Three Examples of Using Developmental Evaluation to Address Uncertainty from a Systems Perspective

Situation Analysis	Health Systems Project	Homelessness Project	Educational Project
What the program/ project was about	A 5-year effort to change US healthcare delivery from its current siloed status to a team-based approach that involves patients in active collaboration with medical providers of all types.	Developing shared principles to provide a framework for collaborations. The principles are evidence-based; they are based on existing research and case study research conducted with fourteen youth.	A multi-year relationship between a non-profit and an urban school district, funded by a Foundation,, focused on the belief that teachers excel when they can form meaningful relationships with their students. Driven by four core values and the needs of the district.
Key actors	• Primary intended users: The project PI, the leaders of the five funding sources (public and private) • Secondary users: Participants in pilot sites around the country, the health systems field at large	• Primary intended users: Directors of six agencies that service Homeless Youth in the Twin Cities, Foundation Executive Director and Program Officers. • Secondary users: Staff at the agencies, the homelessness field at large	• Primary intended users: Program Leadership, Foundation staff • Secondary users: Other program staff and consultants, the Administrators in the School District
Contextual factors supporting the evaluation process	• Verbal support for ongoing and meaningful evaluation from the five funders and the leadership team • The highly visible nature of the project • A verbal commitment to developmental evaluation • An evaluator actively engaged on the leadership group from the get go • A budgeted expectation of evaluation staffing (1-3 FTE) • Solid capacity to collect, analyze, and engage with all types of data	• Patton facilitating—a high degree of credibility and trust allowed him to bring them into unchartered waters (principles) • A funder who "gets" the purpose of DE and the nature of working in complex environments • Agency leadership that showed up to every meeting willing to engage and be vulnerable and the trust that was developed • A consistent monthly meeting for 2+ years • Geography. It was easy to get people into the same room • High agreement about what good youth work looks like • Support in accessing youth and staff for research and evaluation	• Open communication between project lead, funders, evaluators and district personnel • A funder who "gets" the purpose of DE and the nature of working in complex environments • A program lead who "gets" the purpose of DE and the nature of working in complex environments • A culture of evaluation use developing within the Non-profit • The fast pace of the school year* • A commitment of two years
Contextual factors constraining the evaluation process	• The ever changing politics of Obamacare at every level (national, state, local) • The complexity of the evolving intervention (not clear what was going to be developed) • The national scope of the project • The outcome-oriented approach to program evaluation in the health arena • A sincere lack of understanding of the process of developmental evaluation despite words to the contrary • Involvement of pilot sites • Funders' and project leadership's continuing unwillingness to fund evaluation sufficiently	• Time limited process. We were able to develop principles, but don't have time (or money) to support implementation and the development of outcomes • Staff turnover. People change and their historical knowledge disappears with them	• Geography • The fast pace of the school year • Being a small piece of what happens in the district • Creating a lot of evaluation data—too much to absorb or digest at times

*appears in both lists

Examples of How People Addressed Specific Uncertainties in Developmental Evaluations

Content	Health Systems Project	Homelessness Project	Educational Project
The uncertainty	A specific example: Getting the funders to release the money they had committed (i.e., not launching the project before support dollars arrived)—a dilemma: on the one hand, need to have a visible start-up; on the other hand, funders aren't willing to provide the promised funding until they believe the plans are feasible (Boundaries, Perspectives, and Relationships)	• How do different agencies who work with youth in very different ways (street outreach, drop-in centers, shelters, etc.) create a framework that meets all of their agency and contextual needs? That meets the needs of a wide-variety of youth? Principles have to be sufficiently focused and broad. (Boundaries) • Are these the right principles according to youth? (Perspectives) • How do we attend to the interrelated nature of the principles (Relationships)	• What types of outcomes and impacts do we see when people progress through offerings/programs in a voluntary way, in their own order, and at their own pace, sometimes alone and sometimes with colleagues, and work in a variety of roles in different types of schools? (Boundaries) • What is the relationship among individual transformation, the students' experience and engagement, and the school or the district? Where is the "tipping point" when we start to see collective change? (Relationships) • As educators engage with the offerings, what new needs are identified by educators that the Non-profit might address? (Perspectives)
Process(es) used to gather data	Document analysis coupled with "reflective practice"	• Reflective practice sessions • Case studies and cross-case analysis	• Reflective practice sessions • Observations • Surveys • Key informant interviews • Case studies and cross-case analysis
Plan(s) to address the uncertainty	• High stakes face-to-face meeting with all funders in Washington, DC (excluding the evaluator)	Have a guiding vision. Meet monthly. Integrate what we have learned into the guiding vision and our plan for achieving that vision.	Have guiding evaluation questions. Meet weekly as an evaluation team, bi-weekly with staff, and quarterly with a larger group of stakeholders to discuss what we've learned and adapt/develop the evaluation and programming when necessary.
What ultimately happened	• The data were not presented in Washington • One of the funders continued to withhold support until a traditional outcomes evaluation was put in place • The evaluator left the project	• Nine guiding principles were developed. They are guiding different organizations' work in different ways • There is interest in the community • Discussing what outcomes look like	• We meet consistently to integrate learning and adjust • Offerings are developed in response to needs articulated in the evaluations (and guided by the core values)