CHAPTER 1

State of the Art and Practice of Developmental Evaluation

Answers to Common and Recurring Questions

Michael Quinn Patton

Make the world a better place through innovation and systems change. That is the vision and commitment of social innovators and their funders. They are passionate about making major differences on significant issues. They are strategic about changing systems. As developmental evaluators, we also want to make the world a better place. We are passionate about using evaluation to inform innovation. This means adapting evaluation to the particular needs and challenges of social innovation and systems change. This book provides case exemplars of evaluators doing just that. You will get an inside look at variations in developmental evaluation, as well as illumination of guiding principles that make it distinct as an evaluation approach.

The Preface describes the basics of what developmental evaluation is, how it has evolved, and its niche as evaluating innovations in complex dynamic environments. I won't repeat that explanation here. Instead, I'll "cut to the chase" and go right to the developmental evaluation value proposition.

The Developmental Evaluation Value Proposition

As developmental evaluation has become more widely practiced (as evidenced by the case exemplars in this book), a value proposition has emerged. Colleague James Radner of the University of Toronto, one of the contributors to this book, has a breadth of experience working with many different organizations in many different capacities on a variety of initiatives, including doing developmental evaluation. He is thus especially well positioned to identify developmental evaluation's value proposition, which he articulates as follows:

"The discipline of *evaluation* has something to offer social innovators that can really help them succeed. Developmental evaluation is based on the insight that evaluative thinking, techniques, practice, and discipline can be a boon to social innovation—that data systematically collected and appropriately tied to users' goals and strategies can make a difference, even in open-ended, highly complex settings where the goals and strategies are themselves evolving. Developmental evaluation has something distinctive to offer through the way it marries empirical inquiry focused on the innova*tion* to direct engagement with the innova*tor*. What developmental evaluators do helps innovators advance social change, *but* it only works when customized to the very special context of each social innovation."

Q&A about Developmental Evaluation: 10 Questions, 10 Responses

Developmental evaluation has become widely recognized and established as a distinct and useful evaluation approach (Dickson & Saunders, 2014; FSG, 2014; Lam & Shulha, 2014; Preskill & Beer, 2012). As new practitioners hear about and try implementing this approach, questions naturally arise. This chapter answers the 10 most common questions I get about developmental evaluation. The emergence of these questions provides one window into the state of the art and practice of developmental evaluation, for these questions, even without answers, reveal what practitioners are encountering, grappling with, and developing responses to in their own contexts. Below, then, are the questions I respond to as one contribution to the continuing evolution of developmental evaluation. The answers also set the stage for the case studies in the following chapters.

1. What are the essential elements of developmental evaluation?
2. How is developmental evaluation different from other approaches: ongoing formative evaluation, action research, monitoring, and organizational development?
3. What is the relationship between developmental evaluation and development evaluation?
4. How do systems thinking and complexity theory inform the practice of developmental evaluation?
5. What methods are used in developmental evaluation?
6. What conditions are necessary for developmental evaluation to succeed?
7. What does it take to become an effective developmental evaluation practitioner? That is, what particular developmental evaluator skills and competencies are essential?
8. How can developmental evaluation serve accountability needs and demands?

9. Why is developmental evaluation attracting so much attention and spreading so quickly?
10. What has been the most significant development in developmental evaluation since publication of the Patton (2011) book?

Now, on to the answers.

1. What Are the Essential Elements of Developmental Evaluation?

The first question represents the *fidelity challenge*. An experienced practitioner recently told me, "More often than not, I find, people say they are doing developmental evaluation, but they are not."

The fidelity challenge concerns the extent to which a specific evaluation sufficiently incorporates the core characteristics of the overall approach to justify labeling that evaluation by its designated name. Just as fidelity is a central issue in efforts to replicate effective programs in new places (are the replications faithful to the original model on which they are based?), evaluation fidelity concerns whether an evaluator following a particular model is faithful in implementing all the core steps, elements, and processes of that model. What must be included in a theory-driven evaluation to justify its designation as *theory-driven* (Coryn, Noakes, Westine, & Schröter, 2011)? What must occur in a participatory evaluation for it to be deemed genuinely *participatory* (Cousins, Whitmore, & Shulha, 2014; Daigneault & Jacob, 2009)? What must be included in an empowerment evaluation to justify the label *empowerment* (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 2014)?

Miller and Campbell (2006) systematically examined 47 evaluations labeled *empowerment evaluation*. They found wide variation among practitioners in adherence to empowerment evaluation principles, as well as weak emphasis on the attainment of empowered outcomes for program beneficiaries. Cousins and Chouinard (2012) reviewed 121 pieces of empirical research on participatory evaluation and also found great variation in approaches conducted under the *participatory* umbrella. I've seen a great many evaluations labeled *utilization-focused* that provided no evidence that primary intended users had been identified and engaged to focus the evaluation on those users' priorities. What, then, are the essential elements of *developmental evaluation*?

The answer is that there are eight essential principles:

1. *Developmental purpose*
2. *Evaluation rigor*
3. *Utilization focus*
4. *Innovation niche*
5. *Complexity perspective*
6. *Systems thinking*
7. *Co-creation*
8. *Timely feedback*

Each of these is defined, described, and discussed in Chapter 15. From my perspective, these principles must be explicitly addressed in any developmental evaluation, but how and the extent to which they are addressed depend on situation and context. The principles serve the role of sensitizing concepts. This is a significant departure from the usual approach to *fidelity*, which has traditionally meant to implement an approach operationally in exactly the same way each time. Fidelity has meant adherence to a recipe or highly prescriptive set of steps and procedures. The principles of developmental evaluation, in contrast, involve sensitizing elements that must be interpreted and applied contextually—*but must be applied in some way and to some extent if the evaluation is to be considered genuinely and fully developmental*. This means that when I read a developmental evaluation report, or talk with those involved in a developmental evaluation, or listen to a developmental evaluation presentation at a conference, I should be able to see/detect/understand how these eight essential principles informed what was done and what resulted.

The authors of the case chapters in this book did not have the principles before them when they wrote about their developmental evaluation experiences. Rather, I developed the list of principles after reading the cases and interacting with developmental evaluator colleagues. So, as you read the cases, see if you can detect the principles in practice. Coeditors Nan Wehipeihana and Kate McKegg provide a synthesis of the cases in Chapter 14, identifying major cross-case themes and incorporating the principles in their synthesis. Then, in Chapter 15, the book ends with an in-depth elaboration of each principle.

2. How Is Developmental Evaluation Different from Other Approaches?

Because developmental evaluation claims a specific purpose and niche, questions about how it differs from other approaches are common. Examples include how (or even if) developmental evaluation is different from ongoing formative evaluation, organizational development, monitoring, and action research. So let me try to clarify.

Developmental Evaluation in Contrast to Formative Evaluation

Developmental evaluation offers an alternative to formative and summative evaluation, the classic distinctions that have dominated evaluation for four decades. In the original conceptualization, a formative evaluation served to prepare a program for summative evaluation by identifying and correcting implementation problems, making adjustments based on feedback, providing an early assessment of whether desired outcomes were being achieved (or were likely to be achieved), and getting the program stabilized and standardized for summative assessment. It is not uncommon for a new program to go through 2–3 years of formative evaluation, working out startup difficulties and getting the program model stabilized, before a summative evaluation is conducted. Over time, formative evaluation has come to designate any evaluative efforts to *improve* a program. Improvement means making it better. In contrast, developmental evaluation focuses on *adaptive development*, which means making the program different because, for example, (1) the context has changed (which comes with the territory in a complex dynamic environment); (2) the clientele have changed significantly; (3) learning leads to a significant change; or (4) a creative, innovative alternative to a persistent issue or challenge has emerged. Here are three examples of such adaptive developments.

- A program serving one population (white, low-income high school dropouts) adapts to demands to serve a different population (e.g., immigrants, people coming out of prison, or people with particular disabilities). This kind of adaptation goes beyond improvement. It requires developmental adaptation.
- A workshop or course moves online from the classroom. Teaching effectively online requires major adaptation of both content and process, as well as criteria for interpreting success. Again, this goes well beyond ongoing improvement.
- Public health authorities must adapt to a new disease like Ebola. Innovation and adaptation become the order of the day, not just improving existing procedures.

Keep in mind here that supporting ongoing adaptive development of programs is only one of the five purposes of developmental evaluation. Developmental evaluation also supports development of completely new innovations. Kate McKegg has offered these innovative examples from New Zealand:

- Development of low-cost, environmentally friendly housing for marginalized people in rural areas.
- Development of child care options for low-income parents that can accommodate children from birth to age 16.
- Development of a local food service that uses local food sources as a response to the failure of multinational food distribution to solve hunger and nutrition.

Developmental Evaluation in Contrast to Action Research

Action research takes many forms. The methods of action research and developmental evaluation (e.g., use of reflective practice) can be the same. The difference is purpose. Action research is typically used to understand and solve problems: Why aren't patients keeping follow-up appointments? Why aren't databases being kept up to date? Why is there so much negativity about staff meetings? Action research is typically undertaken to solve these kinds of problems. Developmental evaluation, in contrast, focuses on innovation and systems change.

Developmental Evaluation in Contrast to Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring (the M in M&E, where E is evaluation) typically involves tracking progress on predetermined indicators. Monitoring is used to comply with accountability requirements and to watch for important changes in key output indicators. Because indicators are predetermined and standardized, and focus on quarter-to-quarter and year-to-year comparisons to report progress against predetermined targets, they are fairly useless for picking up unintended consequences and emergent developments. Data from a monitoring system can provide useful developmental evaluation information for documenting changes in key indicators, but additional fieldwork and inquiry will be needed to understand why the monitoring indicators are moving as they are. Moreover, monitoring data are typically collected at an output level rather than at a system, strategic, or outcome level, which is the arena for major innovative developments. Monitoring serves best to track progress against implementation plans when a detailed implementation plan has been funded for a model-based project. Innovations lack detailed implementation plans and predetermined monitoring indicators precisely because they are occurring in complex dynamic systems, where both the work and the indicators are emergent, developmental, and changing.

Developmental Evaluation in Contrast to Organizational Development

Organizational development supports increased organizational effectiveness, usually by analyzing processes of communication, staff interactions, work flow, power dynamics, personnel competencies, capacity needs, and related functions to help make things run more smoothly. Organizational development, like formative evaluation for programs, helps improve organizations, often by identifying problems and taking people through a process of problem solving. Developmental evaluation, in contrast, when working with an organization as the unit of analysis, focuses on innovation to support the organization's becoming more adaptable to the uncertain and unpredictable dynamics of complexity.

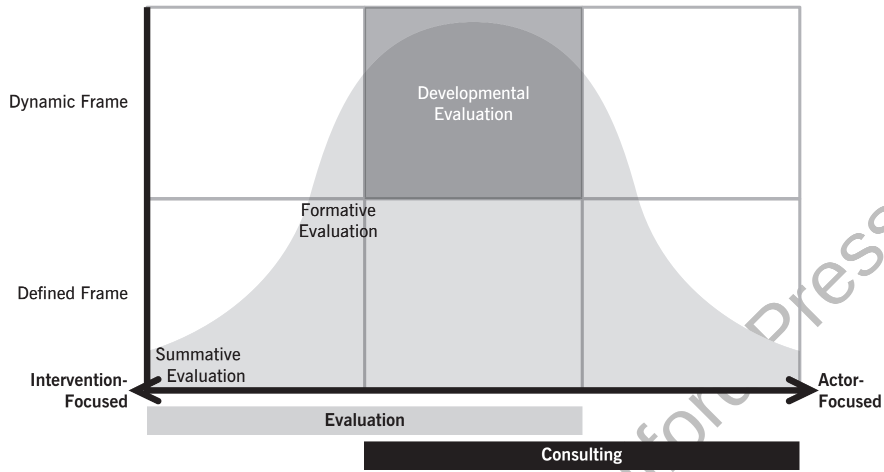
Developmental Evaluation as Dynamic Reframing

In elaborating the preceding distinctions, I've drawn on the experiences and insights of many developmental evaluation practitioners. Nathaniel Foote—managing director of the TruePoint Center for Higher Ambition Leadership, as well as a distinguished organizational effectiveness and leadership scholar, experienced management consultant, and coauthor of Chapter 6—has insightfully identified the role of developmental evaluation as *dynamic reframing* and has positioned it along a spectrum from traditional evaluation at one end and organizational consulting at the other end. Exhibit 1.1 presents this role and positioning, which I think is particularly useful in delineating the niche of developmental evaluation. Foote explains:

> I see developmental evaluation occupying a midpoint on a spectrum. At one end is evaluation to serve the interests of a third-party (typically a funder or policy-maker) seeking to assess a well-defined intervention, and understand whether it will work, independent of the specific actor who has implemented it. At the other end is a consulting intervention that is focused solely on the interests of a client to achieve more effective action. The focus is entirely on the actor and what s/he should do next, independent of any broader assessment of the intervention and its validity in other contexts or as undertaken by other actors.

EXHIBIT 1.1

Developmental Evaluation Distinctively Focused on Dynamic Reframing



Source: Nathaniel Foote.

> Developmental evaluation is needed where "actors" are embedded in and seeking to change a complex system. Actors and intervention are intertwined and cannot be separated. The intervention is inevitably shaped by characteristics of the actors, and observations and insights about the intervention can only fully be appreciated and acted on by actors in the system. Because it is a complex system, actions always lead to unintended consequences (whether good or bad), which in turn offer the potential to learn more about the dynamics of the system and how the "actors" can better achieve their intent. At its essence, developmental evaluation is about ***dynamic reframing***, seeking to articulate, test, inform, and reframe the mental models of the "actors" for the system they are operating in and the ways they have been and could be influencing it, so as to realize their intent. This explicit focus on the overall frame as dynamic, rather than defined, is, to me, the most significant aspect that differentiates developmental evaluation from more conventional evaluations (summative and formative) on the one hand and from more conventional consulting interventions on the other. (personal communication, January 4, 2015)

3. What Is the Relationship between Developmental Evaluation and Development Evaluation?

Ah, adding that pesky little *-al* at the end of the word *development* transforms one meaning into another. Development*al* evaluation is easily and often 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 programs and initiatives. 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. But developmental evaluation is by no means limited to projects in developing countries.

The *-al* in *developmental* is easily missed, but it is critical in distinguishing development evaluation from developmental evaluation. Moreover, languages other than English don't have a grammatical way of distinguishing *development* from *developmental*. So translation is a problem, as I've found in doing international and cross-cultural training. For example, international developmental evaluator Ricardo Wilson-Grau, a contributor to Chapter 10, says, "I translate 'developmental evaluation' into Spanish and Portuguese as 'evaluation for the development of an innovation.' "

Another way to mitigate the confusion is to use labels other than *developmental evaluation*, as some are doing, preferring to call it one of the following:

- Real-time evaluation
- Emergent evaluation
- Action evaluation
- Adaptive evaluation

4. How Do Systems Thinking and Complexity Theory Inform the Practice of Developmental Evaluation?

Thinking systemically is fundamental to developmental evaluation. This means, at a minimum, understanding interrelationships, engaging with multiple perspectives, and reflecting deeply on the practical and ethical consequences of boundary choices. The shift in thinking required is from focusing on discrete components of a program to thinking in terms of relationships. In delineating the dimensions of "being systemic," Bob Williams, the 2014 recipient of the American Evaluation Association (AEA) Lazarsfeld Theory Award for his contribution to systems approaches in evaluation, explained: "Every endeavour is bounded. We cannot do or see everything. Every viewpoint is partial. Therefore, holism is not about trying to deal with everything, but being methodical, informed, pragmatic and ethical about what to leave out. And, it's about taking responsibility for those decisions" (2014, p. 1).

Innovation involves changing an existing system at some level and in some way. If you examine findings from the last 50 years of program evaluation, you'll find that projects and programs rarely lead to major change. Effective projects and programs are often isolated from larger systems, which allows them the autonomy to operate effectively, but limit their larger impact. On the other hand, projects and programs often fail because they operate in dysfunctional systems. Thus social innovators are interested in and motivated by changing systems—health care systems, educational systems, food systems, criminal justice systems. In so doing, they engage in efforts and thinking that supersede traditional project and program logic models. To evaluate systems change, developmental evaluators need to be able to engage in systems thinking and to treat the system or systems targeted for change as the *evaluand* (the thing being evaluated). This means inquiring into, tracking, documenting, and reporting on the development of interrelationships, changing boundaries, and emerging perspectives that provide windows into the processes, effects, and implications of systems change (Williams, 2005, 2008; Williams & van 't Hof, 2014).

Thinking systemically comes into play even in small pilot projects. Systems and complexity concepts are helpful for understanding what makes a project innovative. Moreover, even small innovations eventually face the issue of what it will mean to expand the innovation if it is successful—which directly and inevitably will involve systems change. The cases in this book all involve systemic thinking and systems change. Here are five diverse examples:

- Changing the youth homelessness system (Chapter 4)
- Changing the early childhood system (Chapter 6)
- Changing indigenous food systems in Africa and in the Andes (Chapter 8)
- Changing community systems where people are mired in poverty (Chapter 9)
- Changing Ontario's school system (Chapter 13)

These cases illustrate and illuminate how developmental evaluation is attuned to both linear and nonlinear relationships, both intended and unintended interactions and outcomes, and both hypothesized and unpredicted results. Fundamental systems-oriented developmental evaluation questions include these: In what ways and how effectively does the system function for whose interests? Why so? How are the system's boundaries perceived? With what implications? To what extent and in what ways do the boundaries, interrelationships, and perspectives affect the way the innovative change process has been conceptualized and implemented? How has social innovation changed the system, through what processes, with what results and implications?

The Complexity Perspective

Viewing innovation through the lens of complexity adds another way of framing, studying, and evaluating social innovations. Innovations involve uncertain outcomes and unfold in situations where stakeholders typically disagree about the nature of the problem and what should be done to address it. These two dimensions, degree of uncertainty and degree of disagreement, define the zone of complexity (Patton, 2011, Ch. 5). In essence, complexity theory directs our attention to characteristics and dimensions of dynamic systems change—which is precisely where innovation unfolds. Core developmental evaluation questions driven by complexity theory include these: In what ways and how can the dynamics of complex systems be captured, illuminated, and understood as social innovation emerges?

How Developmental Evaluation Can Enhance Innovation under Conditions of Complexity

Chi Yan Lam and Lyn M. Shulha (2014) conducted a case study on "the cocreation of an innovative program." The case study describes the pre-formative development of an educational program (from conceptualization to pilot implementation) and analyzes the processes of innovation within a developmental evaluation framework. Lam and Shulha concluded:

> Developmental evaluation enhanced innovation by (a) identifying and infusing data primarily within an informing process toward resolving the uncertainty associated with innovation and (b) facilitating program cocreation between the clients and the developmental evaluator. Analysis into the demands of innovation revealed the pervasiveness of uncertainty throughout development and how the rendering of evaluative data helped resolve uncertainty and propelled development forward. Developmental evaluation enabled a nonlinear, coevolutionary program development process that centered on six foci—definition, delineation, collaboration, prototyping, illumination, and reality testing. (p. 1)

To what extent do the dynamics of uncertainty and disagreement shift and change during the unfolding of the innovation? How is innovation's development captured and understood, revealing new learning and knowledge that can be extrapolated or applied elsewhere?

Complexity theory is sometimes viewed as a subset of systems theory. In other framings, complexity theory and systems theory are sufficiently distinct to constitute separate and unique but overlapping approaches to understanding the world, like seeing and hearing. Seeing someone speak can enhance hearing and deepen understanding about what the person is saying. Listening to someone is given additional meaning by watching that person's expressions. Both are senses. They operate separately, but can overlap to reinforce what we take in and make sense of in an interaction. I find it useful to conceptualize systems thinking and complexity theory as distinct but overlapping frameworks (Patton, 2015, p. 151), as shown in Exhibit 1.2. Both perspectives are essential to developmental evaluation.

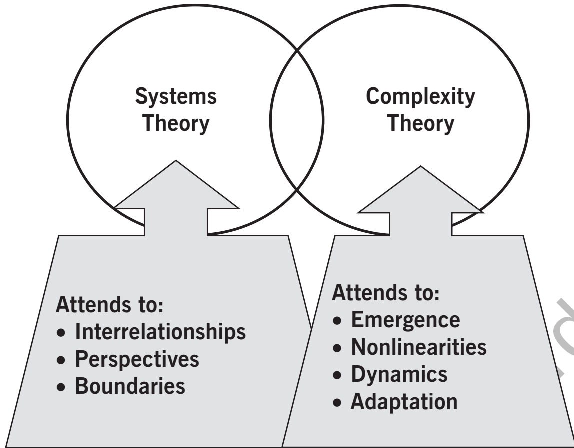
5. What Methods Are Used in Developmental Evaluation?

My response to this question has five parts.

- *Developmental evaluation does not rely on or advocate any particular evaluation method, design, tool, or inquiry framework*. A developmental evaluation can include any kind of data (quantitative, qualitative, mixed), any kind of design (e.g., naturalistic, experimental), and any kind of focus (processes, outcomes, impacts, costs, and cost–benefit, among many possibilities)—depending on the nature and stage of an innovation, and on the priority questions that will support development

EXHIBIT 1.2

Systems Theory and Complexity Theory as Distinct but Overlapping Inquiry Frameworks



Source: Based on Patton (2015, p. 151). Adapted with permission.

of and decision making about the innovation. Methods and tools can include rapid turnaround randomized controlled trials, surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, performance data, community indicators, network analysis—whatever sheds light on key questions.

Moreover, developmental evaluation can use any of a number of inquiry frameworks. For example, the *Developmental Evaluation* book (Patton, 2011) presents and discusses a number of different inquiry frameworks that can be useful for different situations, including triangulated learning, the adaptive cycle, appreciative inquiry, reflective practice, values-driven inquiry, wicked questions, outcome mapping, systematic risk management, force field analysis, actual–ideal comparisons, and principles-focused evaluation, among others. The trick is to use a framework that is appropriate for the particular situation and resonates with the social innovators engaged collaboratively in the particular developmental evaluation. Chapter 10 demonstrates the use of *outcome harvesting* as both an inquiry framework and a developmental evaluation tool. (See also Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012.)

- *The process and quality of engagement between the primary intended users (social innovators) and the developmental evaluators is as much the method of developmental evaluation as any particular design, methods, and data collection tools are.* Asking evaluation questions, examining and tracking the implications of adaptations, and providing timely feedback on an ongoing basis—these are the methods of developmental evaluation.

Cartoon by Christopher P. Lysy. Used with permission.

• *Whatever methods are used or data are collected, rapid feedback is essential.* Speed matters. Dynamic complexities don't slow down or wait for evaluators to write their reports, get them carefully edited, and then have them approved by higher authorities. Any method can be used, but it will have to be adapted to the necessities of speed, timely reporting, and just-in-time, in-the-moment decision making. This is a major reason why the developmental evaluators should be part of the innovation team: to be present in real time as issues arise and decisions have to be made.

• *Methods can be emergent and flexible; designs can be dynamic.* Contrary to the usual practice in evaluation of fixed designs that are implemented as planned, developmental evaluation designs can change as an innovation unfolds and changes. If surveys and interviews are used, the evaluators may change questions from one administration to the next, discarding items that have revealed little of value or are no longer relevant, and adding items that address new issues. The sample can be emergent (Patton, 2015, Ch. 5) as new participants or sites emerge, and others are abandoned. Both baselines and benchmarks can be revised and updated as new information emerges.

• *Developmental evaluators need to be agile, open, interactive, flexible, observant, and highly tolerant of ambiguity.* A developmental evaluator is, in part, an instrument. Because the evaluation is co-created and the developmental evaluator is part of the innovation team, bringing an evaluation perspective and evaluative thinking to the team, an evaluator's capacity to be part of the team and facilitate the evaluation elements of the innovative process involves both essential "people skills" and is part of the method for developmental evaluation. The advice from experienced developmental evaluators offered throughout this book, as well as other research with practitioners (Cabaj, 2011), affirms and reinforces this point.

6. What Conditions Are Necessary for Developmental Evaluation to Succeed?

Readiness is important for any evaluation. Utilization-focused evaluators work with intended evaluation users to help them understand the value of reality testing and buy into the process, thereby reducing the threat of resistance (conscious or unconscious) to evaluation use. A common error made by novice evaluators is believing that because someone has requested an evaluation or some group has been assembled to design an evaluation, the commitment to reality testing and use is already there. Quite the contrary: These commitments must be engendered (or revitalized if once they were present) and then reinforced throughout the evaluation process. Utilization-focused evaluation makes this a priority (Patton, 2012, pp. 15–36).

Developmental evaluation adds to general readiness the following 10 readiness characteristics:

1. Commitment to innovation, the niche of developmental evaluation.
2. Readiness to take risks—not just talk about risk taking, but actually take risks.
3. Tolerance for ambiguity. Uncertainty, unpredictability, and turbulence come with the territory of systems change, innovation, and therefore developmental evaluation.
4. Some basic understanding of systems thinking and complexity. This will increase through engagement with developmental evaluation, but some baseline understanding and comfort with the ideas are needed to begin the design process.
5. Contextual and cultural sensitivity centered on innovation and adaptation. Those searching for standardized so-called "best practices" are not good candidates for developmental evaluation, where contextual customization rules.
6. Commitment to adaptive learning and action.
7. Flexibility. Developmental evaluation involves flexible designs, flexible relationships, flexible budgeting, and flexible reporting.
8. Leadership's understanding of and commitment to developmental evaluation. Ignore leadership at your peril.
9. A funder or funding stream that understands developmental evaluation.
10. Preparation to stay the course. Developmental evaluation is not about flirting with change. Authentic engagement is long-term engagement.

What these readiness factors mean will vary by context. This is merely a suggestive list to highlight the importance of raising the readiness question and doing a joint assessment of readiness with the primary intended users who need to be engaged in the process. Exhibit 1.3 highlights additional dimensions of readiness to engage in developmental evaluation.

EXHIBIT 1.3

Where and When Is Developmental Evaluation Appropriate?

Appropriate contexts	Inappropriate contexts
• Highly emergent and volatile situations (e.g., the environment is dynamic) • Situations that are difficult to plan or predict because the variables and factors are interdependent and nonlinear • Situations where there are no known solutions to issues, new issues entirely, and/or no certain ways forward • Situations where multiple pathways forward are possible, and thus there is a need for innovation and exploration • Socially complex situations, requiring collaboration among stakeholders from different organizations, systems, and/or sectors • Innovative situations, requiring timely learning and ongoing development • Situations with unknown outcomes, so vision and values drive processes	• Situations where people are not able or willing to commit the time to participate actively in the evaluation and to build and sustain relational trust • Situations where key stakeholders require high levels of certainty • Situations where there is a lack of openness to experimentation and reflection • Situations where organizations lack adaptive capacity • Situations where key people are unwilling to “fail” or hear “bad news” • Situations where there are poor relationships among management, staff, and evaluators

Source: Kate McKegg and Michael Quinn Patton, Developmental Evaluation Workshop, African Evaluation Association, Yaounde, Cameroon, March 2014.

7. What Does It Take to Become an Effective Developmental Evaluation Practitioner?

The AEA’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators emphasize that “Evaluators should possess (or ensure that the evaluation team possesses) the education, abilities, skills and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation” (AEA, 2004, B1). The *basic competencies* for developmental evaluation are the same as those for any evaluation based on the profession’s standards and guiding principles. What developmental evaluation adds is a greater emphasis on direct engagement with primary intended users of the evaluation (social innovators and funders) and therefore increased attention to interpersonal and group facilitation skills. As Exhibit 1.4 shows, developmental evaluation poses particular challenges in applying general evaluator competencies.

Research on evaluation use consistently shows that findings are more likely to be used if they are credible—and *evaluator credibility* is a central factor in the overall credibility of the findings. Yes, the methods and measures themselves need to be credible so that the resulting data are credible. But methods and measures derive their credibility from appropriate and competent application by the person(s)

EXHIBIT 1.4

General Evaluator Competencies and Specialized Developmental Evaluator Competencies

Six essential competency areas*	General evaluator competencies	Specialized developmental evaluator competencies
1. *Professional practice*	Knowing and observing professional norms and values, including evaluation standards and principles.	The importance of the ongoing relationship between social innovators and developmental evaluators increases the need for professional boundary management as an essential competency.
2. *Systematic inquiry*	Expertise in the technical aspects of evaluations, such as design, measurement, data analysis, interpretation, and sharing results.	Developmental evaluator Mark Cabaj has observed, "The competencies demanded are greater because you need a larger methods toolbox and capability to come up with creative approaches."
3. *Situational analysis*	Understanding and attending to the contextual and political issues of an evaluation, including determining evaluability, addressing conflicts, and attending to issues of evaluation use.	Being able to distinguish the simple, complicated, and complex is essential. So is understanding how to use complexity concepts as part of situation analysis: emergence, nonlinearity, dynamical, uncertainty, adaptability.
4. *Project management*	The nuts and bolts of managing an evaluation from beginning to end, including negotiating contracts, budgeting, identifying and coordinating needed resources, and conducting the evaluation in a timely manner.	Special project management challenges in developmental evaluation include managing and adapting the emergent design, timely data collection and feedback, handling the sheer volume of data that emerges as the project unfolds, and flexible budgeting.
5. *Reflective practice*	An awareness of one's program evaluation expertise, as well as the needs for professional growth.	Reflective practice is a data collection approach in developmental evaluation, as is a commitment to assess and further develop one's developmental evaluation competencies. This practice includes reflexivity—reflecting on one's contribution and role in relation to particular contexts and processes.
6. *Interpersonal competence*	The "people skills" needed to work with diverse groups of stakeholders to conduct program evaluations, including written and oral communication, negotiation, and cross-cultural skills.	A developmental evaluation is co-created with primary intended users (social innovators, funders, and implementation staff). The approach is heavily relationship-focused, so interpersonal relationships are parallel to methods in determining the evaluation's relevance and credibility.

*Ghere, King, Stevahn, and Minnema (2006).

conducting the evaluation. Methods don't just happen. Someone, namely an evaluator, has to employ methods. So the evaluator's competence in selecting and applying appropriate methods and measures, and appropriately and competently analyzing and presenting the findings, are the fundamental source of an evaluation's credibility. Developmental evaluator Mark Cabaj adds:

> "In fast-moving, complex contexts, the traditional challenges of evaluation design and getting valid and reliable data are amplified, requiring evaluators to use their best *bricoleur* [creating customized solutions for unique problems] skills to come up with real-time methods and data. Moreover, the signals from that data are often weak and ambiguous, [so] the challenge of helping social innovators—who, like any of us, are eager to find patterns and meaning in data even when they don't exist—properly interpret and use that data [becomes] more challenging than normal.
>
> "In my thesis research [on early adopters of developmental evaluation; Cabaj, 2011], several people pointed out that they thought the methodological challenges in a developmental evaluation situation may sometimes outstrip the capacity of any one evaluator—and in those situations, developmental evaluation might be offered by a lead evaluator who can draw upon a network of evaluators with different expertise and skills."

Earlier, I have noted the importance of leadership buy-in as part of organizational readiness. Developmental evaluators also play a leadership role in providing leadership for the direction of the developmental evaluation, which also affects the direction of innovation and intervention adaptations.

> An element of leadership is involved in developmental evaluation because the developmental evaluator is actively helping to shape the initiative. *How* that's done makes a world of difference to the effectiveness of their work. (Dozois, Langlois, & Blanchet-Cohen, 2010, p. 23)

The traditional emphasis on methodological competencies assumes that methodological rigor is the primary determinant of evaluation credibility. But the evidence from studies of developmental evaluation use shows that evaluator characteristics interact with methodological criteria and facilitation skill in determining an evaluation's credibility and utility. In essence, how the evaluation is facilitated with meaningful involvement of primary intended users and skilled engagement of the developmental evaluators affects the users' judgments about the evaluation's credibility and utility—and thus their willingness to act on feedback. The active and engaged role of the developmental evaluator has been called "the art of the nudge" (Langlois, Blanchet-Cohen, & Beer, 2012, p. 39):

> [F]ive practices [have been] found central to the *art of the nudge*: (1) practicing servant leadership; (2) sensing program energy; (3) supporting common spaces; (4) untying

EXHIBIT 1.5

The Developmental Evaluation Context and the Developmental Evaluator

Context/Context: Organization	Evaluator: The pragmatic *bricoleur*
High levels of awareness of context and changes in the wider environment	Vigilance in tracking internal and external emergence
Willing to balance development and innovation with a commitment to testing reality	High tolerance for ambiguity, as well as the ability to facilitate values-based sense making, interpretations, and decision making
Willingness to explore, dig deeper, interpret whatever emerges, and provide timely feedback as the innovation develops	Methodological agility and creativity, combined with a willingness and ability to change and respond with adapted design, framework, program theory, methods, and processes
Courage to keep going and adapt in the face of uncertainty	Courage to take on messy journey of ups and downs, sidetracks, and the unexpected, all the while retaining a tolerant and critical open-mindedness and commitment to truth telling
Readiness to co-create the future, collaborate, and trust	Readiness to develop long-term relationships of trust—to be "in it for the long haul"

Source: Kate McKegg and Michael Quinn Patton, Developmental Evaluation Workshop, African Evaluation Association, Yaounde, Cameroon, March 2014.

knots iteratively; and (5) paying attention to structure. These practices can help developmental evaluators detect and support opportunities for learning and adaptation leading to right-timed feedback.

Question 6 in this chapter has asked about organizational readiness. This question has examined evaluator readiness to conduct a developmental evaluation. Exhibit 1.5 puts these two questions together.

8. How Can Developmental Evaluation Serve Accountability Needs and Demands?

Accountability is traditionally associated with spending funds in accordance with contractual requirements to achieve set targets. But the developmental evaluation approach to accountability includes *accountability for learning and adaptation*. This was the conclusion the senior staff of the Minnesota-based Blandin Foundation reached while engaged in developmental evaluation focused on the foundation's strategic framework. The result was a report titled *Mountain of Accountability* (Blandin Foundation, 2014). I urge readers to examine the report online for the graphic depiction and full explanation of the Mountain of Accountability concept. It's a resource I use regularly to explain how developmental evaluation addresses accountability concerns. Here I can only provide a brief overview.

The *Mountain of Accountability* graphic depicts three levels of accountability and the interconnections among them.

- *Level 1: Basic accountability.* The first level of accountability assesses the extent to which resources are well managed, the quality of personnel management practices, the implementation of programs with due diligence and professionalism, and basic accountability-oriented reporting. The data for basic accountability should be embedded in fundamental management processes.

- *Level 2: Accountability for impact and effectiveness.* The second, more advanced level of accountability involves assessing intervention (program) outcomes and impacts. This is the arena of traditional program evaluation.

- *Level 3: Accountability for learning, development, and adaptation.* The third level approaches accountability through the lenses of complexity concepts and systems change. At this level, developmental evaluation is used to support learning, adaptation, systems change, mission fulfillment, principles-focused evaluation, and "walking the talk" of values. Whereas traditional evaluations focus on improving and making decisions about projects and programs, developmental evaluation addresses strategy implementation and effectiveness at the overall organization and mission fulfillment levels.

Developmental evaluation integrates accountability with *ongoing development* by paying particular attention to changes in the organization's environment (e.g., economic, social, demographic, policy, and technological changes) that affect strategic adjustments. *Accountability for learning and development* involves identifying lessons learned through deep reflective practice that can be applied to innovative systems change initiatives, adaptation, and making a difference in complex dynamic systems.

The Blandin Foundation's *Mountain of Accountability* report describes one creative approach to incorporating accountability concerns into developmental evaluation. The point is not to replicate the Mountain of Accountability concept. The point is to negotiate and clarify what *accountability* means within the context and arena of innovative and systems change action where developmental evaluation is being undertaken.

9. Why Is Developmental Evaluation Attracting So Much Attention and Spreading So Quickly?

As documented in the Preface, since the publication of *Developmental Evaluation* (Patton, 2011), the idea has taken off. Weekly I receive examples of developmental evaluations either underway or completed. In a short time, developmental evaluation has become recognized and established as a distinct and useful approach. So the question is "Why?"

I would point to four intersecting social change trends, with developmental evaluation sitting at the point where these trends converge. First is the worldwide demand for *innovation*. The private sector, public sector, and nonprofit sector are all experiencing pressure to innovate. As the world's population grows, climate change threatens, and technology innovations expand horizons and possibilities exponentially (to mention just three forces for change), social innovation is recognized as essential to address global problems. A good way to see how developmental evaluation has intersected with the more general innovation trajectory over the last decade is to look at the *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* which began publishing in 2003. A recent archival search turned up a number of references to developmental evaluation, including "next generation evaluation" and "a game-changing approach" (FSG, 2014).

The second trend consists of *systems change*. Evaluation "grew up" in the projects and has been dominated by a project- and model-testing mentality. I would say that the field has mastered how to evaluate projects. But projects, we've learned, don't change systems—and major social problems require action at the systems level. Project-level evaluation doesn't translate directly into systems change evaluation. Treating a system as a unit of analysis—that is, as the evaluand (thing evaluated)—requires systems understandings and systems thinking. Developmental evaluation brings a systems orientation to evaluating systems change.

The third trend is *complexity*. Innovation and systems thinking point to complexity theory as the relevant framework for making sense of how the world is changed. Question 4, earlier in this chapter, has addressed how systems thinking and complexity theory inform developmental evaluation practice.

The fourth trend is the acknowledgment of developmental evaluation as a *legitimate evaluation approach*. I've heard from evaluators and social innovators all over the world who were already engaged in developmental evaluation thinking and practices, but didn't have a recognizable name for what they were doing and expressed appreciation for identifying the approach as a rigorous option. I've heard from evaluators that the publication of the 2011 book gave developmental evaluation legitimacy, brought it into sharper focus for people allowing them to better do what they were already intuitively led to do, created a common language that allows people to talk with each other about taking a developmental approach to evaluation, and demonstrated that developmental evaluation can be done with validity and credibility. Exhibit 1.6 displays these four intersecting forces propelling developmental evaluation.

As a matter of balance, it is only appropriate to acknowledge that the rapid spread of developmental evaluation has also generated problems with fidelity (see Question 1 in this chapter); confusion about what developmental evaluation is and how to do it; and, unfortunately, misinterpretations and misuses of developmental evaluation. Exhibit 1.7 provides examples of some common issues that have emerged and my advice for dealing with them.

EXHIBIT 1.6

Global Societal Forces Propelling Developmental Evaluation

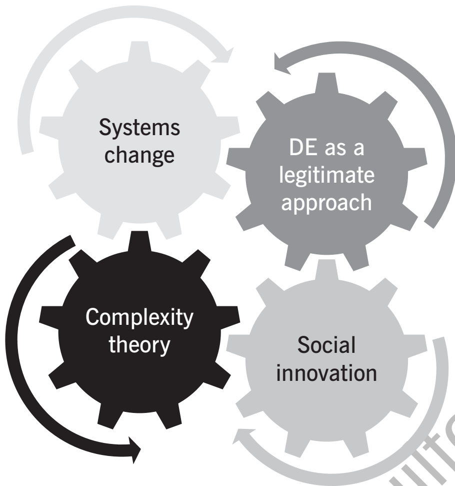


EXHIBIT 1.7

Developmental Evaluation Issues and Challenges

Issue	Developmental evaluation approach	Potential problem or misuse of developmental evaluation	Advice
1. **Understanding emergence:** Learning and adapting through engagement, not detailed advance planning. The innovation unfolds through active engagement in change processes, fostering learning and adaptation.	Letting the evaluation evolve naturally: As the nature of the intervention emerges, so do the developmental evaluation design, data collection, and feedback.	Staff members' using developmental evaluation as an excuse for not planning: "We'll just make it up as we go along" becomes a convenient way to resist logic models, theories of change, or other upfront evaluation design work that may be appropriate.	Distinguish between situations where enough is known to engage in traditional planning and evaluation, and situations where the complex nature of the problem necessitates emergent, innovative engagement and use of developmental evaluation as the appropriately aligned approach.

(continued)

Issue	Developmental evaluation approach	Potential problem or misuse of developmental evaluation	Advice
2. **Hybrid approaches:** Combining developmental evaluation with other evaluation approaches (e.g., outcome mapping, feminist evaluation) and purposes (formative, summative).	Aligning the evaluation approaches with the situation and context.	Confusion and lack of focus by dabbling with multiple approaches: starting with developmental evaluation, throwing in some theory-driven evaluation and a dash of empowerment evaluation, adding formative and summative evaluation to offer familiarity, then a heavy infusion of accountability	Employ *bricolage* (creative design and integration of multiple approaches, drawing on available resources) and pragmatism: Do what makes sense for a given situation and context, and be explicit and transparent about why what was done was done. Know the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches.
3. **Treating developmental evaluation as just initial exploration and experimentation.**	Emphasis on ongoing development and adaptation. Understanding that the purpose and nature of developmental evaluation are different from those of formative and summative evaluation.	Engaging in "bait and switch" or failing to stay the course: Funders ask for developmental evaluation without knowing what it entails. They start with it, then halfway through start demanding traditional deliverable products (e.g., logframes, formative reports) and expect a traditional summative report to be produced.	Become adept at explaining the purpose and niche of developmental evaluation—and reiterate the commitment to it on an ongoing basis. Don't expect an initial commitment to developmental evaluation to endure without reinforcement. The initial commitment needs nurturing and deepened reinforcement as the evaluation unfolds.
4. **Responding to requests for proposals or tender solicitations.**	Understanding that the developmental evaluation design emerges as the innovative process emerges, so a fully specified design is not possible at the request-for-proposals or terms-of-reference stage.	Rejecting a developmental evaluation response to a request as indicating lack of design specificity.	Work to switch solicitations and tenders from requesting design details to requesting qualifications and competences. Demonstrate design and methods competence, then show why and how the developmental evaluation design will emerge.

(continued)

Issue	Developmental evaluation approach	Potential problem or misuse of developmental evaluation	Advice
5. **Budgeting for developmental evaluation.**	Understanding that as the developmental evaluation design emerges, the budget emerges. Budget options are presented to offer alternative inquiry paths to support emergent information and decision-making needs.	Rigid upfront budgeting requirements, which reduce flexibility, adaptability, and emergent responsiveness.	Do the developmental evaluation budget in stages, rather than for the whole initiative all at once and at the beginning. Be prepared to do a series of budgets as the innovation unfolds in stages over time.

10. What Has Been the Most Significant Development in Developmental Evaluation since Publication of the Patton (2011) Book?

Principles-focused evaluation has emerged as a major inquiry framework and focus for developmental evaluation. For example, in their insightful volume titled *Evaluating Complexity*, Preskill and Gopal (2014) advise: "Look for effective principles of practice in action, rather than assessing adherence to a predetermined set of activities" (p. 16). Treating principles as the focus of evaluation requires principles-focused sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 270). This involves identifying and studying cases that illuminate the nature, implementation, outcomes, and implications of principles. Studying the implementation and outcomes of effective, evidence-based principles is a major new direction in developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011, pp. 167–168, 194–195; Patton, 2015, p. 292).

A principles-based approach is appropriate when a group of diverse programs are all adhering to the same principles, but each is adapting those principles to its own particular target population within its own context. A *principle* is defined as a fundamental proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning. An approach grounded in evidence-based, effective principles assumes that while the principles remain the same, implementing them will necessarily and appropriately require adaptation within and across contexts. Evidence for the effectiveness of principles is derived from in-depth case studies of their implementations and implications. The results of the case studies are then synthesized across the diverse programs, all adhering to the same principles, but each adapting those principles to its own particular target population within its own context.

The ideal is that the principles guiding the innovation and those informing the evaluation are aligned. This is a distinguishing feature of Chapter 2, in which the innovative program and the developmental evaluation are based on a holistic set of Māori cultural principles that guide ways of knowing and being in tribal and Māori contexts. This seamless blending of cultural and evaluation principles exemplifies principles-focused developmental evaluation. Chapter 4 also presents a principles-focused evaluation exemplar.

Developmental Evaluation Case Exemplars

This opening chapter has offered responses to the 10 most common questions I get about developmental evaluation. We turn now to the heart of this book: case exemplars of actual developmental evaluations. As I do keynote speeches, conduct training, and consult on developmental evaluations, the most common request I get is for real-world applications and case examples. This book responds to that demand. As you read these examples of different kinds of developmental evaluation in a variety of settings, focused on quite diverse innovations, I invite you to look for patterns, themes, and principles in practice. In Chapter 14, coeditors Kate McKegg and Nan Wehipeihana present a synthesis of the patterns and themes they have observed, drawing on both the cases and their own extensive experiences as developmental evaluators. Chapter 15 completes the book with a detailed discussion of the eight essential developmental evaluation principles.

REFERENCES

American Evaluation Association (AEA), Task Force on Guiding Principles for Evaluators. (2004). *Guiding principles for evaluators* (rev. ed.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from *www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51*.

Blandin Foundation. (2014). Mountain of accountability. Grand Rapids, MN: Author. Retrieved from *http://blandinfoundation.org/resources/reports/mountain-of-accountability*.

Cabaj, M. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Experiences and reflections of 18 early adopters*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Coryn, C. L. S., Noakes, L. A., Westine, C. D., & Schröter, D. C. (2011). A systematic review of theory-driven evaluation practice from 1990 to 2009. *American Journal of Evaluation, 32*(2), 199–226.

Cousins, J. B., & Chouinard, J. A. (2012). *Participatory evaluation up close: An integration of research-based knowledge*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Cousins, J. B., Whitmore, E., & Shulha, L. (2014). Arguments for a common set of principles for collaborative inquiry in evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 34*(1), 7–22.

Daigneault, P. M., & Jacob, S. (2009). Toward accurate measurement of participation: Rethinking the conceptualization and operationalization of participatory evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 30*(3), 330–348.

Dickson, R., & Saunders, M. (2014). Developmental evaluation: Lessons for evaluative practice from the SEARCH program. *Evaluation, 20*(2), 176–194.

Dozois, E., Langlois, M., & Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2010). *DE 201: A practitioner's guide to* *developmental evaluation*. Montreal: J. W. McConnell Family Foundation. Retrieved from *www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/publication/de-201-a-practitioners-guide-to-developmental-evaluation*.

Fetterman, D., Kaftarian, S. J., & Wandersman, A. H. (Eds.). (2014). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment, evaluation capacity building, and accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

FSG. (2014). Next generation evaluation: Embracing complexity, connectivity, and change. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from *www.ssireview.org/nextgenevaluation*.

Ghere, G., King, J., Stevahn, L., & Minnema, J. (2006). A professional development unit for reflecting on program evaluation competencies. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*(1), 108–123.

Lam, C. Y., & Shulha, L. M. (2014). Insights on using developmental evaluation for innovating: A case study on the cocreation of an innovative program. *American Journal of Evaluation* [published online before print]. Retrieved from *http://aje.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/08/08/1098214014542100*.

Langlois, M., Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Beer, T. (2012). The art of the nudge: Five practices for developmental evaluators. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 27*(2), 39–59.

Miller, R. L., & Campbell, R. (2006). Taking stock of empowerment evaluation: An empirical review. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*(3), 296–319.

Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Preskill, H., & Beer, T. (2012). Evaluating social innovation. Retrieved from *www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/708/Default.aspx?srpush=true*.

Preskill, H., & Gopal, S. (2014). Evaluating complexity: Propositions for improving practice. Retrieved from *www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/1204/Default.aspx?srpush=true*.

Williams, B. (2005). Systems and systems thinking. In S. Mathison (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of evaluation* (pp. 405–412). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Williams, B. (2008). Systemic inquiry. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vol. 2, pp. 854–859). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Williams, B. (2014, November 16). A systems practitioner's journey [Post to AEA365 blog]. Retrieved from *https://us-mg204.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.partner=sbc&.rand=3sva69d24c9fe#*.

Williams, B., & van 't Hof, S. (2014). *Wicked solutions: A systems approach to complex problems*. Wellington, New Zealand: Bob Williams. Retrieved from *www.bobwilliams.co.nz/wicked.pdf*.

Wilson-Grau, R., & Britt, H. (2012). *Outcome harvesting*. Cairo, Egypt: Ford Foundation Middle East and North Africa Office. Retrieved from *www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=374*.