Designing Evaluations for Systems Change

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Evaluation

- Typically strikes fear in the heart of many
- Traditional Evaluation - Story telling
- Development Evaluation - Co-creating the story
- Evaluation Niche that was coined by Michael Quinn Patton
Traditional Evaluation Options

- Formative Evaluation – to improve a program usually conducted at the beginning or during program implementation
- Summative Evaluation – to make an overall judgement of merit or worth usually conducted at the end of the project
- The evaluator is the EXPERT that collects and analyzes data and provides input on how “WELL” the program or intervention is doing

Developmental Evaluation is Different...

- To inform and support innovative and adaptive development in complex, dynamic environments (Patton)
- Can provide real time feedback from the beginning to the end of the project
- Allows you to continue to develop a program and adapt it to changing conditions (i.e., changing government leadership, changing technology, economic concerns)
- The evaluator is a FACILITATOR that helps conceptualize, design and test new approaches in an on-going process of continuous improvement, adaptation and change
The Emergence of Developmental Evaluation...In Michael’s words

• “Developmental evaluation will help you be clear about where you started, what forks in the road you took and WHY, what you learned along the way and were you ended up, at least for this moment in time...”

Key Developmental Evaluation Characteristics (Patton)

• Focus on development (vs. improvements or summative judgement)
• Takes place in complex, dynamic environments
• Feedback is rapid (as real time as possible)
• Evaluator works collaboratively with the program developers to conceptualize, design and test approaches in a long-term, on-going process of adaptation, intentional changes and development
Key Developmental Evaluation Characteristics
(Patton)

• Developmental evaluator can be part of the intervention team
• The evaluator’s primary functions are to elucidate the innovation and adaption processes, track their implications and results, and facilitate ongoing, real-time, data-based decision-making in the developmental process
• Developmental Evaluation becomes part of the intervention

Not for Everyone

• For social innovators, working to solve systems level issues
• Newly formed or forming organizations responding to a specific issue or exploring an idea that has not fully taken shape
• Organizations in a changing context that has made traditional approaches ineffective and there is a need to explore alternatives
• Organizations open to diverse perspectives
• Organizations with a culture suited for exploration and inquiry
Three Key Features of a Developmental Evaluation

• Framing the issue – supports innovators in conceptualizing and articulating the problem
• Testing quick iterations – being systematic about testing and interpreting data related to the consequences of new programs/innovations
• Tracking the trajectory of the innovation – documents steps taken, not taken, intended and unintended consequences

Examples of Developmental Evaluation Inquiry Frameworks

• Questions focusing on identifying the organizational learning over time and how that learning can be used to support and inform ongoing development
Developmental Evaluation Inquiry Frameworks

- Questions aiming to identify an organization’s strengths and positive assets
- Questions focusing on identifying the root cause of problems by identifying perspectives, boundaries and interrelationships through systems thinking
- Questions assessing collaboration for innovation
- Value-driven questions that focus on assessing how things are being done

Myths About Developmental Evaluation

- It replaces other evaluations
- It is about “soft methods”
- It is about collecting stories
- It is process evaluation
- It downplays accountability
- Is the same as participatory evaluation
Developmental Evaluation Creates Change Differently

• This is opposed to the evidence-based practice – not looking for BEST PRACTICES
• Utilizes a bottoms up adaptive management model as opposed to top-down dissemination of proven models

Example: Ineffective Traditional Approaches

• Community Based Program for Health Equity
• Overall Great Outcomes
• Increases in Family Planning/Birth Control
• Decreases in Post Partum Visits