# What's quality got to do with it?

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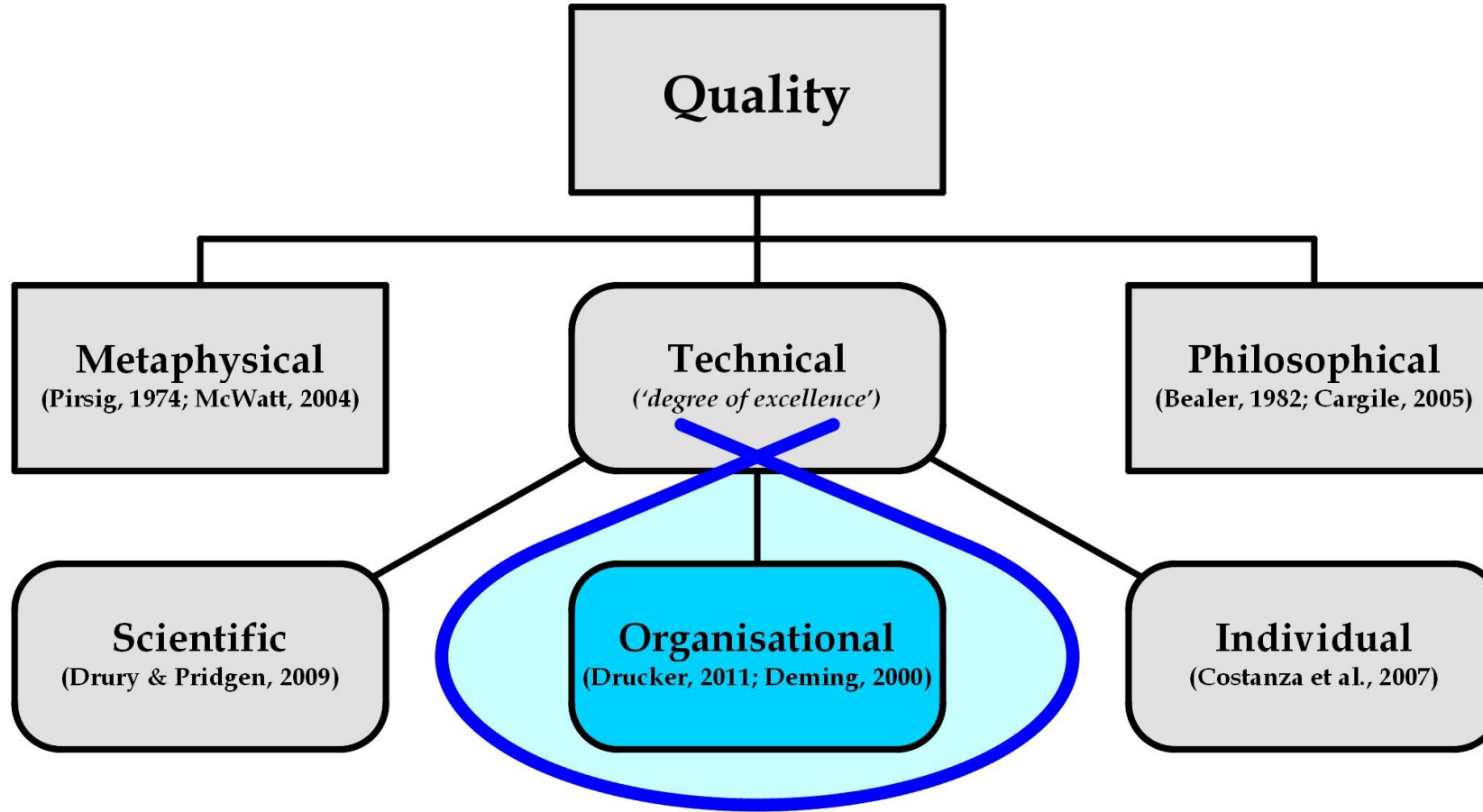
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"Nobody is against quality, so of course everyone is in favour of assuring quality"
*(Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, 1996, p. 3)*

"…who could not want 'good quality'? – unless and until we have to say what we actually mean, at which point it becomes far more elusive"
*(Moss, 1994, p. 1)*

# Locating quality for this research



Source: Boardman (2018)

# What is quality?

➢ Quality is not a new concept
- Quality approaches can be observed in Babylonian, Egyptian, Hebrew and Chinese culture

➢ Definitions of quality are numerous and variable
- Quality is the **degree of excellence** (Webster's Dictionary)
- Quality is **fit for purpose/use** (Juran, 1990)
- Quality is the **consistent conformance to customer expectations** (Basu, 2014)
- Quality is often treated as being subjective ~ e.g. quality is in the eye if the beholder

# Quality is...

➢ ... an **interaction** between normative (prescriptive) and positive (descriptive) perspectives
  - ...the difference between 'what should be done' and 'what is done' (Hoyle, 2007)
  - In practice, these are represented by *expectation* and *achievement*, respectively

➢ ... **constructed** – quality does not exist, per se (Harteloh, 2003)

➢ ... **contextual**
  - Requires a <span style="color:red">**frame of reference**</span> (i.e. some 'boundary').
  - Different 'contexts' of quality – e.g. air quality verses water quality
  - This determines the degree the **objective and/or subjective** assessment

➢ ... **measurable** and/or **describable**

➢ ... **intersubjective** (within an organisational domain)

# Why is quality important?

➢ The inability to meet an 'expectation' means additional work, or re-work, is required.
  - This is an economic cost, hence low quality represents an inefficiency in a system

➢ Quality is intrinsically linked to satisfaction
  - Conceptually different by empirically overlapping (Schneider & White, 2004)
  - Better quality ➤ greater satisfaction
  - Greater satisfaction leads to better support and retention
    - In development, this is important for all project actors

➢ Quality provides real-time assessment of performance
  - Often more appropriate in a monitoring setting

# Quality in development practice

- ➤ Often quality is focused on the 'organisation' or the 'programme'
  - 'Total quality management'
  - Programme/quality standards – often proxy organisational measures
- ➤ Often mixed up with other terminology
  - e.g. 'quality of life' (which is an impact assessment)
- ➤ Quality is less well articulated in the *practice* of development
- ➤ Quality is often treated as being 'secondary'
  - In one study, staff from an international NGO indicated that they "should not be asking questions…about the quality of work; 'We should just be supporting them.'" (Moxham, 2010, p. 348).

# Differentiating quality and…

➢ … '**effectiveness**'
  - effectiveness is too close to 'impact' (Chianca, 2008) or has become an umbrella term for development performance (i.e. Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness')

➢ … '**efficiency**'
  - efficiency is the 'rate of performance'. For example, two project can have same 'result' but may have different efficiencies – e.g. if one was completed faster while the other came in under budget. Often an economic measure.

➢ … '**relevance**'
  - relevance is the appropriateness of the expectation.

➢ … '**sustainability**'
  - quality builds into sustainability. Remember the leaky buildings: poor quality ➔ poor sustainability

# Quality…accountability

➢ Quality and accountability are often treated as similar and 'interchangeable'. However, they "do not automatically go hand-in-hand" (Hilhorst, 2002, p.367)
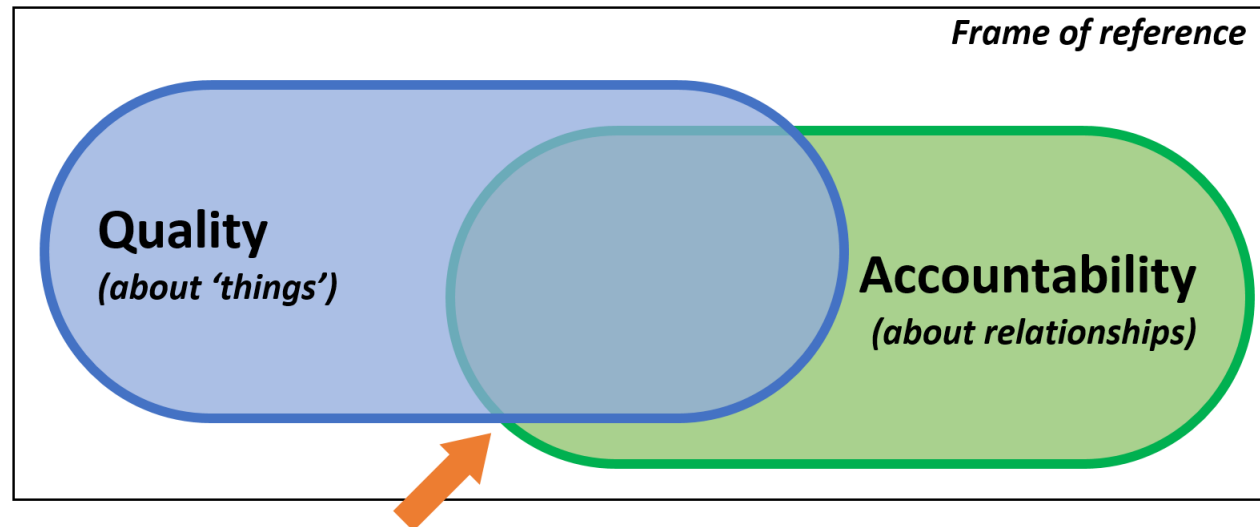


Intersection: Where quality and accountability share the same expectations

# Quality…impact…change…
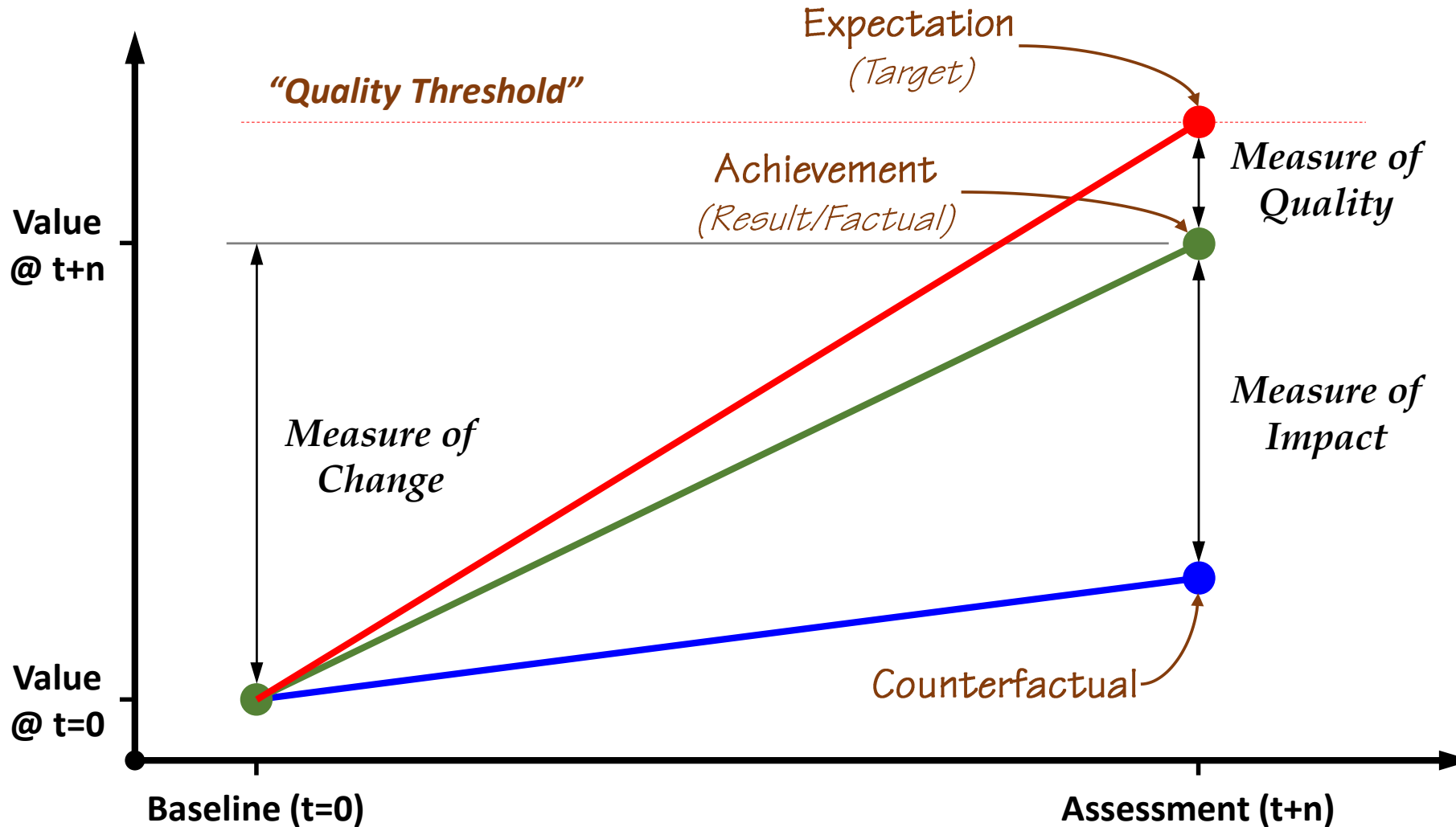
# Quality is practical…

➢ Unlike impact, quality can apply throughout a programme theory
  - Impact is an outcome measure based on the 'cause and effect' relationship of a logic model (or theory of change)
    ➜ *inter-objective performance*
  - Quality is a practice measure based on achieving an expectation
    ➜ *intra-objective performance*
  - Quality provides a pragmatic performance assessment for activities and outputs



Source: Boardman (2018)

# Implications

➢ Quality of practice (especially implementation) is an important measure for development to re-engage with

- Assessment of satisfaction
- Complementary to financial performance (e.g. cost savings)
- Acts as a catalyst to achieving impact

➢ Requires a 'clearer' understanding of terminology and how different terms relate to each other

- This is a perennial challenge in development…
- Quality is 'weakly' defined/articulated in development literature
  - In the OECD glossary on development terms, quality is not defined

# Further research

➢ More empirical research to assess the relationship between impact and quality
  - Pilot testing of modified monitoring tools over a full duration of a project cycle

➢ Greater understanding of implementation is required to ensure an proper assessment of quality

# Questions?

"Quality is never an accident. It is always the result
of intelligent effort"
*(John Ruskin)*

# Selected references

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