On-line e-Learning programme on:

EQUITY-FOCUSED EVALUATIONS

READING MATERIAL

Unit: How to evaluate equity-focused and gender-responsive interventions in complex dynamic environments

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DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION FOR EQUITY-FOCUSED EVALUATIONS

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Developmental evaluation supports innovative intervention *development* to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments (Patton, 2011b). Developmental evaluation is *utilization-focused* (Patton, 2011b) in that it focuses on a specific intended use – development – for specific intended users: social innovators adapting their interventions in complex dynamic environments. Evaluation for equity and the fostering of human rights, as part of achieving meaningful development results, often occurs in complex adaptive systems. A complex system is characterized by a large number of interacting and interdependent elements in which there is no central control. Complex environments for social interventions and innovations are those in which what needs to be done to solve problems is uncertain, where key stakeholders are in conflict about how to proceed. This is typically the situation when fostering human rights. What has worked in one place may not work in another. Context matters. Variations in culture, politics, resources, capacity, and history will affect how development initiatives unfold and how attention to equity and human rights is incorporated into those initiatives. In such situations, informed by systems thinking and a sensitivity to complex nonlinear dynamics, developmental evaluation supports increased effectiveness of interventions, social innovation, adaptive management, and ongoing learning.

The developmental evaluator is often part of a development team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in a long-term, on-going process of continuous development, adaptation, and experimentation, keenly sensitive to unintended results and side effects. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to infuse team discussions with evaluative questions, thinking, and data, and to facilitate systematic data-based reflection and real-time decision-making in the developmental process.

Improvements versus Developments

There are many approaches to evaluation. Each, including developmental evaluation (DE), fulfills a specific purpose and adds a particular kind of value. As noted above, DE has proven especially relevant and

attractive to those interested in systems change and social innova-
tion in complex dynamic systems. These are systems where peo-
ple are trying to bring about major social change by fighting poverty;
homelessness; inequity; human rights abuses; community and family
violence; and helping people with AIDS, severe disabilities, chronic
diseases, and victims of natural disasters and war. A deep commit-
ment to fostering human rights and supporting equity undergirds
many of these interventions and systems-change initiatives. Canadian
colleagues Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and I have studied
successful social innovations. We reported what we found in a book
entitled *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* (Wesley, Zim-
merman, & Patton, 2006). To be a change agent is to think boldly and
envision grandly. Complexity theory shows that great changes can
emerge from small actions. This involves a belief in the possible, even
the "impossible". Moreover, major social innovations don't follow
a simple linear pathway of change. There are ups and downs, roller
coaster rides along cascades of dynamic interactions, unexpected and
unanticipated divergences, tipping points and critical mass momen-
tum shifts, and things often get worse before they get better as sys-
tems change creates resistance to and pushback against the new.

Traditional evaluation approaches are not well-suited for such turbu-
lence. Traditional evaluation aims to control and predict, bring order
to chaos, by carefully specifying and measuring fidelity of imple-
mentation and attainment of predetermined priority outcomes. In
contrast, developmental evaluation accepts turbulence and uncer-
tainty as the way of the world, as social innovation unfolds in the
face of complexity. Developmental evaluation adapts to the realities
of complex non-linear dynamics rather than trying to impose order
and certainty on a disorderly and uncertain world. DE does this by
tracking and documenting emergent and dynamic implementation
adaptations and results.

Many of those working to foster human rights tell me that they have
experienced evaluation methods that are entirely unrelated to the
nature of their initiatives. Identifying clear, specific, and measurable
outcomes at the very start of an innovative project, for example,
may not only be difficult but also counter-productive. Under condi-
tions of great uncertainty, outcomes can emerge through engage-
ment, as part of the process for change rather than prior to such
change efforts. So-called "SMART objectives,"[1] imposed prema-
turely, are not smart – and can, in fact, do harm by limiting respon-

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1   SMART objectives: specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, timely

siveness and adaptability. Developmental evaluation is designed to be congruent with, and to nurture developmental, emergent, innovative, and transformative processes.

Developmental evaluation and Complexity theory

Complexity as a construct is a broad tapestry that weaves together several threads relevant to innovation and evaluation: non-linearity; emergence; dynamic systems; adaptiveness; uncertainty; and co-evolutionary processes (Patton, 2011a). Developmental evaluation, likewise, centers on situational sensitivity, responsiveness, and adaptation, and is an approach to evaluation especially appropriate for situations of high uncertainty, where what may and does emerge is relatively unpredictable and uncontrollable. Developmental evaluation tracks and attempts to make sense of what emerges under conditions of complexity, documenting and interpreting the dynamics, interactions, and interdependencies that occur as innovations and systems-change processes unfold.

Complex adaptive systems

Complexity writings are filled with metaphors that try to make complex phenomena understandable to the human brain's hard-wired need for order, meaning, patterns, sense-making, and control, ever feeding our illusion that we know what's going on. We often don't. But the pretense that we do is comforting – and sometimes necessary for some effort at action. So complexity theorists talk of flapping butterfly wings that change weather systems and spawn hurricanes; individual slime molds that remarkably self-organize into organic wholes; ant colonies whose frantic service to the Queen mesmerize us with their collective intelligence; avalanches that reconfigure mountain ecologies; bacteria that *know* the systems of which they are a part without any capacity for self-knowledge; and 'black swans' that appear suddenly and unpredictably to change the world. Complexity science offers insights into the billions of interactions in the global stock market; the spread of disease throughout the world; volatile weather systems; the evolution of species; large scale ecological changes; and the flocking of migrating birds. Complexity theorists explain the rise and fall of civilizations, and the rise and fall of romantic infatuation. That's a lot of territory. It can and should include attention to the rise and fall of evaluations.

Dealing with the unexpected

There is a lot of lip service in evaluation about looking for unanticipated consequences and assessing side effects; in reality, these are typically token elements of evaluation designs and inadequately budgeted, which are rarely given serious time and attention because of the overwhelming focus on measuring attainment of intended outcomes and tracking the preconceived performance indicators. You have to go out into the real world, do fieldwork, engage in open inquiry, talk to participants in programmes, and observe what is going on as interventions and innovations unfold to detect unanticipated consequences. I find that evaluators typically approach the unexpected and unanticipated in a casual and low-priority way, essentially saying, we'll look for unanticipated consequences and emergent outcomes if we have time and resources after everything else is done. But, of course, there seldom is time or resources. But the probabilities for unexpected impacts become quite high under conditions of complexity and so, developmental evaluators make expecting the unexpected fundamental to the work at hand.

Developmental Evaluation and learning

Developmental evaluation supports learning to inform action that makes a difference. This often means changing systems, which involves getting beyond surface learning to a deeper understandings of what is happening in a system. Social innovators and social entrepreneurs, especially those working on issues of human rights and equity, are typically trying to bring about fundamental changes in systems, to change the world. To do so, they have to understand how the system they want to change is operating and to make the changes that change the system itself, by getting beyond temporary and surface solutions. This involves *double-loop learning*.

For decades three stories have been endlessly repeated: one about the stream of ambulances at the bottom of the cliff instead of building fences at the top; one about the numerous dead bodies coming down the river but all we do is build more impressive services for fishing them out; and one about giving someone a fish versus the value of teaching that person how to fish. In reviewing these stories, distinguished Australian action research scholar and practitioner Yolande Wadsworth (2011), has commented that they are reminders about our repeated tendency to go for the short-term quick fix (rather than to examine, come to understand, and take action to change how a system is functioning), that creates the very

problems being addressed. Double-loop learning involves systemic solutions and is supported by evaluation attuned to looking for system explanations, and offering systemic insights.

In single-loop learning, people modify their actions as they evaluate the difference between desired and actual outcomes, and make changes to increase attainment of desired outcomes. In essence, a problem-detection-and-correction process, like formative evaluation, is *single-loop* learning. In double-loop learning, those involved go beyond the single loop of identifying the problem and finding a solution to a second loop that involves questioning the assumptions, policies, practices, values, and system dynamics that led to the problem in the first place, and then intervening in ways that involve the modification of underlying system relationships and functioning. Making changes to improve immediate outcomes is single loop learning; making changes to the system to prevent the problem or embed the solution in a changed system, involves double-loop learning. *Triple-loop learning* involves learning how to learn, and is embedded in the processes of developmental evaluation.

Developmental Evaluation in the context of Development Evaluation

Developmental evaluation is easily confused with development evaluation. They are not the same, though developmental evaluation can be used in development evaluations.

Development evaluation is a generic term for evaluations conducted in developing countries, usually focused on the effectiveness of international aid programmes and agencies. *The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Development Evaluations* (Imas and Rist, 2009) is an exemplar of this genre, a book based on The World Bank's highly successful International Programme for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) which the book's authors founded and direct, and on which their book is based.

Developmental evaluation, as defined and described in the *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* (Mathison, 2005, p.116), has the purpose of helping develop an innovation, intervention, programme, or systems change. The evaluator uses evaluative methods to facilitate ongoing programme, project, product, staff and/or organizational *development*. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to facilitate and elucidate team discussions by infusing evaluative questions, data and logic, and to support data-based decision-making in the developmental process.

An evaluation focused on development assistance in developing countries could use a developmental evaluation approach, especially if such developmental assistance is viewed as occurring under conditions of complexity with a focus on adaptation to local context. Developmental evaluation can be used wherever social innovators are engaged in bringing about systems change under conditions of complexity.

The '*al*' in *developmental* is easily missed, but it is critical in distinguishing development evaluation from developmental evaluation.

Figure 1: DD^2 = Developmental evaluation
for development evaluation

Development Evaluation DD^2 **Developmental Evaluation**

When I first labeled and wrote about *developmental evaluation* 15 years ago (Patton, 1994), development evaluation was not a distinct and visible category of evaluation practice and scholarship. Evaluations in developing countries were certainly being conducted, but an identifiable body of literature focused on evaluating development assistance had not attracted general professional attention. One of the most important trends of the last decade has been the rapid diffusion of evaluation throughout the world including, especially, the developing world, as highlighted by formation of the International Development Evaluation Association. Confusion about the distinct and sometimes overlapping niches of development evaluation and developmental evaluation is now, I am afraid, part of the complex landscape of international evaluation. I hope that this chapter helps to sort out both the distinctions and the areas of overlap.

Examples of developmental evaluation in development contexts

• Working with agricultural scientists to take an integrated systems approach to 'orphan crops' would involve working with agronomists; soil scientists; plant breeders; water specialists; extension personnel; health; nutrition; gender researchers; and farmers, to conceptualize agricultural innovation as a complex adaptive system and identify real time indicators of the systems interactions and dynamics as the new farming approaches start to affect use of agricultural inputs, production techniques, farm

labour, and farm family dynamics. This kind of holistic intervention involves changes in how traditionally distinct agricultural and nutritional scientists engage with farmers (separately rather than together), and would affect farm family decision-making and interactions.

- A microfinance intervention examined through a developmental evaluation lens would look at the infusion of capital as triggering a leverage point in a complex adaptive system. It would have implications for a variety of business calculation and decisions; interdependencies among loan recipients; relationships with consumers; and family finances and interpersonal dynamics. Watching for and adapting to emergent outcomes beyond simple use of small loan funds would be built into the evaluation design and real time feedback, as the microcredit system developed.

Examples of developmental evaluation in Equity-focused evaluations

Developmental evaluations focusing on the marginalized and excluded populations help to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Here are some examples.

- People living in poverty exist on the edge of subsistence. Sudden changes in food availability can move an entire population from subsistence to famine. Food insecurity can result from weather (severe drought or flood), political unrest (food transport is disrupted), and economic changes (increases in food prices). Sometimes all three factors – weather, political, and economic disruptions – occur simultaneously, creating a mutually reinforcing downward spiral on increasing desperation. Such situations require real time data about what is happening to the people affected and how well-intentioned interventions are actually performing.

- Marginalized and excluded populations are especially susceptible to contagious diseases. For example, polio immunization campaigns have to be adapted to specific development contexts. Where polio eradication efforts have floundered, as in parts of Nigeria, Pakistan, and India, new outbreaks can break-out and spread rapidly in areas where the disease was thought to have been eradicated. For example, a developmental evaluator would help monitor rumors about resistance to a vaccination campaign. Detecting and correcting such rumors in real time, as they emerge, can save lives.

- A human rights campaign anywhere in the world may have to be significantly adapted as street demonstrations calling for democratic reforms in Tunisia and Egypt (2011) change the global context within which human rights initiatives are undertaken. Marginalized, disempowered, and excluded populations can become homeless refugees when political turmoil accelerates and spreads.

- Responding to a humanitarian disaster, such as the earthquake in Haiti (2010), requires real time data about how local pockets of people are being affected; which roads are passable; where heavy rains after the earthquake are threatening the stability of remaining buildings; where there are outbreaks of cholera; where food, clean water, and medications are most desperately needed; and so on and so forth. Efforts to coordinate an international humanitarian response are inherently *developmental* because the disaster context is complex and emergent. The evaluation should also be developmental in support of ongoing humanitarian relief decision-making. Marginalized, disempowered, and excluded populations are often especially vulnerable in disaster situations because they tend to live in highly vulnerable areas that lack basic infrastructure. This makes delivering timely assistance all the more challenging. Developmental evaluation can track both developing vulnerabilities and developing interventions.

Dynamic versus static impact evaluation designs

As these examples illustrate, developmental evaluation views development interventions as dynamic and emergent in complex adaptive systems. Both the intervention and the evaluation are dynamic and adaptive. This stands in stark contrast to impact evaluations that use randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as a methodological framework. RCTs conceptualize interventions as occurring in closed systems, and study the intervention as a static and mechanical cause aimed at preconceived effects in a simple linear model of cause-effect. Such designs aim to standardize interventions and to control variation, which limits the utility and generalizability of findings. (For more on the mechanical and linear assumptions of RCTs, see Patton, 2008, chapter 12). In contrast, developmental evaluations assume that development more often occurs in complex dynamic systems and puts a premium on understanding context, real time adaptability, and ongoing development, rather than

generating high-fidelity and highly prescriptive practices. These differences go beyond methodological preferences and debates. They involve fundamentally different views about the nature of development, the contexts within which development occurs, how change occurs, and epistemological differences about what constitutes actionable knowledge.
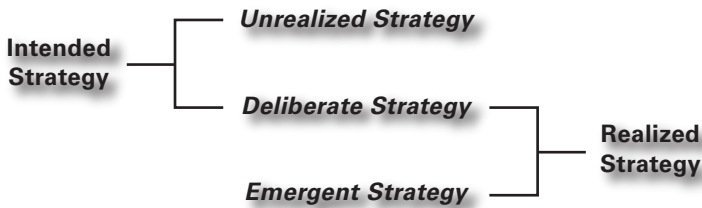
Developmental Evaluation and accountability

The traditional approach to accountability is to evaluate whether resouces are used as planned, and whether targeted outcomes are attained. This is a static and mechanical approach to accountability that assumes designers know, three or five years in advance, what important outcomes to target and how to go about achieving those desired outcomes. Departing from planned implementation is considered implementation failure. Targeting new and emergent opportunities is considered 'mission drift.' The mantra of traditional, static accountability is plan your work, work the plan, and evaluate whether what was planned was achieved. But that's not how high performance organizations approach either development or accountability.

Henry Mintzberg is one of the world's foremost scholars on strategic thinking, organizational development, and the characteristics of high performing business. He has found that, implementing strategy is always a combination of deliberate and unplanned processes. In studying hundreds of companies over many years, he found that there is no such thing as a perfectly controlled, deliberate process in which intentions lead to formulation of plans, implementation, and the full realization of intended results. The real world does not unfold that way. As the graphic below shows, realized strategy (where you end up after some period of time) begins as intended strategy (planning), but not all of what is intended is realized. Some things get dropped or go undone because planning assumptions proved faulty in the face of real world processes; this he calls "unrealized strategy." What remains of the intended strategy he calls the deliberate strategy, which intersects with emergent strategy to become realized strategy. Emergent strategy comes from seizing new opportunities, which is another reason some things that were planned remian undone as new and better opportunities arise (Mintzberg, 2007, chapter 1). In essence, a high performance organization that is paying attention to the world in which it operates does not expect to rigidly follow a highly prescriptive plan. The plan is a starting point. Once

implementation begins, the plan has to be – and should be – adapated to what is observed and learned, in interaction with the complex adaptive system of real world dyanmics.

Mintzeberg's insights about strategy implementation in the real world contrast significantly with the classic accountability-oriented approach to evaluation in which programme implementation and results are measured and judged based on what was planned to be done and achieved (intended outcomes). Under such an accountability framework, an innovative and adaptive programme that seizes new opportunities and adjusts to changing conditions will be evaluated negatively. Developmental evaluation, in contrast, expects that some of what is planned will go unrealized, some will be implemented roughly as expected, and some new things will emerge. *Developmental evaluation tracks and documents these different aspects of strategic innovation* – and their implications for further innovation and development. Accountability resides in carefully, systematically, and thoroughly documenting these developmental shifts, making transparent the data on which changes are made, and tracking the implications of deviations from the original plan – both deviaitions in implementation and in emergent outcomes.

Figure 2: Mintzberg on Strategy

Complexity-based developmental evaluation shifts the locus and focus of accountability. Accountabilty in developmental evaluation means documenting adaptations and their implications, not evaluating rigid adherence to planned implementation and preconceived outcomes. Why? Because complexity-sensitive developmental evaluation assumes that plans are fallible, based on imperfect information and assumptions that will be proven wrong, and that development occurs in dynamic contexts where even good plans will have to be adapted to changing realities. Thus, rather than becoming a barrier to adapatation, as occurs in traditional rigid accountability

measures in which programmes are deemed to have failed if they depart from what was planned, developmental evaluation assumes a dynamic world with departures from initial plans. Developmental evaluation places the emphasis on understanding, supporting, and documenting adaptations and their implications.

Developmental Evaluation as Utilization-Focused

What brings me to complexity is its utility for understanding certain evaluation challenges. Complexity concepts can be used to identify and frame a set of intervention circumstances that are amenable to a particular situationally-appropriate evaluation response, what I am calling here developmental evaluation. This makes dealing with complexity a defining characteristic of the developmental evaluation niche. Principles for operating in complex adaptive systems inform the practice of developmental evaluation. The controversies and challenges that come with ideas on complexity will also, and inevitably, afflict developmental evaluation. The insights and understandings of complexity thinking that have attracted the attention of, and garnered enthusiasm from, social innovators will also envelope developmental evaluation – and be the source of its utility.

Developmental evaluation is meant to communicate that there is an option in an approach to conducting evaluations that specifically supports *developmental adaptation*. In so doing, I place this approach within the larger context of *utilization-focused evaluation* (Patton, 2008, 2009, 2011b). *Utilization-focused evaluation* is evaluation done for and with specific primary intended users for specific, intended uses. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use. 'Use' is about how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and how they experience the evaluation process. Therefore, the focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on achieving *intended use by intended users*. In developmental evaluation, the intended use is development, which I have here argued is a distinct and important evaluation purpose. The primary intended users are development innovators and others working to bring about major change.

Situation recognition and Developmental Evaluation

Astute situation recognition is at the heart of utilization-focused evaluation. There is no one best way to conduct an evaluation. This insight is critical. The design of a particular evaluation depends on the people involved and their situation. The Development Assistance Committee standards (DAC, 2010) provide overall direction, a foundation of ethical guidance, and a commitment to professional competence and integrity, but there are no absolute rules an evaluator can follow to know exactly what to do with specific users in a particular situation. Recognizing this challenge, situation analysis is one of the "essential competencies for programme evaluators" (CES, 2010)

The ideal is to match the type of evaluation to the situation and needs of the intended users to achieve their intended uses. This means – and I want to emphasize this point – *developmental evaluation is not appropriate for every situation*. Not even close. It will not work if the conditions and relationships are not right. The point here is that every evaluation involves the challenge of matching the evaluation process and approach to the circumstances, resources, timelines, data demands, politics, intended users, and purposes of a particular situation. Such matching requires astute situation recognition. Developmental evaluation is appropriate where the situation is understood to involve interventions and innovations in complex adaptive developmental situations (Patton, 2011a).

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