



CHAPTER 15

The Developmental Evaluation Mindset

Eight Guiding Principles

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Principles are like prayers. Noble, of course, but awkward at a party.
—VIOLET CRAWLEY, DOWAGER COUNTESS OF GRANTHAM,
Downton Abbey

The party's almost over; this book is nearly done. But before you leave, it's time to talk principles. In Chapter 1, I have reviewed the state of the art and practice of developmental evaluation, in the form of answers to the 10 most common questions I get about it. The first question is this: What are the essential elements of developmental evaluation? The answer is that there are *eight guiding 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*

This concluding chapter elaborates and explains each of these eight guiding principles, as well as their integral interconnection.

These principles come from my own experiences in developmental evaluation, as well as the insights of my coeditors and other developmental evaluators—both those whose work is featured in this book, and others in what has emerged as a

global community of practice. I have been writing about evaluation for more than 40 years. I have never had as much engagement from colleagues on something I was writing as I have had in the process of developing the eight principles. I received detailed feedback about which principles to highlight as essential, how many to include, and how to word those included. Questions and thoughtful suggestions took me deeper into key points. The experience-based insights of others complemented my own. The substance these colleagues shared demonstrated a commitment to reflective practice unlike any I've previously experienced. The reactions to early drafts of the principles and later rewrites came with these messages: Developmental evaluation is hard work, challenging work, but (most of all) important work. The need and niche are real. The results are being used. Demand for developmental evaluation is increasing, and momentum is building. And developmental evaluation is, first and foremost, a principles-based approach.

The Principles-Based Developmental Evaluation Mindset

Developmental evaluation is not a set of methods, tools, or techniques. There isn't a set of steps to follow. There's no recipe, formula, or standardized procedures. Rather, developmental evaluation is a way of approaching the challenge of evaluating social innovation through guiding principles (Patton, 2015). A principles-based approach contrasts with prescriptive models, which, like recipes, provide standardized directions that must be followed precisely to achieve the desired outcome. For example, goals-based evaluation prescribes operationalizing clear, specific, and measurable goals in order to measure goal attainment. In contrast, guiding principles provide direction, but must be interpreted and adapted to context and situation, like advice on how to be a good student: *Make your studies your priority*. What that means in practice will depend on what you're studying and what else is going on in your life. The alternative principle is *Have fun, hang out, hook up, and study just enough to get your degree*. Different principles, different guidance. Pick your poison.

Standardized models, like recipes, are specific and highly prescriptive: *Add one-quarter teaspoon of salt*. Principles, in contrast, provide guidance: *Season to taste*. A time management "best practice" prescribes setting aside the last hour of the workday to respond to nonurgent emails. The principled approach guides you to distinguish urgent from nonurgent emails and manage email time accordingly.

The eight principles offered in this chapter are written to be succinct, pointed, and distinct enough to provide direction within the niche of developmental evaluation. The cooking principle *Season to taste* meets these criteria. The principle doesn't tell you what seasonings to consider, or even what a seasoning is. It doesn't tell you how to taste, exercise taste, or judge taste, or even who is doing the tasting. Novices learning to cook may be better off initially following the recipe that says *Add one-quarter teaspoon of salt*, and then experiencing how that amount of salt tastes as they develop confidence to season to taste. My point is that these developmental evaluation principles assume some knowledge of evaluation, innovation,

complexity concepts, and systems thinking as presented and discussed in depth in *Developmental Evaluation* (Patton, 2011). This chapter goes beyond the book in converting those core ideas and elements into a set of guiding principles.

Taken together as a whole, the eight principles constitute a *mindset*—a way of thinking about evaluation’s role in the development of social innovations and, correspondingly, a way of working with social innovators in the adaptive innovation process. As I go through the separate principles, I urge you to keep in mind that this is not intended as a laundry list, but rather as a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing principles—a point to which I return after introducing and explicating the principles. Let me also note that the discussion of the first four principles is more detailed and therefore lengthier than the subsequent four because the elaboration of the first four principles involves a review of some basics about developmental evaluation that I hope will make the meaning and implications of the later principles more immediately understandable and usable.

The Developmental Evaluation Principles

1. **Developmental purpose principle:** Illuminate, inform, and support what is being developed, by identifying the nature and patterns of *development* (innovation, adaptation, systems change), and the implications and consequences of those patterns

The first principle guides us in staying mindful of the *purpose* of developmental evaluation—to support innovation *development*. Developmental evaluation serves a distinct purpose in contrast to other evaluation purposes. Summative evaluation renders overall judgments of merit, worth, and significance. Formative evaluation supports improvements in a model. Improving a model, especially to get it ready for summative evaluation, serves an important purpose. But it is not a developmental purpose.

Developmental evaluation supports innovation, adaptation, and systems change. Innovations can take the form of initiatives, programs, projects, policies, collaborations, and interventions. The structure or form is not what makes something a social innovation; it is, rather, the degree and nature of change involved compared to the existing situation. Exhibit 15.1 identifies five specific types of developmental evaluation contributions: (1) evaluating a new, original approach to a problem as it is being created; (2) informing ongoing innovative development of a program or intervention in response to changing conditions and new understandings (basically, *adaptive innovation*); (3) adapting effective principles validated in one context to a different context; (4) supporting major systems change, including cross-systems/cross-scale innovation; and (5) developing rapid responses in crisis situations. These five types of developmental evaluation are discussed at length throughout the *Developmental Evaluation* book (Patton, 2011).

EXHIBIT 15.1

Five Types of Developmental Evaluation: Variations in the Nature of the Innovation and Adaptation

Focus of development, corresponding to five types of developmental evaluation	Nature of the innovation*	Contribution of developmental evaluation	Key concepts
1. Developing (creating/inventing) a new intervention aimed at a significant problem	Creating an <i>original</i> approach, or <i>inventing</i> a new intervention and/or innovative program; the emphasis is on <i>originality</i> within a complex context.	Clarifying the elements of the innovation; examining effectiveness, unanticipated consequences, and the emergent dynamics of the innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invention • Original • New • Significantly different in important, identifiable ways
2. Ongoing adaptive development	Innovatively adapting an existing intervention, approach, or program to changing conditions, new knowledge, and new clientele	Clarifying the nature of the adaptive innovation: what is carried forward; what is changed; how these interact; and the consequences of ongoing innovative adaptation as a way of engaging in change through trial-and-error, double-loop learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting an existing initiative or program • Changes that go beyond marginal improvements • Ongoing innovation
3. Developing greater impact by adapting validated innovation principles and practices to a new context (scaling)	The adaptive innovation of principle-based practices from one context to another, or to a larger context; this means that what has become established in one context is experienced as innovative in a different context.	Clarifying and elaborating the ways in which different contexts affect adaptive innovation: the degree, nature, and consequences of adaptive innovation from context to context as ideas and approaches are shared and spread.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling • Expanding options by context • Adapting principles contextually (not replicating a model or recipe)
4. Developing changes in and across systems	Innovation through changed relationships, perspectives, and boundaries within and across systems.	Tracking, mapping, and interpreting systems changes both within and across systems; supporting adaptive innovation responses as systems changes become manifest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems as the focus of change • Complex dynamics in play
5. Developing rapid responses in crisis situations	"Building while flying"; rapid adaptive innovations in the face of humanitarian, political, social, and economic crisis.	Tracking, documenting, and providing real-time feedback about emergent challenges, urgent needs, flow of resources, and aligning interventions in highly turbulent, uncertain conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent • Real-time feedback • Simultaneous planning, implementation, and evaluation

*Innovations can take the form of initiatives, programs, projects, policies, collaborations, and interventions. The structure or form is not what makes something a social innovation. It is, rather, the degree and nature of change involved, compared to the existing situation.

Let me reiterate: The purpose of developmental evaluation is *developmental*. Some kind of innovation is being *developed*. The evaluation tracks what is being developed and how it is being developed—the nature and implications of the innovative and adaptive processes. And because the innovation is developing, the evaluation must also be developed. The design and implementation of a developmental evaluation are emergent and adaptable as the innovative process emerges and adapts. Developmental evaluation is characterized by short cycles of design, data collection, feedback, and evaluative synthesis and reflection.

Let me provide a specific example of how developmental evaluation can accompany creation of an innovative systems change initiative. Sometimes a problem may be identified by social change agents who share a commitment to attempt major change, but the nature of that change has not yet been determined when the developmental evaluator is invited to join the process. The evaluator, then, especially when involved from the beginning, may play a significant role in helping shape the innovation vision and process. Donna Podems, an experienced developmental evaluator based in South Africa, tells of such an experience:

“I was asked to work with innovators in the national health program of an African country. When I started working with the group, they said, ‘We aim to shift the health system.’ After listening for a few hours, I said, ‘Honestly, I have no idea what you are doing, or what you are trying to achieve . . . and I haven’t a clue how to measure it. I don’t understand what it means to “shift the health system.”’ And they looked at each other and burst out laughing and said, ‘We have no idea, either.’ I could not have helped this group of innovators if forced to do a traditional evaluation where everything has to be specified upfront. But using developmental evaluation, we developed what came to be a very successful initiative. Engaging together through developmental evaluation was an immense relief for everyone as we figured out how to innovate toward shifting the health system.”

Innovation often begins with problem identification and a commitment to change (Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006). This is an example of using developmental evaluation to help create a response to a problem. It also illustrates the *principle of co-creation*, discussed below.

Mark Cabaj has studied ways in which developmental evaluation contributes to different kinds of development. His “growing list” includes the following:

- Deeper insight into the nature of the challenge being addressed.
- Working conclusions about what does and does not work.
- Emergent elements of what could become a broader intervention.
- Strengthened capacity of the innovation group.

Exhibit 15.2 presents his developmental framework, illustrated with examples drawn from his experience of working with a network of social service agencies in a

EXHIBIT 15.2**Examples of Developmental Evaluation Support in a Canadian City's Network of Agencies: Experimenting with Innovative Ways to Help Homeless Day Laborers Secure Housing and Better Income**

What was developed through developmental evaluation	What this means	Examples
1. Understanding the challenges of innovation and systems change	The effort to tackle a complex problem may generate new and/or deeper insights about the nature of the challenge being addressed and/or the context in which it is being addressed.	The innovators realized the importance of social supports in the “homelessness puzzle,” once some of the clients who secured housing were drawn back to the streets to regain the friendship and company of their previous networks.
2. Theory-of-change elaboration	The innovators may have new ideas about how they might address the challenge and/or the kinds of results they might expect from their efforts.	The innovators expanded from their strategy focused primarily on housing and employment income to one that included education, social networks, and mental and emotional health.
3. Change mechanisms	The establishment of concrete mechanisms (e.g., practices, regulations, relationships, policies) that have an influence on the challenge being addressed may represent the most tangible development of the innovation.	The innovators established (a) a protocol with local credit unions to provide clients with access to bank accounts, even before they had permanent addresses; and (b) an arrangement where laborers could bypass predatory, temporary job agencies (which took 50% of their wages) and use a nonprofit intermediary that allowed them to retain all their employment earnings.
4. Capacity development of social innovators	Developments that relate to the capacity and morale of the innovators and affect how they think about and pursue their innovation (e.g., skills, resources, membership).	The trust levels between previously disconnected service agency leaders increased after these early successes and allowed them to open up their work to discussing the deeper reasons why they found it difficult to integrate their services more closely (e.g., competition for resources).

(continued)

Source: Provided by Mark Cabaj from his developmental evaluation practice. Used with his permission.

What was developed through developmental evaluation	What this means	Examples
5. Deepening understanding of context	Developments that are not under the complete control of innovators, but in which what happens (emerges) contextually shapes the goals, design, delivery, and results of the innovation (e.g., economy, demographics, key events). All developments are important to track and assess in developmental evaluation. Whereas the previous four types in this exhibit refer to the development of the innovation, this fifth one (the context) is equally important because innovation does not emerge in a vacuum, but instead is highly influenced by the context in which it is unfolding.	A slowdown in the construction industry (the major employer for homeless day laborers) required the innovators to develop relationships with different types of employers and adjust their expansion plans.

major Canadian city; this network was experimenting with new ways to help homeless day laborers secure housing and better income. You will have found many concrete examples of these kinds of developmental evaluation contributions to innovation development throughout the cases in this book.

Developmental evaluator Meg Hargreaves adds her own examples of important developmental evaluation contributions: leveraging funding for social innovation and reframing issues through “new narratives,” such as changing the focus of school discipline from punishment to a “broader issue of adolescent health and development.” Coeditor Kate McKegg finds that developmental evaluation leads to “greater confidence among the innovation stakeholders to take action/change/adapt to emergent conditions and situations.” She also emphasizes that as the innovative process emerges and adapts, the evaluation design is emergent and adaptable; this is “one of the most profoundly different features of developmental evaluation from other evaluations.” Such flexibility is not easy. I hear often from practitioners that the need for continually redesigning the developmental evaluation process is a major challenge for evaluators and innovators alike. The case exemplars in this book show how experienced practitioners of developmental evaluation are handling this challenge.

Bottom line: Developmental evaluation is distinguished from other forms of evaluation by its *purpose*: to illuminate, inform, and support what is being developed, by identifying the nature and patterns of *development*, and the implications and consequences of those patterns.

- 2. Evaluation rigor principle:** Ask probing evaluation questions; think and engage evaluatively; question assumptions; apply evaluation logic; use appropriate methods; and stay empirically grounded—that is, rigorously gather, interpret, and report data.

Developmental evaluation is *empirically driven*: Data are gathered and interpreted to understand the implications of what is being developed. Any high-quality evaluation is data-based, but this principle is included here because in some cases, organizational or community development processes, evaluator-facilitated program staff discussions, and development-oriented expert consulting are being labeled as *developmental evaluation* with no data collection. So let me be absolutely clear: *No data, no evaluation—developmental or otherwise.*

So I hope that's clear. But the principle calls for *rigorous* evaluation. *Rigor* is a loaded word for some, restricted to randomized controlled trials or external, independent evaluations. I reject such a narrow framing and emphatically insist that developmental evaluation can and must be conducted rigorously. Developmental evaluation is not *evaluation lite*, like a beer with fewer carbs (and little taste) that gives the impression to oneself and others that one is drinking beer, when in fact it's more like beer-flavored water. It's good that people restricting calories have a "lighter" alternative to real beer, but serious beer drinkers don't confuse lite beer with the real thing. Extending the beer analogy just a bit, I've noted that developmental evaluation designs are customized and contextualized, not standardized. A developmental evaluator is like a brewmaster at a local microbrewery—crafting a unique, high-quality product within and for a distinct milieu. Microbreweries don't produce lite beers. Developmental evaluators don't produce lite evaluations.

Now, to be fair, there are occasions (let's hope, rare ones) when a little *lite evaluation* is appropriate for small programs with few resources and simple questions. But serious developmental evaluation is *rigorous* evaluation. Because some are perceiving developmental evaluation as *evaluation lite*, or not serious evaluation, or not even evaluation, I want to reclaim and emphasize developmental evaluation's commitment to rigor. Let me explain, then, what I mean.

The problem, it seems to me, is the focus on methods and procedures as the primary, or even only, basis for determining quality and rigor. The notion that methods in and of themselves are more or less rigorous decouples methods from context and the thinking process that determined what questions to ask, what methods to use, what analytical procedures to follow, and what inferences to draw from the findings. In an evaluation, rigorous thinking is manifest in the full range of activities—from framing hypotheses; to seeking and validating information; to analyzing data; to collaborating to assess the meaning of findings; and to questioning, testing, and reexamining results and conclusions. Evaluation rigor resides in diligent, systemic situation analysis, principles-based evaluative thinking, and appropriate methodological decision making with primary intended users (Patton, 2015, pp. 701–703). Rigorous evaluative thinking combines critical thinking, creative thinking, design thinking, inferential thinking, strategic thinking, and practical thinking.

A rigorously conducted evaluation will be convincing as a presentation of evidence in support of an evaluation's conclusions, and will presumably be more successful in withstanding scrutiny from critics. Rigor is multifaceted and relates to multiple dimensions of the evaluation. . . . The concept of rigor is understood and interpreted within the larger context of validity, which concerns the "soundness or trustworthiness of the inferences that are made from the results of the information gathering process" (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994, p. 145)

This quotation is also a reminder that developmental evaluation, as evaluation with a distinct purpose (informing and supporting development; see Principle 1), still must adhere to and be judged by the professional evaluation standards of the Joint Committee Standards for Evaluation, as well as relevant professional association standards, guiding principles, and ethical statements.¹

Rigorous evaluative thinking forces clarity about the inquiry's purpose, those for whom it is intended, and its intended uses. This means being explicit about the criteria applied in prioritizing inquiry questions, making design decisions, determining what constitutes *appropriate* methods, and selecting and following analytical processes. It includes being aware of and articulating undergirding values, ethical considerations, contextual implications, and strengths and weaknesses (for there are always both) of the evaluation. Assessing evaluation rigor, then, involves examining the extent to which a multidimensional, multiperspectival, and critical thinking process was followed determinedly to yield conclusions that best fit the data, and therefore findings that are credible to and inspire confidence among those who will use them.

Approaching rigor in this way avoids "*research rigor mortis*: rigid designs rigidly implemented, then rigidly analyzed through standardized, rigidly prescribed operating procedures, and judged hierarchically by standardized, rigid criteria." (For an extended critique of and rumination on *research rigor mortis*, see Patton, 2015, pp. 701–703.)

In essence, rigorous evaluative thinking is grounded in intellectual rigor. Methods do not ensure rigor. A research design does not ensure rigor. Analytical techniques and procedures do not ensure rigor. Rigor resides in, depends on, and is manifested in *rigorous thinking*—about everything, including methods and analysis.

One final point about rigorous evaluation: It is a commitment shared with social innovators and their funders. James Radner, cited in Chapter 1 and a contributor to this book, has reflected on what the developmental evaluator contributes to the evaluative perspective of social innovators. His insights about the evaluation-focused interactions between social innovators and developmental evaluators captures both elements of the evaluation rigor principle: evaluation *and* rigor.

¹See the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles; the Ethical Standards of the Australasian, Canadian, and European Evaluation Societies; and the Evaluation Standards of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee as examples (Patton, 2012, Ch. 17, pp. 388–402).

This is an endnote but it has been misplaced in Exhibit 15.5 on page 310.

“In my experience, social entrepreneurs, like all entrepreneurs, have a remarkable capacity to scan, sense, and integrate empirical phenomena, to respond to the complex environment around them. They are doing that every day, all the time. So why add an evaluator with her claim to empirical know-how? Because, I think, the tools of the evaluator’s craft can complement and deepen the innovator’s own empirical sense in a rigorous, productive way. The innovator, of course, is a collaborator in developmental evaluation, helping to gather and make sense of data. The innovator, to one degree or another, is also an evaluator. But the developmental evaluation frame means data collection is systematic, intentionally reaching out to places and people the innovator may not have considered, or may not have direct access to. The developmental evaluation process provides data the innovator otherwise wouldn’t have. The combination of an ‘outside’ perspective and multiple ‘inside’ perspectives helps make sense of that data.

“A second key contribution of evaluative thinking relates to accountability. Even the most brilliant entrepreneur is at the same risk all of us humans are, the risk of being limited by our own ways of seeing and conceptualizing the world around us. We may honestly think we have a clear idea of what we’re doing, that we know the key steps and how they produce results, but the reality may be (at least somewhat) different. We all need accountability to external reality—we need our frames tested and challenged. This is well aligned with the kind of accountability that funders appropriately want and need, but by the same token, empirically based evaluation is highly beneficial to the mission of the social innovator, the mission of catalyzing change.”

The devil is in the details, of course, so details are what we need, and details are what the case studies in this book provide. I suggest that the case exemplars in this book exemplify both the application of developmental evaluation rigor and the challenges of doing so under conditions of turbulence, emergence, and ongoing innovation.

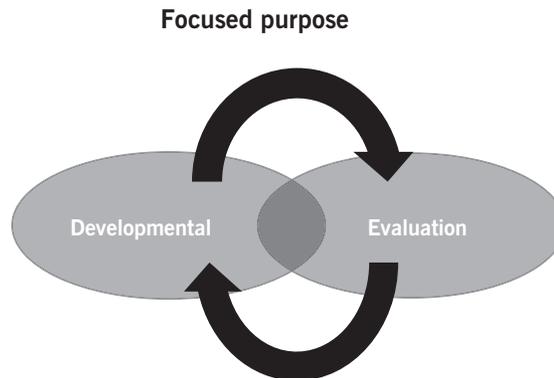
Bottom line: The credibility and utility of developmental evaluation depend on rigorous evaluative thinking and situationally appropriate rigorous evaluation methods.

Integrating Developmental Purpose with Evaluation Rigor

Determining the order of the eight developmental evaluation principles posed a challenge because they are interconnected and interactive (see Exhibit 15.5 at the end of this chapter). Thus the order in which the principles are discussed is not meant to imply priority or degree of importance. Rather, the first two principles lay a foundation that explicates and connects the two words in the nomenclature—*developmental evaluation*. Each subsequent principle is meant to delineate further what constitutes the developmental evaluation approach. Exhibit 15.3 depicts this foundational relationship between developmental purpose and evaluation rigor. The developmental purpose principle provides focus for the evaluation. Evaluation

EXHIBIT 15.3**The Foundation of Developmental Evaluation: Principles 1 and 2**

1. *Developmental purpose principle:* Illuminate, inform, and support what is being developed, by identifying the nature and patterns of *development* (innovation, adaptation, systems change), and the implications and consequences of those patterns.



2. *Evaluation rigor principle:* Ask probing evaluation questions; think and engage evaluatively; question assumptions; apply evaluation logic; use appropriate methods; and stay empirically grounded—that is, rigorously gather, interpret, and report data.

rigor ensures the utility and credibility of the evaluation in support of innovation, adaptation, and systems change.

3. *Utilization focus principle:* Focus on intended use by intended users from beginning to end, facilitating the evaluation process to ensure utility and actual use.

Developmental evaluation emerged during an evaluation of a leadership development program, as a response to the director and staff, who chafed against the emphasis in formative and summative evaluation on demonstrating the effectiveness of a standardized model. They understood that as leadership trainers, they needed to be continually developing their program and adapting in the face of societal, political, cultural, and technological changes. (For the full story of the utilization-focused emergence of developmental evaluation, see Patton, 2011, Ch. 1.)

Utilization-focused evaluation centers on *intended use by intended users*. Social innovators, funders of social innovation, advocates and supporters of social

innovation, and change agents are the primary intended users of developmental evaluation—and clearly identified as such in any specific developmental evaluation. The intended use (purpose) of developmental evaluation is to support adaptation and development of the innovation (Principle 1). This is done through rigorous evaluation (Principle 2). The developmental evaluation feedback and findings are used by social innovators and change agents to illuminate and adapt innovative strategies and decisions. That's intended use by intended users. That's utilization-focused evaluation. Funders of social innovation use developmental evaluation findings to inform funding decisions and meet accountability expectations and demands. That's also intended use by intended users. That's also utilization-focused evaluation. In short, developmental evaluation is a particular kind of utilization-focused evaluation. All that has been learned about enhancing use over 40 years of utilization-focused evaluation practice and research undergirds developmental evaluation (Patton, 2008, 2012, 2015).

In identifying and working with social innovators and their funders (primary intended users), some sophistication about the different kinds of social innovators engaged in different levels and types of developmental initiatives is essential. This includes sensitivity to how social innovators refer to themselves in various contexts. Some prefer nomenclature like *social entrepreneur*, *change agent*, *systems change catalyst*, *community organizer*, *difference maker*, *status quo disrupter*, *political activist*, and a host of other names. There is no orthodoxy about or insistence on labeling all primary intended users of developmental evaluation as *social innovators*. It is simply a shorthand way of referring here to those engaged in innovative social change and ongoing intervention adaptation. These can include innovation-minded program directors and initiative leaders, as well as funders of major innovations who make it possible to turn ideas, rhetoric, visions, and proposals into reality. Beyond contributing to a specific innovation under development, developmental evaluation can also contribute to the substantive field in which the adaptive experiment is unfolding (environmental issues, public health, poverty reduction, etc.) and, in some cases, to the development of an innovation platform for funders and their collaborators.

Given this broad view of the potential primary intended users of developmental evaluation, understanding different kinds of social innovators (and what they call themselves) can guide the developmental evaluator in working collaboratively to determine what information will be most useful to whom for what purposes as innovative processes unfold. Frances Westley holds the J. W. McConnell Chair in Social Innovation at the University of Waterloo, where she leads the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience. As an example of distinguishing different types of social innovators, she distinguishes *social entrepreneurs* from *system entrepreneurs*. Social entrepreneurs come up with innovative ideas, whereas a new and different kind of social innovator focuses on systems change: the system entrepreneur.

The system entrepreneur identifies the promising alternatives to the dominant approach and then works with networks of others to stimulate and take advantage

of opportunities for scaling up those innovations. Working at the level of the whole system, system entrepreneurs develop the alternatives, attract the resources, and work toward the moment when the system tips. (Westley, 2013, p. 1)

Systems thinking, one of the developmental evaluation principles discussed below, is essential for working effectively and knowledgeably with system entrepreneurs. System entrepreneurs engage in innovation as systems-change leaders: “The deep changes necessary to accelerate progress against society’s most intractable problems require a unique type of leader—the system leader, a person who catalyzes collective leadership” (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015, p. 1).

The utilization-focused evaluation principle guides developmental evaluators to know, understand, be able to work with, and adapt to the particular styles, approaches, and commitments of diverse social innovators, whatever they may call themselves. Likewise, developmental evaluators must be skillful and attentive in working with other users of developmental evaluation—specifically, those who fund and support innovation. For them, the tracking of the development process and emerging outcomes serves the need for accountability and learning.

Developmental evaluation can offer a meaningful solution to a real concern funders often have: accountability in complex environments, where, because of this very complexity, the innovative initiatives they fund simply can’t have preset targets and indicators. At a philanthropic meeting on developmental evaluation involving both evaluators and funders, the consensus after much discussion was this: “Developmental evaluation isn’t the enemy of accountability, providing some kind of free pass. Rather, it’s a way to bring effective, constructive, and serious accountability to settings where traditional tools don’t suffice.” In dynamic environments where goals and targets are themselves changing, assuring accountability is a complex challenge, and developmental evaluation is tailored to meeting that challenge. (For more on developmental evaluation and accountability, see pp. 000–000, 17-18)

Bottom line: Developmental evaluation is guided throughout by the *utilization-focused principle* of focusing on intended use by intended users from beginning to end, facilitating the evaluation process to ensure utility and actual use.

4. **Innovation niche principle:** Elucidate how the change processes and results being evaluated involve innovation and adaptation, the niche of developmental evaluation.

Social innovators are unhappy with the status quo, so they work to change the way things are. That is the *innovation*—changing the way things are to some significant extent. The *innovation process* refers to how they go about changing things. Thus developmental evaluation documents, interprets, and provides feedback about both the processes and outcomes (products) of innovation. I am often asked for my definition of *innovation*. My response is that it is not my inclination or role to impose some standardized, universal, and operational definition. Rather, part of the developmental evaluation task is to find out what innovation means to those

who are engaged in bringing about change within the context where the evaluation is occurring. The terms *innovation* and *adaptation* may, or may not, mean the same thing depending on how they are defined and employed within different contexts. Developmental evaluation supports efforts to create a fresh response to an emergent or intensifying crisis, an intractable challenge, or a *wicked problem* (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Williams & van 't Hof, 2014).

A recurring theme in delineating the niche of developmental evaluation is that invention, innovation, and development are different in degree and scope of change from program improvement. Mark Cabaj interviewed early developmental evaluation adopters about what stood out for them in their developmental evaluation experiences. One emphasized, “The act of creation [innovation] is very different



Wicked Problems and Social Innovation

Wicked problems are those that have no definitive formulation or time frame; thus there's no definitive way to test solutions to them. Every wicked problem is unique, yet also connected to and a symptom of another problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). *Wicked* in this context means “difficult to deal with or resolve,” not “evil.” A wicked problem cannot be solved in any definitive way because the very nature of the problem defies a firm definition, due to its inherent complexity—multiple interacting factors and tightly intertwined interrelationships in a turbulent environment. The problem is like a dynamic maze where the pathway through the maze keeps shifting. Adding to the complexity of a wicked problem is that the problem and any potential solution are so intertwined that any solution identified and implemented changes the understanding of the problem. It is impossible to predict or control how things will unfold once an attempted solution is put in motion. Imposing clear outcomes will not solve the problem and may well make it worse. Nor can wicked problems be resolved with traditional analytic approaches that run roughshod over complexity, in the belief that simplification is essential to make problems manageable. Indeed, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem—that is, its inherent complexity—is likely to reveal or create other problems (Churchman, 1967).

Social innovation approaches wicked problems through engagement, learning, and adaptation, rather than imposition of project-like solutions or models. *Double-loop learning* (learning how to learn about the nature of the problem and situation) is integrated into the social innovation through developmental evaluation.

Wicked problems are systemic problems that are characterised by multiple stakeholders involved in complex and unpredictable interactions. Stakeholders are people or organisations with an interest in the (wicked) problem and its re-solution. Systemically designed interventions are needed because conventional understanding and management cannot address wicked problems. (Williams & van 't Hof, 2014, p. 2)

Emergent designs and mixed methods are especially appropriate for evaluating innovations aimed at wicked problems, because both problem identification and innovative interventions (attempted solutions) will be multidimensional, dynamic, and dependent on how the problem is understood over time as engagement deepens and learning occurs (Mertens, 2015).

than the act of improvement” (quoted in Cabaj, 2011, p. 38). Innovation can take the form of new initiatives, programs, projects, policies, collaborations, and interventions. As noted earlier, the structure or form is not what makes something a social innovation. It is, rather, the degree and nature of change involved compared to the existing situation.

Sometimes what is being developed is new to a particular context, but may not be viewed as “innovative” in a different context. In these cases, the innovation is the adaptation of the original innovation to a new context. Adaptation also includes initiating innovative changes in a program or other intervention (adaptive innovation) when knowledge, circumstances, and/or context change. Thus this advice from experienced developmental evaluation practitioners Hallie Preskill and Srik Gopal (2014) is important: “Pay particular attention to context and be responsive to changes as they occur” (p. 14).

Innovative processes are typically dynamic, so explicitly connecting innovation and adaptation is being mindful of the dynamic and adaptive nature of the innovative process—and thus of the developmental evaluation process. Frances Westley (2008) explains that social innovators engage in a “social innovation dynamic”:

Social innovation is an initiative, product or process or program that profoundly changes the basic routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of any social system. Successful social innovations have durability and broad impact. While social innovation has recognizable stages and phases, achieving durability and scale is a dynamic process that requires both emergence of opportunity and deliberate agency, and a connection between the two. The capacity of any society to create a steady flow of social innovations, particularly those which re-engage vulnerable populations, is an important contributor to the overall social and ecological resilience.

Resilience theory suggests that the processes of adaptation and transformation are dynamic, cyclical, and infinite. Social innovation is not a fixed solution either; it is part of a process that builds social resilience and allows complex systems to change while maintaining the continuity we rely on for our personal, organizational, and community integrity and identity.

Exhibit 15.1, presented earlier, distinguishes types of innovation and adaptation in relation to the five different types of developmental evaluation. Because developmental evaluation is innovation-driven, part of the documentation and data collection involves finding out what *innovation* means within a context and among specific social innovators—an approach I have discussed above in connection with the utilization-focused principle (Principle 3). We are attentive to their definition of what they are doing (*innovation*) to find out what they mean. We pay attention to and document what they are doing and how they talk about what they are doing. We interact with them about what is going on and the implications of their efforts and documented results. We gather data about what is unfolding and emerging. We observe and provide feedback about how what is actually happening matches expectations and hopes. We work with those involved to interpret what is happening and judge what is working and not working, and thereby to help them adapt,

learn, and move forward. In so doing, we are engaging with them around, and deepening both their and our understanding of what is meant by, *innovation* and *adaptation* in that context. The definition and meaning of innovation are likely to evolve, deepen, and even morph as part of the developmental evaluation inquiry and engagement. For example, significant adaptations of an initial singular intervention (innovation, invention, or creation) thought to be sufficient for change can develop into *ongoing adaptive innovation* when informed by developmental evaluation observations and feedback.

Developmental evaluator Nora Murphy, a contributor to this volume (Chapter 4), reflects on the dynamic and iterative nature of the process of clarifying key concepts with social innovators.

“Reflecting back to social innovators how they are defining key words related to the innovation, and revisiting and redefining these terms periodically, may be one of the most important jobs of the developmental evaluator. What is meant by *systems change*? *Innovation*? *Complexity*? And so on and so forth. At the start of a project, it’s easy to assume shared understandings, so social innovators and other stakeholders are often surprised as they interact to surface variations in what concepts mean. They continue to be surprised when we come back to these central terms and learn how their understanding of the concepts [has] changed as their understanding of the context and intervention has developed and deepened. This is important to capture, but creating time to work on developing and revisiting shared understandings is a place I frequently experience pushback from action-oriented people. I have to help them see this as valuable because it is part of what is being developed.”

Bottom line: The arena where innovation is occurring, or at least being attempted, is the defining niche of developmental evaluation.

Four plus Four

I have noted in introducing the principles that the discussion of the first four principles is more detailed than the discussion of the subsequent four because the elaboration of the first four principles has incorporated a review of some basics about developmental evaluation, aimed at establishing a foundation for understanding the meaning and implications of the later principles. I hope that this will be the case as I turn now to the remaining four principles, with shorter discussions of each.

5. **Complexity perspective principle:** Understand and interpret development through the lens of complexity, and conduct the evaluation accordingly. This means using complexity premises and dynamics to make sense of the problems being addressed; to guide innovation, adaptation, and systems change strategies; to interpret what is developed; to adapt the evaluation design as needed; and to analyze emergent findings.

The fifth developmental evaluation principle calls for understanding innovation, and designing and conducting the developmental evaluation, by applying complexity concepts. An evaluator needs to expect that plans, goals, and targets will all need to evolve as the innovation itself develops. No one, simple model can capture the complexity inherent in social systems. Why? Disruptive innovations aimed at major change are usually being introduced into a complex dynamic system in which multiple variables interact in uncertain and unpredictable ways to take on wicked problems. Nonlinear effects, turbulence, and emergence characterize complex dynamic systems. Unpredictability and lack of control make results uncertain. Change is multidimensional and multifaceted. Disagreements, even intense conflict, among key stakeholders about what can and should be done can add to the turbulence and uncertainty. In the face of complexity, serious attention to *emergence* is essential in the developmental evaluation findings, even as the design of the evaluation itself is emergent and adaptive. Both linear and nonlinear relationships, intended and unintended consequences, and anticipated and unanticipated interactions, processes, outcomes, and system changes are documented and evaluated. Here are insights on innovation and complexity as essential elements of developmental evaluation, from three experienced developmental evaluators:

“A developmental evaluation touchstone is evaluation for people doing something innovative (purposefully, or emergently) in situations of high complexity.”

—JAMIE GAMBLE, author of *A Developmental Evaluation Primer* (2008)

“In my experience, when I must clarify what developmental evaluation is and is not, two aspects ring especially true. Creating a new approach to a challenge or problem, that is, *developing* one from rudimentary ideas contrasts quite clearly with *improving* an approach by doing more or better. Similarly, people appreciate the distinction between developing something new in a complex, dynamic situation in which you cannot predict what will be the results, or even what you will be doing, versus replicating, transferring, or adapting an approach in a new but more or less stable and predictable environment.”

—RICARDO WILSON-GRAU,
international developmental evaluation practitioner
and coauthor of *Outcome Harvesting* (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012)

“Had I not employed complexity concepts in a developmental evaluation, I would have missed all patterns and behavior that were unfolding before my eyes. Complexity helped me connect the dots, sooner rather than later, before having the full picture in place.”

—CHI YAN LAM, Canadian developmental evaluation practitioner
and researcher on evaluation

Complexity concepts that have proven especially relevant to developmental evaluation include emergence, nonlinearity, adaptation, uncertainty, dynamical, and coevolution (Patton, 2011).

Bottom line: Complexity understandings inform and undergird all aspects of developmental evaluation.

6. Systems thinking principle: Think systemically throughout, being attentive to interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and other key aspects of the social system and context within which the innovation is being developed and the evaluation is being conducted.

Developmental evaluation draws together complexity concepts and systems thinking to attune and orient the developmental evaluator to the dynamics of innovation development. Systems thinking provides a means for conceptualizing multi-dimensional influences, interrelationships, and interactions as innovative processes and interventions unfold. This in turn helps social innovators and evaluators, thinking together, to deepen their understanding of whether, how, how much, and in what ways systems changes are occurring. Together, complexity concepts and systems thinking provide powerful lenses through which to make sense of innovative situations and dynamics.

Experienced developmental evaluation practitioner Meg Hargreaves emphasizes the *nested reality* of systems and systemic thinking.

“When people think of boundaries, they often stop after they have drawn one circle that surrounds the whole and separates it from its context. But thinking systemically is also profoundly about recognizing the interplay across levels, [and] between the parts, the whole, and the greater whole. Some system innovations effectively link and align innovations vertically, from changes in individual mindsets, to changes in organizational practice, the development of new programs, and broader changes in local, state, and federal policies. Systems innovations often span multiple systems boundaries.”

In Chapter 1 of this book, I have discussed in more depth the relationship between and integration of complexity theory and systems, and the contributions of each to developmental evaluation.

Bottom line: Systems thinking is essential for framing, designing, and drawing conclusions in DE.

7. Co-creation principle: Develop the innovation and evaluation develop together—interwoven, interdependent, iterative, and co-created—so that developmental evaluation becomes part of the change process.

The seventh principle calls on developmental evaluators to acknowledge, document, report, and reflect on the ways in which a developmental evaluation becomes

part of the intervention. The developmental evaluator gets close enough to the action to build a mutually trusting relationship with the social innovators. The quality of this collaboration derives in part from the capacity of the developmental evaluator to facilitate evaluative thinking, timely data-based feedback, and illuminative sense-making processes in support of innovation and adaptation. The developmental evaluator works *collaboratively* with social innovators to conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in an ongoing process of adaptation, intentional change, and *development*. Developmental evaluation is interactive—engaging social innovators, funders, supporters, and other core stakeholders to tailor and align the dynamics of innovation, development, adaptation, and evaluation. This dynamic amounts to the *co-creation* of both the unfolding innovation and the developmental evaluation design (Lam & Shulha, 2014). The co-creation principle is a manifestation of a more general observation about collaborative processes of evaluation, articulated by Cousins and Shulha (2006) in the *Handbook of Evaluation*: “Possibly the most significant development of the past decade in both research and evaluation communities has been a more general acceptance that *how* we work with clients and practitioners can be as meaningful and consequential as *what* we learn from our methods” (p. 277; original emphasis).

Co-creation becomes especially powerful in *principles-focused developmental evaluation*, where the principles guiding the innovation and those informing the evaluation are aligned. This is the distinguishing feature of the exemplar described in Chapter 2 of this book, in which the innovative program and the developmental evaluation were co-created, 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, in which the intervention and evaluation principles for a youth homelessness initiative were co-created, aligned, and integrated.

The consequences of how we work with social innovators on the change process itself constitute *process use* (Patton, 2008, 2012). *Process use* refers to the learning and behavior changes that occur among those involved in the evaluation as a result of their involvement—for example, becoming more adept at evaluative questioning and thinking. Changes based on feedback of findings is *findings use*. Changes based on the processes of collaboration and co-creation constitute *process use*. For example, social innovators’ learning from a developmental evaluator how to articulate and use a complexity-based theory of change is process use.

A developmental evaluator can be either external or internal to an innovation, including being part of the innovation intervention team. Diverse structural and contractual arrangements have been used in the case exemplars in this book. What is evident as important across cases is that the developmental evaluators were willing and able to form mutually trusting relationships and work collaboratively with the social innovators in each initiative to co-create the innovation and evaluation design.

Bottom line: Developmental evaluation, fully engaged, implemented, and used, becomes part of the innovation.

- 8. *Timely feedback principle:*** Time feedback to inform ongoing adaptation as needs, findings, and insights emerge, rather than only at predetermined times (e.g., quarterly, or at midterm and end of project).

We live in a real-time world, where things change rapidly, attention spans are short, windows of opportunity open and close quickly, and information flows continuously from multiple directions. This elevates the importance of timeliness as a developmental evaluation principle. But what is *timeliness* in a developmental evaluation?

Timeliness is defined by the nature of the innovation and by the needs of the primary intended users. As such, determining timeliness is part of situation analysis and negotiation, not a matter of adhering to a precise and fixed schedule. Feedback is not rapid for the sake of being rapid. It's rapid because it must be to support timely decision making, adaptation, and fork-in-the-road funding and strategy decisions. Timeliness is driven in part by the recognition that evaluation findings have a short shelf life, especially in turbulent environments. What is relevant and meaningful can change rapidly. Keeping findings fresh and useful requires speed. The capacity to work quickly is an essential capability in developmental evaluation.

Coeditor Kate McKegg emphasizes that timeliness is connected to utility:

“The usability of feedback is what’s important. The issue of timeliness has struck me as one of the more important and potentially costly features of effective developmental evaluation—the need to build in regular, ongoing opportunities for feedback, discussion, sense making, and adaptive decision making.”

One of the rewards of providing timely and useful feedback is having social innovators, funders, and other stakeholders understand and accept the insights offered, react appreciatively, and follow through with decisive action. On occasion, timely and astute developmental feedback leads to important reframing and a new direction. The impact can be profound, affirming the observation of American abstract painter Darby Bannard that “Most ‘profound truths’ are just timely ideas.”

On the other hand, the extent to which speed matters is situational. Sometimes developments are unfolding slowly, leading to a slower pace for the developmental evaluation. While the pace of social innovation is often fast and almost always iterative, it can also be uneven (speeding up and slowing down in response to the pace of development). Developmental evaluation must adapt accordingly.

Timeliness also informs developmental evaluators’ reporting to funders and other stakeholders for accountability purposes. Traditional evaluations serve accountability needs through predetermined midterm and end-of-project reports, or standardized quarterly monitoring reports. In contrast, rapidly changing conditions and opportunities in complex dynamic systems may mean that decisions about funding the developmental evaluation, revising its design, changing its scope of work, assessing the added value of its processes and findings, and related accountability queries can occur at any time. Timeliness rules.

Bottom line: Timeliness is essential for usefulness. Align and time evaluative feedback to inform and support intended use by intended users.

Developmental Evaluation as an Integrated, Principles-Based Approach

Exhibit 15.4 presents the eight developmental evaluation principles. The principles are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The developmental purpose (1) frames and focuses evaluation rigor (2), just as rigor informs and sharpens understanding of what's being developed. Being utilization-focused (3) requires actively engaging with social innovators as primary intended users and staying attuned to the developmental purpose of the evaluation as the priority. The innovation niche (4) necessitates understanding the situation and what is developed through the lens of complexity (5), which further requires understanding and applying systems thinking

EXHIBIT 15.4

Developmental Evaluation Principles

1. **Developmental purpose principle:** Illuminate, inform, and support what is being developed, by identifying the nature and patterns of *development* (innovation, adaptation, systems change), and the implications and consequences of those patterns.
2. **Evaluation rigor principle:** Ask probing evaluation questions; think and engage evaluatively; question assumptions; apply evaluation logic; use appropriate methods; and stay empirically grounded—that is, rigorously gather, interpret, and report data.
3. **Utilization focus principle:** Focus on intended use by intended users from beginning to end, facilitating the evaluation process to ensure utility and actual use.
4. **Innovation niche principle.:** Elucidate how the change processes and results being evaluated involve innovation and adaptation, the niche of developmental evaluation.
5. **Complexity perspective principle:** Understand and interpret development through the lens of complexity, and conduct the evaluation accordingly. This means using complexity premises and dynamics to make sense of the problems being addressed; to guide innovation, adaptation, and systems change strategies; to interpret what is developed; to adapt the evaluation design as needed; and to analyze emergent findings.
6. **Systems thinking principle:** Think systemically throughout, being attentive to interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and other key aspects of the social system and context within which the innovation is being developed and the evaluation is being conducted.
7. **Co-creation principle:** Develop the innovation and evaluation together—interwoven, interdependent, iterative, and co-created—such that the developmental evaluation becomes part of the change process.
8. **Timely feedback principle:** Time feedback to inform ongoing adaptation as needs, findings, and insights emerge, rather than only at predetermined times (e.g., quarterly, or at midterm and end of project).

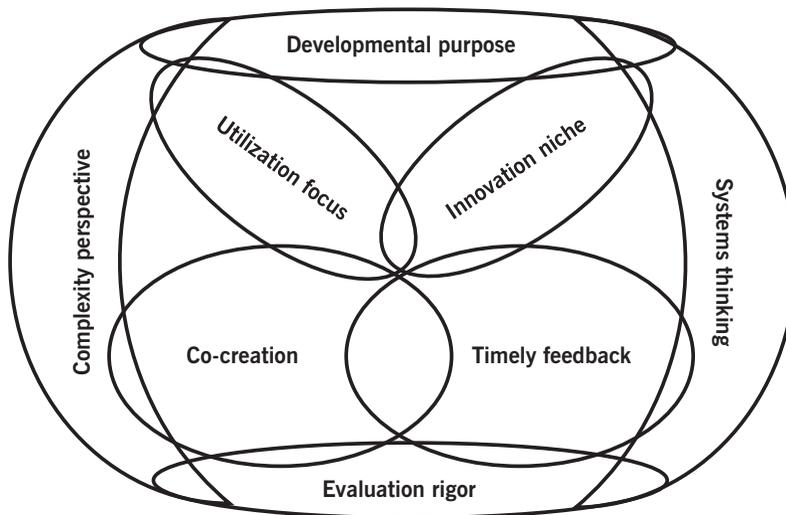
(6) with timely feedback (8). Utilization-focused engagement involves collaborative co-creation (7) of both the innovation and the empirically based evaluation, making the developmental evaluation part of the intervention. Exhibit 15.5 depicts these interconnections.

In a developmental evaluation, all eight principles are addressed to some extent and in some way. This is not a pick-and-choose list; all are essential. This means that there is evidence in the developmental evaluation's processes and results that these principles have been addressed in some meaningful way (or, for specific contextual reasons, not incorporated explicitly⁰). For example, let's imagine working with a social innovator and/or funder who hates the word *complexity* and thinks it is overused jargon—so the developmental evaluation process avoids explicitly using the term *complexity*, but does explicitly address *emergence*, *adaptation*, and perhaps even *nonlinearity*. Such negotiations are part of contextual sensitivity and adaptability, and part of the essential developmental evaluation learning process.

Bottom line: Incorporate and integrate all eight principles into DE.

EXHIBIT 15.5

Depiction of Interrelated, Mutually Reinforcing, Dynamic Connections among Developmental Evaluation Principles



Note. My thanks to Ricardo Wilson-Grau, a contributor to this volume, for assistance in creating this graphic.

⁰See the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles; the Ethical Standards of the Australasian, Canadian, and European Evaluation Societies; and the Evaluation Standards of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee as examples (Patton, 2012, Ch. 17, pp. 388–402).

This is an endnote. It should not be part of this exhibit.

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