to achieve. One participant spoke about a development project in which they had established a clear need (accessible housing for aged independent people), a goal (for the housing to be valued by the community), and an output (x number of apartments to be built). Each level of purpose influenced which information became valuable to the leader. The leader sought support from academics, consultants, and government to confirm that the need was real, the goal was achievable, and the output was feasible within constraints (Participant 007).

Researchers (Chambers 2003; Castelfranchi 2016; Reynolds et al. 2020; Bokulich and Parker 2021) have argued that information value is relative to purpose. Bokulich and Parker (2021) note that there is value in having accurate, precise data, and although this is applicable for a broad range of purposes, it may not always be preferable or useful. Data and its value cannot be assessed in isolation (Reynolds et al. 2020). Sometimes, a greater “fitness-for-purpose” can be achieved with “lower-fidelity data” (Bokulich and Parker 2021, p. 31). Researchers, forecasters and evaluators are trained to value high-fidelity, high-accuracy data as a mark of good practice. This creates a tension between professional norms and pragmatic adequacy.

Purpose shapes the value of information, but leaders and information providers both navigate multiple levels of purpose from different vantage points. Leaders move between organisational and community purposes; information providers move between methodological, professional, and disciplinary purposes. To bridge this gap, leaders and information providers must move beyond assumptions and explicitly state their purposes, what they are trying to achieve, and why it matters, so evidence can be matched accordingly.

Pathways

Pathways shape the value of information. How something is done matters when judging its goodness and importance. Participants recognised that the sequence (the order of things), prioritisation (the most important thing), and process (how it is done) shape the value of information and its alignment with existing factors (such as values, principles, and frameworks). Sequence, priorities, and process shape how evidence is perceived.

One participant captures all three elements well in their story about delivering behavioural change programs in a low- to middle-income country. They begin by stating that there is “value from the process” and share that some people may value things like logic frameworks, theories of change or indicators at the level of either outcomes or impact, but that what their team value, “especially in countries like [country], where there's a very developed development space...on the level of process and activity” (Participant 009). They attributed the valuing *process* in part because:

...we're a lower middle income country... so a lot of people have a certain weariness around groups trying to come in and ‘help’ them, many of them have experienced being left, meaning they participated and interviewed, and they never experienced benefits... They're like, we don't want that project, and then the project was essentially forced on them. So, to us, we're very conscious of not replicating that violence. And part of that means you have to be very in tune with the people who are in the space who know the space...to make sure that there's an alignment there (Participant 009).

This highlights valuing relationships first, outcomes second (sequence), that relationships matter (priority), and of relationship-building (process) as one viable pathway.

Another participant (Participant 003) highlighted that the film industry has understood for years the value of editing, that is, deciding what to keep, throw away and in what order to put scenes together, to guide the audience's perception. The participant drew upon a concept in filmmaking called the Kuleshov effect. The Kuleshov effect (Mobbs et al. 2006) concerns how the juxtaposition of images shapes people's interpretation of a story. Viewers construct meaning from the sequence of the images rather than from the images themselves. In the experiment, when the same shot of an actor's neutral face is shown alongside different images (a bowl of soup, a child, a coffin), audiences interpret the actor's expression differently each time, as hunger, joy, or grief, depending on the preceding context, despite the neutral face not changing. The Kuleshov effect shows that meaning is not inherent in individual objects but emerges through their relationship with other images. Sequence shapes perception and value. Just as the Kuleshov effect shows that neutral images gain meaning through juxtaposition, evidence has no fixed universal meaning. The same evidence may be useful or useless depending on what precedes and follows it or on what is prioritised. For leaders and information providers, a persistent tension exists between process and outcome. Leaders often face external pressures such as government directives, board mandates and funding constraints that demand results. Information providers, by contrast, are accountable to professional standards and methodological due diligence, which demand a careful process. Two different pathways to value that create a common frustration. Leaders might see the information providers' valuing process as bureaucratic delay, slow or obstructive. Information providers may see outcome-driven pressure as compromising integrity and reckless. Yet both matter. The challenge is to make visible what each party values and why, so that evidence can serve both rigour and results.

Perspectives and Positionality

Perspectives and Positionality shape information value. Participants recognised that what counted as *good* or *important* varied depending on their roles and responsibilities (perspectives) and their identity and background (positionality). Roles and responsibilities were considered circumstance-driven and fluid, shifting depending on the title or 'hat' one was wearing. These shape the Perspective and Positionality lenses. Perspective is what you value from where you stand. Backgrounds were considered more contextual and stable, rooted in identity, history and power. Positionality is who you are and how that shapes what you value.

Several participants (Participants 001, 004, 005, 009, 014) spoke about how their role provided clarity around what information to value. One participant (005) spoke about how ensuring everyone's voice was heard was critical to their role of providing "natural justice" to the situation as a mediator. Another (009) spoke about how, because other people in their team were responsible for meeting outcomes and the project's financial sustainability, the participant was able to focus on consolidating the research information that mattered.

Positionality revealed deeper challenges. Several participants (Participants 002, 003, 008, 010, 014) spoke about how being from a particular background (ethnic, gender, health status, religious, cultural, professional) allowed them to see value differently. One participant (014) spoke about the challenges of being a woman in the technology field and how this meant that when she was having difficult conversations about the treatment of women or gender-diverse people, it pushed her to ensure she had "strong evidence" to back up her arguments. In their words:

I mean, I always don't like to give information that I can't back up or give a reason why I've landed there...if I'm having difficult conversations about the treatment of women or gender diverse people... it will come with an attached research paper or something similar...I just want to, like, sense-check that what I'm thinking in my experience of the world is reflected in data and in numbers that make sense (Participant 014).

This participant's experience illustrates how positionality shapes evaluative judgement, her own and those of others. Her position as a woman in technology meant that arguments about gender treatment required stronger evidence to be taken seriously. This was not simply a difference in perspective; it reflected a credibility gap rooted in her social position, requiring her to do additional work to be heard. She had to work harder for the same evidence to be valued.

Perspective and positionality also mattered to the receiver when assessing the source of information. One participant, who was a Chairperson and CEO of a not-for-profit (002), when receiving information, expressed a desire to know more about the person providing the information

... you want the person that presented to me...How do they present? Are they confident? Are they cocky? What's my history with that person? Is the person whose

papers I [receive]...trust to be accurate or is this a person who's new to me? ... What's their history in terms of not just competence, but are they somebody who presents things that tend to overpromise and underdeliver? All this kind of comes into my assessments (Participant 002).

From the other side of the whinge, one participant, a strategy and marketing consultant, notes that while companies might state on paper what they are looking for, the actual decision-making process can be influenced by factors like personal preferences, past experiences, or even pre-determined choices, making it challenging for the information provider to align with the leader's true criteria.

Perspective and Positionality are widely discussed in the literature as value-shaping influences. Several theories suggest that individuals tend to view and interpret the world through the lens of, for example, roles (Arieli et al. 2020), frames (Marani et al. 2021) and standpoints (Kezar 2002; Reed 2022). The challenge is that people often carry multiple roles and identities (e.g., leader, employee, community member, shareholder), and the salient role may dictate which goal dominates (Arieli et al. 2020). They may make decisions without realising their identity is driving their choices (Morris et al. 2008). Similarly, positionality can shift depending upon the specific "moment, time or space" a researcher is standing in (Bayeck 2022, p. 1). Without contextualising the researcher and their environment, the meaning of the research output may be lost (Jafar 2018). Leaders, along with researchers, forecasters and evaluators, can have "multiple overlapping identities", making "meaning from various aspects of their identity" (Kezar 2002). Positionality requires some level of "self-reflection" that "considers how one's own opinions, values and actions shape how data is generated, analysed and interpreted" (Rogers et al. 2013).

This multiplicity matters because it affects what information people notice, value, and how they use it. Individuals may interpret evidence differently depending on which identity is most prominent at the moment. Conflicting perspectives can lead to inconsistent decisions, undermining the coherence of evidence use. When people switch identities unconsciously, driven by competing values they may not recognise, this may lead to decisions that seem inconsistent to others and possibly to themselves, even if they believe they are being consistent.

Emotions

Emotions were a theme that underpinned all other lenses, shaping the value of information. Emotions were “driving a lot of what we do” (Participant 015).

Participants reported addressing emotions by absorbing and/or shutting out. Absorbing was framed as: taking in, seeing and hearing all that moves through themselves and a situation. One participant (011) described the process of trying to “absorb” and “take on all of those different things through sights and sounds... gut feel as well your intuition... you can pick up on energy in a room” to inform what you or others value. Shutting out, they described as remaining unmoved, ignoring or suppressing emotions. One participant spoke about both trying to “argue the facts” and take the “emotion out of it,” but also “never diminishing anyone’s emotional reactions” (Participant 006).

Emotions were seen as a window into the implicit, a signal about what matters to people. This was evident in a case involving heritage preservation consultants, where an information provider (Participant 012) described how young consultants often struggle to accept certain evaluation outcomes due to their strong emotions and passion. They explained that these consultants tend to “value everything” and view all aspects of heritage as important, which makes it challenging to determine priorities. When decisions do not align with their expectations, they find it difficult to accept the realities of the decision-making process. Their emotions (sadness, frustration, anger) were signals, revealing what they cared about and what was shaping their judgements.

Several participants acknowledged the emotional pain of making these judgements. They recognised that while making evaluative judgements was a “normal part of business” (Participant 002), they could be difficult and challenging. Reasons included pressure to make the *best*, *right* or *preferred* judgement (Participants 001, 003, 004). One participant, a not-for-profit leader (007), spoke about how people vandalised her property after a judgement was made by their organisation, in which they were the public face. This level of anger was a shock to the leader. Another participant (009), a not-for-profit leader shared, “there were plenty of moments where I was like, Oh, my god, does it have to be this hard? ...those feelings of am I making the right decisions...or am I so completely freaking messing this up?”

There is a growing consensus on the importance of understanding emotions (Clore and Huntsinger 2007), often referred to as affect, as they influence information value and vice versa. Affect, through the affect-as-information framework, views emotions as “embodied information” about “value and importance” (Storbeck and Clore 2008, p. 1824)(p. 1824), influencing what users see, seek and deem of value. Research suggests that humans make evaluative judgements by asking ourselves, “How do I feel about it?” On the other hand, information itself has emotional properties such as valence (good/bad) and arousal (intensity) that directly influence how people process and respond to it . Thus, emotions and information are in an ongoing, dynamic dialogue. Emotions reveal what people value; in turn, information either confirms or challenges what they value. This reciprocal process influences feelings, which then guide the next pieces of information people seek. Emotions are a powerful force in determining what is valuable.

Summary

Our research found six interconnected Lenses of Value related to good/useful evidence: Time and Temporality, Situatedness, Purpose, Pathways, Perspective and Positionality and Emotions. These lenses make visible what matters in making evidence useful to decision-makers. Together they provide a different frame on what use means and how it can be created and generated for and by different audiences. In the discussion section below, we provide an integrated framework and guiding questions to facilitate use.

Discussion

The whinge, the emotional signal of frustration, is our window into implicit value. Frustration can be a response to a tension of unspoken value, of what we think truly matters. The whinging is not a failure of communication, but a signal, a diagnostic moment, that reveals what we see as information, as evidence, as success, as value itself. Our Lenses of Value makes those implicit values visible. When we explicitly consider our evaluative judgements about what is good and important, we create space for intentional judgements and choices. We presented the lenses above individually for clarity, but they constantly interact, working together to shape how evidence providers and evidence users judge what matters. Figure 2 illustrates these reciprocal relationships, how each lens both constrains and activates the others. For example, *Purpose* can activate which *Perspective* and *Positionality* become salient. *Perspective* and *Positionality* can shape which *Purpose* feels legitimate and achievable. *Pathways* determine what is desired while being shaped by what the *situation* makes possible. *Situatedness*

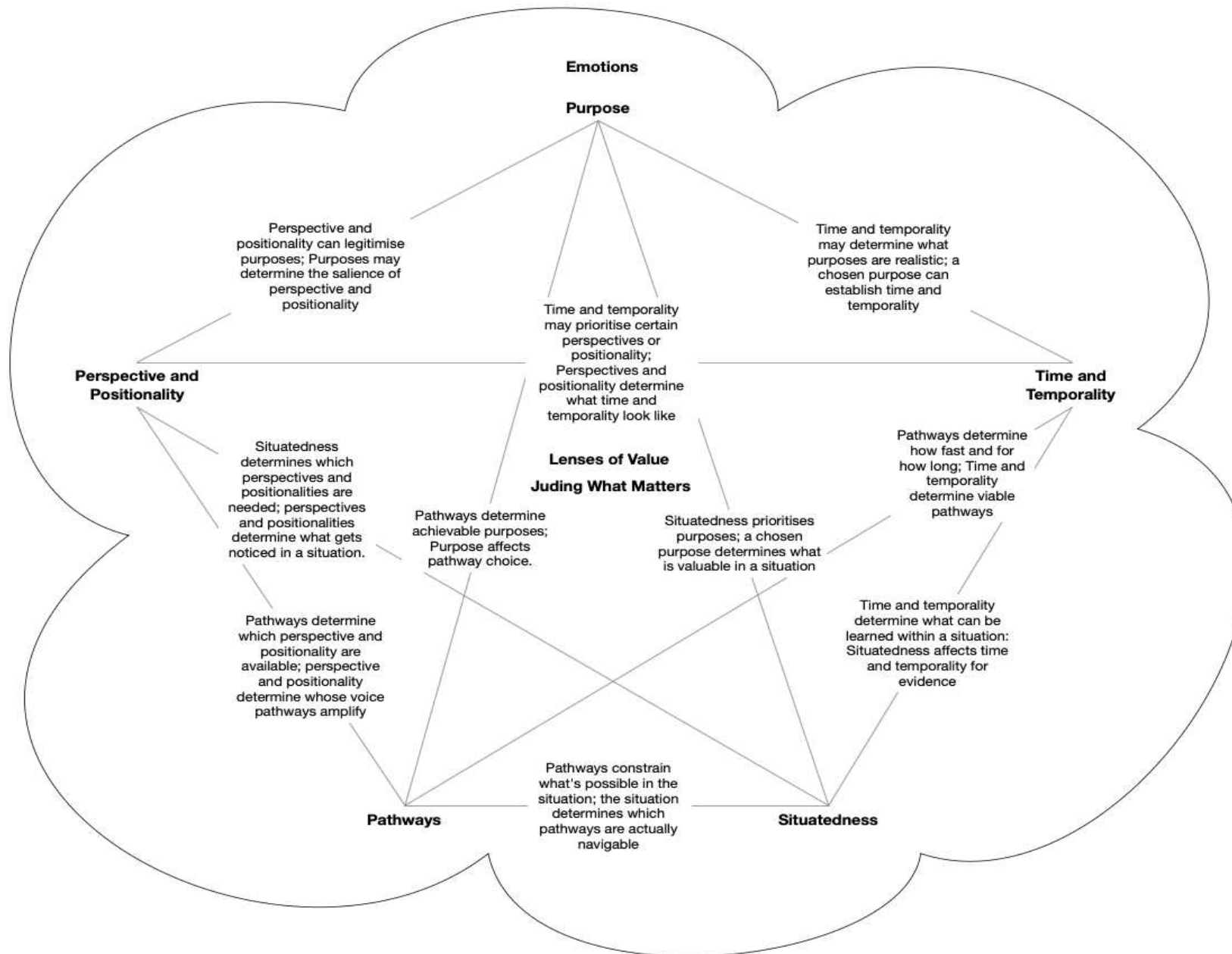
constrains what is navigable while revealing what matters through the lens of *Purpose*. *Time and Temporality* set what is realistic, but *Perspective and Positionality* may shape how time and temporality are experienced. *Emotions*, are in constant dialogue with each lens shaping value and being shaped by value. No single lens operates in isolation. Instead, they form a dynamic system in which changing one lens inevitably alters how others function. Understanding value requires attending to how these lenses interact.

Just as different evaluation governance designs will steer evaluation functions (Kupiec et al. 2023), the attentiveness of different lenses will steer what we count as *good* or *important* evidence. Leaders, decision-makers and information providers can use this framework to diagnose why evidence may not be landing or why decisions feel stuck. By asking questions such as which lens is active or which lens is constraining the others right now, we may be able to navigate towards better use of evidence. Below is an example of how we might put these lenses into practice.

Framework Application: What is the most useful evidence in a crisis?

In a crisis, the context can be the starting point (Situatenedness). A pandemic or natural disaster forces us to ask, “In this situation, what evidence really matters?” The situation imposes tight timeframes (Time and Temporality), making evidence important contingent upon speed. Information that arrives late may become useless. The tight timeframes shape what processes are viable (Pathways). Methods like extensive community consultation are infeasible, forcing decision-makers to look to experts and existing research rather than new commissions. Tools like living systematic reviews become essential. Feelings can run high in a crisis (Emotions), fear, grief and anger swell, revealing what people actually value and what is at stake. Many voices, particularly the communities impacted, will demand to be heard. Those with prior experience of similar crises carry both knowledge and evidence that decision-makers need (Purpose). Their views (Perspective and Positionality) shape not only what evidence matters, but what evidence is available. Communities become both evidence-holders and evidence-shapers. The challenge is that speed demands expertise and existing knowledge, yet the most relevant knowledge often lives in communities whose voices are hardest to access quickly and whose emotions are signalling what matters.

Figure 2. Lenses of Value



From this brief example, by considering each lens, we are making the implicit explicit. We are surfacing evaluative judgements to reveal what matters and why. Transparency of evaluative judgements allows participants to express differing interpretations of the evidence, which may offer alternative courses of action (Finkel 2018). Table 3 provides some questions that can aid in this process. We have taken one relational aspect, *Perspective* and *Positionality* and provided examples of questions that explore this relationship.

Table 3. Starting from Perspective and Positionality: Questions to make the implicit explicit

Lense of Value	Sub-sections	Guiding Questions	
Time and Temporality	Timing, Time Horizon	Time, Temporality	How fast ? How long?
		Time x Perspective	Whose timing matters?
Situatedness	Place, Space, Circumstance, Context	Place, Space, Circumstance, Context	Where are we? Where is there room? What's the immediate situation? What's the big picture?
		Situatedness x Perspective	Whose place matters? Whose circumstance matters?
Perspective and Positionality	Roles, Responsibilities, Identity, Background	Perspective and Positionality	Who matters the most? Does a particular view matter more?
Purpose	Goals, Needs, Outputs	Purpose	What are we aiming for? What do we need? What should we produce?
		Purpose x Perspective	Whose goals an outputs matter? Whose needs matter?
Pathways	Sequence, Priority, Process	Pathways	What's most important to attended to in what order, and how?
		Pathways x Perspective	Whose process matters more?
Emotions	Absorbing, Shutting Out	Emotions	Do emotions tell us something about what matters?
		Emotions x Perspective	Whose feelings matter?

It was never about the apples

The apple was never just an apple. It has always been laden with evaluative judgements from the humans who use it. When the apple is used in a pie, its characteristics start to matter. The baker is not just making food; she is making memories with her grandmother's recipe. But when the nutritionist says, too much sugar, and the budget holder says it is too expensive, and the

environmentalist asks where the apples come from, the whinge emerges. Not because anyone is wrong, but because different ideas about what matters means different value.

Evidence, like apples, is not value neutral. Its value depends on *who* is asking, *when* they are asking, *what is possible*, *whose perspective matters*, and *what people actually care about*. By making the implicit explicit through these lenses, we reveal the valuing happening beneath the surface. Information providers are offering evidence shaped by their own situatedness, temporality, and pathways, constrained by what is possible, what is urgent, and whose voices they could access. Leaders are asking for evidence filtered through their own purpose, perspective, and emotions, shaped by what they value, what they can act on, and what feels urgent *to them*. We cannot eliminate the tensions in decision-making between speed and quality, or between expertise and lived experience, but we can make those tensions more visible and therefore more addressable. Our Lenses of Value Framework, while a preliminary exploration of these concepts, offers a way to make these tensions visible and navigable.

Appendix

See supplementary attachment.

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Human Ethics Declaration

This project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE23-033). This research is fully compliant with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Research Practice for the Management of Research Data & Primary Records).

Consent to Participate Declaration

Informed consent (written and oral) was obtained from all participants.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare no competing interests.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to the potential for individual privacy to be compromised and were not part of ethics approval.

ⁱ *Strategic* was defined in a very broad practical sense, to refer to something that is future-looking, sets a direction for other activities, has resource implications, and has significant consequences, which are often long-term (greater than 12 months)

ⁱⁱ The study population (i.e., multiple actors) were:

- a) people in not-for-profit leadership positions (leaders)
- b) people who provide information to leaders (information providers) and
- c) people in fields where evaluative judgements are prominent in the literature (experts).

To determine the experts, a literature review was undertaken to reveal the fields where evaluative judgement literature was prominently discussed. These included: Education, Evaluation, Art and Design, Health (Medicine / Nursing), Archaeology, Law, Engineering, Intelligence and Military, Marketing and Journalism.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Appendix2026.07.19NatureHSSCWhingeEvidenceApples.docx](#)