Developmental Evaluation: Systems Thinking and Complexity Science

Michael Quinn Patton

MESI 2016
Research on Social Innovators’ Perceptions of Evaluation
Interpretive Frameworks


They concluded that "the way senior executives interpret their business environment is more important for performance than how accurately they know their environment."
They further concluded that it is a waste of resources to spend a lot of money increasing the marginal accuracy of data available to senior executives compared to the value of enhancing their capacity to interpret whatever data they have.

Executives were more limited by a lack of capacity to make sense of data than by inadequate or inaccurate data.

In essence, they found that interpretive capacity, or "mind-sets," distinguish high-performance more than data quality and accuracy.
Ubuntu small group exercise

The spirit of interpersonal interaction that pervades sub-Saharan Africa, *ubuntu* emphasizes the idea that:

“A person is a person because of other people.”
EMERGENCE

• Self-organizing group experiences and outcomes
• Inter-relationships and interconnections
• Boundaries and levels of analysis
Emergence Example

Wilderness Leadership Program
Taking Emergence Seriously

• Beyond “unanticipated consequences” to genuine openness
Uncertainty and Emergence

“No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy.”
Field Marshall Helmuth Carl Bernard von Moltke

“Everyone has a plan…until he gets hit.”
Former World Heavyweight boxing champion, Mike Tyson

Tom Peters (1996) Liberation Management:

“READY. FIRE. AIM.”
Adaptation and Learning

“Shoot bullets not cannonballs.”

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Original Primary Options

Formative and Summative Evaluation

(Mid-term and End-of-Project Reviews)
Blandin Community Leadership Program

LEADERSHIP...
YOU HAVE TO DO IT YOURSELF,
BUT YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE.
Fundamental issue

*Development* vs. *Improvement*
Complex development situations are ones in which this...
And this…
Turns out to be this...
...looks like this
Formative evaluation

Summative evaluation

Developmental evaluation

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Henry Mintzberg

Strategic Leadership Expert

Evaluation of strategy Implementation

"Connect."
Henry Mintzberg’s one word of advice.

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Mintzberg on Strategy

- Intended Strategy
- Deliberate Strategy
- Emergent Strategy
- Unrealized Strategy
- Realized Strategy
Developmental Evaluation Defined

Purpose: Developmental evaluation (DE) informs and supports innovative and adaptive development in complex dynamic environments.

DE brings to innovation and adaptation the processes of asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and gathering and reporting evaluative data to support project, program, product, and/or organizational development with timely feedback.
Key DE Characteristics

• Focus on development (versus improvement, accountability or summative judgment)
• Takes place in complex dynamic environments
• Feedback is rapid (as real time as possible).
• The evaluator works collaboratively with social innovators to conceptualize, design and test new approaches in a long-term, on-going process of adaptation, intentional change, and development.
Key DE Characteristics

• The DE evaluator can be part of the intervention team.
• The evaluator's primary functions are to elucidate the innovation and adaptation processes, track their implications and results, and facilitate ongoing, real-time, data-based decision-making in the developmental process.
• DE becomes part of the intervention.
High Degree of Process Use

Process use refers to and is indicated by individual changes in thinking and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process. Evidence of process use is represented by the following kind of statement after an evaluation: "The impact on our program came not so much from the findings but from going through the thinking process that the evaluation required."
Small group exercise

Distinguishing improvement from development

Each person describe a project example that distinguishes an improvement from a development
Other names

- Real time evaluation
- Emergent evaluation
- Action evaluation
- Adaptive evaluation
DD\(^2\) = Developmental evaluation used for development evaluation
## Five purposes of developmental evaluation

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<td>2. Adapting effective principles to a new context</td>
<td>Innovative initiative Develop ‘own’ version based on adaption of effective principles and knowledge</td>
<td>Top-down—general principles knowledge disseminated Bottom-up—sensitivity to context, experience, capabilities and priorities Adaptation vs Adoption</td>
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<td>3. Developing a rapid response in turbulent crisis conditions, e.g., natural resource or humanitarian disaster</td>
<td>Existing initiatives and responses no longer effective as conditions change suddenly</td>
<td>Planning, execution and evaluation occur simultaneously</td>
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*MESI 2016*
## Five purposes of developmental evaluation

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<td>Disrupt existing system Taking an innovation to scale Major systems change and changing scale will add levels of complexity, new uncertainties and disagreements</td>
<td>Models change as they are taken across time, space and to larger systems Adaptive cross scale innovations assume complex, nonlinear dynamics—agility and responsiveness Adaptation -- Replication</td>
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Conditions that challenge traditional model-testing evaluation

• High innovation
• Development
• High uncertainty
• Dynamic
• Emergent
• Systems Change

Adaptive Management and Developmental Evaluation

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Complexity concepts & Evaluation

- **Emergence**: Self-organizing, Attractors
- **Nonlinear**: Small actions can have large reactions. “The Butterfly Wings Metaphor
- **Dynamical**: Interactions within, between, and among subsystems and parts within systems can volatile, changing
- **Getting to Maybe**: Uncertainty; unpredictable; uncontrollable; unanticipated consequences
- **Coevolution**: Process uses; interdependence
- **Adaptation**: Staff & Intended beneficiaries
Adaptation and Learning

“Shoot bullets not cannonballs.”

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Complexity Concepts

- **Nonlinearity**: Small actions can have large reactions. “The Butterfly Wings Metaphor”
Damiano Soup Kitchen, Duluth, Minnesota
Nonlinearity

- Vicious circle: From working to homeless
- Virtuous circle: Youth homeless center staff story
Dynamical

- Youth homelessness
- Mental illness
- Chemical dependency
- Poverty

Journey-oriented
Co-evolution

Bumblebees and the flowers they pollinate have coevolved so that both have become dependent on each other for survival.
Seeing Through A Complexity Lens

DEFINING COMPLEXITY
Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed?
Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, Michael Q. Patton
Random House Canada, 2006

THIS BOOK IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE AND WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THIS BOOK IS FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO WANT TO MAKE CONNECTIONS THAT WILL CREATE EXTRAORDINARY OUTCOMES. THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPEN. GETTING TO MAYBE: HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD.
Conceptual Options

• Simple

• Complicated

• Complex
Situation Analysis
Matrix:
Mapping the Territory

Degree of Agreement

Close to

Far from

Degree of Certainty

Close to

Far from

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Simple Space

Agreement

Close to

Far from

Simple

Plan, control

Close to

Certainty

Far from
The recipe is essential

Recipes (best practices) are tested to assure replicability

Recipes produce standard products

Focus is on following the recipe (Fidelity evaluation)

The goal is certainty of same results every time
Technically Complicated

- Simple: Plan, control
- Technically Complicated: Experiment, coordinate expertise

Agreement

Close to

Certainty

Far from
**Simple**  
Following a Recipe

- The recipe is essential
- Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts
- No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success
- Recipes produce standard products
- Certainty of same results every time

**Complicated**  
A Rocket to the Moon

- Formulae are critical and necessary
- Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok
- High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination
- Rockets similar in critical ways
- High degree of certainty of outcome

**Complex**  
Raising a Child

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Socially Complicated

- Socially Complicated
  - Build relationships, create common ground

- Simple
  - Plan, control

- Technically Complicated
  - Experiment, coordinate expertise

Agreement

Close to

Certainty

Far from

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Space Shuttle Disasters

- *Challenger* disaster  
  January 28, 1986

- *Columbia* disaster  
  February 1, 2003
Socially complicated

Implementing human rights agreements, like gender equity or outlawing child labor

Environmental Initiatives

- Many different and competing stakeholders
- Diverse vested interests
- High stakes
Socially complicated situations pose the challenge of coordinating and integrating many players.
Know When Your Challenges Are In the Zone of Complexity

- **Zone of Complexity**
  - **Simple**
    - Close to
    - Plan, control
  - **Socially Complicated**
    - Close to
    - Build relationships, create common ground
  - **Technically Complicated**
    - Far from
    - Experiment, coordinate expertise
Following a Recipe

A Rocket to the Moon

Raising a Child

• The recipe is essential
• Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts
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• Recipes produce standard products
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Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok

High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination

Rockets similar in critical ways

High degree of certainty of outcome

• Formulae have only a limited application
• Raising one child gives no assurance of success with the next
• Expertise can help but is not sufficient; relationships are key
• Every child is unique
• Uncertainty of outcome remains

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Simple | Complicated | Complex

**Following a Recipe**
- The recipe is essential
- Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts
- No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success
- Recipe notes the quantity and nature of “parts” needed
- Recipes produce standard products
- Certainty of same results every time

**A Rocket to the Moon**
- Formulae are critical and necessary
- Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok
- High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination
- Separate into parts and then coordinate
- Rockets similar in critical ways
- High degree of certainty of outcome

**Raising a Child**
- Formulae have only a limited application
- Raising one child gives no assurance of success with the next
- Expertise can help but is not sufficient; relationships are key
- Can’t separate parts from the whole
- Every child is unique
- Uncertainty of outcome remains

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Wise executives tailor their approach to fit the complexity of the circumstances they face.
Wise evaluators tailor their approach to fit the complexity of the circumstances they face.
Example

The McGill-McConnell Leadership Program Example

Simple elements

Complicated elements

Complex elements
Simple outcomes

- Increase knowledge and skills of participants

**Evaluation**: Pre-post data and documentation of learning
Complicated Impacts

- Change participants’ organizations

**Evaluation:**
Case studies of organizational change
Complex Vision

- Infuse energy into the moribund not-for-profit (voluntary) sector
- Make the sector more dynamic
- Create network of leaders who actively engage in change
Evaluating the Complex

• Real time follow-up of network connections and actions
• Follow-up is an intervention
• Rapid feedback of findings permits infusion of resources in support of emergent outcomes
Exercise

1. Identify a program or project at your table.
2. What elements are…

Simple
Complicated
Complex
### Purposes of developmental evaluation

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Purposes of developmental evaluation

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Evidence-based Practice

Evaluation grew up in the “projects” testing models under a theory of change that pilot testing would lead to proven models that could be disseminated and taken to scale:

The search for *best practices* and *evidenced-based practices*
Fundamental Issue: How the World Is Changed

Top-down dissemination of “proven models” versus Bottoms-up adaptive management
Models vs. Principles

Identifying proven principles for adaptive management (bottoms-up approach) versus
Identifying and disseminating proven models (top down approach)
Some premises:

• Evaluation is part of initial program design, including conceptualizing the theory of change.

• Evaluator’s role is to help users clarify their purpose, hoped-for results, and change model.

• Evaluators can/should offer conceptual and methodological options.

• Evaluators can help by questioning assumptions.

• Evaluators can play a key role in facilitating evaluative thinking all along the way.
Three ways of conceptualizing and mapping theories of change

- Linear Newtonian causality
- Interdependent systems relationships
- Complex nonlinear dynamics
Linear Logic Model

INPUTS (people, materials) → ACTIVITIES (processes) → OUTPUTS → OUTCOMES → CHANGES IN PEOPLES LIVES → IMPACTS → CHANGES IN COMMUNITIES
Feedback Systems Logic Model

What inputs need to go into the process to make the product that produces the desired result?

What steps need to be taken to create the product that achieves the desired result?

What features / characteristics should the product have?

What is the desired result? What should customer experience?

Output / Product
Essential Attributes
Attributes required to meet or exceed customer needs:
"Do the Right Thing"
Efficacy
Appropriate
Characteristics to meet or exceed customer wants and expectations of excellence
"Do the Right Thing Well": Efficiency
Dignity and Respect
Effectiveness
Timeliness
Reduce Waste
Safety
Continuity
Availability

Key Processes & Functions
Inputs organized and utilized
Procedures
Steps
Key processes
Measure Variability
Assess Process Control
Assess fidelity to planned procedures
Assess impact of variation
Evaluate opportunity to raise the bar

Customer Outcomes & Satisfaction
- Measure Effectiveness
- Measure Satisfaction
- Inform Improvement needs

Planning & Implementation

Structure
Process
OUTCOMES

Inputs
Staff Resources
Financial resources
Internal Standards
External Requirements and Information
Equipment/Materials

Feedback into process
Division workplace that:
· Offers a healthy work environment
· Recognizes excellence
· Provides quality training and management
· Includes effective systems, procedures, and communication (Goal 5)

Division Leadership that provides sufficient:
· Infrastructure
· Policies
· Strategic Planning

Resources that are:
· Available
· Timely

Workforce that is:
· Diverse
· Skilled

Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Evaluation Planning Logic Model

WHAT
· Engaged network of states and partners
· Increased advocacy and "activated constituency"
· Increased focus on heart disease and stroke prevention efforts by states and partners, especially with regard to disparities
· Increased external application of Division goals and strategies

HOW
· Effective: Management Coordination Staff development
· Enhanced ability of programs to apply findings to improve public health
· Enhanced competency of public health workforce
· Enhanced integration among chronic disease programs

WHY
· Increased adoption, reach, implementation, and sustainability of recommended public health strategies to achieve strategic plan goals:
  - Prevent risk factors for heart disease and stroke (Goal 1)
  - Increase detection and treatment of risk factors (Goal 2)
  - Increase early identification and treatment of heart attacks and strokes (Goal 3)
  - Prevent recurring cardiovascular events (Goal 4)

Planning
Activities
Communication
Collaboration
Leadership
Surveillance
Research
Evaluation
Program
Policy
Disparities
Translation, Dissemination
Adoption, Practice, Sustainability
Impact

Reduced risk factors
Reduced morbidity and mortality of heart disease and stroke
Reduced levels of disparities in heart disease and stroke
Eliminated preventable strokes and risks
Reduced economic impact of heart disease and stroke
Improved emergency response
Improved quality of care
Increased knowledge of signs and symptoms

HIGH
Increased adoption, reach, implementation, and sustainability of recommended public health strategies to achieve strategic plan goals:
- Prevent risk factors for heart disease and stroke (Goal 1)
- Increase detection and treatment of risk factors (Goal 2)
- Increase early identification and treatment of heart attacks and strokes (Goal 3)
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WHAT
Engaged network of states and partners
Increased advocacy and "activated constituency"
Increased focus on heart disease and stroke prevention efforts by states and partners, especially with regard to disparities
Increased external application of Division goals and strategies

HOW
Effective: Management Coordination Staff development
Enhanced ability of programs to apply findings to improve public health
Enhanced competency of public health workforce
Enhanced integration among chronic disease programs

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Systems

- Parts are interdependent such that a change in one part changes all parts.
- The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
- Focus on interconnected relationships.
- Systems are made up of sub-systems and function within larger systems.
Understanding the Elephant from a Systems Perspective
The relationship between what goes in and what comes out.

What conceptual framework informs front-end evaluation work?
Teen Pregnancy Program Example
Logic Model for Pregnant Teens Program

1. **Program reaches out to pregnant teens**

2. **Pregnant teens enter and attend the program** (participation)

3. **Teens learn prenatal nutrition and self-care** (increased knowledge)

4. **Teens develop commitment to take care of themselves and their babies** (attitude change)

5. **Teens adopt healthy behaviors: no smoking, no drinking, attend prenatal clinic, eat properly** (behavior change)

6. **Teens have healthy babies** (desired outcome)
Systems web showing possible influence linkages to a pregnant teenager

- Prenatal program staff
- Teachers/other adults
- Child's father & peers
- Young pregnant woman's attitudes & behaviors
- Her parents & other family members
- Her peer group

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Program systems web showing possible institutional influences affecting pregnant teenagers:

Other Systems
-- welfare
-- legal
-- nutrition programs
-- transportation
-- child protection
-- media messages

Context factors
-- politics
-- economic incentives
-- social norms
-- culture
-- music

SCHOOL SYSTEM

Prenatal program

Young pregnant women's attitudes & behaviors

Church

Other community-based youth programs

Prenatal Clinic and Hospital Outreach

Youth Culture

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SYSTEMS CHANGE: Interrelationships, Boundaries, Perceptions, Networks
HIV/AIDS Example

• Hits every system: health, family, social, religious, economic, political, community, international

• Requires multiple interventions on multiple fronts in all subsystems simultaneously

• Resulting reactions, interactions, consequences dynamic, unpredictable, emergent, and ever changing
Challenges:
Situation Recognition and Appropriate Evaluation Designs
The nature of EXPERTISE
Complex Situations

• Highly emergent (difficult to plan and predict)
• Highly dynamic, rapidly changing
• Relationships are interdependent and non-linear rather than simple and linear (cause-effect)
Some Particularly Appropriate Applications of DE: Examples of Innovative Arenas

- Social Movements and networks
- Advocacy Evaluation
- Large-scale, cross-sector, collaborative initiatives
- R & D in public health, technological innovation, science
- Prevention
Beyond just Summative and Formative
Beyond Static Accountability Models
Developmental Evaluation

Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use

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Coherence Through Shared Principles

Principles-focused Evaluation
Evaluation Principles

- AEA guiding principles
- Participatory evaluation principles
- Utilization-Focused Evaluation principles
- Empowerment Evaluation principles
- Culturally competence evaluation principles
- Indigenous peoples’ research and evaluation principles
U-FE Principle

Focus on Intended Use by Intended Users
Principles

“I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, the first of which is to be flexible at all times.”

Everett Dirksen

U.S. Senator
"Principles are like prayers. Noble, of course, but awkward at a party."

Lady Crawley, the Dowager Countess, Downton Abbey
“It is not the responsibility of knights errant to discover whether the afflicted, the enchained and the oppressed whom they encounter on the road are reduced to these circumstances and suffer this distress for their vices, or for their virtues: the knight's sole responsibility is to succour them as people in need, having eyes only for their sufferings, not for their misdeeds.”

— Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*
RECIPES vs PRINCIPLES

REPLICATION RECIPE

Add 1/4 teaspoon of salt

ADAPTIVE PRINCIPLE

Season to taste & situation
Managing email

“Wow! I’ve got one from someone I know!”
Exercise

Rule: 30 minutes of aerobic exercise each day

Principle: Exercise regularly at a level that supports health and is sustainable given your health, lifestyle, age, and capacity.
<table>
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<th>Investing</th>
<th>For individual small investors, own only three diversified mutual funds and no more than 10 individual stocks, which is all a small investor needs and can manage.</th>
<th>For individual small investors, own as few or as many mutual funds and stocks as you can understand, regularly monitor and reasonably manage</th>
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<td>Staff meetings</td>
<td>Start each week with a staff meeting of no more than one hour.</td>
<td>Hold staff meetings at regular intervals and as needed based on the nature of the staff and the purpose of staff meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Every primary school-age child should read at least 15 minutes a day.</td>
<td>Children should read regularly and consistently based on their interest and ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Engage in 30 minutes of aerobic exercise every day.</td>
<td>Create a regular exercise regimen that is sustainable to meet your fitness and health goals given your age and lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Deliver the final report by the date specified in the contract or terms of reference.</td>
<td>Lifestyle: Target delivery of the findings to be useful for informing important decisions and actions. Monitor emergent issues that may influence and change the timing of when findings will be most useful to primary intended users.</td>
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Principles

• Provide direction but not detailed prescription
• Are grounded in values about what matters
• Are based on evidence about how to be effective
• Must be interpreted and applied contextually,
• Require judgment in application
• Inform choices at forks in the road
• Are the rudder for navigating complex dynamic systems
• Point to outcomes and impacts
• Can be evaluated for both process (implementation) -- and results
DE 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
What is Essential in Developmental Evaluation?

On Integrity, Fidelity, Adultery, Abstinence, Impotence, Long-term Commitment, Integrity, and Sensitivity in Implementing Evaluation Models
Creative Challenge

Situational adaptability:

- Contingency-based evaluation
- Appropriateness
  -- Using standard forms of evaluation
  and
  -- Going beyond standard forms when appropriate and useful
Paradigms and Lenses

• The importance of interpretive frameworks
• Complexity as an interpretive framework
VALUES CONTRASTS

Traditional evaluations...

1. Testing models

Complexity-based, Developmental Evaluation...

1. Supporting innovation and adaptation
Traditional Evaluation…

2. Render definitive judgments of success or failure:

Does the program work?

Developmental Evaluation…

2. Rendering nuanced, disaggregated feedback & generate learnings for adaptation & development:

What works for whom in what ways under what conditions?
3. INDEPENDENCE:
Evaluator external, independent, objective

3. RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED, COLLABORATIVE
Evaluator a facilitator and learning coach bringing evaluative thinking to the table, supportive of innovator’s vision
4. CONTROL: Evaluator determines the design based on the evaluator’s perspective about what is important. The evaluator controls the evaluation.

4. OPENNESS & NATURALISTIC INQUIRY
Evaluator goes with the flow, watches for what emerges
Traditional Evaluation…

5. CERTAINTY:
- Predetermined outcomes
- Fix the design upfront
- Predetermined indicators
- Fixed questions

Developmental Evaluation…

5. FLEXIBILITY
- Emergent outcomes
- Flexible design
- Emergent indicators
- Dynamic questions
Traditional Developmental Evaluation…

6. Linear cause-effect thinking and logic models

Developmental Evaluation…

6. Systems and complexity thinking with attention to dynamics, permeable boundaries, interdependencies, and emergent interconnections
7. Value top-down change based on generalizable findings across time & space

- High fidelity, prescriptive “best practices” based on summative evaluation

7. Value bottom-up principles that provide direction but have to be adapted to context

- Aim to produce context-specific understandings that inform ongoing innovation and adaptation.
8. Accountability focused on and directed to external authorities and funders.

8. Accountability centered on the innovators’ deep sense of fundamental values and commitments – and learning as accountability.
Traditional Evaluation...

9. Being outside the action, above the fray

Developmental Evaluation...

9. Being part of the action, engaged in the fray
Traditional Evaluation…

10. TRUTH:
*Speaking truth to power*

Developmental Evaluation…

10. PERSPECTIVES

Facilitating dialogue and engagement with complexity and shifting understandings

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I evaluate; therefore, I am.
Website sample chapter:

website for the book:
http://www.guilford.com/cgi-bin/cartscript.cgi?page=pr/patton.htm&dir=research/res_eval&cart_id=824067.29797
References

