

Unpacking the openness of open evaluations

A conceptual contribution

Fteval conference „Open Evaluation“
25 November 2016

Background

Argument of the paper

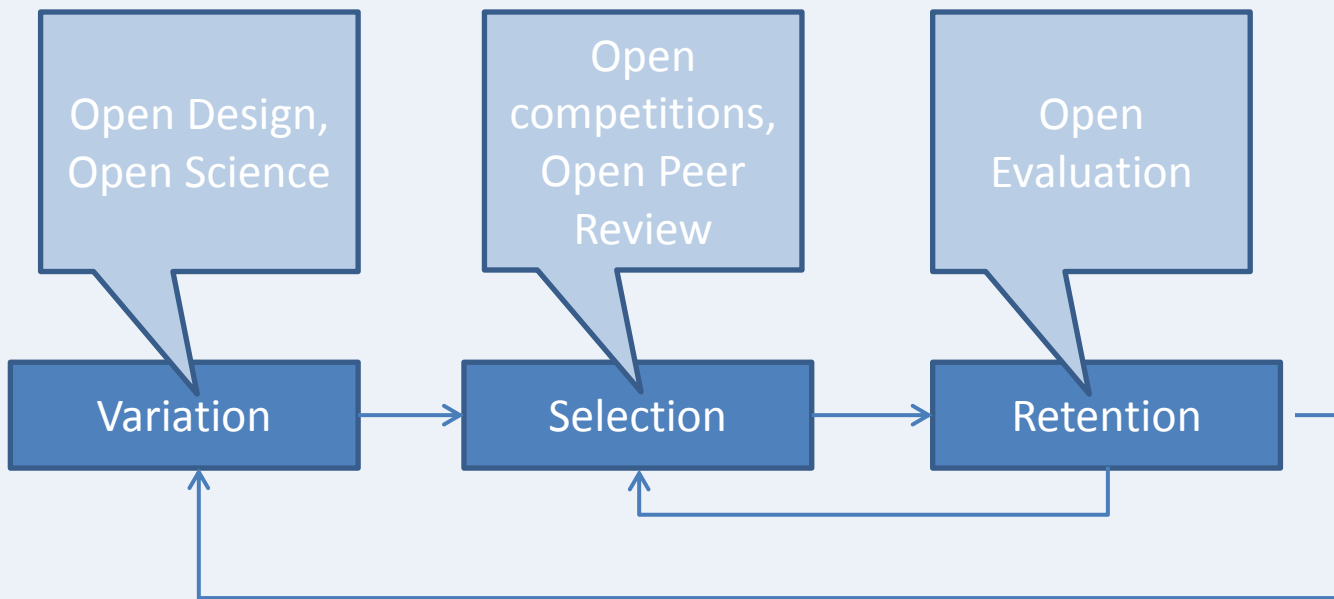
- Openness is increasingly becoming a guiding principle of a variety of knowledge-intensive production and related evaluation activities
- Openness is incorporated into knowledge processes at different stages and in different ways
- Seeing these knowledge processes in an evolutionary perspective helps to understand the functions assigned to or expected from openness
- This can inform a more nuanced understanding of the potentials and challenges of open evaluation.

An evolutionary perspective

Evolutionary processes require three mechanisms (Weick 1979):

- A mechanism generating **variation**
 - A **selection** mechanism
 - A **retention** mechanism
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- **Evolution** can be seen as a knowledge process (Campbell 1988) → evolution as fundamental for learning
 - **Evaluation** as formalising and organising an evolutionary knowledge process, especially with regard to ‚retention‘ and ‚selection‘
 - Openness as potentially modifying the evolutionary knowledge process at all stages (eg. increasing variation, etc)

Evolution, evaluation and openness



Open design and open science

Maker movement/rapid prototyping/open design stands for

- democratised production, do-it-yourself spirit

Open science stands for

- tapping into knowledge (and other resources) of ‚laypersons‘
- producing different kinds of knowledge
- more widely ccessible knowledge
- Etc.
- → **variation**

Open design competitions

Open design competitions as ,evaluations‘ identifying the best solution for a specific purpose in a formalised way → **selection**

Design competitions as a way to move beyond peer2peer ratings

- Evaluation results are accessible openly, procedures are not
- Possible tensions between communities and sponsors (if there is disagreement with regard to the evaluation criteria)



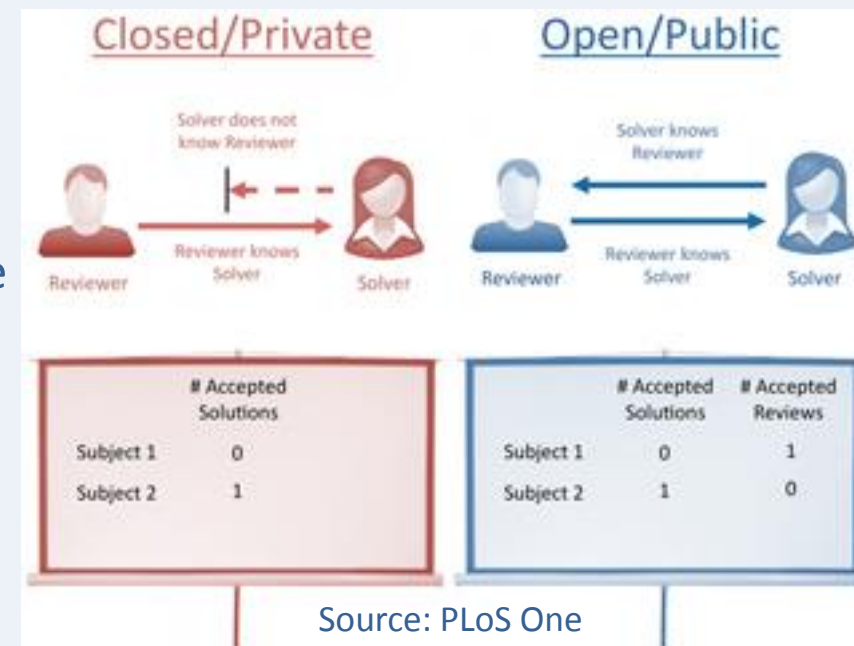
Open peer review

Academic publishing provides access to knowledge and a quality review/evaluation of scientific outcomes → **selection**

double blind peer review as the standard; criticised as: non-transparent, arbitrary, slow

→ **Selection through open peer review...**

- resonates with ideas of public participation in science
- with recent discussions on open science
- Brings openness into the selection mechanisms of scientific communities
- Non-anonymous review != community peer review



Open evaluation – current discussions

Open evaluation...

- New term, no widely accepted definition
- Alluding to: open science, open innovation, etc. (new and better flows of knowledge; getting new kinds of knowledge into perspective, etc)

Haller (2013) defines open evaluation as *„the integration of stakeholders outside the usual group of decision-makers into the assessment of pre-developmental products or services by means of IT-supported acquisition, aggregation and assimilation of quantitative or qualitative judgments“*

- Definition emphasises inflow of knowledge, does not conceptualise possible outflow of knowledge
- Open process does not necessarily mean open results

Open evaluation in practice

Definitions of evaluation typically:

- stress that evaluations are systematic and aim for objectivity;
- depend on subject matter (science policy, product development, labour market...)

and distinguish:

- project, programme, institutional and policy evaluation
- ex ante, interim and ex post evaluations

Currently, openness is most present in variation and selection

Rationales for openness

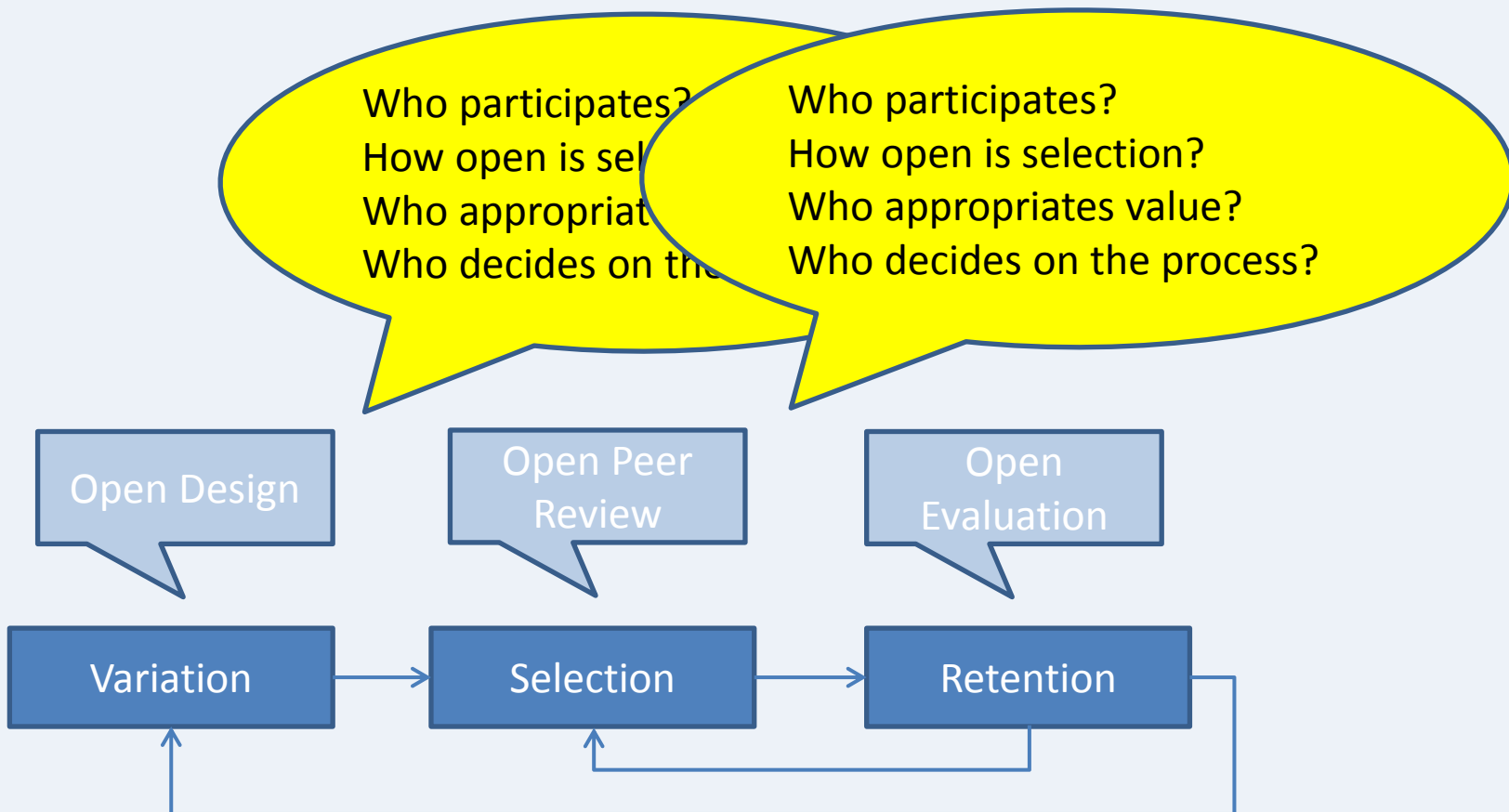
Rationales for openness in evaluations at retention stage include:

- Participatory and democratic logic of inclusion (more transparent and democratic evaluations)
- Logic of rapid technical or functional optimisation (crowds producing ‚better‘ evaluations)
- The logic of a resource economy or frugality (open evaluations as ‚cheaper‘ evaluations)

→ Can sometimes be combined, but not necessarily without frictions

→ Frictions can occur at all levels of the evolutionary knowledge process

Evolution and openness



Frictions/challenges

- Openness does not necessarily imply inclusiveness (Who participates? Possible network effects and related biases, sponsor's dominance, time constraints, etc)
- Openness leads to new questions on how to ensure and organise closure
- Openness between a democratic, participatory and empowering impetus and the appropriation of value created by voluntary labour in hybrid modes of work (exploitation of self-administered discipline)

Conclusions

We see a lot of experiments with different types and degrees of openness in knowledge processes, not necessarily at retention stage.

- Policy uses ‚openness‘ as a positively connotated buzzword
- What openness means in evaluations has to be qualified...
- and a maximum of openness is not always the best solution

Conclusions

→ Prospects for open evaluation:

- Co-production of theory-driven evaluations by experts (providing expertise) and lay-people (possibly providing experience)?
- Open evaluations as an extension of participatory evaluations? In the sense of: practitioner controlled, including all legitimate groups, deep participation instead of consultation...
- Openness as functional in
 - making impact pathways explicit?
 - validating metrics/indicators?
 - the performative aspects of evaluations: offering learning?
 - assessing broader societal impacts?

Thank you!

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