

The Good, The Bad
& The Ugly:
*Learning Our Way
Through Complex
Social Issues*

CUP Annual Celebration Event
Edmonton, Alberta
October 19, 2017



Working with this title...



The Main Points

1. Complex issues require **adaptive** – rather than linear – responses in order to be effective.
2. The **stakes** of employing an adaptive response are high.
3. The extent to which learning and evaluation in addressing complex social issues is good bad or ugly depends on the **orientation** towards evaluation.
4. The **conditions** for complexity-friendly evaluation not great but are getting better.
5. Social innovators, and the evaluators, researchers, funders and policy makers that support them, can **accelerate** the development and adoption of complexity-friendly approaches.

What is the first **word** or **feeling** that comes to mind when you hear the word **evaluation**?



#1:
 Complex issues require **adaptive**
 – not simple or cookie cutter --
 responses.

Grumpy or Practical?

Grumpy

Dealing with complexity is an inefficient and unnecessary waste of time, attention and mental energy. There is never any justification for things being complex when they could be simple.
[Edward de Bono](#)

Practical

Stop trying to change reality by attempting to eliminate complexity. [David Whyte](#).

For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong." [H. L. Mencken](#)

Fools ignore complexity. Pragmatists suffer it. Some can avoid it. Geniuses remove it. [Alan Perlis](#)

Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.-
[Laurence J. Peter](#)

Take a Breath

Abandon the urge to simplify everything, to look for formulas and easy answers, and to begin to think multi-dimensionally, to glory in the mystery and paradoxes of life, not to be dismayed by the multitude of causes and consequences that are inherent in each experience -- to appreciate the fact that life is complex.

— [M. Scott Peck](#)

... take another breath

The capacity to tolerate complexity and welcome contradiction, not the need for simplicity and certainty, is the attribute of an explorer. Centuries ago, when some people suspended their search for absolute truth and began instead to ask how things worked, modern science was born. Curiously, it is by abandoning the search for absolute truth that science has begun to make progress, opening the material universe to human exploration.

[H. Pagels](#)

Finally ...

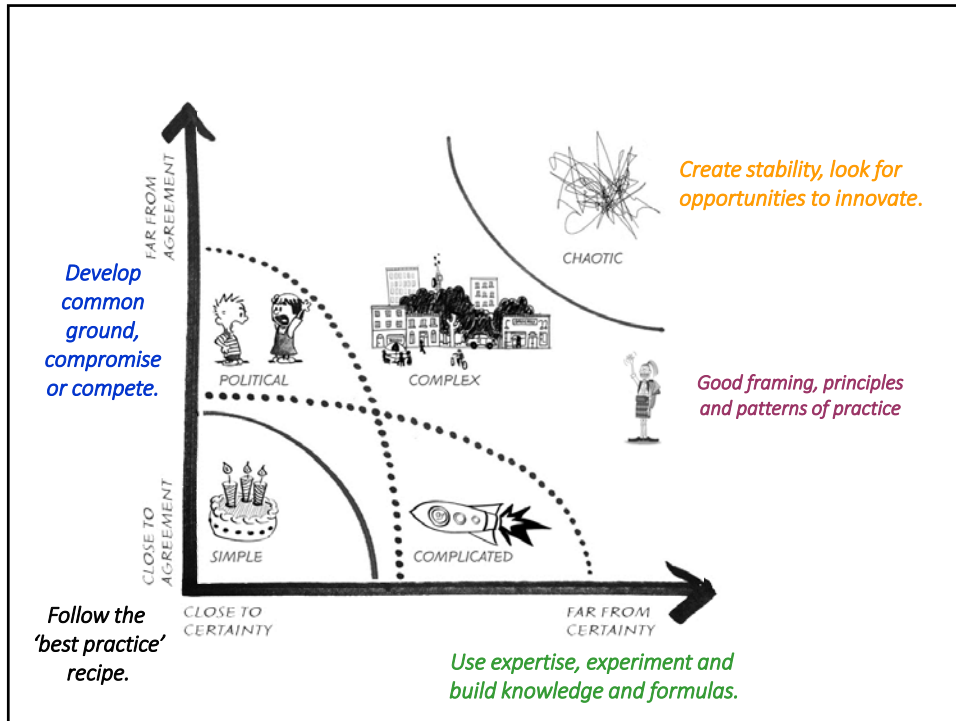
- Life is a continuing process of making adjustments and creative responses in a world too complex to be predictable. But institutions insist not only upon their illusions of predictability, but their systems of control by which they imagine they can direct the world to their ends. This is why institutions have always aligned themselves with the forces of *power*, in order to compel the rest of nature – particularly mankind – to conform to their interests.

B. Shaffer

What is the difference
between:

- baking a cake;
- sending a rocket to the moon;
- raising a child?





Example of an Adaptive Response: Tackling Homelessness in Surrey British Columbia



Principles to Tackle Complex Issues

Experimental



Participatory

Systemic Thinking & Action

Adapted from:



#2:
The **stakes** of using the right
approach to complex issues is high.

The Effects of Poor Fit to Complex Issues

Simple	Serial consumer of “best practice”; fragmented and cookie cutter or recipe approaches.
Complicated	Not enough data, time, resources or expertise; perpetual planning; elaborate plans that have to be sold and unevenly implemented.
Political	‘Demonize’ or ‘enemify’ the “other” stakeholders; low leverage compromises.
Chaotic	Avoid the problem altogether; try to “impose” solution, bet on a charismatic leaders



South Africa



(Complicated Lens)

Meaningful solutions require sophisticated, integrated and expert driven national health care systems.

Another Case Study

Similar HIV Rates

Brazil



(Complexity Lens)

How do we work together, get creative, and experiment with new ways to address root causes?

South Africa

- Our sophisticated, integrated national health care systems is our major tool.
- We cannot provide treatment to all when the drug costs are so high.
- We cannot afford resource to manage treatment compliance.
- With limited resources, focus more on prevention than treatment.
- It will therefore take a long time for the problem to work itself through.

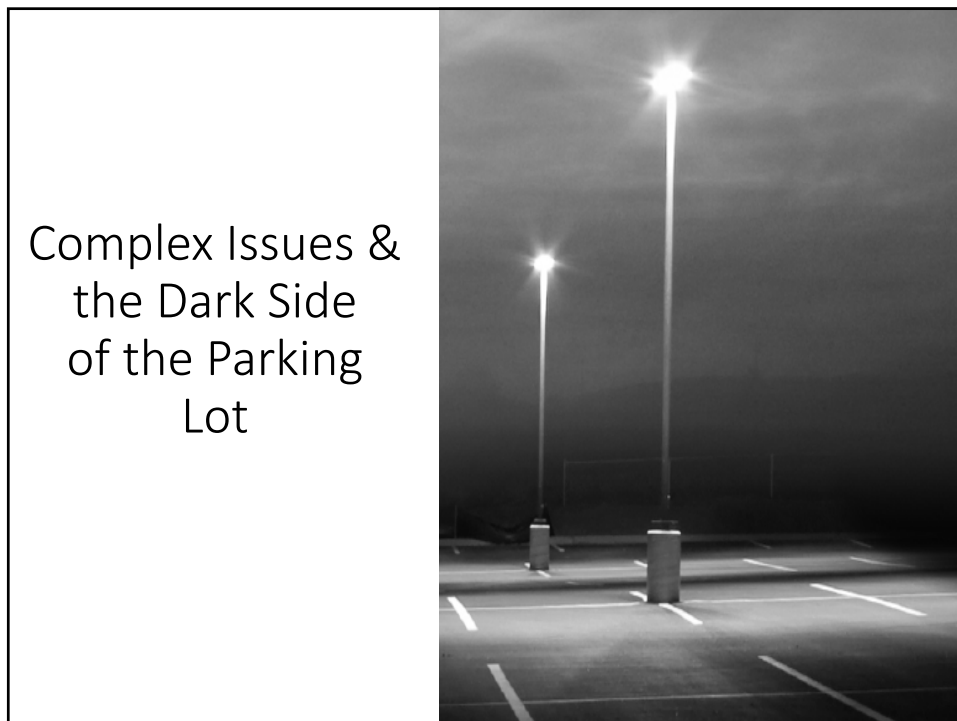
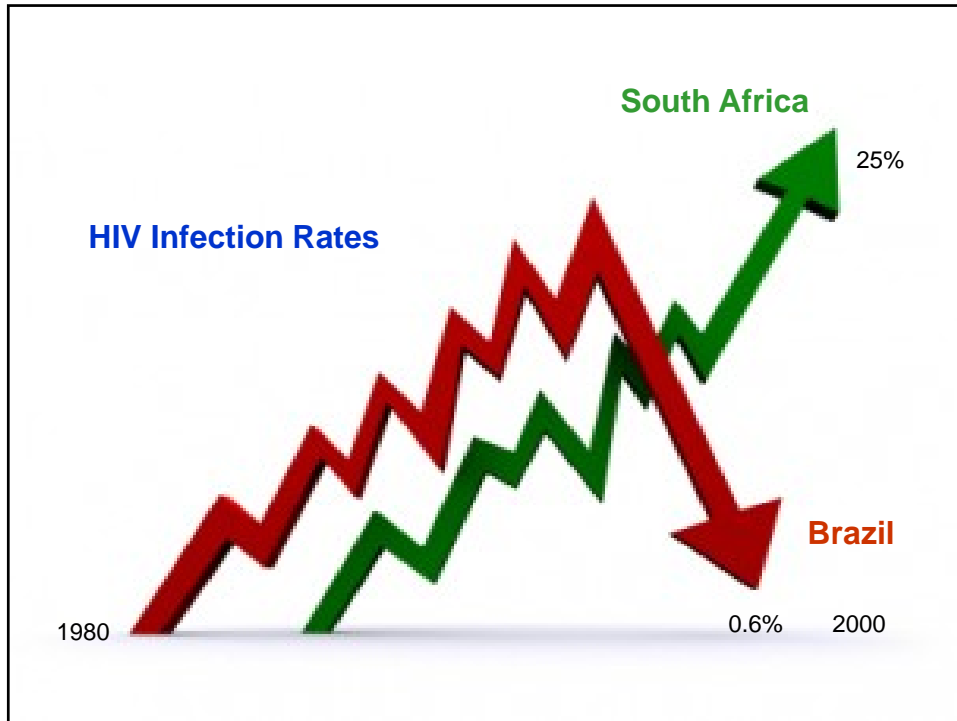
Brazil

- We need to find ways to use the resources we have – including those most affected and non-traditional stakeholders - to respond to the problem.
- How can we provide drugs to all by finding ways to reduce drug costs?
- What are some of the `rules` that prevent innovative solutions?
- How do we mix prevention and treatment in our strategy?
- How do keep a focus on long term outcomes while generating short term wins?



Adaptive Responses in Brazil

- **Systemic:** declared HIV a crisis, produced – and distributed for free -- “generic drugs” (cost reduced by 90%).
- **Collaborative:** worked with Church clergy and alternative media to educate people about HIV and promote “safe sex”.
- **Experimental:** created easy-to-follow drug protocols with citizen groups that allowed illiterate patients to administer own treatment with help with “local” and “trustworthy” hubs (e.g. NGO’s, etc.)



#3:
The extent to which learning and evaluation in addressing complex social issues is good bad or ugly depends on the **orientation** towards evaluation.

A Brief (and Simplified) History

Time Period	Evaluation Paradigm	Purpose	Questions
1950s-80s	Formative	Improving a model.	What is and is not working? How can we refine the model to increase effects, reduce costs or make implementation easier?
	Summative	Judging the merit or worth of a model.	Does the program meet people's needs? What are the outcomes compared to benefit? Should we drop, sustain or scale this program?
1990s	Accountability	Assessing 'fidelity' of model implementation & progress.	Is implementation following the plan? Are funds being used for intended purposes? Is program reaching the right people? Are goals & targets being met? Are quality control mechanisms in place?
21 st century	Developmental	Creating, developing or radically adapting a model.	What are we learning about the problem or challenge and its context? What are areas of promise? What is our 'theory of change' – and implications for design? What are the emerging outcomes? What do we do now?

Three Orientations



**Traditional Evaluation:
Neo-Newtonians**

Often operate with mechanistic understanding of the world. Develop, test and if appropriate scale best practice models through 'gold standard' designs.

**Accountability Evaluation:
Misguided Stewards & Administrators**

Link the investment and use of resources to ; processes more shaped by policy, political and administrative requirements than the change initiative.

**Developmental Evaluation:
Adaptive Pluralists**

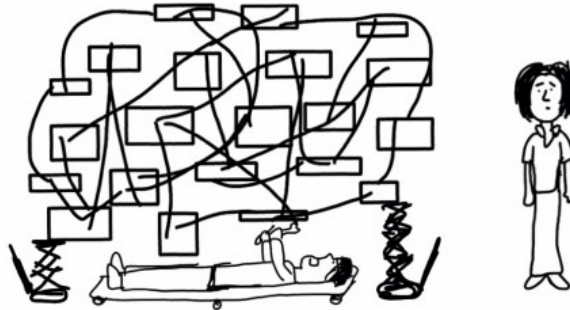
Embrace complexity, diversity, emergence while trying to tackle wicked social issues; pull together evaluations that weave together whatever methods are appropriate and practical.

#1: The Influence of Purpose

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional Evaluation	Developmental Evaluation
Aims to hold social innovators to account for the use of resources, high fidelity to an original plan, and delivery of results.	Aims to improve or judge the merit or worth of model and produce generalizable findings across time and space.	Aims to produce context specific findings and to inform ongoing innovation and adaptation.
Ugly	Bad	Good

Perverse Consequence: Pre-mature Strategy/Theory of Change

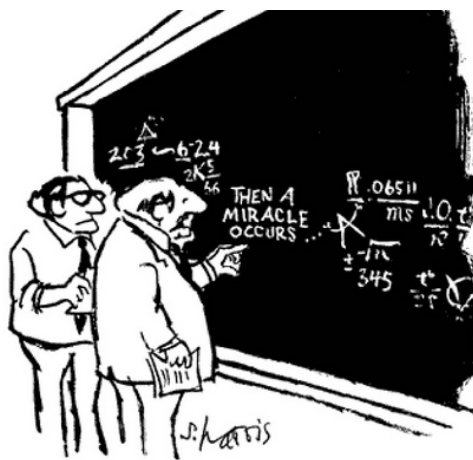
At the logic model repair shop ...



So, I'm guessing this is for a comprehensive program-level intervention

freshspectrum.com

The Reality: Hunches of Change

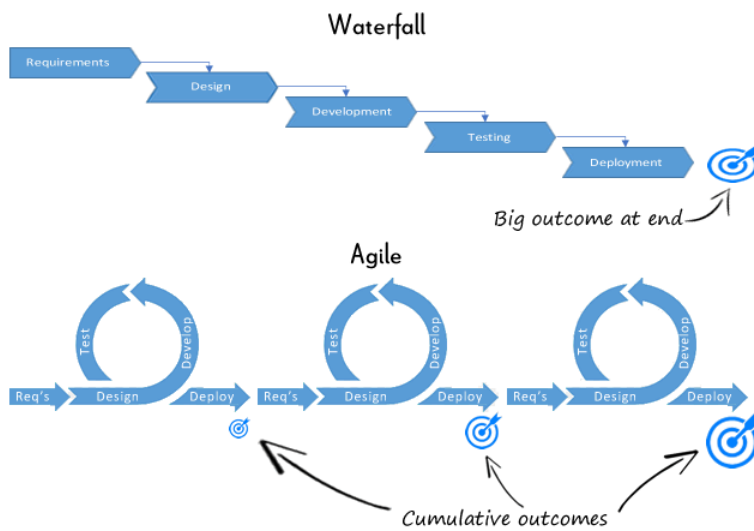


"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

#2: Evaluation Design

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional	Complexity-Based, Developmental Evaluation
Measures success against pre-determined goals with a strong preference for quantitative and reductionist data and methods.	Measures success against pre-determined goals with robust fixed, up front, research designs.	Develops measures and monitoring mechanisms as learnings and goals evolve.
Ugly	Bad	Good

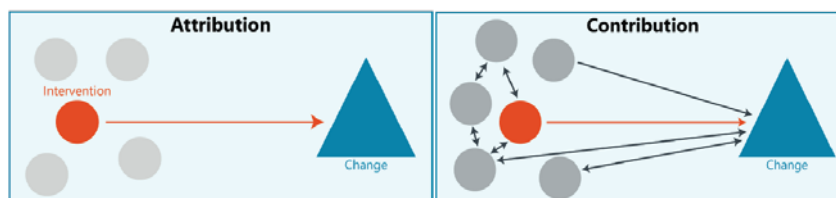
Big Design/Waterfall vs. Agile Designs



#3: Dealing with Cause & Effect

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional Evaluation	Developmental Evaluation
Design evaluation based on linear cause-and-effect models of change.	Design evaluation based on linear cause-and-effect models of change; seeks to assess the attribution of a model to outcomes.	Designs the evaluation to capture complex cause-effect relationships, interdependences and emergent connections: seeks out contribution.
Ugly	Bad	Good

Attribution Versus Contribution



Attribution Analysis	Contribution Analysis
Employs a narrow-angle lens that assumes a linear cause-and-effect relationship between intervention activities and observed changes.	Embraces a wide-angle lens on the non-linear cause-and-effect relationships between intervention and non-intervention factors that influence changes.
Asks: To what extent did our intervention cause the change?	Asks: To what extent did our intervention contribute to the change?
Seeks to prove the link between activities and change.	Seeks to establish a plausible link between the intervention and change.
Privileges experimental design as the 'gold standard' methodology.	Emphasizes triangulation of methods and stakeholder verification of findings.

#5: Capturing Effects & Outcomes

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional Evaluation	Developmental Evaluation
Tracks progress on intended outcomes.	Tracks progress on intended outcomes, with some effort to surface unintended outcomes.	Seek to find out the splatter of effects – intended and unintended, positive and negative – generated by interventions.
Ugly	Bad	Good



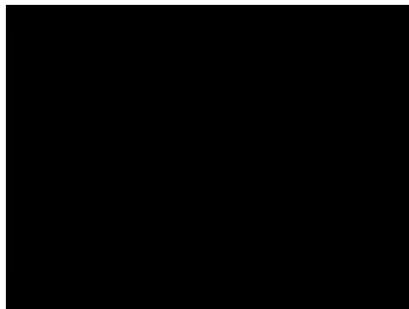
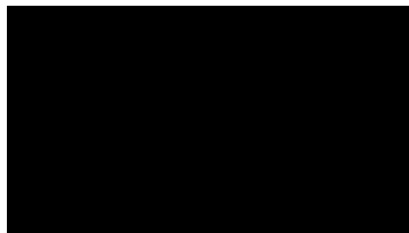
Unanticipated Outcomes Illustrated

Cats in Borneo

<https://ed.ted.com/on/MypuABMk>

Moonwalking Bears

<https://vimeo.com/148247749>



#5: Understanding Success

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional	Developmental Evaluation
Renders definitive judgements of success or failure.	Seeks to converge on general statement of relative merit or worth.	Multiple and relative perspectives on success.
Ugly	Bad	Good



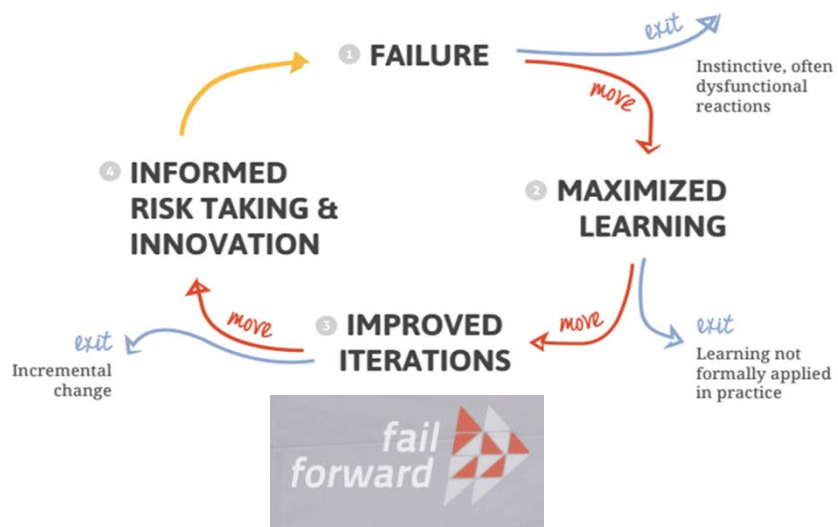
Criteria of Value	Description
Improvement	The number of stayed cases has dropped significantly since the hiring. This is good!
Progress Towards Target	The government did not establish a formal target for reducing the backlog or reducing the number of stayed cases, so it's difficult to say whether the result is "on target".
Benchmarking Against Others	The Province of Alberta continues to have the highest percentage of stayed charges compared to other provinces, as well as the lowest number of Crown Prosecutors per capita of any province. We do not compare well against our peers.
Meeting A Standard or Principle	A spokesperson Alberta Crown Attorney argues that the progress is unacceptable that any case that is not tried within [x] months violates victims' and the accused's rights to a timely and fair trial, as well as the standards of the legal profession.
360 Degree Perspective	<p>The union representing Crown Prosecutors reports that while more prosecutors are required to deal with the backlog, they are happy with the decrease in backlogs and their members report slightly less work related stress.</p> <p>Tough-on-crime activists and victims' rights groups are upset that there are still "criminals walking the street".</p> <p>A taxpayer "watchdog" complains that the \$15 million-dollar investment into hiring prosecutors is simply wasteful spending and argues that the Justice Ministry needs restructuring in order to become more cost-efficient.</p>

#6: Navigating Failure

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional	Complexity-Based, Developmental Evaluation
Engenders fear of failure and its consequences.	Surfaces a general curiosity about what happened and why.	Encourages hunger for further learning and adaptation.



intelligent failure *learning & innovation loop*



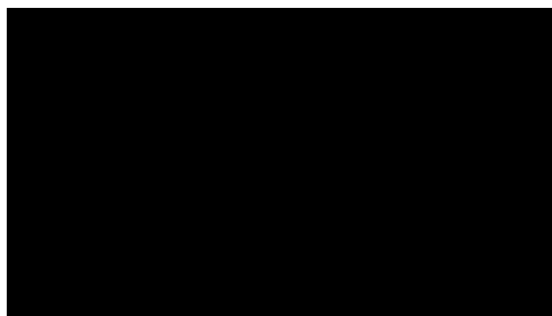
Maximizing Learning

Types of Failure

Amy C Edmondson
(Harvard Business Review, April 2011)



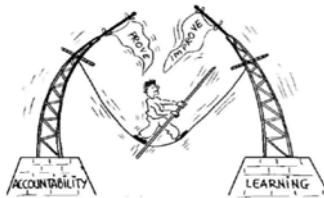
Exemplary Culture Building



#7: Accountability

Accountability-Based Evaluation	Traditional	Developmental Evaluation
Focused on – and directed to – external authorities and funders.	Focused on – and directed to – external authorities and funders.	Centered on innovators deep commitment to change and data-based learning and adaptation.

Accountability & Learning



Enabling Eco-systems

- Many philanthropic funders say that they value learning and want to know what works and doesn't work, then, in the next sentence, they reaffirm their bottom-line thinking about accountability: "You (and we) will ultimately be judged by whether you attain your goals and achieves results." This tension between learning and accountability is seldom recognized, much less openly discussed. Accountability messages trump learning messages every time. As surely as night follows day, this attitude leads those receive funds to exaggerate results and hide failures – the antithesis of genuine reality testing and shared learning. Funders need to engage in their own thoughtful reality testing about the message they're sending and the incentives (and disincentives) they're providing to learning.*
- Westley, F., Zimmerman, B., Patton, M.Q. (2006). *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Toronto, ON: Random House: page 182.



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

#4

The **conditions** for complexity-friendly evaluation are not great but are getting better.

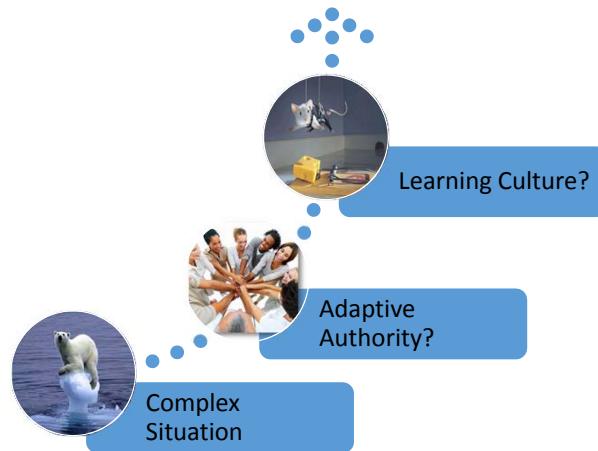
The Resiliency of the Machine Metaphor

- I'm simply stunned at the resilience of the mechanical metaphor. Policymakers and planners are still pushing the machine metaphor for health interventions. This mechanistic approach, that all we have to do is fix some faulty parts in the system, has deep roots and is hard to get past. The so-called evidence-based approach to [complex issues] has become all-powerful, tied to and grounded in a mandate to make things predictable and controllable.



Brenda Zimmerman. Developmental Evaluation. Michael Quinn Patton. 2006. Page 83-84

Uneven Conditions for Developmental Evaluation



The practice of adaptive leadership and developmental evaluation is expanding rapidly.

International Development



Military Affairs & Security

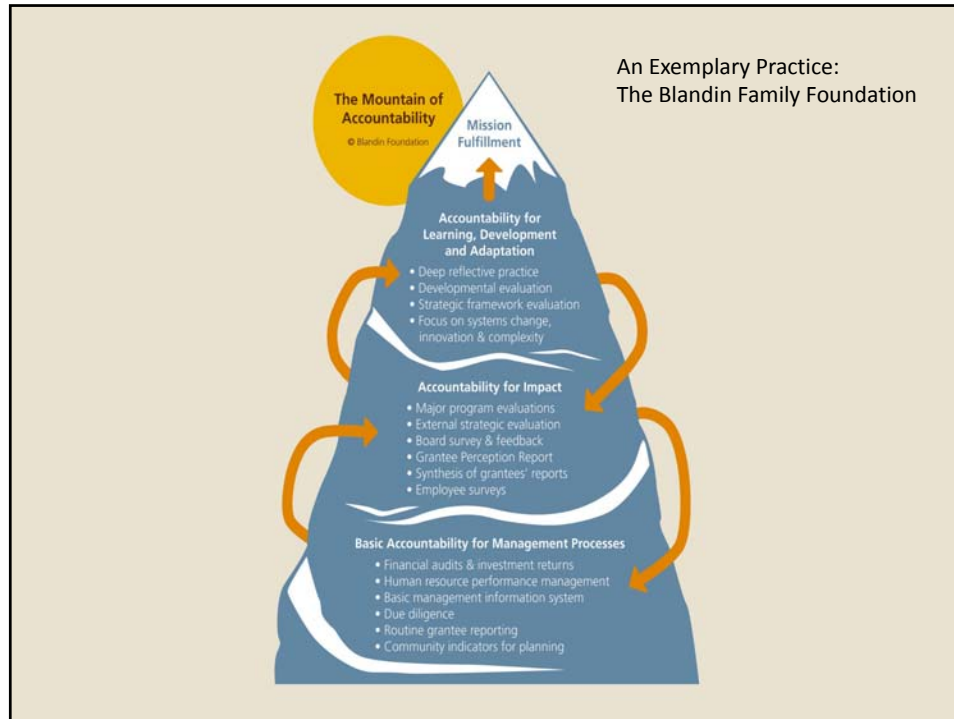


Banking & Finance



Human Services & Public Admin (a hint)

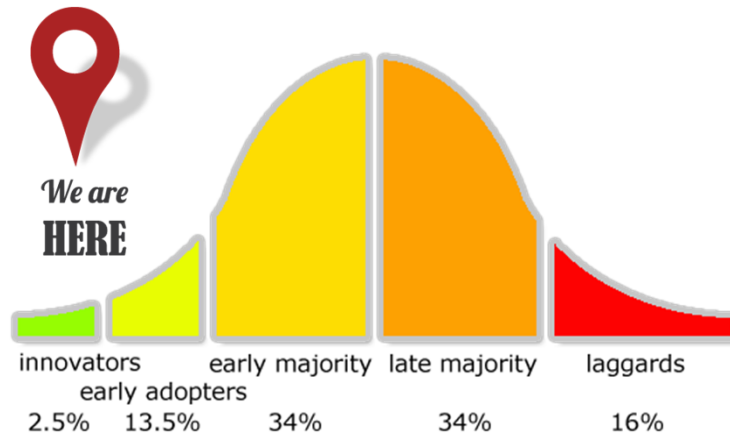




#5

Social innovators, and the evaluators, researchers, funders and policy makers that support them, can **accelerate** the development and adoption of complexity-friendly approaches.

Complexity-Based, Developmental Evaluation



iPhone 1.0: Success or Failure?



Living In Two Worlds

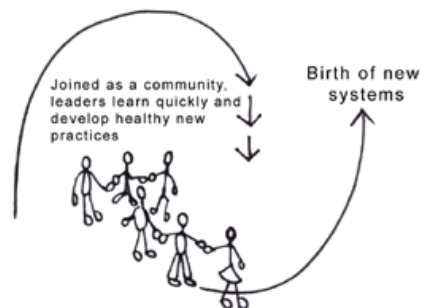


*Its difficult to
to build
something new
while
protecting –
and sometimes
providing
hospice – to
the old ways of
doing things.*

Meg Wheatley

Four Simple Suggestions

1. Embrace a complexity lens and promote participatory, systemic and experimental practices..
2. Commit to employing complexity friendly, developmental evaluation approach.
3. Identify – and address – systemic practices that short-circuit – rather than support – developmental evaluation (e.g., procurement practices).
4. Share your story with other pioneers and early adopters to strengthen the network.



The Main Points

1. Complex issues require **adaptive** – rather than linear – responses in order to be effective.
2. The **stakes** of employing an adaptive response are high.
3. The extent to which learning and evaluation in addressing complex social issues is good bad or ugly depends on the **orientation** towards evaluation.
4. The **conditions** for complexity-friendly evaluation not great but are getting better.
5. Social innovators, and the evaluators, researchers, funders and policy makers that support them, can **accelerate** the development and adoption of complexity-friendly approaches.

Complexity & Leadership

For anyone who's
ever wondered,
"What am I
supposed to
do now?"



Resources on Developmental Evaluation

- **Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation & Use.** Michael Quinn Patton. 2008.

Book



- **Evaluation for the Way We Work.** Michael Patton. Non-Profit Quarterly. Spring 2006.

Article



- **Evaluating Social Innovation.** Hallie Preskill and Tanya Beer. 2012.

Paper



- **Social Innovation Generation.** Knowledge Hub. Resources for Social Innovation. See Section on Developmental Evaluation.

Website



- Podcasts of two interviews with Michael Quinn Patton on Developmental Evaluation. Search Michael Patton on the website.

Podcast



- An ongoing and vibrant on-line discussion of the art and science of Developmental Evaluation.

Eval Talk



What is **most alive** for you after today's session (e.g., a thought, a feeling, a question)?

