**Developmental Leadership and Evaluation –**

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We want to start by acknowledging the Dakota, the traditional Native peoples of this land. This paper addresses monitoring and evaluating complex development initiatives starting with key messages from the research. Then I’ll talk about the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust - or WETT - and what we’re learning from our work with Warlpiri in Central Australia. We’ll finish with implications.

Some will be familiar with Cynefin Framework which helps highlight challenges in designing and evaluating development programs. It argues change can be understood in terms of four dimensions and each requires different types of decision-making and information.

In the simple domain the relationship between cause and effect is well understood and linear, and best practice can be applied. In the complicated domain there are more variables involved and more work is required to understand cause and effect. But with the right expertise and analysis, the pathway between inputs and change can be identified. Here it’s more about good practice. In the complex quadrant pathways towards change are largely emergent and generalisable knowledge is less helpful. While experience and principles from other situations may provide insights, solutions can only be found from the particular context through probing and acting. Finally, in chaotic situations, it’s never possible to fully understand the connections between inputs and outcomes in the change process.

This Framework acknowledges there is movement between the quadrants and one situation may have simple, complicated and complex elements. The work we’re going to talk about sits largely in the complex quadrant. But first some key points from the research on evaluating complex social change processes.

First, there’s growing recognition of the need for a mix of information. Understanding what works for who, under what conditions, and why requires a mix of generalisable, comparable or ‘thin’ data, and more context rich, ‘thick’ data. Limitless factors condition whether an intervention will work in context, so study designs need to measure and account for this. Pointing to the need for an intelligent mix of methods to generate what we are calling ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ data, Ang (2018) calls for integrating methods such as ethnography, interviewing and quantitative analysis at different stages of problem solving, to achieve relevant and rigorous insights.

Second, there is a growing argument for the use of real-time feedback loops to increase the quality and use of findings. Adaptive approaches, like problem driven iterative adaptation, have feedback loops as a key element and are becoming popular in complex development. They can provide program decision-makers with data to enable timely adjustments that help ensure programs remain relevant. But using mixed methods and feedback loops isn’t straightforward in practice. This is partly because, while different types of knowledge are needed in different situations, information and method selection is influenced by worldview, interests and personal preferences.

Going back to the Cynefin Framework, on the simple and complicated side, generalisable knowledge is more valuable. While on the other side, complex problems, like increasing Solomon Islander access to justice in remote provinces, largely need deep, contextual knowledge generated through less formal local knowledge processes.

But evaluation processes are inherently political. Political pressures shape the choice of what is measured and evaluated, the approach and methods, who evaluates, and how findings are framed and used. Donors often prioritise tangible outcomes that can be easily counted and data that serves this purpose. Senior program staff also often value generalisable knowledge because it helps them tell the program story to donors. Whereas for frontline staff and local people, contextual knowledge of what is working in a particular place and why, is often more valuable. So, it’s not just about methods selection, but there’s a political issue about what type of knowledge is valued.

This leads to a fourth point, which is that M&E practitioners often sit in the middle and have to navigate different stakeholders and interests. They need to ensure evaluative processes use a mix of methods that give voice to different groups and interests, and capture the range of development outcomes. This is easier said than done.

Insights from the Developmental Leadership Program suggest that senior development staff and M&E practitioners adopting a ‘developmental leadership’ approach might be helpful. This involves: individual leaders actively resisting pressures to narrowly define ‘results’ and ‘value for money’; building coalitions that can help push for diverse perspectives, including those of the least powerful; and through these coalitions influencing a change in evaluation thinking more broadly. Developmental leadership needs an enabling organisational environment and can be supported by appropriate governance processes that: focus on collective leadership, represent different interests, and hold decision-makers to account for how M&E is done, and findings used.

So now to our work with local partners to co-design and deliver M&E systems in the Pacific and Australia. In each case the M&E tries to serve the dual purposes of accountability to funders and beneficiaries, plus learning and adaptation. I’m happy to talk afterwards to anyone interested in our Pacific work and will use this time to tell the WETT story. Warlpiri are an Indigenous group whose lands are in the remote Tanami Desert region in Central Australia.

The WETT painting tells the story of WETT’s history, governance and projects. The idea started in 2001 when a group of Warlpiri female teachers lobbied the Indigenous director of their Land Council. They wanted to use royalties to educate their young people as the key to a better future. After three years of consultations WETT was set up using a portion of royalties from a gold mine on Warlpiri land. It is governed by a Warlpiri landowner committee which makes all funding decisions. It is supported by an Advisory Committee, which still includes most of the women who lobbied for WETT in 2001, plus more recently additional representatives from the 4 communities – Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirrpi (see top part of painting). The bottom part of the painting shows the range of education and training initiatives that have since been set up, including: early childhood; primary and secondary education; youth development and adult learning. The program uses an Indigenous-led development approach facilitated by the Land Council - an Indigenous statutory body responsible for land use and royalty payments. It supports Warlpiri to set priorities, co-design solutions with partner organisations, and then fund and oversee their delivery by partners.

In terms of the context:

* The four communities have small populations of between 300 and 900 people who are *strong* in Warlpiri language and culture and have recognized land rights.
* But Warlpiri are generally marginalized and disadvantaged compared to the rest of Australia and have no treaty or self-government.
* The death in custody of a young man shot by police last Saturday in Yuendumu, highlights serious ongoing problems with the way the Northern Territory Government works in this and other remote communities. It has left people devastated and further eroded their limited trust in government.
* Another key point is that the WETT initiative was the first of its kind in the region. It was the first attempt by Warlpiri and the Land Council to use royalties for collective locally determined benefit and there were few examples to draw on.

Unlike the Pacific programs we support, WETT is largely locally funded. But the Australian Government provides some operational resourcing via the Land Council and has the power to remove royalties, so it certainly has an interest. Another point of difference is that WETT has no externally set program design or objectives. And the M and E approach is evolving over time through trial and error. There are no dedicated M&E staff, so the development unit at the Land Council, where co-author, Danielle Campbell, worked from 2005 to 16, coordinate this work. La Trobe University has provided support since 2013.

WETT started out with a standard planning, monitoring and reporting approach. Warlpiri ideas were brought together with an expert review of best practice to identify potential projects. Partner organizations were engaged to co-design, deliver and report on each project, with some using detailed log frames and indicators informed by their international best practice. The general project data they have produced has been particularly helpful in winning over government. Although figures are low, enough of the ‘right’ numbers have been produced to show that some Warlpiri kids are finishing secondary school, and some adults are completing certificate training and getting jobs. Combined with financial reporting on the $32 million WETT has spent to date, this has been key in convincing Government WETT has value.

WETT decision-makers have engaged with some of this data, to varying degrees depending on their numeracy and literacy, but like other Warlpiri they are generally more interested in a *conversation* about how WETT is going, through a two-way flow of information. Initially this meant producing accessible information about WETT for Warlpiri, most who were planning, funding and monitoring ‘projects’ for the first time. Warlpiri-produced videos and the WETT painting by committee members were both very effective tools.

WETT and the Land Council also needed information *from* Warlpiri to understand what was and wasn’t working, and why. Some methods were trialed and abandoned, such as a participatory tool to measure WETT committee capacity. The Land Council introduced this because of its objective to build Indigenous capacity. Co-author D Campbell, as the development manager, definitely felt she needed to produce data to prove progress. At another point the CLC hired health economists to design a social return on investment methodology. They proposed a far more prescriptive and standardized approach to project design to enable ‘rigorous’ M and E. Together with CLC’s experienced development reference group staff successfully argued it would undermine Indigenous ownership and control, and it was never used.

Interviewing Warlpiri decision-makers and community members has proven a *far more* useful method. For the last 10 years a small sample of Warlpiri have been interviewed roughly every second year. Together with case studies, staff reflections and social network analysis, this has generated rich data that has helped clarify what Warlpiri value and are trying to achieve, how to strengthen governance, and the need to tailor each project to the specific location, rather than trying to deliver a standardized regional approach.

This year WETT asked the Institute to co-design their first formal M&E Framework. We’ve recruited Marlkirdi Rose to the project team. She is a Warlpiri landowner; respected community leader, a trained teacher, and, yes, she was one of the women who lobbied for WETT back in 2001. In fact, some Warlpiri say she started WETT. Co-designing and facilitating a recent workshop with the WETT landowner and advisory committees generated a rich discussion of WETT’s past and future. People are *extremely* proud of what they’ve done so far and see their collective control and wise use of royalties for future generations as their biggest achievement. The fact WETT is now recognised and respected by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is also very important to Warlpiri.

Looking back has helped Warlpiri articulate future priorities and what information they need to track progress. Objectives go well beyond improving education, training and employment, to: strengthening language and culture, young people, families, leaders and communities; creating respectful relationships with outsiders; and, ultimately, Warlpiri self-determination.

A range of methods have been trialled so far but developing a coherent overall M&E approach that meets Warlpiri needs has been challenging. This is largely because different stakeholders – Warlpiri, the Land Council, partners and government – have different worldviews, objectives, and information needs. The framework will need to help understand how WETT can and is contributing in each location to the broad vision Warlpiri have set. In co-designing it we will need to be much more aware of the worldviews, interests and power of different stakeholders, including our own. It’s going to require thick, context specific data generated and shared by working collaboratively with the WETT committees through feed-back loops. It’s likely to also need some general education, training and employment data, which the Australian Government values, and which some WETT decision-makers want as *one* part of the story.

So, what does all this suggest? Research and our own M&E practice suggests a mixed methods approach is important to satisfy different stakeholder needs and make context specific program decisions. But there are challenges in using them well in complex development settings.

What is considered the 'right' data and methods mix is heavily determined by politics, interests and worldviews - including those of funders, program staff and evaluators. In our Indigenous and Pacific work, the data generally valued by the Australian Government is not the same as that valued by others. And while WETT has more room to experiment and elevate local interests because it’s not primarily government-funded, it has still been constrained by the interests of others.

Recognising the *politics* of evidence and evaluation, means M&E practitioners need to work to manage different interests and ensure less powerful voices are heard in this process of finding the right data mix. But it’s not easy and part of what we are trying to work out is how we can support those stuck in the middle.

We think that managing these interests and building alliances for new ways of working can be supported by developmental leadership thinking. The idea is you need strong, politically skilled senior leaders and M&E staff who understand the politics and actively work to ensure different perspectives are heard and needs met.

These leaders can then work to convince others and create coalitions of actors who value different knowledge types and create space for both thin and thick data. They’re likely to be supported by appropriate governance processes that focus on collective leadership, represent different interests and hold decision-makers to account. This probably means more up-front work to put governance arrangements in place that support this type of M&E from the outset and help stay the course when the going gets tough and messy.