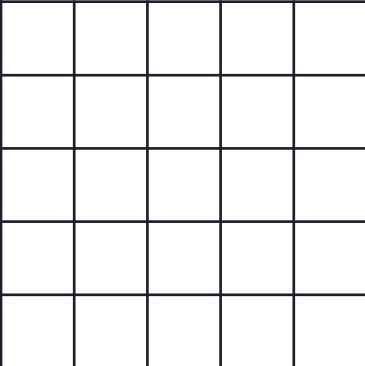
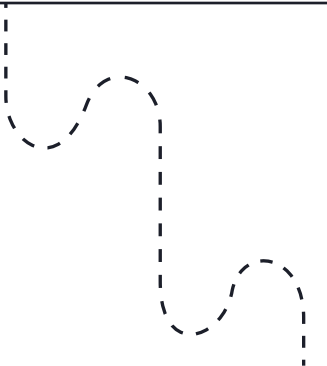
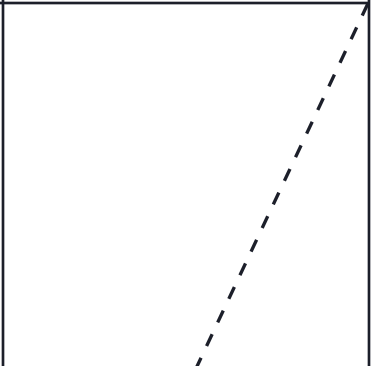
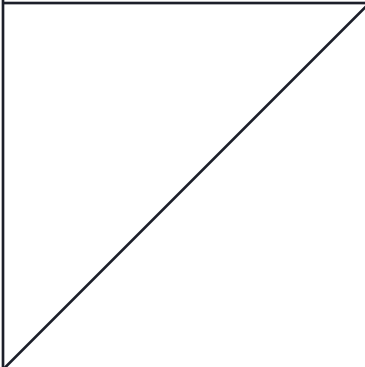
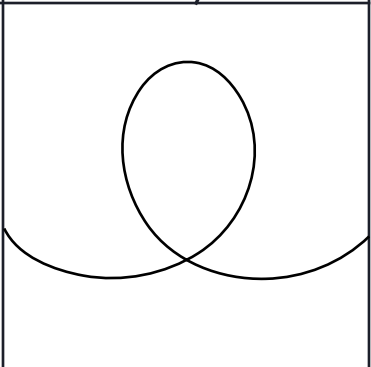
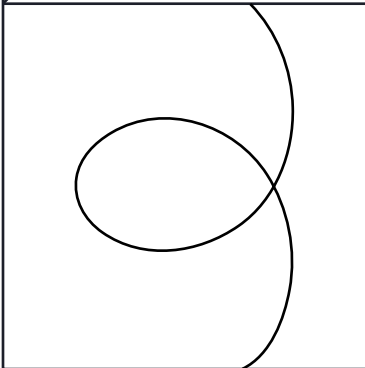
The background of the cover is a complex abstract design. It features a grid of thin black lines. Overlaid on this grid are large, organic, flowing shapes in shades of orange, red, yellow, and purple. Scattered throughout the design are small, simple line-art icons: houses with chimneys, clusters of trees, and a building with a grid of windows. Some of these icons are partially obscured by the larger organic shapes. Dashed lines also meander through the composition, adding to the layered, hand-drawn feel.

A Developmental Evaluation Companion

By **Jamie Gamble, Kate McKegg** and **Mark Cabaj**

May 2021

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With gratitude,
Jamie, Kate and Mark

About the Authors

A Developmental
Evaluation Companion

Jamie Gamble

Jamie Gamble is the founder and principal consultant of [Imprint Consulting](#). Since 2001, Jamie has served organizations involved in poverty reduction, climate change, environmental protection, economic development, public health, social justice, citizen engagement, and the arts by offering consulting in strategy, evaluation and organizational change. Jamie is the author of *A Developmental Evaluation Primer* (2008). He uses DE to help organizations wrestle with complex issues and move past the details, the paradoxes, stakeholder differences and uncertainties of their work.

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Kate is the director of [The Knowledge Institute Ltd](#) and a member of the [Kinnect Group](#), as well as the indigenous-led collective Tuakana Teina, based in the Waikato region of New Zealand. She is also a co-founder of the [Developmental Evaluation Institute](#), and a founding member and past Convenor of the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA). For over 25 years she has worked in government, non-governmental, philanthropic and community contexts, including many indigenous settings, supporting people to develop their evaluative thinking and practice.

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Mark is president of the consulting company [From Here to There](#) and former Executive Director — now Associate — at the [Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement](#). He has first-hand experience as a policy maker, funder, non-profit executive, and activist overseas and in Canada and enjoys working alongside people and organizations trying to make significant progress on stubborn societal challenges. He brings his evaluation expertise and practice to poverty reduction, neighbourhood renewal, energy transition and climate change, food security, community safety and education in a variety of communities and institutions.



Foreward

FORWARD BY

**Michael
Quinn Patton**

Developmental evaluation (DE) applies complexity concepts to enhance the use of evaluation in dynamic situations that call for adaptation. One of those concepts is nonlinearity, that is, the idea that small actions can generate large reverberations. Generally, DE — and this companion specifically — manifest nonlinearity. To understand and trace nonlinearities we must begin with initial conditions.

In 1998, I had the opportunity to conduct training on utilization-focused evaluation for national non-profit leaders across Canada supported by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in Montreal. Following the workshop, I had dinner with the program director, Frances Westley of McGill University, and the foundation's president, Tim Brodhead. Over dinner, they voiced their frustrations with trying to find an evaluator who could adapt to the ambiguities and uncertainties of an approach in which the leadership curriculum, learning activities and outcomes were emergent, dynamic, co-created and customized to the needs and interests of participants. Evaluators were used to predetermined outcomes and a well-specified model aimed at achieving those outcomes. I offered DE as a possibility. I had written about DE as an approach for just such circumstances, but had done little beyond that initial conceptualization. Opportunities to practice this kind of evaluation were proving scarce, but Frances and Tim immediately understood the relevance, appropriateness and the potential.

This led to a collaboration in which we applied DE to the McGill-McConnell Program for National Voluntary Sector Leaders, and during this time the Foundation supported a series of

DE coaching workshops for Canadian evaluators. Jamie Gamble and Mark Cabaj participated in these sessions, and soon after Jamie wrote the original Canadian DE guide, *A Developmental Evaluation Primer*. Those early opportunities helped build momentum for this evaluation approach in Canada.

That dinner in Montreal two decades ago was the beginning of a learning journey that offered an opportunity to integrate theory and practice in conceptualizing DE and understanding its niche in the evaluation landscape. This volume updates that journey. Jamie, Kate, and Mark, the authors of this *A Developmental Evaluation Companion*, have been with me on this journey. Their diverse and cumulative experiences and knowledge make this volume the most up-to-date and leading-edge resource there is on DE.

Developmental Evaluation Developments

Over the last decade, DE has become a well-established and widely implemented option on the menu of intended evaluation uses. Programs of all kinds at all levels have become using developmental evaluation. DE has been applied to innovative anti-poverty initiatives, leadership development programs, conflict mitigation interventions, environmental sustainability collaborations, and social justice advocacy projects, to offer but a few examples. Developmental evaluations are being carried out at local, regional, national, and international levels. It has become even more important as programs have had to adapt to the coronavirus pandemic. DE has even also found its way into large international organizations that have been traditionally dominated by rigid accountability approaches to evaluation. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities, which supports reproductive healthcare for women and youth in more than 150 countries that are home to more than 80% of the world's population, has undertaken DE. The World Food Programme, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 and provides humanitarian relief in more than 80 countries, recently evaluated the organization's response to COVID-19 using DE. UN Women has engaged in DE in Nepal and offered training in the approach to evaluation staff worldwide. The U.S. Global Development Lab's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program at USAID has commissioned DE pilots to (1) support collective impact in Cambodia, (2) advance uptake of innovations at USAID, and (3) examine knowledge management practices. The Global Alliance for the Future of Food, a collaboration of 30 philanthropic foundations from four continents, is working on food systems transformations using developmental evaluation. This scaling of DE presents new opportunities and challenges that make this companion all the more important, and timely.

Along the way, DE has not only emerged as an approach to supporting development of social innovations, it has also supported innovative developments in evaluation. One of the most important breakthroughs in the last two decades has been bringing systems thinking into evaluation and making systems analysis a central feature of situation analysis. Systems thinking for evaluators has meant learning new patterns of perception, new ways of thinking, new methods of collaboration, and deeper understandings of what impact means: changing systems, not just attaining project outcomes. Evaluation developed as a profession to evaluate projects and programs, but we now have a deeper appreciation that those projects and programs are embedded in larger systems and that evaluating systems change is different from evaluating project effectiveness. DE grew from applying systems and complexity thinking to evaluation of innovations. DE has spawned Principles-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2018), Blue Marble Evaluation, global systems change (Patton, 2020a) and evaluating systems transformations (Patton, 2020b).

DE is also being picked up in the private sector as a way to evaluate social impact investing and entrepreneurial initiatives. The approach resonates with social entrepreneurs because it manifests the key lesson of entrepreneurial success:

“Be brutally honest about the short term ... and optimistic and confident about the long term. Take one small step, and analyze the results. Improve what works. Fix what doesn’t. Make smart course corrections. And then take another step... In short, be confident about tomorrow while, at the same, time taking a cold, hard, clinical view of everything you do today. And then be completely objective about short-term results to constantly improve your skills, your products or services, and your program” (Haden, 2020).

DE exemplifies an entrepreneurial and innovative mindset which is a major reason it resonates with social innovators and committed social development entrepreneurs. The momentum behind DE has been building into a global crescendo as it has been further developed and adapted to a dynamic, turbulent, and ever-changing world. To find out how DE has developed and adapted, I leave you in the hands of my dearly esteemed colleagues, long-time friends, and fellow travelers on this journey: Jamie, Kate, and Mark.

Michael Quinn Patton is author of *Developmental Evaluation* (2011) and eight other evaluation books including *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. He is former president of the American Evaluation Association. He regularly teaches developmental evaluation in The Evaluators’ Institute, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training, and national professional conferences.



Introduction

In the face of a global situation that includes the intersection of a climate crisis, economic inequality and social injustice, the call to change is more compelling than ever. The need for adaptive action has heightened as the world has been transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of movements fighting racial injustice. We believe that developmental evaluation (DE) is increasingly needed in places of tension and uncertainty where it can play a supporting role in enhancing dialogue, helping people to learn about what is going on, and bring evidence and critical thinking to bear in finding solutions to complex challenges.

A Developmental Evaluation Primer was published over a decade ago, and in that time DE has become an established evaluation approach. It is no longer an emerging innovation in the evaluation field but is a mainstream evaluation option with a well-developed practice. A lot has evolved in DE, and rather than simply update the original primer, we embarked on a major revision that captures (of course) the developments.

The purpose of *A Developmental Evaluation Companion* is the same as that of the original DE primer — to introduce the concept to those who seek change, and to the evaluators, the

critical friends and reality testers, who are their partners in that journey. Our aim is to provide an overview of what we see as the essential elements and considerations of DE in order to create some coherence, not to present any one version as the right one. There is an ever-expanding set of views, resources and even critiques on DE, which signals to us that it is very much alive. The intent of this companion is to encourage going deeper and wrestling with the many issues and ideas we present.

This book is organized into three sections. In section one, we introduce DE and look at its niche and principles, the importance of paying attention to context, and the roles that developmental evaluators play. In section two, we explore several areas that shape DE: the evaluator's stance and capabilities, assessing readiness, contracting, and working in imperfect conditions. Section three looks at designing DEs including methods for generating evidence, strategies for sensemaking and ways of communicating findings. Throughout, we include case studies from some of our colleagues to help illustrate DE in practice.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

In parallel to *A Developmental Evaluation Companion*, the McConnell Foundation has developed [DEcompanion.ca](https://decompanion.ca) and invites you to access these resources by developmental evaluators from around the world that elaborate on the topics introduced in the book. We hope to add to these resources and invite you to contribute as we collectively continue to grow, challenge and refine the practice.





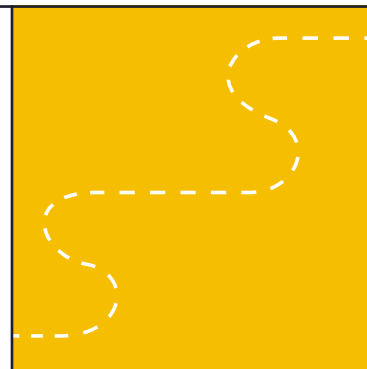
SECTION ONE

Introducing Developmental Evaluation

“Developmental evaluation supports the process of innovation.” This was the opening of the original primer, and, after 12 years, innovation remains important to DE. What has become increasingly clear in the time since the emergence of that primer is that adaptation and complexity are at the core of this evaluation approach. We respond to complexity by trying new things we haven’t done before. We meet complexity with novelty, creativity and improvisation.

DE originated because of the mismatch that those working towards social change were experiencing with linear planning and evaluation. Innovators and change makers are in a state of exploration, with destinations as notions rather than concrete goals, and an uncertain path forward. New things are learned, the framing of the issue shifts, and participants, partners and context change, all of which shape novel ideas and approaches, as well as how the problem is even conceptualized.

**DE is not a set method or process,
it is distinguished by its purpose.
A supporting adaptation in the face
of complexity is the purpose of DE.**



Throughout this book we use the term social innovators. We recognize that it's a label that is resonant for some, and problematic for others. Who we are referring to are those who pursue change in trying to make the world a better place, locally, globally, or somewhere in between. Change can be led by grassroots leaders in communities, or by systems entrepreneurs inside bureaucracies, or really, by any passionate individual with an idea of how to make the world a better place, and a will to act.


A linear, logical approach to problem solving, where we move methodically from assessing the situation, to gathering and analyzing data, to formulating a solution and then implementing that solution, works very well when the problem is well understood; there are clear boundaries and there is a limited set of possible solutions, of which there is likely one that is optimal. Evaluation was originally built to support this kind of problem solving, rendering judgments about the merit, worth and value of a standardized program, or helping a program refine its implementation efficiency towards becoming an effective and dependable model.

But the process of adaptation is out of sync with this kind of problem solving. A solution arrived at in this way may initially appear ideal, but in the end, it might not get at what was intended, or at the root cause of a problem, so the problem needs to be re-examined in light of what was learned in the overall experience. Or, a solution may be crafted that excludes a critical stakeholder and the definition needs to be re-worked so that they, and their contributions to the solution, can be included. A rapidly changing context precludes our ability to implement things as planned.

In these cases, standard evaluation is not adequate. DE does not look to replace supporting problem solving or rendering judgments about the merits of a program, rather, it serves a different niche, that of adaptation and innovation in the face of complexity. Complex problems are difficult to define. They are not bounded, they do not have optimal solutions, and they do not occur within stable parameters. The very techniques that enable evaluation excellence in more static situations — standardization of inputs, consistency of treatment, uniformity of outcomes and clarity of cause and effect — are unhelpful, even harmful, to situations where there is a lot of uncertainty. Efficient goal attainment, and replicability and clarity of causal links works for a well-defined technology or intervention. With dynamic and unpredictable phenomena, however, these same criteria can actually so narrowly define and structure the evaluative questions as to interfere with learning and adaptability.

TABLE 1.1 - COMPLEXITY FEATURES

The table below is a visual summary of many features of complexity. This table is a simplified visual of a wonderful resource, *The Visual Representation of Complexity*, by Dr. Joanna Boehnert.

Unpredictability 	Adaptation 	Feedback 	Tipping Points 
Nested Systems 	Unknowns 	Path Dependency 	Change Over Time 
Emergence 	Levers and Hubs 	Non-linearity 	Distributed Control 
Open Systems 	Self-organization 	Multiple Scales and Levels 	Domains of Stability 

When operating within a complex system, it is difficult to understand the ramifications of changes. There is a high degree of connectivity and interdependence among diverse elements whose interactions create unpredictable, emergent results. This is the place where innovators often find themselves; innovation is often about breaking previous boundaries. What DE does is combine the rigour of evaluation – being focused on using evidence combined with evaluative reasoning – to help with the uncertainty, adaption and emergence of innovation and complexity. DE is more suitable in such situations because it supports the process of innovation in ways that enable exploration and development and the building of more robust solutions.

Feedback is supported by data, qualitative and quantitative, and is delivered in an interactive way that helps innovators consider and adapt to uncertainties, to fine-tune their approach, and to make informed decisions. DE facilitates assessments of how a novel idea is unfolding; it helps to discern which directions hold promise and which ought to be abandoned, and suggests what new experiments should be tried. DE also takes changes within an organization — changes to structure, governance, and relationships — into account inasmuch as they constitute an important context within which innovation takes place. The evaluator may introduce strategic and integrating questions to clarify some of the ambiguity that accompanies organizational change.

People’s interactions and ideas can influence an evaluation. DEs often consider the dynamics of collaboration as complex problems tend to require the integration of diverse perspectives from different parts of a system. Various stakeholders may understand the problem differently and enter into an initiative with diverse reference points. Within this diversity, however, there is still a need to develop and execute strategies. DE helps collaborators to recognize and work through differences in perception that might otherwise fragment the work and hamper ongoing developments.

The practical challenge for innovators, change makers, and developmental evaluators is that social change amidst complexity is multi-faceted and context specific, and it isn’t possible to create a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, developmental evaluators must work alongside change makers and innovators to build on the general developmental and adaptive nature of their work.

**Develop-
mental
evaluators
must:**

- Ensure that the evaluative design matches the unique perspective of the change makers and their strategy (for example, a strong equity lens, or an indigenous-world view);
- Be capable of working with different ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies;
- Reflect on their own positionality given the context, the role they can and should play in an evaluation, and even if, or when, assignments should or should not be taken on.

There are various reasons why an initiative or organization may be in a developmental situation. It may be a newly formed, or forming, organization seeking to respond to a particular issue, or exploring a new idea that has not yet fully taken shape; or it may be that a changing context has rendered traditional approaches ineffective and there is a consequent need to explore alternatives.

In his 2011 book, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Evaluation and Use*, Michael Quinn Patton introduced five niches for DE (see table below). Our experience, and the experience of many of our DE colleagues, is that these five niches are indeed areas appropriate for DE. The table introduces some nuances and extensions in each of the niches that developmental evaluators have observed in their practice over time.

The distinctions between these niches (see Table 1.2 on pg. 14) are not hard and fast. DEs may combine one or more of these niches or may evolve from one niche to another over time. Patton’s thinking about niche is also evolving. Prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing movements for racial justice, Patton reflects that, “All evaluators must now become developmental evaluators, capable of adapting to complex dynamics systems, preparing for the unknown, for uncertainties, turbulence, lack of control, nonlinearities, and for emergence of the unexpected.”

Patton sees an expanded set of niches including supporting transformation, developing networks, capacity building, evolving the evaluation field, and —of course — a vastly expanded niche of adaptation in crisis.

TABLE 1.2 - DE NICHES

NICHE	ELABORATIONS FROM EVALUATORS	EXAMPLES
1. Ongoing development	Ongoing development refers to adapting internal structures, processes and organizations. This includes integrating DE into the learning culture and practices of organizations to help make DE part of the ongoing strategy development and change processes of the organization.	DE is used to support the board and staff of a mentoring organization to adapt its hiring practices, internal work processes and professional development priorities to reflect the increasingly diverse community it serves.
2. Adapt effective principles from elsewhere to a local context	Increasingly evaluations are principles-driven, and this applies to all niches. Developmental evaluators are helping to contextualize principles, developing new principles in innovative situations, and linking DEs with principles-focused evaluations (more on these distinctions later).	A diverse coalition of organizations that aim to end homelessness employ DE to help develop, employ and adapt a set of common principles to guide their collaborative planning and management of human services and advocacy strategies in a variety of neighborhoods in a large metropolitan area.
3. Exploring real time solutions and generating innovative responses in the face of crisis	The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced and expanded this niche and how DE supports transitions to major new dynamics or strategies. Evaluators are also finding pivot points can be prompted by changes in leadership, major events or policy direction.	Decision makers in public health agencies and human service organizations employed DE to help them get quick feedback on their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special emphasis on how to make sense of that feedback and use it to inform decisions in real time.
4. Pre-formative development of a potentially broad-impact, scalable innovation	DE is being used to guide innovation processes from the very earliest stage, including the creation of new organizations and initiatives.	The participants of an innovation lab use DE to inform the development and growth of a portfolio of activities designed to generate new ideas for Indigenous community-led energy transitions.
5. Cross-scale developmental evaluation	Cross-scale DE is also being applied in initiatives seeking major systems change with transformation as a distinct unit of change in how this is planned, designed, developed and evaluated. ¹	An environmental non-governmental agency employs DE to provide feedback on their efforts to transform the logging industry in British Columbia through a multi-level strategy of public awareness campaigns, advocacy for policy change, local capacity building, and experimentation with innovative models of sustainable and reconciliation-oriented forestry management.

¹ This is very much aligned with Blue Marble evaluation. Blue Marble evaluation is an approach to evaluating global initiatives aimed at transforming systems toward a more sustainable world.

Adaptation to Crisis

by
Michael Quinn Patton

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced programs to adapt their delivery methods, staff management practices, allocation of resources and strategic priorities. Programs face cutbacks in staff and reduced resources to deliver programs. The necessity for these substantial and significant changes emerged quickly in March 2020. What once was a narrow niche for DE, namely innovation, has become a much wider niche, namely, adaptation to crisis. The adaptation can take many forms: reconfiguring target populations, prioritizing services, changing the form of delivery from in-person interaction to what can be handled online, and moving from a practice-based model to a principles-focused model. DEs in crisis situations involve the evaluator helping to develop a response to the crisis. This goes beyond monitoring data, which can show how the program’s situation has changed. It requires ongoing situation analysis to find out what information evaluation users need in the face of the crisis, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic.

The original framing of the systems evaluation purpose in DE was to support systems change as opposed to judging the effectiveness of projects and programs. What has emerged in the context of the global climate and pandemic emergencies is a distinction between systems change and systems transformation. Systems change tends to involve reforming systems to make them more equitable or sustainable, incrementally. An affirmative action program might engage in institutional systems change, or a developing a recycling program would involve enhancing and organizations contribution to sustainability. In contrast, transformation involves major and dramatic development of a significantly different system than the one operating at baseline. Attacking systemic racism, or structural racism, evokes transformation in power relationships and redistribution of societal resources beyond incrementally changing regulations and policies, or better implementing appropriate policies and regulations. (Patton, personal communication)

Systems Transformation

by
Michael Quinn Patton

Evaluations may be driven by purposes different from those that drive DE, for example, a need for accountability, or to render a judgement about the efficacy of a well-developed model, or to test the alignment of actions with a set of values. In our experience, there is never a clean distinction. DEs are often done in combination with other evaluation purposes. “Patch evaluation” refers to the messy place that evaluators and evaluations often find themselves in, with overlapping purposes, a variety of methods and, ultimately, meeting the unique needs of different evaluation users.

DEs can vary in intensity, and in degree of focus. Sometimes a situation does not require a fully fledged evaluation, or perhaps there are fewer evaluation resources available. “DE-Lite” refers to a

lower intensity evaluation, which tends to be more episodic and involve fewer resources. There are also situations that are “DE-Like.” These are evaluations where there is primarily another evaluation purpose with some DE elements woven in. This can also refer to situations where the DE is there in name, but the organisational appetite or capacity for adaptation isn’t actually all that strong.

Principles

In 2016, Patton, McKegg and Wehipeihana crafted eight principles of DE based on their review of 12 wildly distinct DE exemplars from across the world, and described them in their book, *Developmental Evaluation Exemplars; Principles in Practice*. These distinct, though overlapping and mutually reinforcing principles, offer a new level of coherency on how to carry out effective DE that was simply not available only ten years earlier.

TABLE 1.3 - DE PRINCIPLES

Developmental purpose	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 patterns.
Evaluation rigour	Ask probing questions; think and engage evaluatively; question assumptions; apply evaluation logic; use appropriate methods; and stay empirically grounded, that is, rigorously gather, interpret, validate and report data.
Utilization-focus	Focus on intended use by intended users from beginning to end, facilitating the evaluation process to ensure utility and actual use.
Innovation	Describe how the change processes and results being evaluated involve innovation and adaptation, the purpose of DE.
Complexity perspectives	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, guide innovation, adaptation and system change strategies, interpret what is developed, adapt the evaluation design as needed, and analyze emergent findings.
Systems thinking	Think systematically throughout while being attentive to interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and other key aspects of the social system and the context within which the innovation is being developed and the evaluation is being conducted.
Co-creation	Develop the innovation and implement the evaluation together (think interwoven, interdependent, iterative and co-created) such that the DE becomes part of the change process.
Timely feedback	Give timely feedback to inform ongoing adaptation as needs, findings and insights emerge, rather than only at pre-determined times or at the end of project.

While the emergence of DE principles has helped sharpen the thinking and practice of evaluators, it has also caused some confusion in how they relate to other principles in evaluations. The main distinction is between principles of evaluation approaches and principles of interventions. In addition, principles-focused evaluation guides us in the how-to of assessing and generating these principles. The table below expands on these distinctions.

TABLE 1.4 - PRINCIPLES IN EVALUATIONS

DE principles	The eight principles that guide the design, implementation and evaluative thinking in DEs.
Principles of other evaluation approaches	Principles that reflect distinct approaches to evaluative work, for example, the principles that guide Empowerment evaluation, Blue Marble evaluation, or Equitable evaluation. Each focus on a different, although sometimes only subtly different, approach or dimension of evaluation.
Intervention principles	Principles that guide social innovators in how they approach their work in general (e.g. principles of human-centered design or the principles of collective impact) or in addressing a specific challenge (e.g. principles of program design for a housing initiative or principles to guide an initiative on a just transition to a carbon-neutral future).
Principles-focused evaluation	Examines if principles are well-defined and actionable, the extent to which such principles are actually being followed, and whether they are leading to desired results. ²

With these multiple, sometimes overlapping functions of principles, it is easy to get tripped up. In practice, developmental evaluators often mix and match with other principles. The use of principles in DE requires situational judgement, and often the integration of multiple constructs and approaches. When evaluators (and innovators) are working in situations where DE is required, the DE principles are an essential part of the evaluation’s foundation, which may be augmented by principles from one or more other, complementary evaluation approaches. For example, Blue Marble principles are designed to help innovators evaluate initiatives from a high-stakes, ecological, global-systems transformation perspective. If, for example, an initiative is global in consideration and aspiration and involves social innovators in a dynamic process of developing, adapting and possibly scaling an innovative response, then the evaluation would draw upon both DE and Blue Marble principles. In time, this same initiative may generate principles that guide the specifics of how the initiative works, and possibly inform the work of others.

DE quality assessment framework

The United Nations Food Population Agency recently developed their own DE quality assessment framework (UNFPA 2020) organized around the main DE principles. They also adopted three additional principles as well as agency-specific practices for each principle, and created an outline of the tensions associated with carrying out a DE in the more traditional United Nations management and evaluation culture and systems (e.g. accountability and learning, administration, and internal and external use). It is an example of an organization taking DE principles one step further by surfacing the practical implications for how they can be usefully applied in their specific context.

Principles help to communicate the approach to prospective evaluation users, and provide evaluators with enough guidance to develop robust evaluation processes, while giving them enough flexibility to allow them to tailor them to their unique contexts.



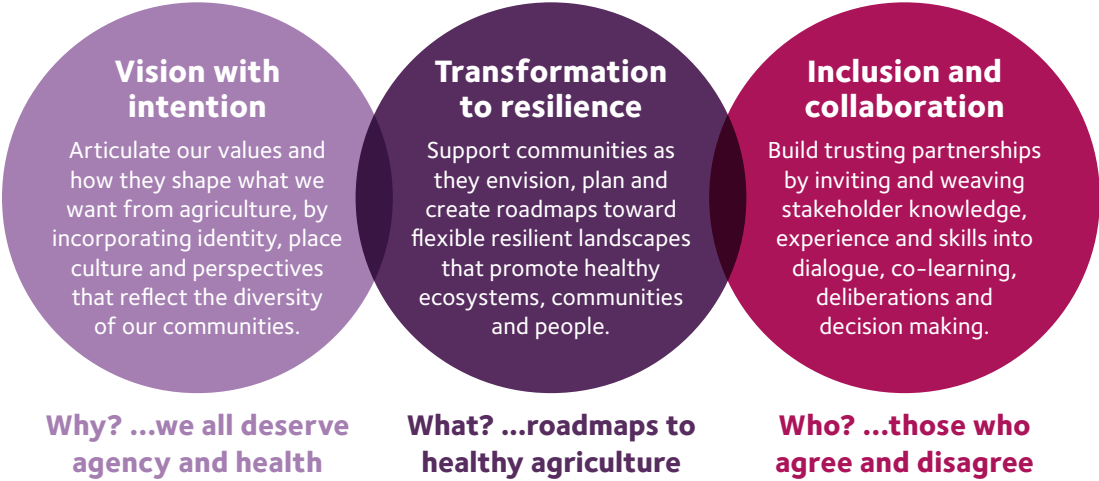
CASE STUDY

Courtney Bolinson is an independent evaluation consultant focused on systems change initiatives. Her varied background in agroecology, conflict resolution and systems thinking provides the foundation for her DE practice.

In 2019, I started leading a small DE team for Grassland 2.0, a collaborative group of agricultural producers, researchers and public and private sector leaders. The group is working to create and identify clear pathways for producers to achieve increased profitability, production stability, and nutrient and water efficiency, while improving water quality, soil health, biodiversity and climate resiliency through grassland-based agriculture. The project is supported by a Sustainable Agriculture Systems Coordinated Agricultural program grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Often with large, interdisciplinary, university-based projects, the project is split up into many sub-projects led by different principal investigators who end up working in silos, conducting their own research and publishing their own papers.

From the start of Grassland 2.0, the group was clear that they wanted to generate continued integration across sub-projects and avoid the typical silos so they could understand and contribute to positive systems change in agriculture in the North Central region of the United States. Given the diversity of individuals and organizations involved in the project, the group decided to draft a set of shared principles to bridge the wide range of backgrounds, research approaches, and values of the group. These principles would serve as an anchoring framework and guide, something the group could come back to throughout the project and hold themselves accountable to, as well as use to guide individual and project-level decisions.

The principles were developed over a period of seven months with ever-changing groups of stakeholders. Given how busy everyone on the project was, many people joined for a meeting or two, contributed perspectives, and then stopped actively engaging. This was effective in that it allowed for more stakeholders to participate (they didn't have to commit to coming to every single meeting), but it also slowed



the process since there wasn't one consistent group making decisions. This is where my role as developmental evaluator became critical. As the consistent thread throughout all of the meetings, my role was to bring new participants up to speed, create space for deliberation and collaboration, ensure a shared understanding of what is meant by principles (e.g., by introducing the GUIDE process developed by Michael Quinn Patton), and to keep the process moving. During meetings, I played a facilitative role where I asked questions to help the group clarify the purpose and use of the principles over time, identify gaps in involvement in the process, and bring new drafts to key touchpoints of stakeholders for feedback and approval (e.g., administrative team meetings, management team meetings and meta-stakeholder team meetings).

The group used the Agroecology Research-Action Collective's (ARC's) principles and protocols as a starting point for Grassland 2.0's own set of principles. The themes of collaboration, ethical research and attention to power dynamics can be seen in both the ARC and Grassland 2.0 principles. While the eight guiding principles of DE were not explicitly introduced to the group, as the evaluator facilitating the principles-development process, I applied these principles throughout the process. For example, I helped the group clarify the developmental purpose of the Grassland 2.0 principles and incorporated the principles into the overall DE plan for

the project. The DE principle of co-creation was applied via the collaborative process of principles development. It was also clear from the start of the principles development process that the principles would be understood as developmental as opposed to static. As the project continues, we will continue to revisit the principles and develop them based on what we learn about their application, relevance and utility.

The group finally converged on a simplified externally-facing version of the shared principles and a more detailed internal version. The external version is intended to support communication about the project and quickly illustrate the values of the group and their approach to the project. The more detailed internal version is intended to guide the group in using the principles, and hold them accountable over time. Now, as we enter the second year of the project, we will begin tracking the implementation of the principles and using the principles as a key part of sensemaking conversations. We will look at how, and how well, members of the project and the project as a whole are following these principles, and how the group can do better. For a large, multi-stakeholder project where participants didn't necessarily have a shared understanding of the world, of how to achieve a shared goal, or even shared vocabulary, taking the time at the start to develop shared principles was an effective way to help integrate the disparate groups involved in Grassland 2.0.

Bansō

by **Katsuji Imata**,
Managing Director
of the CSO Network,
Japan.

The term *bansō* is often used in the social innovation circle in Japan. It comes from *ban* (to accompany) and *so* (to run) and literally means “running side by side.” Social innovators often need to bounce ideas off others, and those who listen, muddle through together, tease out key information and facilitate discussion are often referred to as doing *bansō* support. Working on DE is almost exactly the same but it also adds an evaluation lens to the practice; thus, it is no accident that in Japan, DE has been coined as *bansō* evaluation.

Bansō is what guide runners do for visually impaired runners. It is the runner who controls and decides how fast, how long and what general course to run. Guide runners are there to encourage, check the traffic, warn of barriers ahead, suggest which path to take, and complete the race together. Similarly, *bansō* evaluators do not dictate what to do but follow the rhythm of the innovators. And, of course, trust is the most important ingredient for their success. The art of *bansō* is exactly the art of DE.

Context + Principles = Practice

While these illustrative practices can help changemakers and evaluators get a sense of what these principles may look like in practice, they are not the only thing to keep in mind when designing and implementing a DE. We must also pay attention to the context.

For example, how a group uses DE principles to assess an effort to scale out an innovative neighbourhood-based mentoring program for teenagers involved in the criminal justice system in Europe will differ from how they are used to evaluate the emergence of a new water conservation strategy based on indigenous knowledge leadership on the Pacific coast of South America. Co-creation will be different if you are working with management in an organization or within a multi-stakeholder initiative or in a participatory way with members of a community. Timely feedback will look different in a crisis response, a structured innovation lab, or even a multi-year policy initiative. In the spirit of realist evaluation pioneers Pawson and Tilley, here is a simple formula that we might keep in mind: Context + Principles = DE Practice.

As the practice base of DE grows, we see (and are encouraged by) the great variation in how the application of DE principles is shaped by different contexts. The table below highlights some examples of contexts that developmental evaluators are working in, and gives some illustrations of how that shapes the application of DE principles. All DE principles are, of course, influenced by each unique situation.

TABLE 1.5 - CONTEXTS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

CONTEXTS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES	IMPLICATIONS FOR DE
World view	Stakeholders, innovators, and evaluators often hold diverse, even conflicting, ways of being and knowing about the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous knowledge Western science Positivism or pluralism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has implications for understanding rigour, and what is seen as credible. May require assisting stakeholders to be comfortable with ambiguity or multiple truths. Requires employing diverse methods to generate understanding through different ways of experiencing and seeing the world.
Change strategy or tradition	Social innovators employ different strategies to make change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community action/organizing Collective impact Policy advocacy Human-centered design Innovation labs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences what is evaluated and the criteria of success. Affects time horizon for results, methodologies employed, and pacing of the evaluation.
Anchoring values or milieu	Social innovators are grounded in a set of values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social justice Equity focus Individualism and/or communitarianism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values and beliefs influence what stakeholders find important and how they judge the results of their efforts. Evaluators' values shape their approach, and the kinds of initiatives they will engage in.
Resource levels	Communities, initiative and/or funders have different levels of expertise, time and resources for DE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large public agency Grass roots networks Small human-services organization Medium size corporation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences the scope and level of sophistication in the DE process. Can also shape the amount of capacity building required.
Power differences	Social innovators often work in situations where there are large differences in power amongst stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal power (e.g. government or corporate) Funder relationships Indigenous and racialized communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can (often) manifest in conflict at some point, and the DE can help facilitate understanding of underlying assumptions and one another's perspectives. Evaluation designs may include a power analysis.

To help illustrate the different ways that principles may be applied in different contexts, we have asked some experienced developmental evaluators to share their experience working with principles and reflect on how their context shapes how they think about and apply these principles. In the two parallel cases below, Karim Harji and Penny Hawkins offer a view of some of the DE Principles in an impact investing context, and Katrina Donald and Lexi MacKinnon offer a view in an initiative to centre Indigenous wisdom.



CASE STUDIES

Karim Harji is the program director of the Oxford Impact Measurement Programme at the Said Business School, University of Oxford; and managing director at Evalysis, a Canadian impact measurement and management consultancy. **Penny Hawkins** is the principal consultant at Creative Evaluation in New Zealand. Together they have been applying DE to impact investing. This is what Karim and Penny have to say about DE and impact investing.

We've applied DE to impact investing, a growing field where different types of investors are making investments in businesses, funds and collaboratives to achieve social and environmental impacts alongside financial returns. While impact measurement is seen to be a core distinguishing factor for impact investing (relative to

conventional investing), in practice it is emergent, fragmented and a highly contested space. Unsurprisingly, we think this makes it a good fit for DE, and over the last few years, we have worked with a pioneering impact investing fund to test and evolve a DE approach. Our role as a critical friend to the fund allows us to be an insider on the fund team acting as a technical expert and process coach, while also maintaining an outsider critical perspective to provide feedback, challenge assumptions and identify potential impact risks or concerns. Our DE work in this emerging context has had the benefit of flexibility from the client in using a living work plan that is regularly reviewed and updated to match emergent needs, opportunities and constraints. This has required building trusted relationships among our teams over time.

Katrina Donald is the evaluation strategist at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. **Alexia (Lexi) MacKinnon** is the associate director, Indigenous Leadership at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Together they have been applying DE to centre Indigenous wisdom in all Banff Centre programming. This is what Katrina and Lexi have to say about their experience.

Located on sacred indigenous land in Treaty 7 Territory, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity has a 48-year legacy of indigenous leadership, and later artist specific, programs. In 2015, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, we set out on a

path of our own, a journey that now includes pulling Indigenous knowledge transfer and pedagogies through our program design across leadership and arts disciplines. We have applied DE to support the ongoing development of our work to centre Indigenous wisdom across programs at Banff Centre. This has included internal work processes, the continued education of our team, as well our faculty recruitment and selection, and the fostering of collaborative program design and development processes. Our approach to DE has been predominantly as a design support and is successful because of our focus on being in right relationship with each other, our work and the communities we serve.

The table below compares three of the DE principles in the contexts of impact investing and centring Indigenous wisdom, in the words of Karim, Penny, Katrina and Lexi.

TABLE 1.6 - DE PRINCIPLES IN CONTEXT

DE PRINCIPLE	IMPACT INVESTING	CENTRING INDIGENOUS WISDOM
Developmental purpose	The developmental purpose is to ensure that impact considerations, as described in the fund’s theory of change, are fully embedded in screening and investment processes, and across the evolving portfolio as companies enter, scale or exit. This informs both transaction-specific and portfolio-wide investment decisions, and their coherence with the fund theory of change, which has framed monitoring, evaluation and learning objectives in our DE approach.	The developmental purpose of evaluation in this work is to be in close and trusted relationship with the program team to witness and support their adaptive and iterative program design as they seek to dismantle the systems that support dominant Western culture characteristics that are inherent in faculty selection, program design principles and the framing of the participant experience. We work together to explore and test our own theory of change across the team as learning unfolds in our programming.
Co-creation	Our journey with the fund team has resulted in a range of internal and external knowledge products, which have taken different forms. For example, we periodically jointly review and update the fund theory of change and the impact due diligence criteria and process (used to screen ventures and set expectations for impact performance and reporting). The fund reports annually to its limited partners (LPs) on its financial and impact performance, which includes perspectives from the DE team. We’ve coordinated a series of internal learning notes that draw on primary and secondary data to respond to specific learning questions, which are then used to inform how the fund and DE team set forward-looking priorities. And we’ve also co-presented at prominent industry conferences, such as the American Evaluation Association and SOCAP, on our joint DE experience.	The commitment to centre Indigenous wisdom across all programs involves acknowledging that each aspect of programming will come forward into this work in the same way individuals engage in their own work of Truth and Reconciliation, that is, from different entry points and in their own time. The formative evaluation we’ve done together in the past has prepared the ground by bringing participant, alumni and faculty feedback into our design and planning conversations. The team participates in a 25-week custom-designed experiential learning program about Canada’s shared history, and experiences first-hand the outcomes of program design that centers Indigenous wisdom at the personal level. DE for this work is done in relationship and includes program debrief and iterative design from week to week, participant reflections, engagement data, and evidence in support of action and ongoing commitment. During this time the team also hears stories of people and programming that are intentionally shifting past practice in service of this commitment and relaying their own learning to show each other new potential pathways.

Timely feedback	<p>Operating in a markets-based context requires frequent interaction to anticipate, and respond to, the needs and opportunities for both the fund and investees. With the fund team, we have established a regular cadence of discrete meetings — bi-monthly operational check-ins for day-to-day considerations (e.g. impact due diligence of prospective investments); monthly sessions to reflect on emergent or strategic issues (e.g. reviewing cross-portfolio or system-level trends); and semi-annual reviews based on the TOC and learning questions. This combination allows our teams to obtain feedback at different levels (transactions, portfolio, thematic, etc.), and allows us to proactively plan for different types of conversations (e.g. broader / system-focused vs specific / transaction-focused).</p>	<p>Indigenous wisdom is predominantly shared orally through story within the context of community and protocol. Feedback loops tend to be inclusive and conversational, following circular patterns that spiral in to out and out to in. Group Circle Processes allow all voices to be heard and speakers to be seen for sharing wisdom, knowledge and guidance on next steps or the need for adaptation.</p> <p>This creates ongoing dialogue for learner development between participants and the faculty and also provides insight regarding the participant journey through the design. Faculty and designers are continuously learning based on how participants are responding to the program’s storytelling, song, artistic practice, indigenous knowledge-transfer protocols, land-based and deep- listening processes.</p>
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In these examples there is an element of universality in the DE principles. There are common themes that trace across the principles of DE purpose, co-creation and timely feedback in each situation. At the same time, each example highlights the nuances of DE in each context. Sorting through what is unique requires situational judgement, something that is key for anyone involved in a DE. Which of the principles are most relevant at this time in our context? How do we apply them given our situation? We chose to highlight the principles side by side to highlight the importance of context and show how context shapes thinking about and applying the principles given differences in goals or perspective. Of course, in reality these examples each part of a rich and complex story, and the principles are applied in a much more integrated and holistic way.

Roles: “What, exactly, do developmental evaluators do?”

We get this question a lot.

A developmental evaluator may play various roles, depending on the situation. The following table provides an overview of various tasks that developmental evaluators frequently provide.

TABLE 1.7 - ROLES OF DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATORS

Support adaptive strategy	Developmental evaluators engage with social innovators to surface evaluative questions, gather and make sense of data (primary and secondary), draw conclusions, surface implications for further development (e.g. options, scenarios, new questions), and facilitate the use of findings to inform strategy adaptation. This is an essential — and probably universal — role of developmental evaluators.
Frame key challenges and underlying concepts	Developmental evaluators can assist innovators to better frame the challenges they want to address (e.g. Is the challenge high school graduation rates or developing well rounded citizens?). Developmental evaluators describe the elements of new, innovative, or adaptive practice(s), including their significance, and the extent to which they depart from current practices. They also help surface assumptions about key concepts and implicit theories of change, and the extent to which stakeholders are aligned in their understanding of these. Over time, evaluators develop new questions and insights about the nature of the challenge that the group is trying to address, and what does and does not work in relation to the emerging innovation.
Track developments	Developmental evaluators describe the initial conditions for the initiative including a description of the challenge or problem that innovators would like to address; key contextual influences; ideas and options for how they might address it; anticipated results and criteria for success; and key considerations that shape how they will proceed. The evaluator then tracks the major developments to emerge in the initiative, including forks in the road, major decision points, significant shifts in context, and results and learnings.
Help to design and test small scale probes, interventions and quick experiments	Developmental evaluators help to design prototypes and test quick iterations of some or all parts of the emerging innovation, and draw conclusions about early results, including an assessment of the extent to which the innovation is likely to contribute to desired change.
Document the process of learning	Developmental evaluators document the major changes in the initiative's intent, design, and implementation and expected results, including the rationale, data, and evidence for each major change. This can provide an accountability function by reporting on has been learnt, the implications of that learning, and assessments of the new directions or actions taken as a result of learning. Developmental evaluators also remind people when important process needs or strategic approaches are being circumvented, or, conversely, overdone.

Understand and navigate collaborative dynamics	Developmental evaluators track the paradoxes, dilemmas, and stakeholder agreements and disagreements that emerge in the initiative. DEs help to frame these tensions, and identify how they influence the evolving intent, design and delivery, and outcomes of the project. Often, these tensions are an indicator that something innovative is being worked on (it is never easy) and are generally the result of underlying differences in assumption, understanding of key concepts, or differing implicit theories of change. Evaluators may also assess the resistance to the innovation that initiative stakeholders may experience from their peers and/or by stakeholders in the broader system in which they operate.
Facilitate the use of evaluation findings	Developmental evaluators can facilitate social innovators’ use of evaluation findings and questions in their efforts to draw conclusions and make judgements about the emerging innovation, and then identify implications — and make decisions about — their next steps.

These are not hard and fast roles, and like much of DE, they are applied situationally. These are not only roles that developmental evaluators play, they are also areas where capacity is often built in other members of any project team.

Developmental evaluators must also manage boundaries around these roles. For example, developmental evaluators are sometimes called on to facilitate sensemaking, or to pay attention to the overall dynamics of process and how something is implemented. Developmental evaluators, however, are not the project manager, or the overall facilitator of a process or event. There is a fine line between the facilitation of evaluative activity, and leading the facilitation of an initiative.

“Several times, in the absence of experienced program leadership, I have seen people look to developmental evaluators to assume a greater design, facilitation or even management role. While there can be short term gains from crossing that line, it can undermine both the project managers and the developmental evaluator’s capacity to play the role of honest broker.”	John Cawley
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Purpose, niche, principles, role and context are the foundation of DE. We have been working in DE for much of our professional lives, and these consistently guide our practice. In the next section, we look at the challenges we need to grapple with in DE. This includes understanding who we are and how we enter into the evaluation, assessing the suitability of a situation for DEs, and how we navigate these situations.

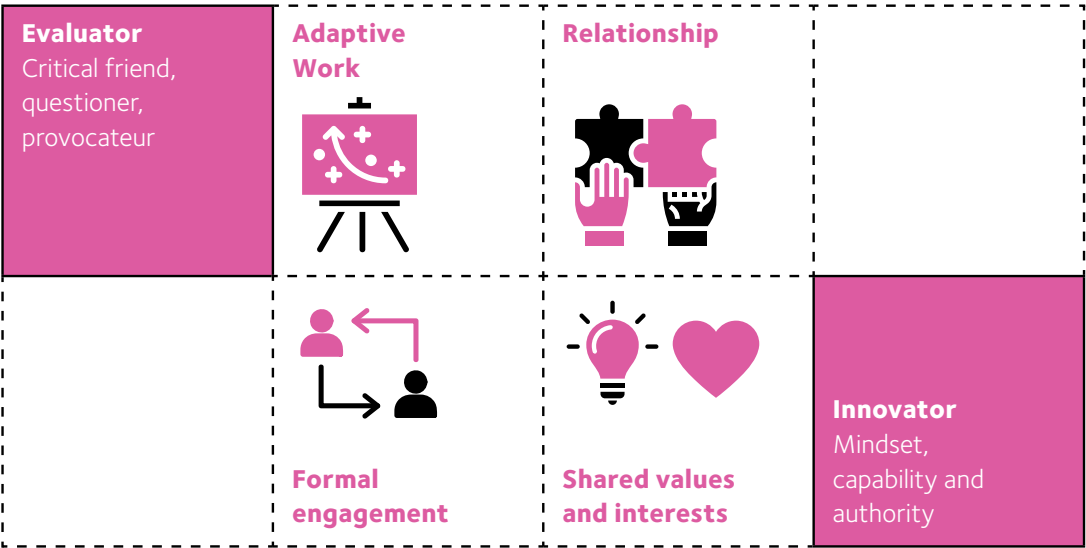


SECTION TWO

Grappling with Developmental Evaluation

This section is about what innovators and evaluators contend with in bringing evaluation into developmental situations. This includes the capabilities and values stance of evaluators, the readiness of those involved to be evaluative and adaptive, and managing the process of a DE. There are four interrelated pieces to this puzzle: the evaluator(s), the innovator(s), the formal engagement between them, and the relationship between them.

DIAGRAM 2.1 - INNOVATORS AND EVALUATORS



Developmental Evaluators’ Capabilities

Developmental evaluators are always learning, developing and honing their practice. The capabilities³ needed to do DE effectively include many traditional evaluation skills, such as understanding methodology, project management, and the ability to manage stakeholder relations. In addition, developmental evaluators need skills suited to the dynamic, emergent and adaptive nature of evaluation in situations of innovation and complexity. Most often, the latter are learned and honed in practice.

Developmental evaluators are often generalists, which is necessary to tailor and match evaluative work to a given situation. The ability to read a situation and assess what evaluative thinking or practice is needed in a complex situation is essential. Like social innovators, developmental evaluators are bricoleurs. Bricolage is an artistic approach that involves “construction or creation from a diverse range of available things.” DE is a highly interdisciplinary practice.

The table below summarises some of the capabilities we’ve found especially important for developmental evaluators. This is a list of capabilities that we consistently draw upon and use in combination in our practice. These are not unique to DE, and there are other capabilities that are not listed that evaluators may draw upon in different situations.

³ We use the language of capabilities, rather than competencies, so that we don’t fall into the trap of thinking we’ve made it.

TABLE 2.1 - DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR CAPABILITIES

CAPABILITY	DESCRIPTION
Ability to raise evaluative questions	Being able to ask evaluative questions is at the heart of all evaluation, including DE. In innovative, adaptive and complex contexts, one of the core roles of developmental evaluators is to ensure the evaluative inquiry process focuses on the questions that are considered valuable and important to those using the evaluation.
Strong pattern recognition skills	Developmental evaluators need to engage deeply and systematically, drawing on and synthesising different kinds of information and data to reach judgments about the nature, quality and value of what's going on in a situation. The developmental role is highly syncretic; it involves being able to extract themes, meaning and learnings from an array of information sources in a way that does not oversimplify important nuances and differences.
Capacity to frame the situation	Developmental evaluators need strong perceptual skills and must be able to identify and name what's going on. Being able to diligently and systematically support people to frame their inquiry, and subsequent data collection, analysis, evaluative thinking and decision making is key to the rigour of developmental evaluation.
Critical thinking and evaluative reasoning	Developmental evaluators need to be savvy guides of rigorous evaluative reasoning and practice, finding opportunities to introduce critical thinking and perspective wherever possible.
Ability to work in teams	Developmental evaluators often work in teams that are made up of diverse roles and perspectives. These teams can include both internal and external stakeholders. What's important about a developmental evaluation team, is that it can learn, adapt and co-create together. Having trusted relationships, good communication and connection between team members will help support the team to be able to think critically, challenge assumptions and learn together in what can be unfamiliar territory.
Comfortable with diverse methods	Developmental evaluators are methods bricoleurs. They need to be comfortable with some of the more traditional qualitative and quantitative tools and methods, but also open to improvising with tools and methods from many disciplines and traditions. Developmental evaluators commonly weave many different strands of data together to support evaluative thinking in different contexts.
Experience with domain/subject matter	Knowledge of the subject matter can be an advantage in some DE processes, particularly at later stages of development. It can also enhance credibility with internal and external stakeholders. Having a current understanding of a field enables a deeper level of inquiry and can assist the evaluator in framing the discussion more appropriately. At the same time, in some situations, bringing a fresh outside perspective can help generate new ways of viewing challenges and opportunities.

Facilitation skills	A lot of the work in DE is convening people to think and co-create together. Facilitation in DE is not about trying to lead people to a pre-determined outcome, rather it's about supporting people to think and create their own pathways towards achieving their shared purpose. The possibilities for action emerge from the interaction of diverse perspectives and often differing values, and developmental evaluators play an important role in bringing some coherence to this complexity.
Ability to navigate conflict, power and uncertainty	A DE journey is not all smooth sailing. When many different people are learning together, traversing new ground, and challenging the status quo, it can be expected that there will be conflict and that uncertainty will give rise to challenging situations. There will be times when developmental evaluators will need to be able to mediate tensions, openly address power and equity dynamics, and negotiate and support people to take their next steps and action.

The continual learning for developmental evaluators calls on us to be deeply self-reflective, and never complacent about our knowledge, skills and experience in doing this work. There isn't a standard or a level of competence to attain, rather we build capabilities over time.



CASE STUDY

Cheryl Poth, PhD, CE and Jacqueline Pei, R. Psych., PhD are co-founders of the Alberta Clinical and Community Evaluation and Research Team (ACCERT) at the University of Alberta. Since its inception, the ACCERT team has been involved in small, single-site DE projects as well as several large, system-level projects embedding DE.

We started ACCERT with the aim of informing complex societal issues through community-involved approaches to program evaluation. We have worked in a wide variety of sectors, such as education, justice, social services, health care, mental health and early childhood development. We have also worked with programs for traditionally marginalized populations and communities, including youth, women, Indigenous groups and people with disabilities. An interdisciplinary approach has been essential for our DE work; we draw upon Cheryl's diverse methodological expertise, her research on enhancing evaluation use and use of a complexity lens, as well as Jacqueline's clinical expertise as a psychologist and her research on enhancing quality of life and

service delivery for complex populations. We also capitalize on the diverse expertise within our entire team. Our evaluation team memberships are tailored to our projects and draw upon the extensive professional and research experiences our graduate students and community members bring to our teams. Two recent examples come to mind. First, a housing-supports focused project benefited from the contributions of community members, some who manage service delivery and others who are frontline staff, and also from community-based recipients of housing supports. Graduate students on the housing-supports project brought related clinical expertise and community experiences specific to understanding functional differences for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities, matching supports to cognitive needs and strengths, and implementing community-based research and evaluation approaches. Second, an evaluation of a deaf-blind service support program benefitted from the collaboration of the program manager who is herself a member of the deaf-blind community, and of our three graduate

students who brought health evaluation expertise, previous experiences working with the deaf-blind community and a mental health perspective to the table. Together with Cheryl and Jacqueline’s expertise we engage in co-creation of unique outcomes.

Central to our work, and aligning well with DE, is listening and learning from one another and drawing upon our unique experiences and training. Our combined expertise allows us to embed multiple perspectives in the work we do and, therefore, walk together with our communities in partnerships. We genuinely believe that if we can improve service delivery we will contribute meaningfully to the likelihood of healthy outcomes for the populations served. Key to attaining and sustaining these desirable outcomes is building the capacity of our communities to continue evolving when provided with the information and tools to help themselves. To intentionally extend our reach beyond a single project and support graduate students’ evaluation and professional capacity building, we mentor our graduate students as they take on leadership roles in our projects.

Over the past decade, our relational approach to building interdisciplinary DE teams has evolved and we have become more aware of the role DE plays within and beyond our team. We have actively sought feedback from all those involved, and pondered lessons learned from our team reflections; this has been progressively integrated into our approach. From this work, we have identified four guiding principles for our evaluation activities:

- Invest time to build trusting relationships
- Be attentive and responsive to our evaluation contexts
- Embrace uncertainty and be agile in our work as evaluators
- Integrate new perspectives and ways of working as interdisciplinary evaluation teams

Our projects often involve extensive time investment early in the relationship. It is not unusual for work that many associate with external evaluators (e.g., formal data collection) to take a while to get started. Yet, in all of our DEs, we have not only met but surpassed our contractual expectations. Our attention to dynamic evaluation contexts and ability to draw upon diverse expertise allows us to generate high quality data that is meaningful to our clients’ work. Our approach to DE is guided by emerging literature, and complemented by our expertise regarding clinical needs and systems of support to uniquely shape our approaches. Along with wisdom generated through thoughtful relationships, a tailored approach enables us to increase the usefulness of our findings with community partners. We are also told that the feasibility of our suggested next steps (a term we prefer to the more traditional recommendations) reflect an authentic understanding of our community partner’s program activities, outcomes, challenges and needs. As we wrap up evaluations and disseminate widely, it is typical for clients to express a desire to keep working with us, and they often remain in contact, sending us program updates, celebrating successes or seeking further guidance in the face of challenges. We believe these to indicate longitudinal impacts of DE involvement and lasting relationships created by our interdisciplinary and relational approach.

Stance

One of the important emerging areas in DE is the issue of evaluator stance and reflexivity, or positionality, as it is sometimes referred to in research circles. Stance helps connect us with those on the front lines of change and enhances our ability to get a grounded perspective and facilitate the use of findings. It guides our choices about the kind of work we engage with. Knowing our stance helps situate our practice as evaluation professionals in relation to inequity, social change, power and contested histories.

“To me it means that I am not entering an evaluation in a value-neutral way. I am working in pursuit of social justice and see evaluation as a way to work towards it. This allows me to align my personal values and my professional practice, and to connect with organizations that share a similar vision for the world. The more I work with organizations that are working on issues I hold near and dear, the more I have skin in the game to ensure that the work they are doing is moving us towards a more socially just world.”

**Charmagne
Campbell-Patton**

Developmental evaluators constantly balance being close and caring with their role as critical friend, questioner, and provocateur. Caring, or having a stake in wanting better outcomes for people or the planet, doesn’t mean that we can’t be professional. We take our responsibility as evaluators — to be transparent about our ethics, assumptions and professional boundaries, and to demonstrate a commitment to honesty — seriously. Caring also means we are committed to listening carefully, taking different perspectives into account, and making space for conflicting and diverse points of view.

We’ve found that our credibility as developmental evaluators is most often earned by being open about who we are and showing up as whole people who care about the work and the people around us. One’s DE practice grows from self-reflection after almost every engagement. We do this because how we act and respond will have an impact on not only the evaluation, but also the initiative.

The work of a developmental evaluator is highly relational, requiring trust and credibility with people. It’s important for us to find connections with people through shared values and interests. People will connect and engage with us at deeper levels if they know what we care about. Who we are matters just as much, if not more so, as what we know as evaluators. Knowing our stance in relation to the work we do means as developmental evaluators, we need to know ourselves as human beings — who we are, our identities, our history, what we value and what we care

about — so we can be useful and effective. We also need to understand who we are in relation to contested historical socio-political relationships, cultures and inequities. Friere (2000) reminds us that objectivity is a naïve quest; we are always in power relations with each other, and our positionality is constantly moving. We cannot speak for others, nor do we work on another's behalf. We are there to support development, and engage with, listen to, and ensure that the voices of those most affected are at the decision-making table.

Being aware of yourself and your boundaries shapes how you interact and negotiate with others. The presence or absence of certain values may be a deal breaker for some, and not for others. An initiative may have a commitment to an approach that an evaluator is not comfortable with. Some groups may purposefully seek evaluators who challenge their perspective, thinking this is generative to new ideas and options. Other groups may rely heavily on a strongly values-aligned evaluator as that is what is needed to have trust and credibility among their stakeholders. There are vital conversations about values, perspective and stance that need to be had as part of any DE among evaluators and those they work with.

What's important to grasp about the concept of stance as a developmental evaluator, is that there is no getting away with comfortably assuming one is neutral or objective in any given setting. For many of us, our training has led us to believe that we can be values-free or have a more balanced view than others; however, this belief is itself grounded in a particular worldview and set of values. Every human is values aligned, so developmental evaluators need to deeply understand our stance, and continually question and critique our own thinking and actions as a key part of our practice. An evaluation colleague Carolyn Camman recently reminded us that we shouldn't disentangle our critical and equity-oriented evaluation practice from our DE practice because DE has as much power to do harm as any other evaluation practice. They remarked that DE has "as much power to uphold the status quo as to upend it" and that it can also just as easily "reinforce inequity and injustice" as lead to liberatory change (personal communication, Carolyn Camman).

Carolyn also reminded us that indigenous approaches to evaluation and DE are complexity approaches grounded in worldviews that are relational, values oriented and, we would add, liberational in perspective and stance. Our colleague Nan Wehipeihana has also suggested that the entry point to DE for indigenous approaches is the axiological, ontological and epistemological positioning and stance of being indigenous. This indigenous positioning is the starting point for any type of evaluation practice, and the choice of evaluation approach follows.



CASE STUDY

Debbie Goodwin, Louise Were, Kataraina Pipi, Nan Wehipeihana and Kirimatao Paipa are Māori evaluators living in Aotearoa New Zealand. They use a DE approach in much of their evaluation work.

Kia ora. Most of our DE work is where innovative initiatives and services are being co-designed and developed with and by Māori (indigenous people), *iwi* (tribes), *hapū* (sub-tribes) and communities. Much of our evaluation work is funded by the

New Zealand Government to provide a combination of DE and *Kaupapa Māori* (a Māori way of doing things) evaluation alongside the development process of these initiatives.

Tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) for Māori, *iwi* and communities is the nexus upon which Kaupapa Māori evaluation is undertaken. A Kaupapa Māori DE approach ideally advocates for Māori/*iwi* led transformative change by beginning from within a natural Māori way of doing

and being. The use of *te reo Māori* (the Māori language) and *tikanga Māori* (Māori protocols) means Māori are able to engage with a Kaupapa Māori evaluation on an equal footing.

Kaupapa Māori DE can be likened to wayfinding used in the sea journeys on voyages of discovery to new horizons. “Central to the wayfinding approach is seeing what is really going on — discerning the detail and seeing the whole” and having a deep understanding of themselves, their crew, their *waka* (sailing vessel) and the environment (Spiller, Barclay-Kerr and Panoho, 2015, p3). This wayfinding approach aligns to some extent with the complexity principle of DE; it’s about emergence and discovery, taking cues from the constantly changing, interactive parts of the system: earth, sea and sky. Variable cues are taken from the currents of the sea, the winds, the clouds, the birds and the constellations. Equally important are the individuals on the journey and how they interact as a whole.

Overlaying the physical signs of interaction are spiritual signs that guide our connection as Māori to the unseen. This includes acknowledgement of ancestors both present and past, how we view time and how we prioritise what is important

and our relationship with the cosmos and the physical and spiritual world we live in. *Wairuatanga* (spiritual philosophy and practice) is a unique aspect of a Kaupapa Māori DE approach; it emphasizes our interconnectedness and our inter-relationships to all things. We use our whole being to notice and sense the *tohu* (signs), *nuances* and *wairua* (spirit and energy) going on in a DE context and process. These signs and wairua are part of our specific cultural world, and they help us to think more deeply about any given experience or situation, and guide our decision making and action.

A Kaupapa Māori DE approach is principles based. It adheres to the principles and processes developed within Kaupapa Māori as well as taking an iterative, reflective and sensing stance to evaluation. These principles include *whakawhanaungatanga* (establishing relationships), who we are in relation to each other and *he kanohi kitea he hokinga mahara* (the seen face is the remembered face), which concedes that one is known and respected for one’s deeds amongst the iwi rather than what one says, or what others from outside say about you. In this way we as Māori evaluators give effect to the *tikanga/kawa* (protocols and practices) of our hapū and iwi, who are at the forefront of our approach as Māori evaluators.

Adaptive and Evaluative Readiness

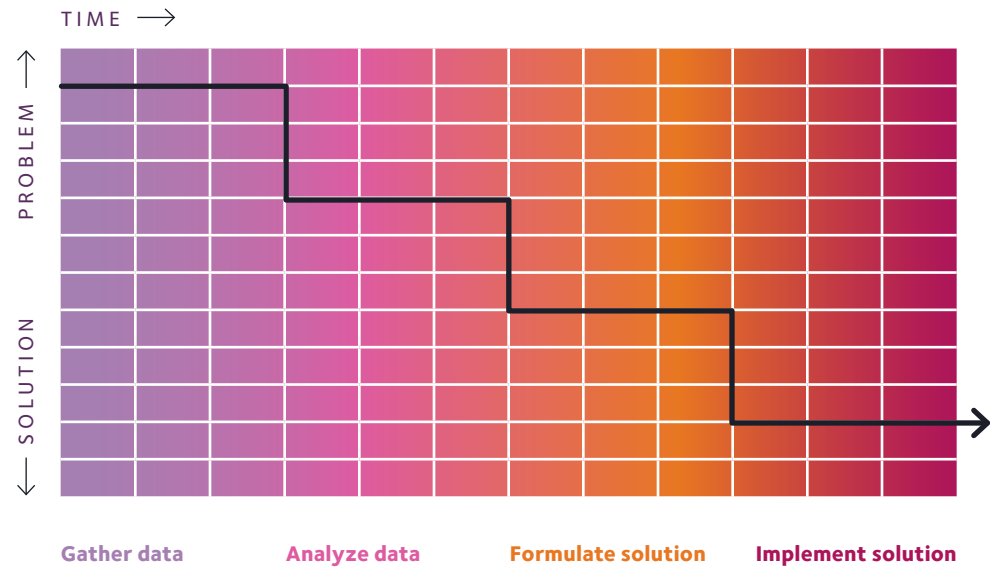
An essential first step of DE is testing the readiness of primary users to adapt and evaluate.

Adaptive Readiness

Just because social innovators are working in one of the developmental niches described above, it does not mean that they are ready, willing and able to adapt their work to reflect new learnings, and to shift contexts and evolve expectations that are typical in an effort to tackle complex challenges. The first step in assessing the readiness of social innovators to meaningfully engage in DE is to determine their individual and organizational level of adaptive culture and capability.

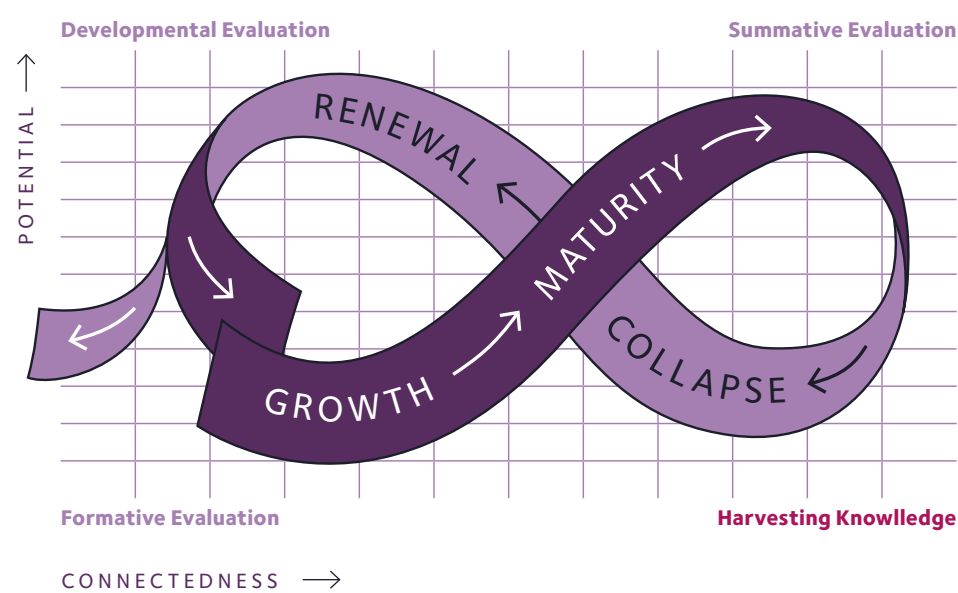
Traditional management practices emphasize a linear plan-the-work, work-the-plan approach to addressing issues. This is typically organized around a waterfall approach to problem solving, which includes the following steps: define the problem, complete research into the problem and past efforts to address it, articulate and choose amongst options, design an intervention and implement and adapt the intervention based on evaluation feedback.

2.2 - TRADITIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING



In the DE niches, innovators wrestling with complex issues are more likely to employ a more adaptive response, characterized by cycles of initially smaller (and eventually larger) interventions, with quick feedback loops that help them integrate what they are learning about the challenge, and adapt the intervention as it evolves. Tackling complex issues is less a process of plan-the-work, work-the-plan, and more multiple iterative cycles of act-feedback-reflect-adapt.

2.3 - ECO-CYCLE



Assessing innovators' adaptive readiness includes an examination of their mindset, capability and authority to engage in adaptive work. It includes, at least, the following attributes:

Mindset

- The conviction and courage to address a complex issue
- An eagerness to think and act systemically
- A tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty and tensions associated with understanding the change people want to see and what it will take to get there

Capability

- An interest in and experience with processes to experiment with novel solutions, to see what insights emerge, and then to reiterate
- An awareness and ability to track context and shifts in wider environment

Authority

- The authority and/or permission to adjust, pivot and adapt their efforts when the feedback and insights uncover that it necessary to do so
- Access to and engagement by leadership and other decision makers

Every developmental evaluator has a story of working with social innovators whose adaptive readiness is uneven or imperfect. Some of them may feel anxious about adopting an emergent learn-by-doing approach which is unavoidably necessary for working with complex issues. Others might have rigid management practices that make real-time responses and pivots in strategy difficult. Still others have an adaptive mindset and robust capabilities, but must report to senior or external decision makers, and therefore operate without the (in)formal authority to adapt their interventions as the situation demands. In each instance, the developmental process that DE is meant to inform is more challenging because the group is not fully able.



CASE STUDY

Brenna Atnikov is a senior consultant with Reos Partners, an international social enterprise that helps people move forward together on their most important and intractable issues.

In close collaboration with our clients and partners, we develop strategy, design processes, and facilitate system change interventions that enable diverse stakeholders — even those who don't agree with, like or trust one another — to make progress on their toughest challenges. We work on a diversity of subjects, including climate and energy, health equity, and peace and

democracy, but every context we work in has two things common: uncertainty and unpredictability. Methods for working in systemic, collaborative and experimental ways, such as social labs and transformative scenarios processes, help us intervene in these environments. In the face of such complexity, embedded DE enables project teams to gather real-time feedback and use it to improve how we intervene.

From 2016 to 2019, I worked alongside a diverse team of higher education sector leaders in the United States to convene the Emergency Aid Lab, a project funded

by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that sought to respond to a critical issue affecting student outcomes. College has become increasingly unaffordable over the past several decades. For many students, a small, unexpected expense — a medical bill, car breakdown or increase in childcare costs — can stretch their budgets and cause them to drop out. An estimated 3 million students leave school over an expense of less than \$1,000. The Emergency Aid Lab has a twofold purpose:

- to support a cohort of five institutions to develop their own comprehensive emergency aid programs that would increase retention and completion,
- and codifying the what and how of emergency aid program development so that other institutions could replicate the approach.

Throughout the lab, the Reos team oscillated between two modes. The first mode was to be on the dance floor, guiding five institutions and their cross-functional teams through an innovation process that resulted in their student-centric emergency aid program. The second mode was to be on the balcony, reflecting with the teams on their work to discern the patterns and principles that we could codify and make useful to the field as a whole. As the leader of our team's practice of using the second mode, my job was to be the developmental evaluator for my colleagues and our partners. To ensure the time spent on this delivered value to our project and end users, it was critical that I build our processes, habits and culture for DE.

In my experience, large, complex projects can easily form the habit of consistently prioritizing the urgent over the important, with the next thing constantly demanding attention. I have found that employing a DE mindset and approach disrupts this pattern. Below, I share my most important learnings and reflections on how to embed a DE approach in ways that improve the work.

Build systems and support people to create reflective habits – I developed a shared spreadsheet entitled Learning and Pulse, and asked team members to individually respond to four questions after every touch point with a campus:

- What happened or is happening?
- What insight or learning surfaced?
- Why is this significant?
- Now what should we do?

I would regularly nudge people to complete their entries, review the content to pull out patterns and questions, and use these to inform the design of our monthly learning calls. Pressing others to develop DE habits around recording individual observations for the purpose of tracking our learning turned out to be critical for when it was time to codify the what and how of an emergency aid program.

Embed the balcony mode into processes – We began to include balcony conversations in our workshops with campuses. These are conversations that prompt reflection on what is happening on the dance floor — in the work itself — and were guided by similar questions in the Learning and Pulse spreadsheet used internally by the Reos team, but instead the content came directly from the members of the cross-functional teams. These perspectives helped the Reos team validate our observations and hone our attention to the most significant insights within the context of the practitioners we were and would be serving. We prioritized DE processes within our workshops that previously may have been seen as extraneous and this turned out to be critical for understanding what the field really needed.

Nurture changes in culture that serve learning – My primary tool for creating space for important learning was to design and facilitate monthly calls. Whereas early in the project “Why is there a 6-hour meeting

in my calendar?” was a common question, I nurtured a change in culture in the team to recognize the value in these purposeful pauses, making it legitimate to incorporate the calls into the team’s workflow. To manage skepticism, I focused solely on running well-designed and facilitated learning calls that were a good use of time. The proxy for good use of time was that the calls produced critical insights needed

to help the team discern and prioritize what was important instead of what was urgent. In doing so, these conversations delivered enormous value by enabling all team members to see the whole of what was happening in the project. Making this visible helped our team to develop a DE culture that values learning and reflection that in turn helps drive the promised results and impact.

<p>“Not only should we consider DE readiness, we also need to think about how to move the organization or group to become more DE ready. Otherwise, DE is useless for many influential organizations that need to change to produce meaningful impact on important issues.”</p>	<p>Katsuji Imata</p>
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Evaluative Readiness

Evaluative readiness, on the other hand, refers to the commitment and ability of social innovators to embrace data and critical thinking to inform the ongoing process of development and adaptation.

While people working in adaptive contexts are often curious, interested in feedback, and see mis-steps and failure as an opportunity to learn, this is not always the case. In a DE training session in 2006, for example, the staff person responsible for evaluation in a well-known values-based social development organization exclaimed, “We are innovative, but we don’t have an evaluative bone in our body”. At the end of the session, he concluded that his group was likely to be lukewarm, even hostile, to introducing a more systematic approach to evaluation simply because they relied heavily on intuition and values and did not like to have their deeply held beliefs tested with new data and different perspectives. In this instance, quite appropriately, the group did not proceed with DE.

What’s the point of investing in DE if even highly adaptive social innovators would prefer not to engage in reality testing their efforts to tackle complex issues? For DE to be effective, social innovators must be ready to engage in deep learning, reflection and evaluative thinking.

Ever since Peter Senge and his colleagues popularized the notion of a “learning organization” in their book, *The Fifth Discipline*, there has been a great deal of work done on defining what a learning and evaluation culture looks like, as well as how groups can develop systems and practices that support ongoing learning, evaluation and adaptation.

While it is difficult to summarize the current state of this dynamic area of evaluation, some of the cross-cutting features include those described in the following table.

Learning & Evaluation Readiness

- A commitment to test ideas, assumptions and beliefs through data, critical thinking and evaluative processes
- Ability to spot and accept dead ends, missteps and mistakes as opportunities for learning and adaptation
- A keen interest in viewing challenges, interventions and learnings through the multiple experiences, perspectives, values and interests of diverse stakeholders
- A willingness to hear, discuss and address feedback on issues, including those related to power, inclusion and equity
- The discipline of ensuring that data plays a key role in making decisions on the next iteration of development and adaptation
- The existence of structures and incentives for new learning to be applied

Of all these attributes, the most difficult to attain is ensuring that decision makers draw on evaluation feedback to inform their thinking and decisions. Ensuring evaluation use has been a persistent challenge for evaluators ever since the field emerged in the 1950s. Use studies have consistently shown decision makers don't pay consistent attention to evaluation data, and often ignore it entirely. This challenge is amplified in developmental contexts when interventions often unfold rapidly, in dynamic contexts, and evaluation signals are often weak. There is pressure to make decisions quickly, even without the benefit of reflection and critical thought.

This requires evaluators both to pay attention to social innovators' patterns of using evaluation data in the past (if the group has a history of working together), as well as to how they might continue to co-develop, co-test and co-refine robust and real-time sensemaking and decision-making processes with social innovators.

We'll explore the scoping and contracting process in more detail later, but at this time we want to highlight that it's very useful when a DE is being considered to engage in a systematic process to assess both the adaptive and evaluative readiness of the organization or organizations involved. This can help evaluators and social innovators establish a rough baseline for the work, identify ways to strengthen adaptive and evaluative capacity of the group through and beyond the evaluation, and manage expectations about what can reasonably be accomplished within the innovation process.

Of course, the readiness of social innovators for DE is dynamic, rather than static. People come and go, teams evolve, organizations shift. The factors that shape a group's evaluation readiness are constantly — sometimes dramatically, sometimes subtly, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly — changing. Evaluators and social innovators need to track these things and adapt their responses accordingly.

However, their job is also to improve, not just work within, these conditions. If done well, a good DE can increase a hunger for learning, a commitment to critical thinking and data-informed decisions, and a comfort with ongoing development and adaptation. The mission of evaluators and social innovators is to do their work in a way that strengthens the adaptive and evaluative culture of their team, organization or network over time.

Working in Imperfect Conditions

Unsurprisingly, whatever checklist or process a group uses to check readiness, they are likely to conclude that the conditions for DE are imperfect. Few teams, organizations or networks excel at adaptive responses to complex issues or have developed world-class learning cultures and practices. In most cases, the conditions will be uneven, with some groups displaying stronger and weaker aspects in both areas. In addition, it is common for people to self-assess their readiness to be higher than it actually is. Dealing with imperfect conditions is the norm rather than exception in DE.

The list of challenges is seemingly as endless as the diverse contexts in which developmental evaluators operate. The following table highlights some common situations.

<p>“I work with program staff whose focus is action, not theory, particularly evaluation theory. One of my adaptations is that I never speak about the DE principles or theory even though they guide everything I do. I speak about everything in relation to the organization’s values that are very deeply engrained in the culture and guide staff, volunteer and members’ conduct. For example, if I want to discuss co-creation I’ll frame it around social diversity and inclusion. Similarly, I talk about my role in terms of the values, honestly sharing ideas and feedback and caring about the well-being of my colleagues and the communities we work with and in.”</p>	<p>Sarah Earl, YMCA Canada</p>
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TABLE 2.5: EXAMPLES OF IMPERFECT CONDITIONS⁴

CHALLENGE	WHY THIS MATTERS
Dealing with the negative consequence of failure	Innovators are uncomfortable with the prospects of failure, either because of their reputation or due to the high stakes of their strategy, and often struggle with negative feedback.
Acting on instinct versus data	Innovators move quickly, are highly intuitive and make quick decisions, often with little attention — or even with resistance — to carefully reviewing and making sense of data as they proceed.
Inflexible strategy	The group is working with a rigid strategy and unable to adapt it even when the evaluative feedback suggests that they need to adapt and evolve their approach.
External or unclear pressures on decision making	The decision makers (e.g. senior executives, funders etc.) often operate outside of the innovation process, and are not immersed in the realities of the development. They therefore feel little ownership of evaluation findings and no pressure to adapt the intervention.
Insufficient burden of proof	Social innovators work quickly in constantly changing contexts. Expecting a high level of validity and reliability in data in these situations is not practical, and can confound decision making.
Ever-changing social innovators	There is sudden or constant turnover in the social innovators whom the DE is meant to support.
Return to more traditional evaluation and planning	Social innovators and/or funders who demand more traditional evaluation processes, products and results in the latter half of an initiative.
Too much uncertainty	Initiatives can become paralyzed in the face of ambiguity when things are in flux, and become unable to move forward on any given path.

⁴ A similar table by the Spark Insight Partners (formerly known as the Spark Policy Institute) was our inspiration for this table.

Developmental evaluators and social innovators can adopt a wide range of basic strategies in response to these challenges. They can also anticipate that challenges will emerge and act proactively in the design and implementation of the evaluation. Some possible strategies include:

2.6: STRATEGIES FOR WORKING IN IMPERFECT CONDITIONS⁵

STRATEGY	WHAT TO DO	EXAMPLES
Start small	Begin with manageable, relevant and engaging DE processes to demonstrate the value of the approach and build interest for broader use of DE in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate after-action review sessions after major events. • Focus on improving parts of the overall strategy that staff and leaders agree are somewhat effective but could be improved. Moderate a discussion on lessons learned at the annual staff meeting. • Facilitate a “pre-mortem” session before the launch of a program or strategy.
Cocoon / Fly under the radar	Ensure that the organization can carry on business as usual, while creating, curating and protecting spaces for DE activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide routine monitoring and accountability reports to funders and the board while developing internal DE processes and reports. • Wait until the culture begins to shift to tackle a challenging problem or a part of the strategy that may not be achieving its desired outcomes. • Seek opportunities to employ DE in the early days of strategy development rather than when it becomes fixed. • Emphasize the importance of treating weak signals with caution.
Sneak it in	Integrate DE friendly techniques and practices into mainstream leadership and management practices informally, without formal reference to DE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a plan-do-study-act process into the group’s routines, which is considered a management, rather than evaluation, practice, but can accommodate DE questions and create pressure for adaptation. • Begin by identifying simple ways that you can use data to rapidly inform the quick decisions and abrupt changes in course that the leaders make.
Manage the frame	Maintain a narrative that reminds people about the nature of adaptation and complexity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind stakeholders (especially decision makers) throughout about the nature of adaptive work and manage expectations about what is appropriate at different phases of the work. • Educate social innovators about fit for purpose and context evaluation designs. • Point to the limitations and benefits of designing evaluations within time and resource constraints.
Adapt the evaluation as you go	Start with a solid evaluation plan but be ready to adjust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the history of the evaluation, including the original scope of work and its evaluation. • Facilitate exit interviews with exiting and arriving social innovators to ensure a smooth transition. • Be prepared to review and upgrade the original evaluation scope of work.

In keeping with the spirit of bricolage as already introduced at the start of this section, evaluators and innovators must accept that conditions for DE will be uneven, and — if and when they think the conditions are sufficiently robust enough to proceed — that they must be inventive in finding ways to make the evaluation experience as meaningful as possible.



CASE STUDY

Charmagne E. Campbell-Patton is an evaluator based in the United States. She brings a decade of program design, implementation and evaluation experience to her work with organizations across a range of fields, including youth civic engagement, education, environmental justice, youth homelessness and philanthropy.

One of the challenges to implementing DE is navigating turnover in the staff of the project or initiative with which you are working. In my experience, the most effective way to prevent turnover from derailing an evaluation is to create an onboarding plan that includes well-documented historical information, training on DE, and processes to engage staff in ongoing learning and reflection. It's also important to build relationships across the organization so that if a person leaves, the commitment to DE does not leave with them. Let me give you an example.

For the past ten years, World Savvy, a non-profit organization based in the United States, has been using DE to inform its work to change the US educational system. When the organization first started using DE, I was a program manager and served as an internal developmental evaluator. Under the leadership of founder and executive director, Dana Mortenson, we developed systems dynamics models to capture the complexity of the work, began to engage in regular reflective practice sessions on the organization's core values, and gathered real-time data to inform program development. Over the next ten years, the organization has gone through significant changes, including several staff transitions, not uncommon for small non-profits like World Savvy. While Dana remains at the helm, I transitioned from an internal evaluator to an external consultant,

and there have been three program directors since that time, and a number of other staff have come and gone. Yet the organization's commitment to DE remains strong.

One of the first things we did early in the process was conduct a retrospective DE, which documented the major decision points over the first ten years of World Savvy's existence. This document helped new staff to understand how we had gotten where we were and what data had informed decisions that were made in the past. For more information on conducting and using a retrospective evaluation, see pages 294–303 in *Developmental Evaluation* (Patton, 2011).

The other key piece as I transitioned from an internal evaluator to an external consultant was to ensure that when new staff came into the fold, I took the time to build relationships with them and engage them in the DE process. In particular, we engaged in regular reflective practice, adaptive action and meaning making sessions, sometimes with just the program team and other times with the whole organization. This work helped the team build common understandings of World Savvy's core values and principles, and to share examples and stories of how they were (and were not) present in the work of the organization. I also conducted regular training with board members and staff to ensure everyone had a common understanding of DE and its unique niche and application in World Savvy's context.

As is its nature, the approach to DE evolved as World Savvy evolved, but it continues to be the foundation upon which the organization makes decisions and innovates in the context of the changing United States education system.

Managing Relationships in a Developmental Evaluation

DE is highly relational. More than something that we must pay attention to or invest in, it's in relationship with others that the work is done. Our relationships with each other influence, at least partly, the quality and effectiveness of the work we do. In addition, these relationships are dynamic, and require our attention throughout a DE, as the quality of these connections can enhance, or derail, an evaluation process.

Practically, this means that developmental evaluators must prioritise building relationships from the beginning of a DE process. It should be a major focus of the work at the outset. Because DE is an embedded process, getting to know people more deeply than just their title and job description is important.

When we develop relationships, we also develop a level of personal investment in the work, and therefore we are more likely to have the confidence to raise and tackle contentious issues, take risks, be comfortable with uncertainty and better able to weather the ups and downs of the journey because we have some skin in the game. This applies to evaluators and social innovators alike. We are also likely to care about the work and the people around us. Trust and credibility are earned in relationship with each other, demonstrated by our actions and our personal and professional ethics of care, our values orientation and our transparency about who we are.

There are things that might put pressure on relationships. A new stakeholder enters the mix, people involved in the initiative may change, or accountability pressures may prompt a shift away from adaptive strategy into one of more linear planning and implementing. Developmental evaluators should be attuned to changes in relationships, as they can be consequential to the evaluation and the direction of an initiative. The goal here is not to mitigate against change, but to watch for it, and be ready to raise what is happening with the evaluation users. Pointing it out may prompt a reset on adaptive strategy, or clarify that the developmental stage is winding down and the initiative is moving into a new phase of work.



CASE STUDY

Kate McKegg, See “About Authors”

My evaluation team submitted a proposal for a three-year DE and was notified that we had been successful in winning the work. As the contract for the work was being developed, the funder kept asking for more and more detail of activities and costs, and was pushing for us to specify these over the entire three years. After going backwards and forwards several times, I called a meeting. At this meeting I expressed my concern about the amount of detail being asked for. I talked about how I felt it was counterproductive for the project because

there was so much that was unknown about the way in which the initiative would unfold. I said that in my experience, an overly specified contract was going to lead to endless contract revisions that would add needless administration for the funder, and ourselves. I suggested that detailed specifications like those being asked for implied a lack of trust and that this wasn't a good basis to begin our relationship. And it might be best if we walked away.

In the discussion that followed, it became clear that the funder was managing their own lack of experience and uncertainty

about DE by trying to tie everything down, so that they didn't feel so exposed and vulnerable. The detail was comforting for the funder. I suggested that perhaps we shift the contracting to short cycles of three months, so that we could develop our understanding of each other together with less money and time at stake. At the end of each cycle we could reflect on what had happened and then co-develop the shape of the next cycle together. After three cycles, the funder realised the very emergent nature of the initiative and had become more comfortable with how we were working as developmental evaluators; they could see we were supporting people to

engage in ongoing reflection and our regular sensemaking processes were generating important insights for the development of the initiative. We have now moved to an 18-month contract cycle.

The example above is not unique. This sort of situation can happen at the beginning when funders or managers are inexperienced with DE and there are many other issues that can arise in a DE. Throughout the course of all DEs, you will encounter situations and issues that will need you to be an astute and careful manager of people and relationships. Each of these will invite a different and tailored response.

Evaluator Positioning

Developmental evaluators are often positioned as a member of, or critical friend to, the design, innovation or implementation team, so it is wise to negotiate with people about expectations, roles and process including decision making. In more traditional evaluation contexts, evaluators are likely to act at a distance and clients are more used to this positioning. Getting too close to the action on the ground can be misinterpreted by those higher up in the organisation. Getting too close to the leaders and funders of an initiative can lower the credibility of an evaluator to a community or those in vulnerable positions. We often walk a fine line in terms of how we act in relationship with the myriad of stakeholders in DE. It's important for us to recognise that our relationship with one another will become interwoven into the fabric of the work and the evaluation.

Power Relations

The contexts in which developmental evaluators work are complex, so too are the inter-relationships. Historical power asymmetries, long-term marginalisation, limited resources and conflict often feature in the contexts we work in. Fear, mistrust, uncertainty and anger are some of the emotions we are likely to encounter as we walk alongside change efforts.

Our actions as developmental evaluators can (and often should) expose the dynamics of power relations, raise unconscious bias, question what's at stake for whom and point out whose perspectives and issues are being privileged more than others. Raising these often-contentious issues is vital, but entails risk taking for the developmental evaluator.

It's important to recognise that we are not outside these dynamics, and that there are power relations in every relationship we have as developmental evaluators. As evaluators, we are frequently in powerful positions where we can have both a positive and negative influence on people and projects. We all have unconscious biases and we also often hold contested power

positions. We should continually question and challenge our thinking about our own power in relation to those we are working with. For example, are we the right person to be engaging in a particular DE?

It’s vital that we are continually being critical, self-reflective and mindful of our own power and the responsibilities and accountabilities that come with it. It’s important to be transparent about our motivations and to continually check in with those around us before we act.

Scoping and Contracting a Developmental Evaluation

This section will look at options for contracting and procurement, and provide guidance for scoping, budgeting and managing a DE.

Co-creation is dynamic and fluid. Complexity involves emergence. There is a dynamism and fluidity to DEs that have implications for how the work is commissioned, and subsequently managed.

“It’s difficult to predict what will be needed or emerge from the evaluation at the outset, so contracts may look different than an organization may typically be used to. (i.e. not a neat and tidy Schedule A with a set of deliverables and a timeline). I have approached this by having high levels of trust with organizations I have worked with. However, this has also meant there needs to be a mutual commitment to adaptive management and revisiting the budget, contract and expectations regularly to ensure we are all on the same page.”

Kerri Klein

DEs can be done by an internal or external evaluator, or by a team. An external evaluator brings focus both to the work and to the evaluation, which can act as a catalyst to the development process. An advantage to filling the developmental evaluator role with someone external such as a consultant is that this person may bring fresh and candid perspectives. The challenge of the external role is one of resources. DE can be a time-intensive process, and a consulting relationship may have cost implications for the organization. Innovation tends not be bound to a specific time frame, which means that the duration of relationship with a developmental evaluator may be unpredictable. The advantage of an internal developmental evaluator is their ongoing access to the development process, knowledge of context and established level of trust; they are well-positioned to observe important lessons as they emerge. A risk is that the developmental evaluator role becomes secondary to other responsibilities or loses the big picture perspective because they become too close to operational activity.

Increasingly, DEs are working with an internal-external hybrid. This can help access the benefits outlined above, while mitigating some of the risks, and, often, help build an organization's internal evaluation capacity along the way. A DE may be supported by an individual evaluator, or a team of evaluators. An individual may suit a smaller initiative, or a situation where there is high internal capacity. A more comprehensive initiative may involve a team to accommodate for the need for different areas of expertise, proximity to multiple initiatives within a larger project or geographic scope.

The up-front specificity needed to scope out a traditional evaluation framework is challenging when the initiative, and, as a result, the evaluation, is expected to adapt and evolve. The challenge of accurately scoping a DE and the long and uncertain duration can make them potentially costly to resource. Evaluation frameworks tend not to be fixed and as a result the scope can change as new questions emerge. The pace of the DE can accelerate or slow down, in sync with how the initiative is developing.

Conventional funding and project management approaches are geared towards specific outcomes and milestones, and there is an expectation of up-front scoping and clear deliverables. DEs work differently as the process is not linear; teams need to be able to respond and adjust to what they discover in the early phases. Changes in relationships, new learning, and a better shared understanding of what is being evaluated shape what comes next and where evaluative focus and energy should be directed.

Contracting arrangements can be bilateral or multilateral, and can range from the simple to the very complicated. Procurement mechanisms, such as requests for proposals (RFPs), assume pre-ordinate clarity about goals, processes and activities, which can be challenging in the highly adaptive nature of the kinds of initiatives and situations that a DE supports. RFPs have a built-in assumption that we can engineer solutions, that there is a singular answer to a problem. Requirements for short-term implementation constrain innovation by pushing for early convergence rather than an exploration of novel options, which tends to result in historical framing of a problem and business-as-usual solutions.

Any development process, particularly when there is a high degree of innovation, is dynamic. It is helpful to anticipate how the scope of an evaluation process will evolve and plan to periodically revisit it. It is common for boundaries to be pushed in an exploratory process, and so adjustments to the scope and evaluation plan change often in a DE. Evaluators who are contracting in DEs tend to become good at costing and managing modifications. There may be surprises to be understood or a shift in emphasis and focus to be supported. Michael Quinn Patton identifies some different contracting strategies that can be used to guide to some of the ways we might build flexibility into the contracting process:

- 1. Retainer fee contracts:** The scope of work is open-ended, and the evaluator and contracting organisation agree on total for the budget. The evaluator draws on the retainer pool as required, and if needed, new funds can be added to the pool over time.
- 2. Stepwise funding:** The evaluation design and funds are negotiated in steps or phases.
- 3. Plan and adjust:** The evaluator and contracting organisation speculate on the DE design and budget based on a best guess, but with a substantial contingency and a readiness to check in and adjust.

The first step in any DE is determining scope. Evaluations consume resources and so it is important to make informed decisions. If we can understand the circumstances and conditions in which the evaluation activity will take place, then we are better positioned to make assessments about what resources are required, who needs to be involved and how to approach the evaluation.

It is extremely difficult, maybe even impossible, to come in cold when doing a DE. The first part of the work is scoping, which often is contracted as a stand-alone exercise that then informs the next phase or phases of work. In a DE, scoping is much more than the just the technical work of determining methodology, it is also about understanding context and situation, and building relationships. While this may seem contradictory, it is important to both invest in the up-front work of scoping, while at the same time, moving quickly into action. Over-thinking and over-planning tend not to be helpful given the likelihood of adaptation that can only be informed by the experience of working on the DE.

**Danielle
de Garcia**

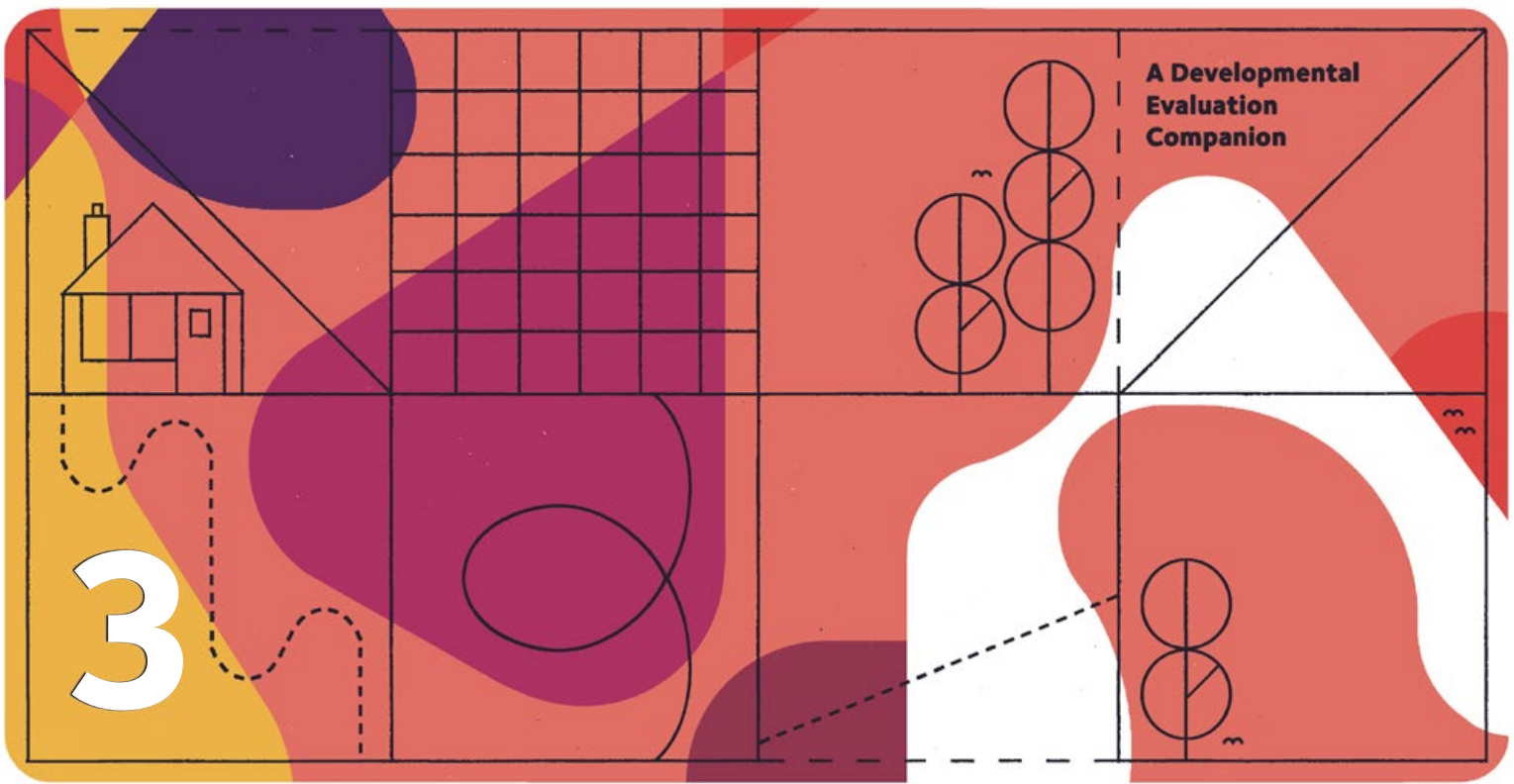
“We’ve found that initial scoping for DE is well worth the investment. Typically, our scoping includes discussions around stakeholder and organizational readiness, identifying potential areas of inquiry and possible decision points, and developing common expectations around a partnership. It’s crucial that both parties understand both what a DE can and cannot do; as well as what will be required from all to make it successful. We also identify key characteristics for an embedded evaluator and begin recruitment for that individual. We only move forward with a DE if the results from the scoping show that they are ready, committed, and a good fit. When DEs haven’t been as successful, it’s often because the proper time/investment wasn’t given to scoping.”

TABLE 2.7 - SCOPING DE

There are many tools and resources that can guide the scoping of a DE. Look to these for more specific and detailed guidance, but in general, the scoping of a DE should address the following:

AREAS TO COVER	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Purpose and use	What is it that those leading the initiative are hoping to do? What do the stakeholders think developmental evaluation might contribute to the work? Who are the primary users of the evaluation? What do they need to know?
Assessment of context and situation	What is the evaluative and adaptive readiness of the participating organizations? How are the DE principles shaped by this context? What are key moments in the timeline for the initiative? When and where do decisions get made? What is the fit with the evaluator’s stance and capabilities?
Lines of inquiry	What are the key questions to be answered? What are the uncertainties the initiative is wrestling with?
Who is involved	How will they engage with the DE? What are their preferences for receiving information?
Approach	What evaluation approaches will the evaluation take to answer the key questions? When and how will stakeholders review and make sense of data? How will the team leverage data to inform key decision making? How will DE findings be communicated?
Effort and budget	What are expectations around roles for those involved? How are decisions to be made? What is the budget, how will this be used, and what is the mechanism to adjust the budget if needed?

Section two reminds us to take a hard look at ourselves and our situation when doing, or even considering, a DE. This is not a static assessment. DEs tend to take place in dynamic circumstances, and the more we are tuned into that, the better positioned we are to adjust the design of the evaluation. “How do I do that?” you ask. The next, and final section, gets into specifics about inquiry frameworks, methods, utilization, sensemaking and communicating findings.



SECTION THREE

Designing a Developmental Evaluation

Why design in DE? The urge to have a method for doing DE is very strong. We recognize that, and in our practice, we hear this request all the time: “Just give me the steps.” We can’t. Such a thing does not exist. If a situation were developed enough to be able to say here is the method, it would no longer be developmental. And even then, any methods direction would be unique to that particular situation. Any evaluation requires a thoughtful, considered design, and DE is no different.

Evaluators and other users of an evaluation make choices about methods and approaches that are driven by the situation. This includes factors of readiness, capability and stance (as discussed in the previous section), and also the users' interests and preferences, the lines of inquiry that the evaluation will focus on and resource constraints.

By methods we don't just mean data collection. Methods involve determining key questions, collecting data, analyzing data, making sense of what is being learned and applying that to strategy. Having some methods experience is essential for any evaluator, and it is an area to continue to develop in one's evaluation practice. Evaluators should also be ready to call in extra help if particular methods capacity is needed. Because DE is inherently explorative, it is driven more by questions than by metrics. Inevitably, you will find that a DE needs an adaptive design. It is very likely that you will need to rescope as the initiative takes shape, new things are learned, and priorities shift. As such, DEs are inherently more adaptive and cyclical. As mentioned earlier, context shapes DE and methods are no exception.

The concept of bricolage is most relevant for methods. What this means is that developmental evaluators are reading the context, understanding their skills and the skills of others involved, and thinking creatively about how questions can be answered and decisions get made. Developmental evaluators may reach to very traditional data sources, such as surveys or interviews, or may look to integrate and sometimes modify approaches from various disciplines and practices. In this there is a bit of a paradox; developmental evaluators do well to have a strong grounding in traditional evaluation practices, and at the same time, must always be ready to explore and apply alternative, creative methods.

Design Guidance

In the process of designing a DE, there are some useful principles that can inform the process. In this section, we introduce three: Utilization-focused evaluation, inquiry frameworks, and the DE principles. You can, of course, be guided by other things too.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation

One of the principles of DE is to be utilization-focused, which aims to ensure that the evaluation process and findings are used, rather than sit on a shelf. This means designing with the end users in mind. For example, what are potential decision points, and how do we organize our timing and

inquiry frameworks to support those moments, while recognizing that these decision points will also likely shift over time?

The main premise of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) is that an evaluation should be designed to assist its primary intended users — those who will use the evaluation process to make decisions about the intervention — achieve their intended purpose. These decisions could range from the design of a next experiment, to making improvements, to make decisions on things like scaling or funding, and everything in between. In developmental situations, the primary intended users are often the social innovators who are working to make progress on complex issues, and the leaders, funders and/or partners who support them. The primary intended use of a DE is to help innovators employ evaluative thinking, questions and feedback loops so that they can continue to develop and adapt their strategy, initiative or response.

On the one hand, a razor-sharp focus on primary intended users and use in DE can be important to consider given the wide array of stakeholders typically involved in developmental situations. While all of them may be an audience for evaluation findings, their information requests cannot easily be treated equally; some need evaluation to make decisions about the intervention while others simply want to be informed of what is going on. Taking the time to get agreement on who is a primary intended user and what their uses will be, and prioritizing their evaluation needs increases the chances that the DE is relevant and used.

However, we are aware that having too much of a utilisation focus has been critiqued by several evaluation scholars and practitioners as having too much focus on those users who hold power over others, or who align to a managerial perspective. In applied DE practice and contexts, there are many situations in which the developmental evaluator's role is to negotiate and mediate between different stakeholder values, needs and interests to make sure that as many interests as possible are fairly represented and considered. And this is a real balancing act.

In any DE, use is a critical consideration throughout the evaluation, from beginning to end. It's not just about findings and final reports. Because DE is inter-woven with whatever is being developed, it is part of the change process, and needs to balance different uses and users' needs and interests.

Inquiry Frameworks

Inquiry frameworks are an aid for discovery, analysis and problem solving that can guide us in developing questions and selecting methods. Another key UFE practice is to organize evaluation designs around the priority questions of the primary intended users, and to match questions to a situation.

Diving into methods and metrics without consideration of the social innovators' burning questions is like a construction company rushing to build a structure for someone before their client has said what type of building they need, or a doctor prescribing a treatment before the patient discloses their health status and what might be ailing them. Why start talking about surveys, social return on investments, or rubrics before we know what the innovators want to know? Questions — not methods — drive evaluation designs.

There is no standardized template of questions around which innovators and evaluators can organize their evaluation design. Each evaluation is a unique activity that requires social innovators and evaluators to craft questions customized to their context. This process can be made easier by reviewing typical inquiry frameworks often used in archetypical innovation contexts to get an idea

of what could be asked.

Take, for example, one of the most elegantly simple inquiry frameworks in the evaluator’s toolbox, useful in highly emergent situations where innovators are developing a response to a challenge in real time: What? So what? Now what? Asking “What?” requires people to focus on the analysis of the data to discern what is emerging, being developed and changing. Asking “So what?” prompts them to interpret what these findings might mean for how they think about the challenge, how they are addressing the challenge, and judging what is working. And asking “Now what?” encourages them to decide how to act on the findings in the next iteration of their efforts. The three questions provide a framework around which to consider more specific methods, as well as one that can be adapted iteratively as the emergent process continues to unfold.

The example above is only one inquiry framework. In the first book on DE, Patton (2011) identified several frameworks. We have included some from that list, and added some others (See Table 3.1), to illustrate some of the options available. There are scores of others, and the output of a DE is sometimes a new inquiry framework that can be applied in other situations.

TABLE 3.1 – SOME SAMPLE INQUIRY FRAMEWORKS

FRAMEWORK	DESCRIPTION
After action review	What did we do well that we should keep doing? What can we do better next time?
Basic questions	Who, what, where, when, why and how?
What? So What? Now What?	Explores what is emerging and being developed; what these findings might mean for how you think about the challenge, how you are addressing it, and judging what is working or not; and then thinking about how to act on the findings in the next iteration of effort.
Actual-ideal comparison	Comparative framework that looks at: Where did we begin? Where did we want to get to? Where are we now? How does where we wanted to be compare with where we ended up? What do we do next? These can be adapted and revised in a developmental process.
Appreciative inquiry	A strengths-based approach designed to support ongoing learning and adaptation by identifying and investigating outlier examples of good practice and ways of increasing their frequency.
Most significant change	Approach primarily intended to clarify differences in values among stakeholders by collecting and collectively analysing personal accounts of change.
Policy advocacy framework	Helps advocates to think more specifically about audiences — who is expected to change and how, and what it will take to get them there. Helps support thinking about the theories of change that underlie public policy advocacy strategies.

System mapping	Explores through questions about perspective (e.g. What are the different ways in which this situation can be understood?), boundaries (e.g. What makes a difference to the way a situation is understood or behaves?) and relationships (e.g. What is the nature of interrelationships within the system?).
Outcome mapping	An impact evaluation approach that unpacks an initiative's theory of change provides a framework to collect data on immediate, basic changes that lead to longer, more transformative change, and allows for the plausible assessment of the initiative's contribution to results via boundary partners.
Values-driven	Assessing how something is done, and the nature and extent to which actions and decisions align with values, principles and a desired approach.
Innovation horizon level	A three-level framework that differentiates between incremental and transformational innovation.
Complexity framing	Distinguishing between simple, complicated and complex situations.
D,V,F,I	A design framework that prompts an assessment of the desirability, viability, feasibility and potential impact of a new idea.

It's not easy for social innovators and evaluators to land on a manageable number of well-crafted evaluation questions. Innovators are by nature curious and generally have a lot of questions! This puts extra pressure on developmental evaluators to draw on their facilitation skills — considered a core capability by nearly every professional evaluation association in the world — before they even begin to think about their skills in research design and methods.

How Developmental Evaluation Principles Inform Methods

The third lens we find useful in guiding the design of a DE is to think about methods through the principles. The table below introduces a set of questions about methods choices related to each of the DE principles.

TABLE 3.2 - DE PRINCIPLES

Developmental purpose	Are the key evaluation questions driving towards that which is in development? Or are the key evaluation questions designed to surface necessary insights to improve what is being developed?
Evaluation rigour	How much rigour is needed given the stage of development? Given the data available, how strong or tentative are the conclusions we can draw at this time? How rigorous are we in our evaluative reasoning, and is that a fit with our audience? Is our approach designed through an equity lens?

Utilization-focus	Is our DE guided by user needs and with a view to enhancing the use of findings? Is data seen as credible to the users of the evaluation?
Innovation	Do we have a clear and purposeful approach to innovation? If there is an aspiration to scale, what is our scaling strategy, and how are we testing towards scale?
Complexity perspectives	Are we clear in naming the uncertainties and ambiguities? Do we have ways of looking for and capturing unintended consequences?
System thinking	What are the boundaries of the system that the initiative is operating within? How are key concepts understood by different stakeholders within a system?
Co-creation	Is there a shared sense of ownership in the evaluation data gathering and sensemaking? Is there actual co-creation going on?
Timely feedback	Are we aware of decision points for development, and designing more appropriate timelines in a DE?



CASE STUDY

Mark Cabaj, See “About Authors”

In 2012, I was the developmental evaluator for a regional initiative in Canada whose stakeholders sought to assist skilled immigrants secure employment in the professions they trained for in their original country. The initiative’s multi-dimensional approach included public education campaigns to alert the public to the valuable skills that new Canadians brought with them to the region, efforts to change the policies of a variety of public agencies and professional bodies, and implementing a mix of programs to encourage employers in a half-dozen key industries (e.g. banking, health services, high tech) to adopt immigrant-friendly employment practices. It was a highly adaptive venture, with the core staff team and partners constantly adjusting their strategy to new learnings, shifts in context, and evolution in their objectives.

One of the group’s evaluation priorities was to answer two questions. The first was: “How have our initiative’s programs resulted in change in how employers recruit, hire and help advance the careers of skilled immigrants?” The second question, based on feedback from question one, was: “Is our strategy effective enough to continue, or should it be discontinued, radically restructured or even scaled out?”

This led to the inevitable discussions about what indicators should be used to measure change in employer practices and the best methods for capturing and making sense of that data. After a review of multiple options, we identified three methodologies that, in combination, seemed to fit the bill: outcome

mapping, most significant change and contribution analysis. However, when we rolled up our sleeves to develop a concrete set of tools to gather, analyze and use data, the group revealed that they did not have the evaluation budget nor the internal expertise to employ the ideal version of even one of these methods, never mind fully implement all three.

This presented the group with a design challenge. While everyone was well aware of their constraints, they were still committed to employing all three methods. In response, we sketched out a half-dozen ways we might make this happen, and eventually settled on having the staff team carry out a simple annual interview using a questionnaire that reflected the key concepts and indicators of each method, which would be followed a highly structured strategy review and decision process to create pressure to use the evaluation results. It worked. While we were cautious in how we interpreted the results of the data given the well-documented limitations in our design, the results of the assessment were so timely — and the evidence on employer changes so significant — that the group decided to engage companies in other sectors in the regional economy.

This example reinforces some key principles of evaluation design. These include that the right methods and indicators in any given DE should reflect the intervention being assessed, answer the evaluation users’ key questions, be considered credible to them and reflect the time, resources and expertise available for the evaluation.

While we cannot provide a cookie cutter method for DE, the table below provides examples of what a DE can look like. These two examples are stakeholder policy process and an energy transitions example.

TABLE 3.3 - DE EXAMPLES

	COLLABORATIVE POLICY PROCESS	ENERGY TRANSITIONS
The situation	A DE ran alongside a collaborative stakeholder policy process that was the main strategy used to develop a plan for the protection of the Waikato river in the North Island of New Zealand. The plan was developed in collaboration with five indigenous Māori tribes and other stakeholders to ensure the river is sustained for generations.	A DE was the core of a multi-year innovation lab that sought to accelerate the transition of Alberta's oil and gas-based economy to a carbon constrained future. The initiative was convened by four major organizations, facilitated by an experienced sustainability group, and involved 70 diverse participants from traditional and clean energy sectors, Indigenous communities, think tanks, workers and public sector.
Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE)	The collaborative policy process involved bringing together diverse stakeholders, scientific information and cultural knowledge to make it useful for decision making among multiple stakeholders. The central challenge was to find ways to facilitate processes by which a wide range of stakeholders could engage with complex problems on equal terms.	The evaluation approach was shaped by the use of the group's <i>Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)</i> , or <i>The Natural Step Framework</i> (a foundational model for energy transitions), and an innovation lab process. The overall design of the process was shaped by the eclectic preferences of the diverse participants, and an initially modest but gradual appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and approach.
Inquiry frameworks used	Four key evaluation questions guided the overarching evaluation enquiry, and the DE question cycle of "What? So what? Now what?" was applied throughout. Evaluative criteria were also co-developed to guide sense-making during the development process.	The evaluation design initially focused heavily on exploring process questions (e.g., Are we following our plan? What do we need to change?), but then quickly focused on questions related to the substance of the work (e.g., What is working, or not working, for whom? and Why?). These were guided by network models, policy change frameworks, rubrics for systems change and prototype testing questions, as well as Theory U approaches.
How methods choices were made	There were seven cycles of evaluative learning. Design and methods choices were revisited at the beginning and end of each cycle to ensure the data and learning would meet the needs of key stakeholders involved in the development process.	The methods were selected by the stewardship team and evaluator after each cycle of the process, once the group settled on strategic priorities and learning questions. The team was heavily influenced by the principle of bricolage, using whatever methods were pragmatic, credible to the users, and could be integrated seamlessly into the lab activities.

Data collection approaches	Evaluation data collection consisted of online surveys, phone as well as face to face interviews and a wide range of facilitated meetings.	Evaluation data included: end-of-workshop feedback surveys, non-participant observation, network surveys, systems mapping diagrams, after action reviews and outcome harvesting studies.
Analysis and sensemaking approaches	Collaborative sensemaking was undertaken after each learning cycle. This was a facilitated process that included all members of the collaborative stakeholder group. Members reflected on the findings against the criteria and reached shared agreements about the level of quality and value emerging in the collaborative process.	There were two streams of sensemaking activity that informed decisions based on the evaluation feedback. The first was regular check-ins and reflection before and after each major event by the core stewardship team, which coincided with their management and planning meetings. The second was periodic sensemaking sessions with the larger network of lab participants, to review and discuss the implications of workshop feedback, interim and final evaluation findings.
What happened? Lessons & Advice	Feedback from key stakeholders indicated that the DE provided a form of accountability for the collaborative process as well as an opportunity to learn and understand the value of the process from multiple perspectives. The project sponsor indicated that the developmental approach taken was underpinned by trust and respect and this enabled a complex project to have an agility and responsiveness to the project demands which resulted in broad stakeholder ownership of the project direction.	The stewardship group routinely used the DE feedback to upgrade the design and delivery of lab activities. The biggest effect of the DE, however, came when the stewardship group, lab participants and key partners concluded that they were successful in their strategy of (1) building connectivity between participants and (2) aligning them and their organizations around a framework for energy transition. They were less successful in developing, testing and scaling a critical mass of new innovative business models amongst themselves. They used those invites to pivot in their approach, and sought to create game-changing exemplar ideas and policy proposals that would catalyze others outside the lab to embrace the transition framework and customize it to their own work.

Unique Challenges of Methods in Developmental Evaluation

Experienced evaluators are aware of the endless challenges to designing and implementing evaluations so they are relevant and used. Some better-known challenges are limited budgets, knowing if, when and how to weave together multiple methods, and ensuring that overall design and effort are manageable. These challenges exist for DE, but the unique nature of DE means that it must also deal with an extra set of unique method challenges. Some of the most common are described below.

(Sometimes Fast) Iterations

One of the consistent features of DE is that its evaluation designs are almost always iterative. While a group may start out with a workable set of questions and methods about their innovation, they will eventually need to adjust their design in order to keep up to their ever-evolving innovation, and the new evaluation questions that accompany it. All evaluation designs have a half-life and must be adapted constantly in order to be effective.

Often, the iteration is quite rapid. A group running an innovation lab to develop novel ways for neighborhoods to reduce their carbon footprint may review and adapt their strategy at a monthly meeting; a group involved in an advocacy campaign during an election would do so daily; and a team managing an emergency response to forest fires may meet every sixty minutes. In each case, a group's shift in strategy will necessitate a minor to radical shift in how they go about evaluating it.

This creates a dilemma. Ideally, social innovators and evaluators would prefer to invest the time and resources to develop, test and implement methodologically rigorous designs, to generate as valid and reliable data as possible. Practically, however, they must embrace the principle of bricolage, pulling together what data they can, within the time, resources and expertise they have at hand, to answer innovators' questions in real time. This often, though not always, means working with very small sample sizes, limited time to gather and analyze data in-depth, and uneven attention to how to mitigate a group's own biases and blind spots that distort how they interpret the information. In short, the evidence can sometimes be highly uneven, ranging from poor to robust.

Developmental evaluators and social innovators have limited choice except to embrace the inevitable tension between real time evaluation feedback and imperfect data. This means being cautious in drawing conclusions and making decisions with the data they have, being willing to slow down and dig deeper when high-stakes decisions require more robust evidence, and being constantly vigilant in monitoring the effects of decisions in case new data emerges that suggests the need to backtrack.

Weak Effects

Another common feature of developmental situations is that the effects — also referred to as results, outcomes and impact — are often small and subtle. This makes it difficult for social innovators to decide whether they should continue, pivot or discontinue their efforts.

Of course, weak effects are a possibility in any strategy or initiative. Many promising interventions generate results that are small, scattered, ambiguous and/or not very durable. Some have no effect whatsoever. This may be because of a bad hunch, wrong design, uneven implementation, wrong timing or other factors. The job of the evaluator is to find out what difference — if any — emerges, and help understand why or why not.

For a variety of reasons, the challenge of dealing with weak effects is amplified in developmental contexts. Social innovators are often engaged in small-scale experiments to test promising ideas, which means that the dosage of their intervention is modest, and therefore generates weak results. Some social innovators put together powerful interventions that have significant lag time between activities and results (e.g. the extent to which building a diverse coalition influences multiple policy changes), with only hints from policymakers that their prospects for success look good. Yet other social innovators are able to track changes in addressing one part of a complex issue but see only a subtle change in the overall challenges, simply because there are so many other factors in play (e.g. the effect of a breakfast program on academic achievement). Weak effects are the rule, rather than the exception.

This creates several challenges and implications for developmental evaluators, who must:

- sharpen their efforts to measure whatever subtle effects they can, taking care to acknowledge that even if an intervention appears to have made a measurable difference, that the change might be due to other factors beyond the intervention;
- guard against innovators' natural human bias to seek positive signals about their efforts, and ignore those that are negative or inconclusive;
- encourage intervention stakeholders — including funders — to be realistic in their expectations of what type, scale and pace of results they expect given their strategy, timelines and complexity of the challenge;
- assist innovators in drawing careful conclusions about whether the intervention is on track and/or should be radically adjusted or dropped altogether.

Diverse Perspectives

Many social innovators are looking for a definitive response to the simple question: “Does it work or not?” This is a dangerously simplistic question to ask in complex situations in which there are stakeholders with sometimes wildly different values and interests, who not only may have different perspectives on what success looks like, but also might not even agree that the intervention should be pursued in the first place, or that the issue it aims to address is worthy of attention.

Take, for instance, a program to install a safe injection site, an innovative response to the dramatic increase in drug overdoses across the world. Safe injection sites are a health service where people who inject drugs can do so in a clean space with the supervision of medically trained staff, who are also there to provide emergency support in case of overdose as well as to provide referral for other healthcare and drug related treatments.

While the evidence shows that a safe injection site — if properly run — can lead to reductions in injection behaviour and mortality as well as an increase in the use of treatment services, stakeholders still differ in their judgments of their overall merit. Advocates of harm reduction strategies

view the sites as a success. Those who view drugs as a social evil argue that it is unethical to support the use of drugs in any instance, and that safe injection site funding should be channelled to treatment programs. Local residents and businesses adjacent to the sites typically deal with conflicting or hard-to-interpret evidence on whether safe injection sites increase, decrease or have no influence on public order.

In complexity-based DE the more productive question is, “What works (and what doesn’t work), for whom, in what context, and why?” This requires the evaluator to embrace more participatory modes of assessment so that the innovators have a richer, 360-degree understanding of how different stakeholders experience and judge the intervention, insight that they can use in the next iteration of the strategy.

Uneven Results & Impact

Impact presents a unique challenge in DE. Something that is in the early stages of development is not likely to have a clearly defined image of desired impact, thus bottom line determinations of impact are premature, and most likely difficult to measure. We have, on more than one occasion, each heard reference to DE being “evaluation that doesn’t involve impact.” This is not the case. Impact is essential in a DE, and it demands our attention. Whatever they are developing, the innovators have aspirations to have a positive effect on the world and the evaluation must take this into account.

While we are not measuring a pre-defined impact, a DE helps the evaluation users refine and clarify what their intended impact is, and helps to establish what constitutes a baseline in a given situation. DE helps to reveal signs of progress, and, over time, improve how we define what performance towards a desired impact would look like, as well as strengthen our understanding of what drives progress towards impact. It is also useful to ask about potential negative impacts so you can be alert to them from the outset.

DEs are not summative in the classical definition, that is, testing the efficacy of a highly-defined and rigid model. It is common, however, for DEs to reach summative moments. These are major decision points where something of consequence is determined, for example, after a year of investing in an early stage innovation that is supported with a DE, there could be a decision point on whether to invest in a next phase of development or stop.

Analysis, Synthesis and Sensemaking

Sensemaking in DE is a collaborative, dialogical process for interpreting what has already happened, combining a range of data and experiences, to make meaning for future decisions and actions. Sensemaking is intentionally collaborative and inclusive of diverse perspectives to ensure that many and different interpretations are surfaced. It is dialogical because conversations, storytelling and interaction generate richer insights than a single interpreter. Developmental evaluators seek out opportunities to support innovators and others involved to weigh and shape multiple data points as well as experiences into meaningful patterns, at key points in time.

Evaluative sensemaking supports those involved in and with a stake in an initiative to think critically and evaluatively about their assumptions, interpretations and conclusions. The process makes explicit our often-implicit practice of reasoning i.e., how we connect our experience and other data and evidence to judgements we make about what we think is valuable and important to focus on or do next.

Evaluative sensemaking supports rigorous thinking and reasoning processes, complementing and deepening the thinking and skills of those people innovating and working on the initiative. Sensemaking tends to be synthetic, pulling together multiple analyses and perspectives. The developmental evaluator helps people critically question and examine what value they are ascribing or assuming is evident in different contexts. They do this by bringing different kinds of data to the sensemaking table, as well as a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Because data in DE contexts is not always elegant or complete, the sensemaking process should aim to be generative and useful; it doesn't have to be polished or exhaustive. The process usually involves facilitating some form of interactive process of meaning making to generate conclusions and decisions about future actions. Iterative evaluative sensemaking processes play a key role in helping people reach sufficiently credible, reasonable conclusions along the way, in context.



CASE STUDY

Jamie Gamble, see “About Authors”.

From 2009 to 2014, I was the developmental evaluator for a multi-year initiative to develop a community of practice on youth education for the United Way Greater Toronto. This city-wide initiative engaged a network of practitioners who shared a common goal for improving outcomes in youth educational attainment through a variety of network building and knowledge exchange activities. The community of practice was a new way of working for the United Way, so there was a lot of pressure to learn what was taking shape and adjust

quickly in response, while at the same time understanding what value and benefit was being created.

The process of sensemaking involved three interwoven activities: core team strategy sessions, engagement with members of the community of practice and an expert panel.

The core team met every three to four months for a scheduled sensemaking workshop. These half-day sessions reviewed emerging patterns in who was engaging, looked at recent activities and

how they could be improved going forward, documented the major strategy decisions and reviewed the implications of previous decisions, and took stock of what was being learned about the initiative’s theory of change (and along the way made several upgrade revisions to the theory of change). Ad-hoc sensemaking was also done with this team when there were emerging and pressing issues that needed attention.

The community of practice members were engaged to provide their perspective on the data and help make sense of what was happening. For example, a workshop was held with a group of active community of practice members to review data on the network activity outside of formal events and communications. This helped deepen the understanding of the extent and nature of spontaneous interactions that were emerging, which in turn helped shape new activity to further support this, and to communicate the value that was being created.

The expert panel was made up of four independent experts from disciplines that included community development, economics, research and communities of practice. Their role was to help make an independent assessment of the value and benefit of the community of practice. This group helped United Way Toronto to develop a more nuanced understanding of impact and was a very effective mechanism for communicating to the board, executive staff and community stakeholders.

By engaging participants and experts alike in conversations that helped make sense of what was emerging in the initiative and shape what needed to happen next, a comprehensive picture of what was happening was created, which also stewarded a strong sense of shared ownership in the initiative. Systematic sensemaking provided deeper insight in what was developing that allowed stakeholder to more confidently use the findings to adapt their approach and communicate their learnings to others.

Because DE unfolds alongside whatever is being developed, there will be key moments when insights emerge, or decisions need to be made about changes, adaptations or direction as initiatives are developing. It’s at these moments that the practice of evaluative sensemaking is so critical. These opportunities are not always planned and windows of opportunity for sensemaking often emerge unexpectedly. For example, an innovator or initiative leader may be given the opportunity to share their insights with key influencers in their area, or a new funding opportunity might arise that is important and yet unexpected.

It’s important to know that there is a tightly woven interconnection in any DE between the processes of creating and generating insights, making sense of these, facilitating evaluative conclusions, communicating them and making using of them. All of these aspects can be in play at once, or they can occur at different times, it all depends on the situation.

Communicating Developmental Evaluation Findings

DE challenges many of the usual ways we think about communicating evaluation feedback or findings and use. Communicating and feeding back insights in DE doesn't happen just by writing reports or briefing papers or presenting papers at conferences, although it can also be any of these things. It happens for the most part through engagement, through reflection processes, through discussions, in strategy meetings and in sensemaking workshops. It happens when you least expect it to, for example, when people suddenly realize they have an opportunity to influence outcomes or when decisions are being made unexpectedly.

Communication and use in a DE also happens continuously; it doesn't just happen at the end. You can expect many cycles of learning and feedback in DEs. The timeliness principle reminds us that it is the pace and phase of the innovation or initiative we are working on that will determine how, and how often, we will need to prepare summaries of findings to date, pull together data notes, briefings, run reflection sessions and synthesise data.

The form of our communication and feedback will also vary depending on who wants to know what. We have to be attentive to the developmental process and the people involved, and then be prepared to be adaptive, flexible, creative and innovative ourselves if we want to be as useful and timely as we can with evaluative feedback.

It could be that a report format is required, but it's often not in our experience. Some of the different formats we have used include:

- A slide presentation
- A stakeholder or network map
- A memo (or briefing paper)
- A knowledge repository
- An options paper
- A workshop presentation with discussion (where the discussion insights and notes become more important than the presentation)
- An infographic
- A series of short videos
- A journey map of significant decision and turning points

As the list above shows, some of these formats are facilitated processes, where communication and feedback are integrated with engagement.

When reports are needed, they are often written more regularly, and are shorter and more focused than a traditional evaluation report. Comprehensive reporting at the end of a developmental phase is sometimes beneficial, but is not a given. Communication is helped, even in these briefer reports, by the use of graphics and visuals. There are increasingly creative forms of communication also being used in DE, such as creative writing, poetry, quilts, plays, songs and videos. One example is where the evaluators collated the learning from a DE into an online workbook for the organisation, capturing the process and the outcomes.



CASE STUDY

Working in both French and English, **Lara Evoy** has 20 years of experience working with organizations in the cultural and non-profit sectors in Canada and internationally. She specializes in change management, through hands-on coaching, facilitation and training. In 2010, she co-founded Garrow & Evoy, a consulting firm that helps organisations clarify and measure their social impact in order to make real progress on problems that matter to them.

In 2019, the Integrative Culture Lab organized a forum with 150 stakeholders in order to co-create a charter on inclusion, promoting the principles of equality and accessibility. The aim of the project was for the charter to serve as a guidepost for the implementation of practices and policies towards greater access and inclusion for marginalized populations to cultural institutions across Montreal. It was the culmination of an in-depth, three-year cultural mediation project that brought together 11 major cultural institutions across Montreal with 9 community-based organizations working with people who have traditionally felt marginalized or excluded from these same institutions, such as people newly arrived to Canada, homeless and LGBTQ+ populations, and people living with physical and intellectual disabilities.

The project was spearheaded by Exeko, a non-profit organisation based in Montreal that works on cultural mediation, and uses creativity for the social inclusion of people who experience or are at risk of exclusion. As the developmental evaluator, I worked with the team through regular day-long research-action sessions organised every two months. Because it was a research project, as well as a community intervention, one of the challenges was the sheer number of interconnected methodologies deployed to collect information (more than 7 in total!). These methodologies were often experimental. For example, Invisible Theatre used an approach developed by popular educator Augusto Boal, in the form of a theatrical performance that is enacted

in a place where people would not normally expect to see one, e.g. in the street or in a museum. Performers disguise the fact that it is a performance from those who observe and those who choose to participate, thus leading spectators to view it as a real, un-staged event. The approaches, or methodologies, often involved the active participation of the people impacted, who, as co-researchers, were full participants in the research process. Sharing learnings with the various stakeholders in the project, all of whom had a deep stake in the outcomes, was tricky at the best of times. This was highlighted even more at the culmination of the 3 year-cycle of round tables, communities of practice and inclusive cultural outings, when it was time to unveil the long-awaited charter.

Luckily, this happened to be one of the strengths of the organisation, which had in-depth experience in cultural mediation techniques, as well as creative ways of synthesizing, communicating and sharing back findings and information. During the October 2019 forum, held in the cathedral-like atrium of the Montreal Arts Council, one of the cultural partners of the project, the Research-Action team, brainstormed on how to unveil a charter that was still a work in progress in real time. They opted for a low-tech 10 x 50 ft cloth, unfurled from the balustrade of the atrium. The long draping fabric included rectangular squares of various shapes and sizes, where participants were invited to go up and paste on plain cardboard clauses that they had been working on over the course of the day in their small groups. Each clause represented a strategic guideline or practical recommendation informed by the research, that could be adopted by a cultural institution committed to accessibility and inclusion. Suggestions included: “Install spaces, special furniture, signage and lighting adapted to different needs”; “Offer training to staff that interface with the public that focuses on special needs, forms of oppression and non-violent communication”; “Incorporate accessibility standards into building codes and upcoming

architectural changes”; “Include in the institution’s code of ethics a commitment to inclusion in the types of productions that are created.”

At the end of the day, this activity culminated in the unveiling of a fully fledged charter on inclusion that was hoisted from the balustrade and hung 50 feet off the floor where it was visible to all who had created it, and could be admired collectively. During the final ceremony, the charter was symbolically adopted by the 11 participating cultural institutions.

The compelling visual representation of the charter mimicked the intention of the process, which was one of equality, inclusion and accessibility. Although the day involved intensive hands-on reflection and writing up of clauses

for the charter, the animation contrasted with this seriousness, by providing light-hearted humour, theatrics and the sharing of creative processes by participants. Signage was prominent on walls, tables and in documents, depicting easy-to-understand instructions and visual icons. Rooms and quiet spaces were available for participants who needed to rest or unplug from sensory overload. All of these actions came directly from the more than 150 recommendations of co-researchers, which reinforced the notion of a shared sense of responsibility in enacting and implementing the outcomes named at the outset of the project, namely the transformation of cultural institutions so that they become more inclusive to diverse stakeholders, and more responsive to their needs.

It’s also often the case in DE that there isn’t a clear set of findings to report on, rather there are a series of tensions or conundrums that people still have to grapple with and work out how they might respond. When this is the case, the communication of these tensions might be better integrated with a facilitated process for considering them.

The processes and tools for communication and engagement in DE are very often intertwined and indistinguishable from each other, because it’s when we’re engaging that we are also being communicators, sensemakers and critical friends. There is a tightly woven interconnection in any DE between the processes of creating and generating insights, making sense of these, communicating them and facilitating evaluative conclusions and decision making using them. All these aspects can be in play at once, or they can occur at different times, it all depends on the situation.

Our communication and engagement forms and processes must energize people, motivate them to sit up and take notice, question and think critically, all while using data. One of our core activities is to help people who are innovating and developing initiatives to work with and interpret the data they have. Often, the data we work with is still emerging and incomplete; the extent and quality of data is often imperfect. Our role is to find ways to collate and synthesise this data and then support people to make sense of it, interpret it and use it as a key part of their learning and decision making. Our processes for doing this are a key part of the DE’s communication and use function. Having question frameworks that help people think critically and deeply, to get beyond the face value of data are important tools for developmental evaluators. Similarly important are facilitation processes for surfacing assumptions, revealing what is and isn’t there, making meaning and rendering judgements.

So, we must be good communicators, able to listen, spot patterns, know when to hold back and let conversations flow, as well as when to intervene. We also need to be able to pull different kinds of data together and represent it in ways that make sense to those we are working with, as well as facilitate processes for people to interpret the data and make sense of it for themselves. There is little doubt that how we communicate is as important as the quality of the material we work with.



Conclusion

A Developmental
Evaluation
Companion

A lot has changed since the first edition of the DE primer came out over a decade ago, but it wasn't until we set to work on *The Developmental Evaluation Companion* that we realized by how much. The thinking and practice of DE has expanded, taken form and, in its own dynamic way, been codified.

Our aim has been to update those who have been on the DE journey for a while with what is taking shape, and at the same time, provide an introduction to critical dimensions of DE for those who are coming to it for the first time. We hope we have set a foundation that can be an anchor to your practice, whether you are a novice, or seasoned developmental evaluator. We did not aim to be exhaustive in this handbook. We encourage you to take a deeper dive into the many wonderful DE (and other evaluation) resources available. We have collected many of these and are hosting a DE Library of sorts at DEcompanion.ca. Our goal is to maintain this resource for the long term and continue to regularly add new resources. Maybe you have something that you'd like to contribute?

We have each been inspired over and over again by people doing amazing things to make our world a better place and are encouraged by the extent to which DE is resonant with them. As we have been writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the globe and racial justice movements have come to the forefront of our collective attention, all while the climate crisis and global inequities heighten. We have seen the relevance of DE intensify in this moment, and as we face the white water of constant change and other massive challenges that may impact the world, that relevance will only increase. As developmental evaluators, we have a responsibility to pay attention to the context unfolding around us, and to help those standing in the face of uncertainty. DE is a support to those who seek to learn, dialogue and act as they navigate pathways through complex challenges. Please stand tall and be strong in the face of these challenges.

The world needs you.

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More tools and resources
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