

Developmental Evaluation (with Ricardo Wilson-Grau)
Summary of for the 'Methods Market' May 2010 Conference
"Evaluation Revisited: improving the quality of evaluative practice by embracing complexity"

1. The background/reasoning behind this approach/methodology (preferably linked to the themes of the evaluation: 'complexity', 'values' and 'quality standards')

The purpose of Developmental Evaluation is to support the development of an innovation. This evaluation mode began to emerge from the practice of Michael Quinn Patton¹ about twenty years ago as he realised social innovators would benefit from evaluative thinking that was not offered by traditional evaluation. Social innovators do not think and act in terms of theories of change and logic models. As Patton says, they “don’t follow a linear pathway of change; there are ups and downs, roller coaster rides along cascades of dynamic interactions, unexpected and unanticipated divergences, tipping points and critical mass momentum shifts, and things often get worse before they get better as systems change creates resistance to and pushback against the new.”² In this complexity and turbulence they can benefit from support for evidence-base decision-making. Formative and summative evaluation approaches, which focus on improving or judging an intervention model, are not suitable when the intervention model is being created. Social innovators require hard data and hard questions about what they are doing and where they are going as they develop their intervention strategies. That is the role of Developmental Evaluation.

Initially through Patton’s own evaluation practice and then more recently with the experiences of other evaluators, often mentored and coached by him, the incipient field of Developmental Evaluation has emerged. To date it has been the subject of a few articles, blogs and in 2006 the book *Getting To Maybe*, co-authored by Patton. His new book *Development Evaluation* will be published in July and will address the topic in-depth. This ‘open market session’ at the May 2010 Conference is based primarily on that manuscript, for which I commented and made small contributions, and secondarily on my own practice in this new field.

2. A description of the methodology/approach and your experiences with this methodology/approach

Developmental Evaluation supports the creation of innovative approaches and solutions to major social problems and needs when conditions are changing and the environment is complex and dynamic. (Note that it is distinct from the *evaluation of development*.) A developmental evaluator generates and examines data on actions taken by innovators and their consequences to inform ongoing decision-making. In tracking what happens as an innovator innovates, and communicating

¹ Patton is one of the founding fathers of the evaluation profession in the 1970s and to which he has dedicated his life. He is former president of the American Evaluation Association and author of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, now in its fourth edition, and *Qualitative Research and Evaluative Methods*, now in its third edition. His 2006 book *Getting To Maybe*, with Frances Westley and Brenda Zimmerman, introduces Developmental Evaluation.

² Michael Quinn Patton, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*, Guilford Press, forthcoming 2010.

their implications, the developmental evaluator calls upon diverse evaluation methods and tools. The key to success, however, is a trusting, respectful working relationship between innovator and developmental evaluator with both tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty and dedicating time together to interpret data from multiple and often conflicting sources, and raise and answer questions about the evolving innovation.

In addition to engaging with Patton as he wrote his manuscript, my practical experience with Developmental Evaluation has revolved around my support for organisations creating planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. This has involved adapting the principles of Outcome Mapping across cultural, social, political and economic divides. These organisations include the Global Water Partnership and its 70-plus national water partnerships in 13 regions around the world; the NGO Free The Slaves in India, Nepal and Western Africa; the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict in 15 regions, and an IDRC-sponsored action-research Eco-Health project in Lima Perú. In addition, I am advising the Dutch Doen Foundation's development of a new strategy for arts and culture grant making in Senegal, Mali, Kenya and Uganda.

3. The advantages and disadvantages in respect to understanding and influencing societal change

Social innovators operate in a disorderly and uncertain world characterised by complex, nonlinear dynamics. In these circumstances Developmental Evaluation can support the process and results of developing an intervention model. It offers systematises information and reflected upon it in real time to inform the ongoing development of the innovation. Thus, the promise of Developmental Evaluation is that it meets this need and supports the development of a viable solution – a model – to meet new, unusual and messy social problems.

Developmental Evaluation is inappropriate, however, when there is already a model to be improved or to be judged for its merit, validity or worth, which is the terrain of formative and summative evaluation. Developmental Evaluation can, however, determine when and if an innovation is ready for formative evaluation as a pilot intervention or for a summative evaluation as a model to be assessed for its potential to brought up to scale or replicated.

4. Links to public documents/websites where more information on this methodology/approach can be found.

- Gamble, J.A. (2008). *A Developmental Evaluation Primer*. Montréal: The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
- Patton, M. Q. (1994). "Developmental evaluation". *Evaluation Practice* 15 (3), 311-20.
- Wehipeihana, N. & McKegg, K. (2009). "Developmental evaluation in an indigenous context: Reflections on the journey to date." American Evaluation Association Conference, Orlando, Florida, November 14.
- Westley, F., B. Zimmerman & M. Q. Patton. (2006). *Getting To Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Toronto: Random House Canada.