Exploring the Evaluation Capacity of Evaluation Commissioners: Learnings from International Development

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Rationale

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Background

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) has focused on the capacity to *do* and *use* evaluation → limited focus on capacity to *commission*

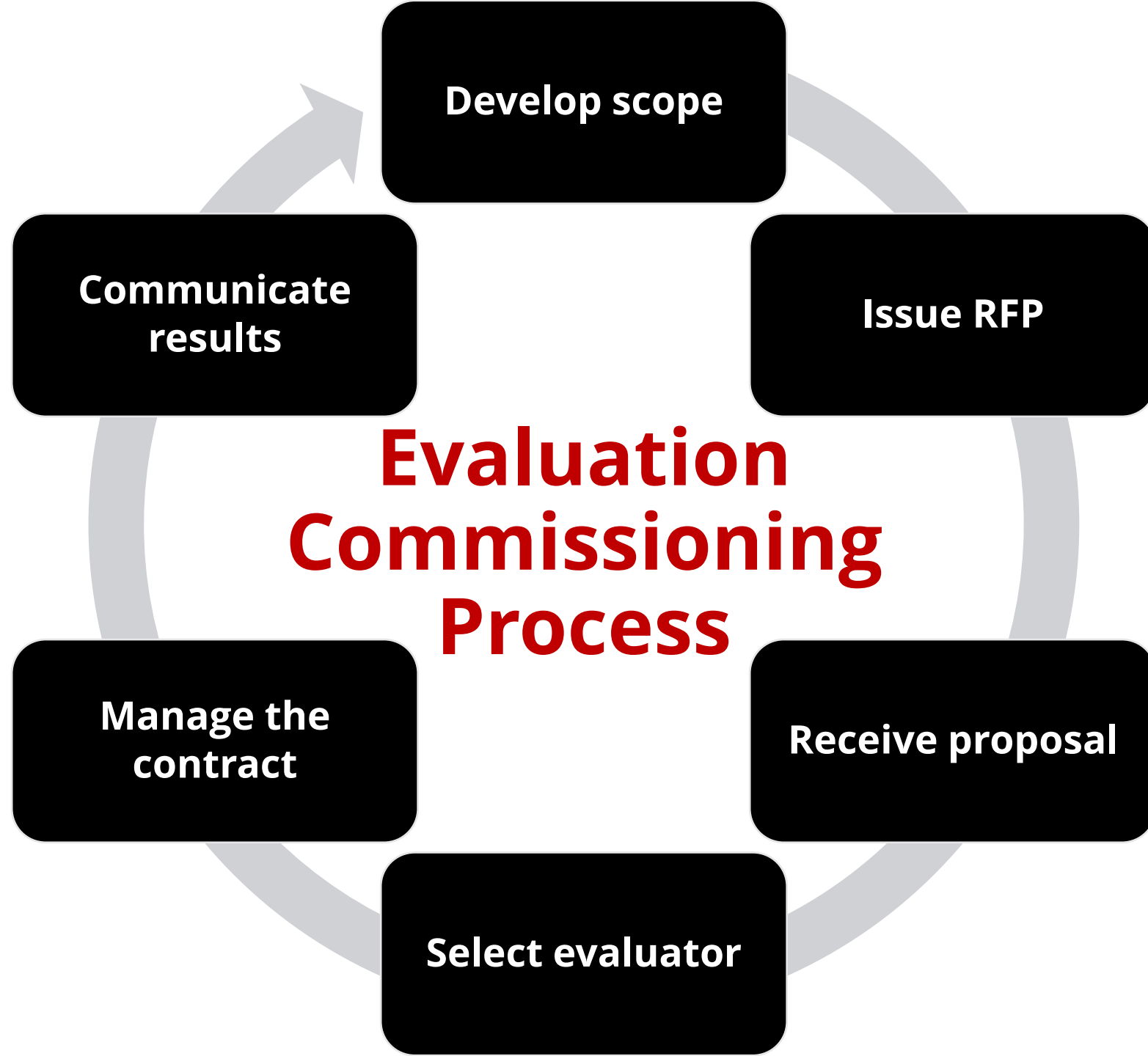Evaluation commissioners generate demand for evaluation

Few evaluation competency sets specify commissioner knowledge & skills

Evaluation is mandated in the international development sector

Little empirical knowledge on the evaluation marketplace in international development

Evaluation Commissioning Process

- Develop scope
- Issue RFP
- Receive proposal
- Select evaluator
- Manage the contract
- Communicate results

Evaluation Commissioners

- Foment demand for evaluation and sustain its practice within an organization

- Individual, organizational, and systemic factors affect evaluation capacity

Systems-level Factors

Organizational-level Factors

Individual-level Factors

Evaluation Commissioner
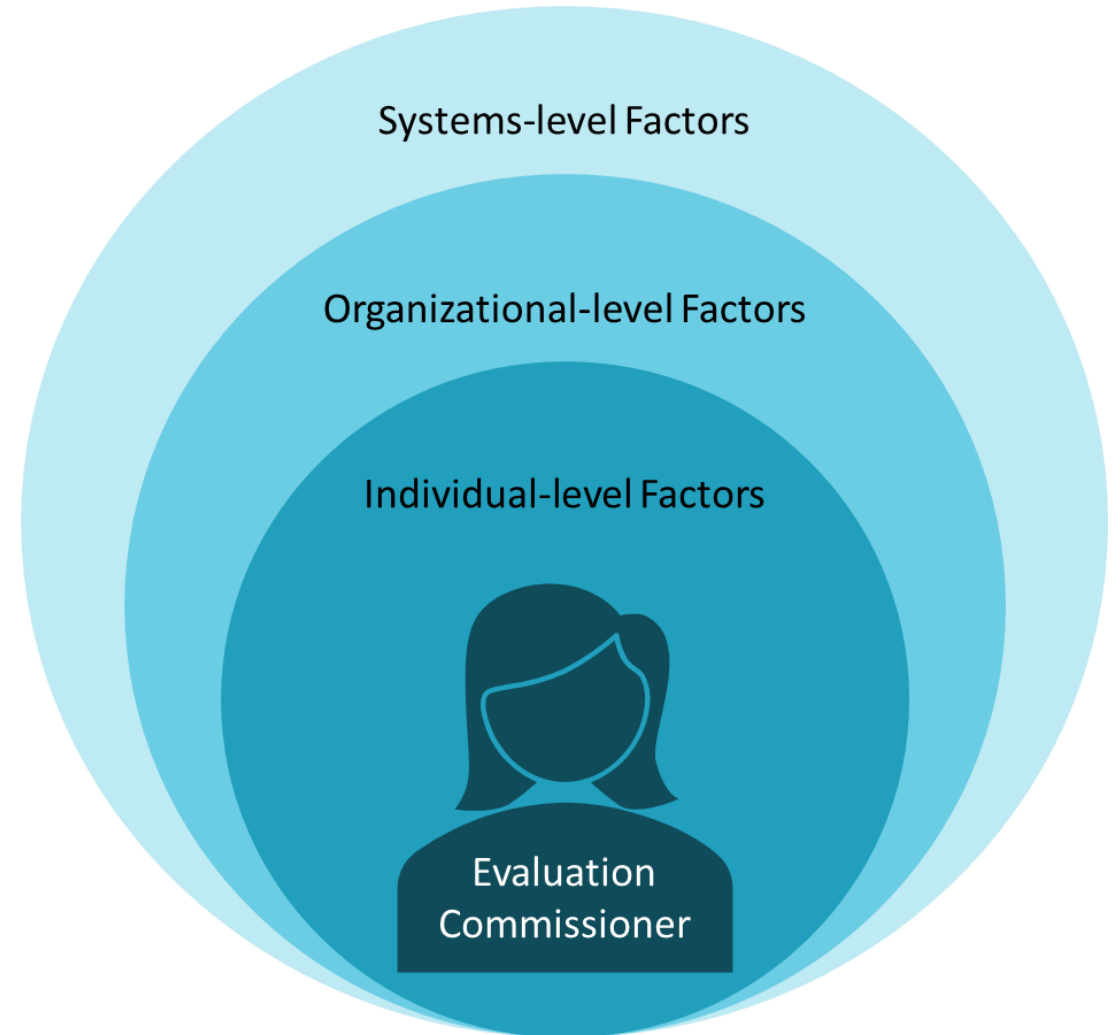
Commissioner Influence on Evaluation

- Commissioners determine "when, how, and why evaluations are carried out" (Lemire et al., 2018, p. 156)

- Specify evaluation theory/approach, design & methods, interest holders to engage

- Determine what evaluator qualifications are prioritized

- Play a role in determining whether evaluation is used
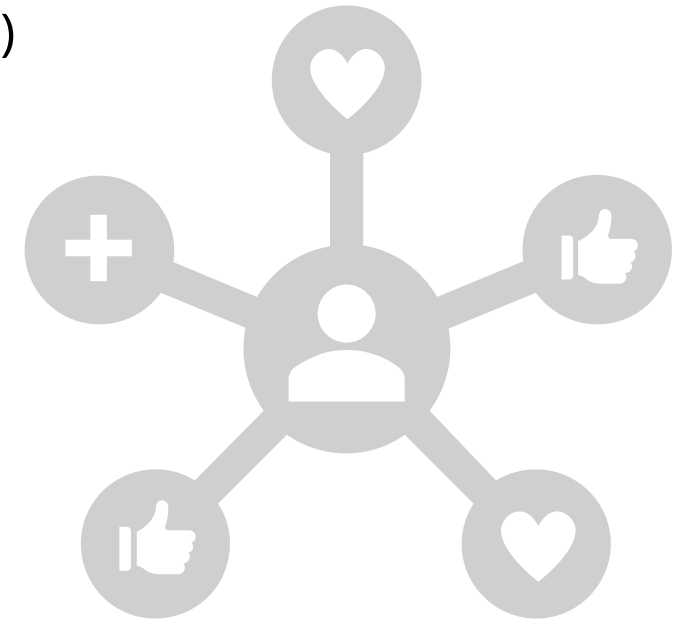
Evaluation in International Development

- Calls to decolonize evaluation posit unlearning & relearning evaluation approaches

- $186 billion of development aid distributed in 2021

- International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) commission a lot of evaluations

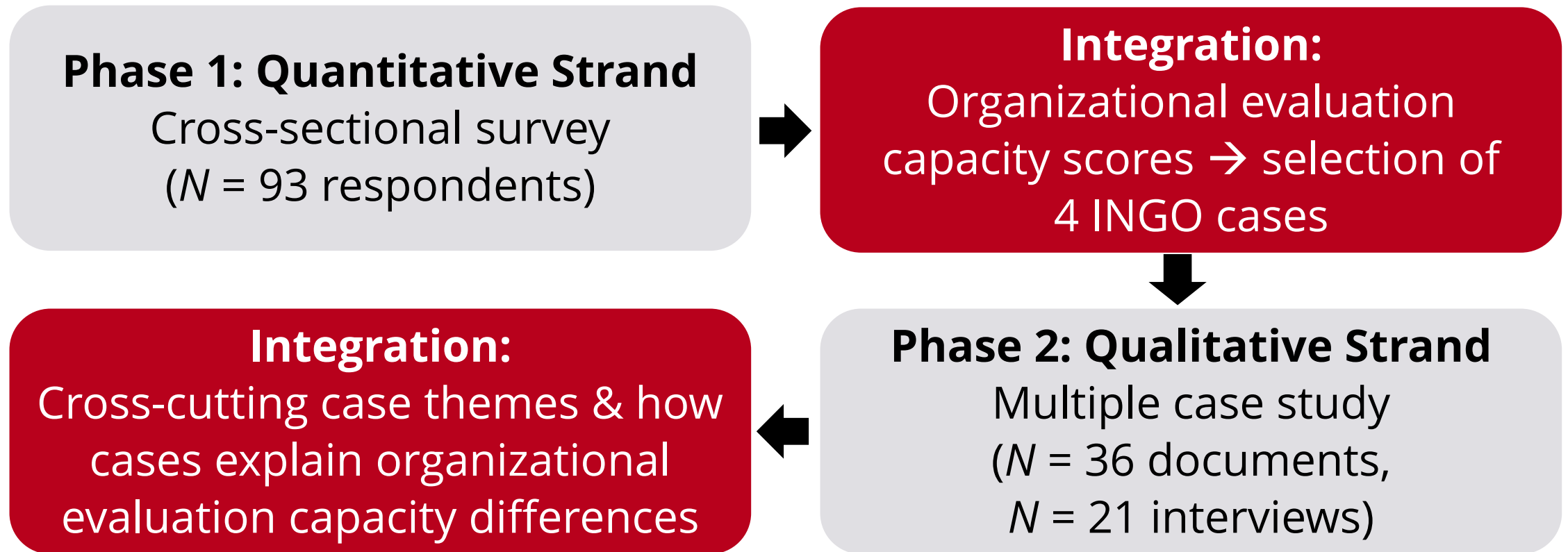- Evaluation for Agenda 2030 shifts toward Global South-led evaluation

Study Purpose & Design

Study Purpose

Investigate INGO evaluation commissioner evaluation capacity

Examine the commissioning process & influential factors

Explore commissioner awareness of & contributions to decolonizing evaluation

Research Design

Explanatory sequential mixed methods

Phase 1: Quantitative Strand
Cross-sectional survey
(*N* = 93 respondents)

→

Integration:
Organizational evaluation capacity scores → selection of 4 INGO cases

↓

Phase 2: Qualitative Strand
Multiple case study
(*N* = 36 documents,
N = 21 interviews)

←

Integration:
Cross-cutting case themes & how cases explain organizational evaluation capacity differences

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Phase 1 – Survey Respondents

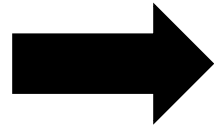76.3% worked in INGO headquarters

10 years commissioning

Most had a master's degree

Integration

Quantitative Survey ➡️ Organizational evaluation capacity (1-5 scale)

- Organizational resources for evaluation
- Organizational use of evaluation

Dichotomized scores

≤3.0 = emerging capacity

>3.0 = high capacity

Criterion sampling

Qualitative Multiple Case Study ➡️ INGO cases (*N* = 4)

- High resources-high use
- High resources-emerging use
- Emerging resources-high use
- Emerging resources-emerging use

Multiple Case Study

High organizational evaluation use

High organizational evaluation resources

Emerging organizational evaluation resources

Case 2 – Head office
INGO head office – Switzerland
Community development

Case 1 – Head office
INGO head office – Uganda
Economic development

Case 4 – Country office
INGO head office – U.S.
Economic development

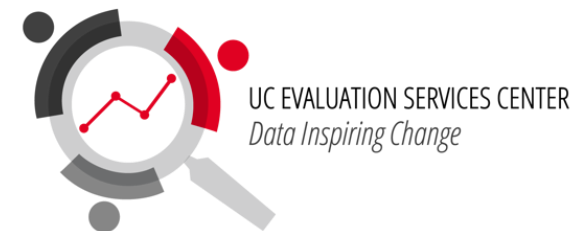**Case 3 – Head office**
INGO head office – Belgium
Public health

Emerging organizational evaluation use

Findings

Individual Level Evaluation Capacity
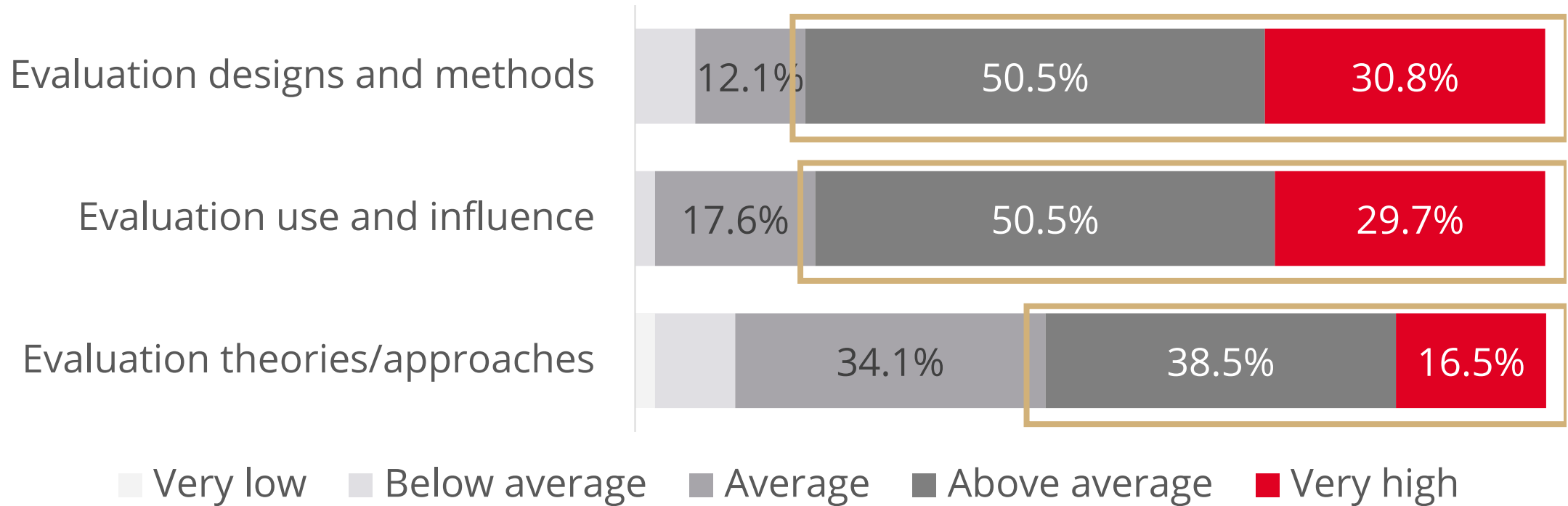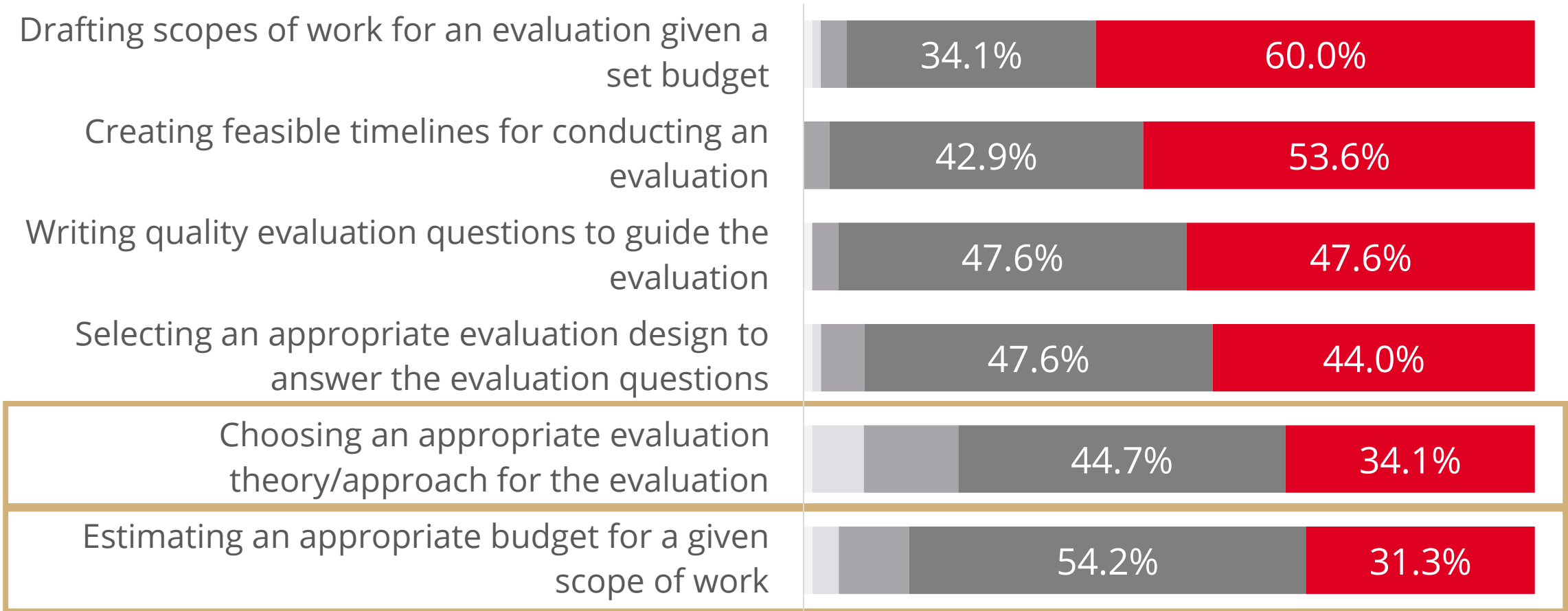
Reported Ways of Learning Evaluation

Method	Percentage
My own practice or experience	78.5%
Evaluation professional development workshops (in-person or online)	64.5%
Observing someone skilled in evaluation	54.8%
Evaluation self-study	51.6%
Evaluation coursework at a university/college	48.4%
Evaluation mentoring or coaching (formal or informal)	41.9%
Another method	11.8%
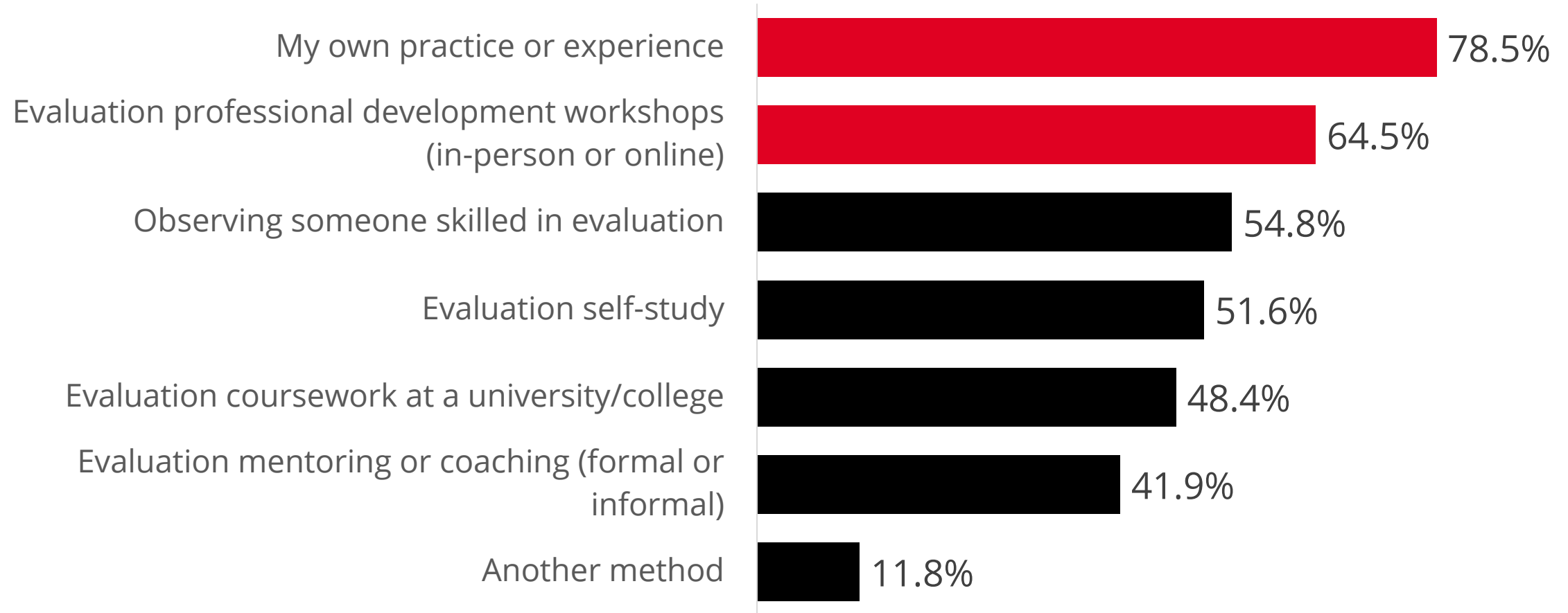
Evaluation Commissioner Individual-level Evaluation Capacity

- Commissioner evaluation capacity
  - High – those with more experience, evaluation-related job responsibilities
  - Emerging – those who manage programs

- Primarily learned evaluation commissioning through experience

- Less knowledgeable of evaluation theories & thus epistemologies

- Interpersonal, communication, facilitation skills are needed
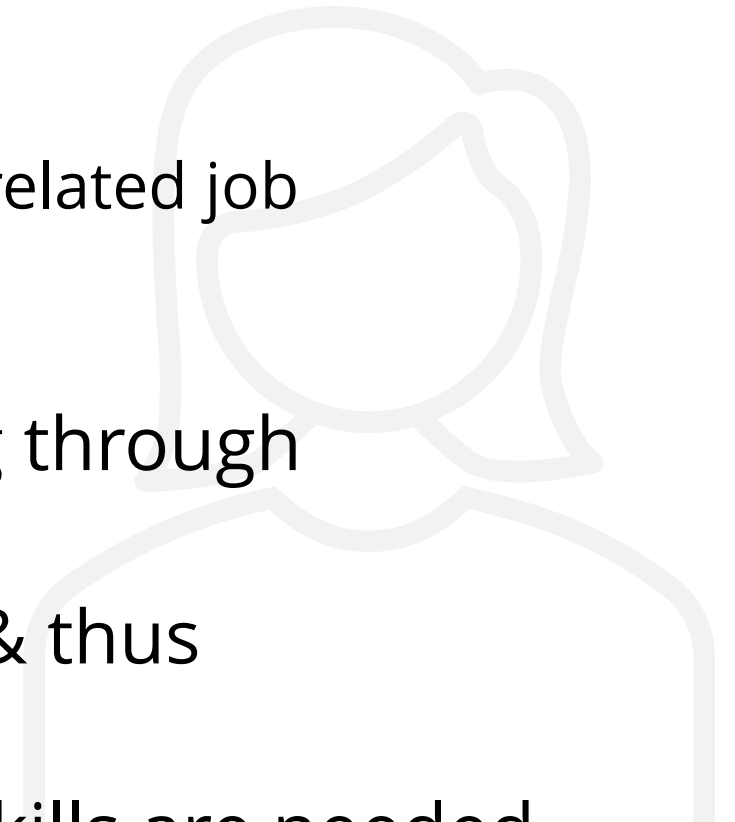
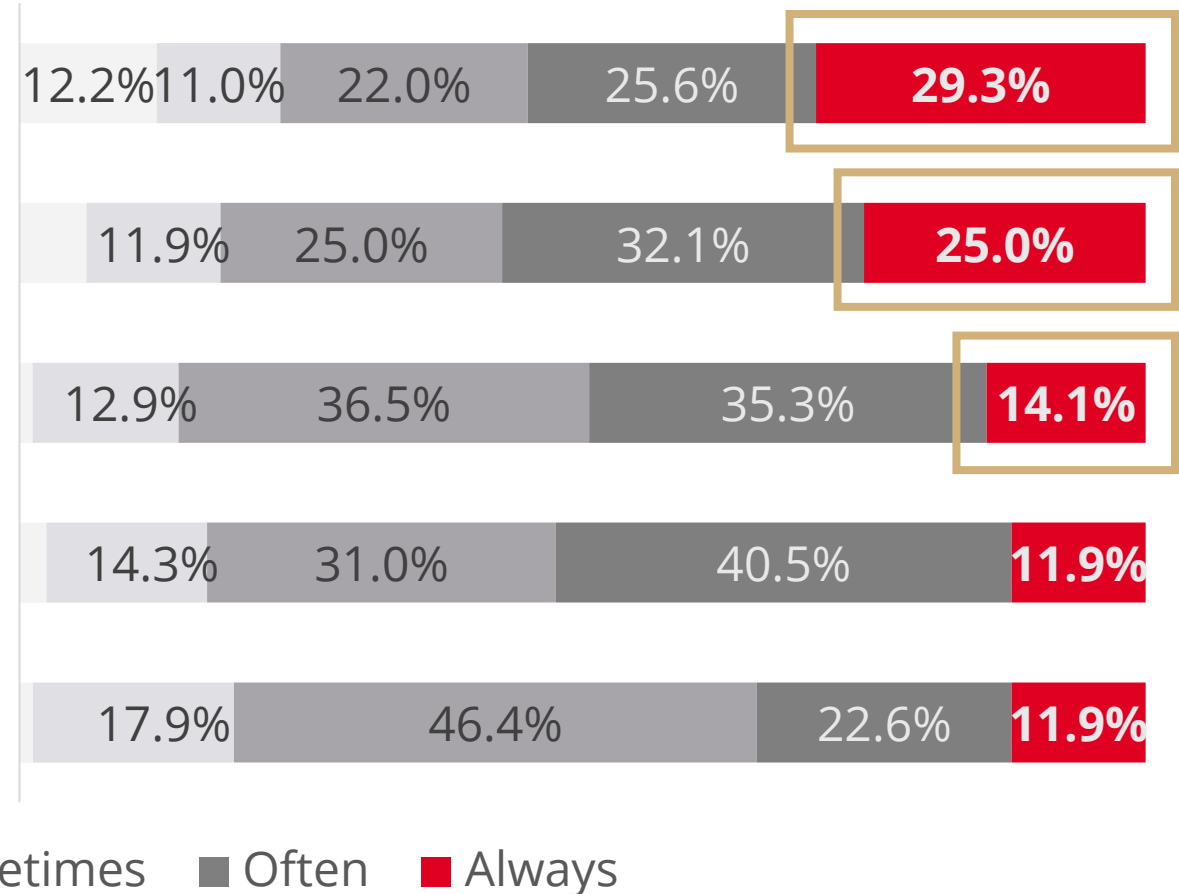# Organizational & Systems Level Evaluation Capacity

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Organizational Resources for Evaluation

The evaluation budget is managed by the unit that commissions evaluations.
12.2% | 11.0% | 22.0% | 25.6% | **29.3%**

Organizational policies and procedures have been established to guide evaluation activities.
11.9% | 25.0% | 32.1% | **25.0%**

Adequate, stable resources are available to complete evaluation projects.
12.9% | 36.5% | 35.3% | **14.1%**

The unit that commissions evaluations has the necessary staff to complete its work.
14.3% | 31.0% | 40.5% | **11.9%**

Funding for new programs includes adequate funding for an evaluation.
17.9% | 46.4% | 22.6% | **11.9%**

■ Never   ■ Rarely   ■ Sometimes   ■ Often   ■ Always

Organizational Use of Evaluation

Evaluation is used to meet accountability requirements. — 4.8% | 22.9% | 39.8% | **31.3%**
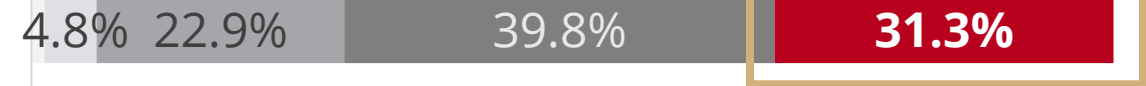
Evaluation reports are disseminated within the organization. — 8.2% | 29.4% | 32.9% | **29.4%**

Evaluation is used to learn about program functioning. — 27.1% | 45.9% | **24.7%**
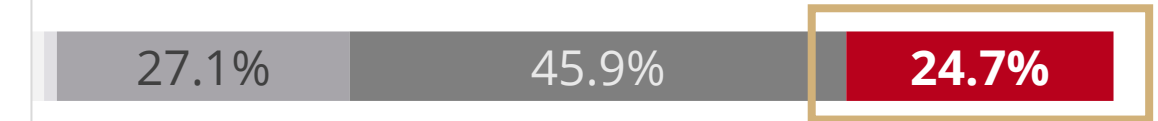
There is demand for evaluation services beyond mandatory requirements (e.g., funding requirements). — 12.0% | 31.3% | 38.6% | **16.9%**

There is demand for evaluation services from all levels of the organization (i.e., from program-level staff up… — 24.4% | 25.6% | 34.1% | **14.6%**

Evaluation findings and recommendations are considered in organizational decisions. — 9.5% | 41.7% | 34.5% | **13.1%**

Legend: Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always

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Commissioner Decision Making & Influential Factors

Organizational factors

- Time
- Funding ➡️ ⭐ Evaluation use enhanced by:
  - Individual evaluation capacity +
  - Organizational culture of learning

⭐ Organizational evaluation capacity moderated by evaluation policy:
  - Prescriptive policy ~ compliance activity
  - Descriptive policy ~ tailoring required

Commissioner Decision Making & Influential Factors
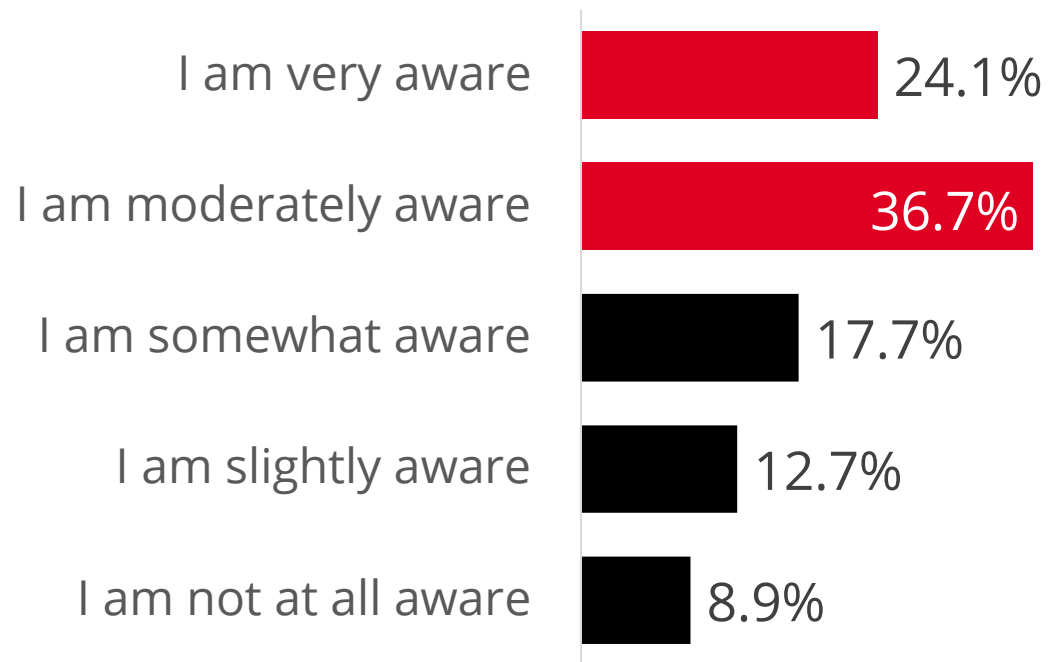
Systems-level factors

- Limited supply of qualified local evaluators

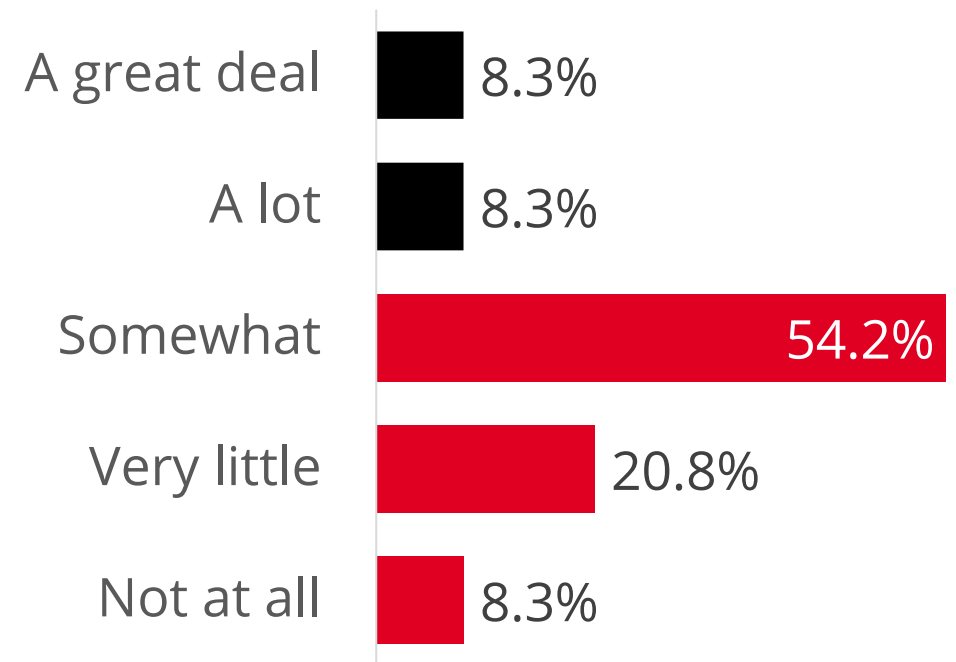- Donor requirements and influence

- Development sector norms

Decolonizing Evaluation

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Decolonizing Evaluation & Commissioning

Mixed awareness of calls to decolonize evaluation

Ways of contributing to calls:
- Collaborative/participatory approaches
- Engaging local interest holders
- Hiring local evaluators
- Using localized methodologies and reporting formats

Implications

Implications for Practice

Opportunity to enhance evaluation training *by function*

Need for discussion on how ontology, epistemology, & axiology shape evaluation practice

Strengthen individual evaluation capacity through organizational supports

Limitations

✓ Limited perspective on commissioning in the Global South

✓ Phase 1
  - Limited commissioner experience
  - Non-probability sample

✓ Phase 2
  - Limited perspectives (e.g., commissioners, evaluators, supervisors)
  - Excluded perspectives (e.g., donors, participants)

The Evaluation Ecosystem
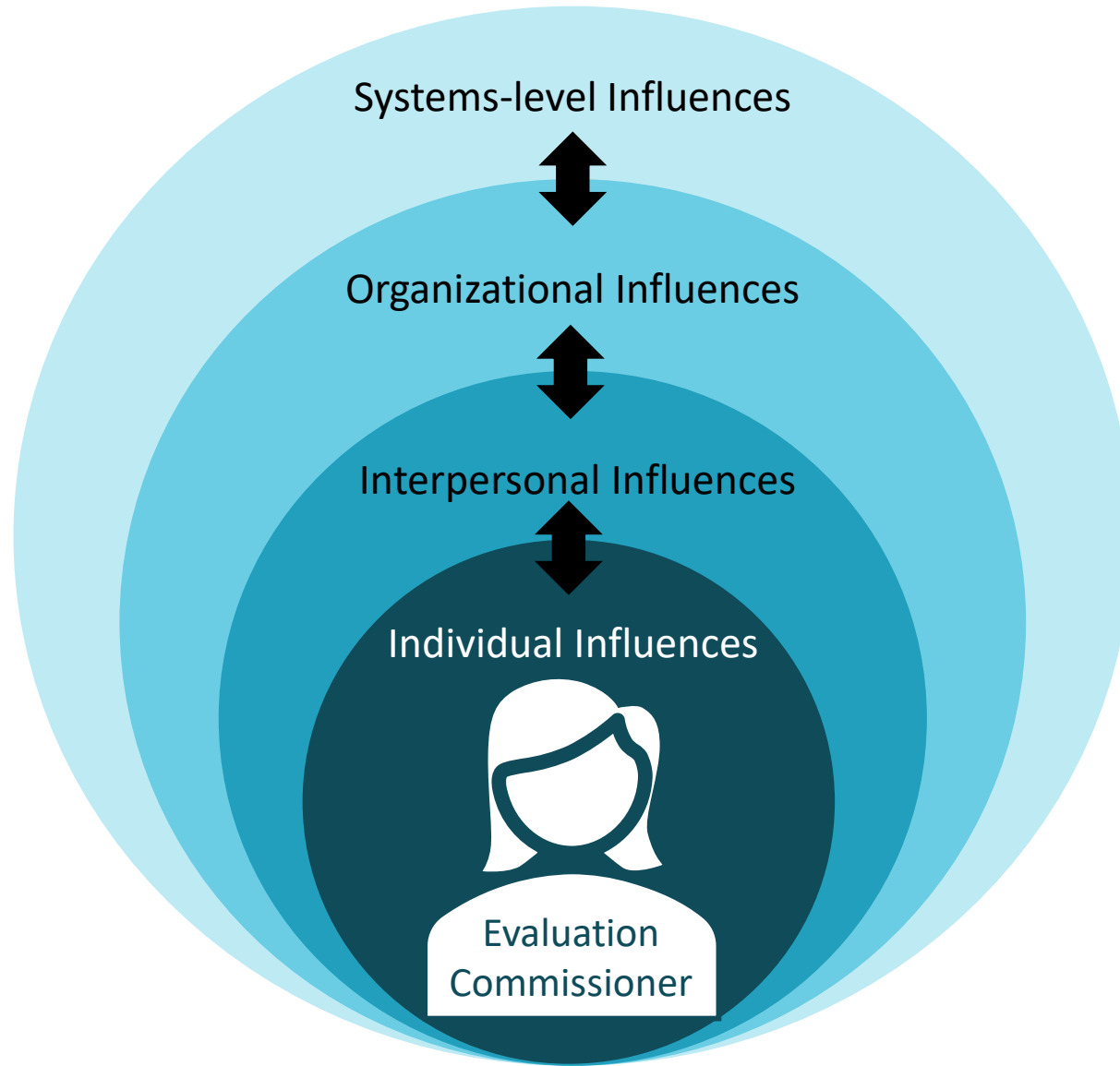
Thank you!

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