

# Developmental Evaluation

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### **Adaptive Management (AM)<sup>1</sup>**

- Concept developed by two ecologists, C.S. Hollings and C.J. Walters
- Learning by doing and observing
- Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management (AEAM)
- Flexible, encourages input, and monitors the results of actions for the purpose of adjusting plans and trying new/ revised approaches

### **What is Developmental Evaluation (DE)?**

- Active, reactive, interactive, and adaptive<sup>2</sup>
- Utilization-focused<sup>2</sup>
- Rigor of evaluation combined with flexibility, imagination, and organizing necessary for development<sup>3</sup>
- Embedded rather than detached; continuous rather than episodic; goal is learning not judgment<sup>3</sup>

### **When and why DE?**

- A setting with multiple, conflicting, and still developing or changing goals<sup>2</sup>
- A setting with multiple stakeholders, high levels of innovation, fast paced decision-making, and/or areas of uncertainty<sup>3</sup>
- Complex systems can not be reduced to cause and effect<sup>1</sup>

### **How can DE be used?**

- Ready, fire, aim<sup>2</sup>
- Define a focus<sup>2</sup>
  - Future decisions, critical issues/concerns, questions for evaluation, 'naming the elephant'
- Traditional methods<sup>4</sup>
- Feedback through conversation is key<sup>4</sup>

### **What is the role of Development Evaluators (DEs)?**

- Conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in a long-term, on-going process of continuous improvement, adaptation, and intentional change<sup>2</sup>
- Skills: community connectedness/domain expertise, curiosity, appreciativeness, facilitation, communication, time management, flexible, resourceful, active listening<sup>3</sup>

### **Cautions with DE**

- A high level of engagement is required of DEs<sup>2</sup>
- Difficult to focus, perceptions of credibility, ambiguity and uncertainty, volume of data, time allocation, objectivity<sup>3</sup>

### How does DE differ from traditional evaluation?

- Situations in which it is used<sup>3</sup> (see Table 1 on pg. 3)
- Not goal-oriented<sup>2</sup>
- (See Table 2 on pg. 3 for clear depiction)

### Practical applications of DE

- Children's and Families' Community Initiative<sup>5</sup>
  - Concern: Two inner city neighborhoods with risky environments
  - Solution: Provide grants to people in the community to fund projects they want to see in order to support a healthier environment
  - DE's role: Support internal, community-based accountability and aid in developing its own evaluation process
- Twin Cities Rise, MN<sup>2</sup>
  - Concern: Chronically unemployed and disadvantaged men of color
  - Solution: Help get living wage through sustainable jobs in established companies with good benefits
  - DE's role:
    - Key Starter:
      - Completed a cluster evaluation of 34 programs and found that none had unfolded as planned through detailed expectations
    - Recommendations:
      - Don't make a plan and begin immediately, making corrections throughout the process; successful amidst its changing aspects
- Supporting Diversity in Schools, MN<sup>5</sup>
  - Concern: Lower levels of success for children of color on virtually every indicator
  - Solution: High degree of community engagement, especially by people of color
  - DE's role:
    - Key starter:
      - No predetermined strategies or outcomes due to varying needs, goals and methods that will emerge from process
    - Documented development, provided feedback at different levels, facilitated gathering everyone involved to develop evaluation criteria
- Hope Community Inc., MN<sup>2</sup>
  - Concern: Unsafe neighborhood
  - Solution: Vital, engaged community through housing revitalization project
    - Began by 'doing' with monetary support following and a complex, constantly changing method

- DE's role: offered a way to infuse systematic evaluative thinking and real time data into process of change

Table 1

	Situation <sup>8</sup>
Summative evaluation	At the end of a program or initiative when key decisions about its future are going to be made. When judging the model's merit or worth for continuation, expansion, going to scale, or other major decisions.
Formative evaluation	When fine-tuning a model. When a future summative evaluation is expected and baseline data will likely be needed.
Developmental evaluation	When working in situations of high complexity. When working on early stage social innovations.

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Table 2

Traditional evaluations	Developmental evaluations
Render definitive judgments of success or failure.	Provide feedback, generate learnings, support changes in direction.
Measure success against predetermined goals.	Develop new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve.
Position the evaluator outside to assure independence and objectivity.	Position evaluation as internal, team function integrated into action and ongoing interpretive processes.
Design the evaluation based on linear cause-and-effect logic models.	Design the evaluation to capture system dynamics interdependencies, models and emergent interconnections.
Aim to produce generalizable findings across time and space.	Aim to produce context-specific understandings that inform ongoing innovation.
Accountability focused on and directed to external authorities, stakeholders and funders.	Accountability centered on the innovators' deep sense of fundamental values and commitment.
Accountability to control and locate responsibility.	Learning to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what's unfolding and thereby respond strategically.
Evaluator determines the design based on the evaluator's perspective about what is important. The evaluator controls the evaluation.	Evaluator collaborates with those engaged in the change effort to design an evaluation process that matches philosophically with an organization's principles and objectives.
Evaluation results in opinion of success or failure, which creates anxiety in those evaluated.	Evaluation supports ongoing learning.

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<sup>1</sup><http://oregonstate.edu/instruction/anth481/ectop/ecadm.html>

<sup>2</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2008). Evaluation focus options: Developmental evaluation and other alternatives. In *Utilization- Focused Evaluation*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development. (2010). *DE201: A practitioner's guide to developmental evaluation*. Canada: Dozois, E., Langlois, M., & Blanchet-Cohen, N.

<sup>4</sup>The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. (2008). *A developmental evaluation primer*. Canada: Gamble, J.A.A.

<sup>5</sup>Patton, M.Q. (1994). Developmental Evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 15, 310-319. doi:10.1177/109821409401500312