Evaluating community development

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Abstract

Community development initiatives are by their very nature iterative and emergent. At the start, it is not clear what they will look like, how they will be delivered, or even what outcomes they will aim to achieve. They often continuously evolve, rather than become settled 'models'. Conversations between engaged community members shape understandings, intentions and actions, and outcomes are affected by interdependencies. However, with governments increasingly focused on accountability, community organisations receiving government funding are being required to evaluate their community development initiatives – reporting on their effectiveness and outcomes. Community development theorists and practitioners have raised concerns about the appropriateness of this expectation. Indeed, traditional formative and summative evaluation are not well-suited to community development. However, alternative approaches to evaluation have evolved as evaluators have grappled with their role in empowering communities to take ownership of evaluation and in supporting interventions into complex, adaptive systems. These include developmental, empowerment and principles-focused evaluation. This article uses a case study of the national Dementia Friendly Communities program evaluation to illustrate how these evaluation approaches can effectively support the ongoing development of a community development initiative. The case study highlights the challenges involved in these approaches and what is required for them to work.

Introduction

There is no universally agreed definition of community development. However, there are some clear distinctions between what community development is and what it is not. Community development is not one-off consultations with community, nor is it community-based work, such as service delivery or social work. While community-based work *involves* community, community development is *driven* by community. Grounded in principles of inclusion, self-determination and empowerment, community development initiatives are shaped by community members throughout – from defining the issues that affect their lives, through developing solutions, to implementation. They are focused on developing local solutions to local problems, aiming to achieve longer-term outcomes (Campbell, Pyett, & McCarthy, 2007; Kenny, 2007; Labonte, 1993; Wallerstein, 2006).

In recent decades, community development initiatives have 'enjoyed a revival' (Craig, 2002), with governments embracing and funding this work. One of the

drivers for this shift is the recognition that community factors can undermine the impact of initiatives intended to change individual attitudes and behaviours, or disrupt the sustainability of change (Weiss, 2002).

At the same time, with governments increasingly focused on accountability, community organisations receiving government funding are being required to evaluate their community development initiatives and report on their effectiveness and outcomes. Community development theorists and practitioners have raised concerns about the appropriateness of this expectation, including: the disproportionate resources required for measurement of small grants (Wadsworth, 1991); the emphasis on accountability and reporting to funders rather than learning, improvement and accountability to community (Liket, Rey-Garcia & Maas, 2014; Craig, 2002); the inappropriateness of accountability for pre-determined outcomes instead of responsivity to community; and the focus on quantitative measurement (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011; Weiss, 1998).

In this article, we explore the nature of these concerns. We then highlight alternative approaches to evaluation that can support community development practitioners. These include developmental (Patton, 2008), empowerment (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 2015), and principles-focused evaluation (Patton, 2017). These approaches are consistent with the philosophy and practical realities of community development initiatives.

We then offer a case study of the national Dementia Friendly Communities program evaluation to illustrate how these evaluation approaches can effectively support the ongoing development of a community development initiative in practice. The case study highlights the challenges involved in these approaches and what is required for them to work.

The complex and adaptive nature of community development

There are a range of theoretical approaches to community development, including Asset-Based Community Development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996), capacity building, community empowerment and dialogical approaches (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011; Westoby & Dowling, 2013). What they have in common is a "need to be organic, arising from and responding to community processes" (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011, p. 25). At the start, it is not clear what community development initiatives will look like, how they will be delivered, or even what outcomes they will aim to achieve. They often continuously evolve, rather than become settled 'models'. Conversations between engaged community members shape understandings, intentions and actions, and outcomes are affected by interdependencies.

Community development initiatives can be understood as complex and adaptive. The characteristics of complex, adaptive systems include non-linearity (there is a level of unpredictability in the process and the outcomes), emergence (patterns emerge from interactions and the whole of the interactions 'become greater than the separate parts'), dynamism (interactions within and between subsystems are turbulent and somewhat unpredictable), adaption (elements respond and adapt to each other and their environment), uncertainty ('processes and outcomes are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unknowable in advance', and co-evolution (agents interact and co-evolve) (Patton, 2011, p. 8).

Community development concerns about measurement and evaluation

In the context of neo-liberalism and new managerialism, the relationship between government and non-government providers has become one of 'purchaser' and 'provider', with government 'steering' the way. Organisations receiving government funding for community development initiatives are expected to meet significant accounting and reporting requirements (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011, p.21–23). The requirement to evaluate community development initiatives has given rise to several concerns among community development theorists and practitioners.

Firstly, there are suspicions about the purpose of evaluation. Many community development practitioners question the legitimacy of evaluation, viewing it as a mechanism to either defend current operations or justify reductions in funding (Craig, 2002; Epstein, Tripodi & Fellin, 1973). Organisations feel pressured to demonstrate positive outcomes to "demonstrate their raison d'etre" (Liket et al., 2014, p.171) and secure ongoing funding (Craig, 2002; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011). In practice, governments conduct evaluations for different purposes, the most common of which are accountability, learning and improvement (Vo & Christie, 2015). However, in the context of new managerialism, the focus can be on a narrow conception of accountability and economic efficiency. Evaluation conducted for accountability or audit purposes ('to check') rather than inquiry and improvement purposes ('to learn'), has led community development practitioners to question how funders can best understand what they're doing, without spending a disproportionate amount of time documenting, recording and reporting (Wadsworth, 1991). These concerns about the time and resources required for evaluation are amplified when the purpose of evaluation is unclear (Craig, 2002).

Secondly, community development practitioners question the usefulness of evaluation, commonly believing that money spent on evaluation would be better spent addressing immediate, on-the-ground needs (Kenny, 2002). This is unsurprising, given that concerns about non-use of evaluations have plagued the profession since its establishment (Brandon & Singh, 2009; Patton, 2008). In practice, "non-profits struggle to perform useful evaluations, especially when

conducted under accountability pressures" (Liket et al., 2014, p. 173). Evaluation is often dismissed as a chore, rather than an opportunity for continuous improvement.

Thirdly, there are questions about whether evaluation can appropriately capture the value of community development. As Kenny put it, funding bodies' "purposes of providing value for money are not served well if the evaluation does not "get at" either the qualitative nature of people's experience, or it counts the wrong things or at the wrong times, or if it is done for the wrong purposes" (Wadsworth, 1991, p. iii). Others have identified issues with the linear logic models that often form the basis of evaluations because it is hard to identify what success will look like and to anticipate or confidently determine causes and effects of community development initiatives embedded in a complex web of interdependencies (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011).

Fourthly, evaluation is complex, with a myriad of conflicting conceptual approaches and difficult to decipher jargon. Organisations are often confused by the claims and counter-claims of evaluators representing different schools of thinking (Epstein et al., 1973). This makes it difficult for them to identify and make a strong argument for the most appropriate approach to suit their context.

> Like "research" and "science", evaluation has become a technical speciality with its own language and high priests. This often makes it difficult… to feel confident (Wadsworth, 1991, p. iii).

Meanwhile, professional expertise can be out of reach because of limited budgets (Liket et al., 2014). In this context, community development practitioners commonly perceive monitoring and evaluation as 'demanding and often ineffective technical tasks that have to be done to please some external body" (Kenny, 2002, p. 2).

Situating concerns in the context of traditional evaluation

The concerns that community development theorists and practitioners raise about evaluation are substantial. However, they seem to relate primarily to traditional approaches to evaluation, as well as the reporting requirements set by some funding bodies.

Until the 1970s, evaluations tended to focus on whether programs achieved their intended outcomes (Weiss, 1988). Over time, the focus extended from outcomes to processes, as evaluators realised that they could not take for granted that programs were being implemented as intended, and as they needed to understand whether differences in outcomes were attributable to differences in intervention implementation (Weiss, 1998).

Traditionally, the main approaches were *formative* and *summative evaluation*. In a *formative evaluation*, the focus is on program improvement and preparing for summative evaluation. In a *summative evaluation*, the focus is on assessing the merit

and worth of a 'stabilised' program 'model'. In this context, the assumptions are that 'the root cause of the problem being addressed is known and bounded', the intervention is 'well conceptualised', the goals are clear, and the variables likely to affect outcomes are 'controllable'' (Patton, 2011, p. 23). Evaluators act as 'fidelity police' – checking for the faithful implementation of a model (Patton & Cabaj, 2015).

For a long time, the only form of evaluation with 'professional legitimacy' was quantitative, preferably randomised control trials (Weiss, 1998). However, it has been recognised that when the goal of an intervention is to change the community, not the individuals in it, randomisation is extremely difficult, if not impossible (Weiss, 2002). While there still exist proponents of hierarchies of evidence – in which systematic reviews of randomised control trials are at the pinnacle – key evaluation theorists recognise that "there is no one best way to conduct an evaluation" (Patton, 2011, p. 15). Methodological appropriateness – having the right evaluation design for the nature and type of intervention, existing knowledge, available resources, intended uses of the results, and other factors – is what is required for evaluation to best answer questions about what works, for whom, where, when, how and why (Donaldson et al. 2010, pp.31–34; Patton, 2014).

Contemporary evaluation practitioners take very different approaches – from the technocratic to the participatory and empowering – related not only to the purpose of the evaluation, but to different research paradigms and values (Caracelli, 2000). Conceptualisations of the role of the evaluator have also expanded from objective outsider to collaborative investigator, problem solver, and critical friend assisting in program development or improvement (Caracelli, 2000).

Evaluators have evolved their approaches to address the challenges that have limited the usefulness of traditional approaches (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 2015). Stakeholder involvement approaches – from collaborative (involvement) to participatory (joint ownership) to empowerment (conducted by community with evaluator as coach) – have become increasingly popular in addressing concerns about relevance, trust and use in evaluation (Fetterman, Rodriguez-Campos & Zukowksi, 2018). Putting more control in the hands of stakeholders is a key factor in the increasing use of evaluations (Maloney, 2018).

Recognising that "not all forms of evaluation are helpful" and that some are actually the "enemy of social innovation", theorists like Patton have also developed new approaches to evaluate interventions into complex adaptive systems (Patton, 2007, p. 28).

Evaluation approaches suited to community development

There are various contemporary approaches to evaluation better suited to community development than to traditional formative and summative evaluation or to randomised control trials. We have identified three approaches that we think are the most valuable to community development practitioners, given their consistency with the philosophy and practical realities of community development. These are developmental, empowerment, and principles-focused evaluation.

All three approaches can all be considered within the framework of utilisation-focused evaluation (Donaldson et al., 2010; Patton, 2017). "Utilisation-focused evaluation answers the question of whose values will frame the evaluation by working with primary intended users" (Donaldson et al., 2010). The focus is on intended use by intended users (Patton, 2008). In the context of community development, this can enable practitioners to inform the evaluation focus and approach and use the evaluation for learning.

The three approaches are outlined below to enable community development practitioners to consider when they may be appropriate for use, the challenges and factors important to their successful implementation. This section also provides a background to understanding how the approaches were applied in practice to the case study in the following section.

Developmental evaluation

Developmental evaluation grew out of Patton's need for an alternative approach to *formative* and *summative evaluation* to support a community leadership initiative that required ongoing adaptation to changing contexts and cohorts (Patton, 2011). The approach has gained traction since first introduced in 1997, and is now being used to support interventions in complex systems in various countries and contexts around the world, including Australia and New Zealand (Patton, McKegg & Wehipeihana, 2015; Patton & Cabaj, 2015).

While Patton commonly refers to developmental evaluation as suited to evaluations of social innovations, many of the characteristics of social innovations (such as emergence) are shared by community development. Patton's approach to evaluation is influenced by his time supporting community development while in the Peace Corp in the 1970s (Patton, 2011).

The developmental approach addresses many of the concerns identified by community development practitioners about evaluation. It supports development rather than providing judgement; it does not require outcomes to be pre-determined but allows for measures to evolve; it engages with system dynamics; and it centres accountability on those driving the initiative, their values and commitments. The

differences between developmental and traditional evaluation outlined in Table 1 (which are necessarily overgeneralised given the varied nature of traditional evaluation) highlight how the developmental evaluation approach suits the complex, adaptive and emergent nature not only of social innovation but community development.

Table 1.   Differences between traditional and developmental evaluation

Traditional evaluations	Developmental evaluations
Render definitive judgements of success or failure	Provide feedback, generate learnings, support direction or affirm changes in direction
Measure success against pre-determined goals	Develop new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve
Position the evaluator outside to assure independence and objectivity	Position evaluation as an internal team function which is integrated into action and an ongoing interpretive processes
Design the evaluation based on linear cause-effect logic models	Design the evaluation to capture system dynamics, interdependencies and emergent interconnections
Aim to produce generalisable findings across time and space	Aim to produce context-specific understandings that inform ongoing innovation
Have the accountability focused and directed to external authorities and funders	Have the accountability centred on innovators' deep sense of fundamental values and commitments
Identify the accountability to control and locate blame for failures	Learn to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what's unfolding and respond strategically
Position the evaluator as the person in control of the evaluation and responsible for determining the design based on their perspective of what's important	Position the evaluator as a collaborator in the change effort in order to design a process that matches philosophically and organisationally
Engender fear of failure	Supports hunger for learning

Source: Patton, M.Q. (2007). Developmental Evaluation: Evaluation for the Way We Work. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, p. 29

In practice, in a developmental evaluation, the evaluator facilitates regular data-based discussions about what is working and what isn't and what that means for practice (Gamble, 2008; Patton, 2011). They can draw on a range of methods, as appropriate to the context. Participatory action research – which is commonly used in community development - and developmental evaluation are mutually reinforcing

(Patton, 2011). Four characteristics of action research reflect evaluation appropriate to community development: purpose – for action, not only understanding; epistemology – relevant and valid knowledge is produced through action; contextualisation – understanding is embedded in local settings; and greater equality between evaluators and actors (Stern in Patton, 2011).

Some critics have taken developmental evaluation to be about dialogue devoid of evidence. However, in principle, the emphasis of the dialogue in developmental evaluation is in understanding and interpreting evidence in context to enable decision-making about the most appropriate next steps. Developmental evaluators require a 'deep methodological toolkit' to draw in appropriate evidence to inform practical dialogue (McKegg, 2014). Additionally, for the process to most effectively influence the ongoing development of an initiative, the organisation must be supportive, the program team must be open to findings they may not want to hear, the evaluator must have the skills and sensitivity to support critical reflection, and the program and evaluation teams must be flexible (McKegg, 2014).

Evaluators of community development and social innovation will find that these conditions are not always in place. Other challenges to taking a developmental evaluation approach in practice include tendering processes that require planning, budgeting and contracting a long-term evaluation before engaging with stakeholders (McKegg, 2014) and the lack of fit between a developmental approach and the culture of pre-defining outcomes (Hutchinson & Coyle, 2014). The approach can also be resource intensive.

Empowerment evaluation

When Fetterman first introduced empowerment evaluation in his presidential address to the American Evaluation Society in 1993, there was heated debate among professionals about whether the approach constituted evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 2015). However, it has since been adopted in countries around the world (Fetterman, Rodriguez-Campos & Zukowksi, 2018).

As conceived by Fetterman, et al. (2015), empowerment evaluation pays attention to both 'scientific process' and 'practical problem solving'. It was designed to respond to the challenge created by governments and private sector funders requiring community organisations – with limited experience in developing and evaluating interventions, and a lack of funding for evaluation – to demonstrate their impact (Fetterman et al., 2015). Thus, it addresses one of the key challenges with evaluation identified by community development practitioners.

Empowerment evaluation "aims to increase the likelihood that programs will achieve results by increasing the capacity of program stakeholders to plan, implement, and evaluate their own programs" (Wandersman & Snell-Johns, 2005, p. 28). In an empowerment evaluation, program staff and community members are in control and the evaluator acts as a critical friend (or coach) – someone who

believes in the program but is able to ask the critical questions to ensure an honest reflection on the evidence.

Different empowerment evaluation tools and practices have evolved, with the three-step and the ten-step being the most popular (Fetterman, 2015). The three-step approach involves working alongside a community group to do the following (Fetterman, 2015).

1. Establish their mission – by asking participants to draft mission statements, synthesising these, and build towards a consensus. In this phase, values are also established.

2. Take stock of their current status – by developing a list of the 10 most important activities to achieve the mission, and then asking stakeholders to rate how well they are doing each of these on a 10-point scale. An overall rating is calculated for each individual and each activity – and the evaluator facilitates a discussion to clarify differences of perspective and test the evidence behind perspectives.

3. Plan for the future – by developing goals and strategies and identifying the evidence required to track achievement. A range of different methods – conventional and innovative – can be used.

The 10 principles guiding the approach are: improvement, community ownership, inclusion, democratic participation, social justice, community knowledge, evidence-based strategies, capacity building, organisational learning, and accountability (Fetterman et al., 2015). These align with community development principles. Additionally, Freirean pedagogy and empowerment evaluation "share a common emancipatory tradition" (Fetterman, 2017, p. 111), as does an empowerment approach to community development. They share a view that "every person, however ... submerged in the 'culture of silence', can look critically at his or her world through a process of dialogue with others, and can gradually come to perceive his personal and social reality, think about it, and take action in regard to it" (Fetterman, 2017, p. 111).

There has been much criticism of empowerment evaluation, including questions about the extent to which it has actually empowered communities in practice (Donaldson et al, 2010). In part, this relates to the lack of consistency with which the approach has been applied by evaluators, which Fetterman and colleagues have progressively worked to address by strengthening the conceptual clarity of the approach (Donaldson et al, 2010; Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 2015). Questions have also been raised about how the approach deals with bias, and thus its credibility, given the role of program stakeholders in the evaluation. Fetterman has challenged this critique – indicating that a 'critical friend' (the role of the

evaluator in empowerment evaluation) is able to provide honest, critical feedback (Donaldson et al, 2010).

Principles-focused evaluation

Principles-focused evaluation is a useful approach for evaluating social interventions that are guided by principles rather than a standardised service model (Patton, 2017). This is often an appropriate approach for interventions into complex adaptive systems (Patton, 2017). Principles-focused evaluation is an outgrowth of developmental evaluation, and a principles-focused approach can be used by developmental evaluators to support social innovators to clarify their principles.

Patton's GUIDE framework outlines the characteristics of a good principle.

- **Guide**: provides advice and guidance on how to think, what to value and how to act to be effective; provides direction and supports priority setting.

- **Useful**: is interpretable, actionable, and feasible; can be used to guide decision-making.
- **Inspirational**: makes values explicit; provides motivation and inspiration by identifying what matters in how to proceed and the desired result.
- **Developmental**: is adaptable and applicable to diverse contexts over time, providing a way to navigate complexity and uncertainty, and adapt ongoing changes in context.
- **Evaluable**: is possible to document and assess whether the principle is being followed and what results occurred (that is, if implementing the principle took you in the desired direction).

In an evaluation, the evaluator considers whether the principle/s identified for the program:

- are meaningful to the people they are supposed to guide,

- are adhered to in practice,

- supported desired results.

As community development is guided by principles rather than the faithful implementation of a best practice model, the principles-focused approach can provide an appropriate means of assessment. It can also support improvement because the way some principles are constructed means they fail to provide clear guidance, and because there can be a gap between rhetoric and reality (Patton, 2017).

It is still early in the development of principles-focused evaluation theory and practice (Patton, 2017, p. 399). Some have questioned why a principles-focused approach is needed, or raised concerns about principles being vague and needing to focus on outcomes. Patton has addressed these critiques indicating that a principles-

focused approach is suited to some contexts, and that effective principles are clear and point to outcomes (Patton, 2017, p. 392–394).

Considering the three approaches

Given the importance of methodological appropriateness, no one of these approaches will always be appropriate for community development evaluations. However, they all reflect the philosophy and practical realities of community development. Developmental and empowerment evaluation enables communities to drive evaluation (to varying extents), while principles-focused and development evaluation reflects the principles-driven and emergent nature of community development. Thus, each may be appropriate given the right evaluation purpose and questions, authorising environment, organisational support and resourcing. In particular, developmental evaluation requires funding bodies to be open to emerging outcomes, and both developmental and empowerment evaluation require funding bodies to be comfortable with evaluation that is community-driven. In the context of neoliberalism, evaluators and community development practitioners may need to argue the case for these approaches.

A developmental evaluation case study in practice

In 2016, Dementia Australia received funding from the Australian Department of Health to develop and implement a three-year national Dementia Friendly Communities program. The initial brief for the evaluation was to use a participatory action research approach to examine the extent to which the program improved awareness and understanding of what it means to be "dementia friendly" across Australia and to identify opportunities for increasing the program's impact and sustainability. As the program had not yet been developed when the evaluators were engaged, the evaluation team identified a developmental approach as an appropriate overarching framework for the evaluation. Given the nature of the program that evolved, the evaluation team also drew on principles-focused and empowerment approaches.

Developing the initiative

In the design phase, the evaluation team worked with the program team to identify evidence about dementia friendly communities from the international literature and staff experience. The evaluation team also supported the program team to source and interpret input from people living with dementia and their families, professionals, and community members through online surveys. Both the literature and the consultations pointed to the importance of principles rather than a set program 'model' for dementia friendly communities. This finding was used to inform the program design and ongoing co-development of the program with people with dementia and their carers (through a Dementia Advisory Group). The key role of the evaluation team in the design has been to bring evaluative thinking

to bear on the evolving program design – testing the logic of connections between planned actions and intended outcomes, and consistency with identified guiding principles for dementia friendly communities.

The Dementia Friendly Communities program has evolved into multi-layered community development initiative.

- At the national level, the program is essentially a capacity building approach to community development.

  - An online <u>Hub</u> provides resources and enables people to connect to share local initiatives.

  - An <u>awareness program</u> provides face-to-face and online awareness sessions about what it means to be dementia friendly.

- At the local level, the model is centred around community empowerment. Grant funding is provided to selected organisations to work with people with dementia and their carers to make their local communities more dementia friendly.

Developing the evaluation approach

As the design progressed, the evaluation team worked with the program team, the Dementia Friendly Communities Steering Committee and the Dementia Advisory Group to co-develop an overall framework for the approach to the evaluation. We held a series of evaluation capacity building workshops – building understanding of theories of change and evaluation approaches and identifying some core data that would support ongoing critical reflection on the evolving program, consistent with a developmental approach. We focused on web analytics and user surveys (including qualitative questions) to understand the nature of engagement, the reason for it, and the usefulness of the resources and connections. We also identified methods that would enable us to assess whether principles were being adhered to in practice. In the early stages, we did not specify the other data collection methods, but left space within the budget to develop these to best support program evolution.

Enabling data-based reflections

The core data has formed the basis of regular reflective discussions between the evaluation and program teams. The evaluation team regularly analysed administrative and survey data from the online Hub to understand patterns of uptake and interaction with the Hub, as well as drop-off points. When reviewing the data with the program team, the evaluators used the frame of 'What? So what? Now what?' (Gamble, 2008) to guide reflection on the data and the developmental directions. This informed ongoing promotion and rollout of the program, as well as content development.

While the evaluation team was supporting the program team to stop and reflect on what the data were telling them about what to do next, we also needed to reflect on what the data were telling us about emerging lines of enquiry and interest, and what methods would best enable the evaluation to explore these and contribute to the evolution of the program.

Supporting the evolution of the community engagement program grants

The plan was always for the evaluation team to inform the community engagement program grant application process. We used the principles for the national program and evidence about criteria for success from other 'dementia friendly' initiatives to review the grant application forms and the selection criteria before communities were invited to apply for grants. When the program attracted far more grant applications than originally expected, the evaluation team became involved in the assessment process – informing the refined assessment process, providing a member of the assessment panel, and informing the final review process.

As the 21 funded communities received their grants, the need for self-evaluation tools and case studies emerged. Talking to the project teams, the program and evaluation teams realised that the stories from these projects could be used not only for the evaluation, but to support broader public engagement with the program. In an appropriate format, the stories could help other communities understand what "dementia friendly" might mean in practice and make it accessible – that is, show them that it is something they have the capacity to do. So, the evaluation team updated the case study approach to include the production of videos that could capture stories of change over a 12-month period. This approach capitalised on the evaluation data collection process to support program implementation.

Supporting community-level reflective practice and shared learnings

The evaluation team considered using an empowerment evaluation process in site visits to funded communities to assist stakeholders to identify their mission and self-assess their progress. However, the evaluation and program teams realised that the community project leads were concerned about what evaluation would mean for them and the level of work involved given the size of the grants. Consequently, we decided to use a reflective interview process with project teams, advisory committee members and community stakeholders as a soft-entry point into evaluation.

Even without a formal evaluation process, the evaluation team's initial visits to the selected communities for the video production case studies proved extremely valuable to project teams. The reflective interview process prompted them to think critically about their goals, how they planned to meet these, what would be feasible and sustainable, and what data they should collect from the outset.

During the visits, the team also noticed that communities were facing some common challenges in designing and delivering their projects, while some teams had found ways to overcome these. Subsequently, the team hosted a webinar for all of the project teams to share their learnings and top tips. The findings were then synthesised and circulated to all participants.

Q&A between the evaluators and the program manager

While the developmental evaluation approach, with the influence of principles-focused and empowerment approaches, was appropriate to the situation, it was not without its challenges. A verbatim dialogue between the lead evaluator and program manager is used to describe how the evaluation evolved, what worked and what was challenging. This format demonstrates the valuable process of dialogue used throughout the evaluation.

Evaluator: Before this project, what was your previous experience with evaluation?

Program manager: I mainly had experience of using pre- and post-evaluation surveys. While this aligned with key performance indicators, it provided very little chance for reflection or change along the way. I considered evaluation a separate process that the program team had little to do with and, to be honest, a bit of an administrative burden. I also found that outcomes and learnings would sometimes get lost, or not be valued by the next program team.

At the same time, I was familiar with the concept of continuous improvement and participatory action research. When it came to Dementia Friendly Communities, I knew that a similar approach was needed – something that enabled ongoing development and flexibility – but I wasn't familiar with developmental evaluation.

How did you make that connection?

Evaluator: When we read the tender request, we recognised the broader request to support ongoing development of the initiative and we thought the developmental evaluation approach would best enable the evaluation team to support innovation and development at the national and local community levels.

How does the developmental approach differ from your previous experience with evaluation?

Program manager: I see the developmental approach as an instinctive way of doing things. In community development, it makes sense for evaluation to be embedded into the program. Rather than collecting and interpreting data separately, sometimes as an afterthought to project activity, developmental evaluation provides an opportunity to test and evolve our ideas in real time, using simple, collaborative processes.

How have you managed the ever-evolving approach?

Evaluator: Being brought in at the outset helped us to establish the relationships and trust required to support a developmental approach. This has enabled us to have open conversations, support critical reflection on the data, and think creatively about what this means for the next steps for the program and the evaluation.

It has also allowed us to negotiate the evaluation tasks and budget as needs emerge. In an ideal world, you would be able to confirm the budget for a developmental evaluation each year when the scope of work become clear. In reality, NGOs often have a set budget for evaluation tied to overall program funding. So, it's important to be able to negotiate the scope of tasks within the budget and have the program team support data collection.

Program manager: I agree – we've been able to manage the evolutions well because the funder requirements were not overly specified.

There have still been challenges though. What have you learned from these? Is there anything you would do differently?

Evaluator: We're always adaptive to emerging needs, but not *this* adaptive. In the early stages, it was sometimes difficult to keep up. And while we had a strong relationship, the evaluation team weren't as well connected to senior management and the Hub developers. This meant decisions were made to change our surveys in a way that made analysis difficult, but we quickly realised this and were able to course correct. We also haven't been as connected to the staff delivering the face-to-face awareness sessions, so it's been harder to engage them in the evaluation.

The other challenge was something we often face: people fear evaluation because they see it as something more akin to auditing or a personal performance review (Maloney, 2018). When we agreed to visit the funded communities, some were concerned that we were there to judge them and that it was too early for us to assess progress. But we worked together to overcome this. Taking a capacity building approach has helped to demystify the process and support communities to identify the data they need to reflect on and evolve their activities.

We also think that because the developmental approach recognises that outcomes and activities are appropriately iterative in a community development context, it reduces some of the fear about evaluation and helps people to see how evaluation can support development and learning.

Program manager: Yes, while some of our project teams feared possible judgement, and were hesitant about the burden of data collection, this soon turned around as we developed good working relationships and open communication – over the phone and face-to-face. The fear is also reduced once people understand that evaluation can support program development.

Evaluator: It also helped that you were supportive of the approach and could talk to the community representatives about how the evaluation was working at a national level.

Program manager: Yes. Personally, I didn't fear the evaluation as I was lucky enough to be involved in writing the tender. I was clear on what the program requirements were and saw the evaluation as an opportunity for us all to work together, learn and evolve.

Evaluator: What has surprised you about the evaluation?

Program manager: It has surprised me how simple it can be to support communities to understand evaluation as a resource, rather than an administrative task for funders. Our case study communities were very generous as they opened up and trusted the process, participating enthusiastically in interviews and focus groups.

In addition, I think that sometimes we assume evaluators are the experts and will know it all. But this process has shown that everyone brings their own expertise to the team. We've needed trust and understanding that both program and evaluation teams are learning and evolving; it's a two-way process.

What has surprised you as evaluators?

Evaluator: Probably how the two-way process has evolved – first with the national program team, and then with the funded communities.

People often think of evaluation as a technical exercise – all about measurement and metrics. However, evaluation is about values; it has strategic and human dimensions. Interpersonal relationships are always important to evaluation, but they are critical in developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011). They're key to building trust and credibility with stakeholders, so they are willing to speak openly with you; this plays a big role in whether your findings are accepted and acted on.

In a developmental evaluation you essentially become part of the program team – walking alongside them, but also challenging them to critically reflect on what the data is telling them. We've been surprised at how open the program team and you, in particular, have been to this relationship and to using the evaluation to inform learning.

We were also surprised by the extent to which the interview process with the community engagement project teams supported valuable reflection. This reminds us of what we sincerely believe – that the process is as important as the product. This belief is only realised when stakeholders openly engage in the process.

It has been extremely rewarding to see evaluation used in real time to inform the ongoing development of a community development initiative so that it best meets the needs of those involved.

What has been most valuable to you in the evaluation?

Program manager: Dementia Friendly Communities is a complex program, so having professional and informed advice from the evaluation team has been invaluable. Getting to the heart of local issues and being clear on what we are trying to achieve has empowered us all to move forward, try new things, and not impose what we think *should* happen on local communities – instead letting things evolve naturally.

A great example of this was the development of the video case studies. Initially, we asked the evaluation team to write case studies about the communities. But, in talking to the teams, we realised that what they were achieving could not only be used for the evaluation but showcased to support broader public engagement with the program, so the video case study approach emerged. The conversations during the visits also provided the catalyst for a webinar to support reflection and shared learning across the projects, which the teams found valuable.

Conclusion

While there has been much scepticism about evaluation among community development theorists and practitioners these concerns seem to relate primarily to traditional formative and summative evaluation, as well as the reporting requirements set by some funding bodies.

This article has identified developments in evaluation that provide promise for evaluation of community development. Approaches include developmental, empowerment and principles-focused evaluation. These enable community ownership, recognise the developmental and iterative nature of community development initiatives, and have a focus on continuous development and learning.

Developmental evaluation was designed to support the evaluation of innovation and interventions into complex, adaptive systems. Community development shares the characteristics of complex, adaptive systems including non-linearity, emergence, dynamism, adaption, uncertainty, and co-evolution. Developmental evaluation also addresses many of the concerns community development theories and practitioners hold about traditional evaluation – it recognises the need to value and understand emergence, ensure accountability to community, and collect data (including qualitative data) that is meaningful to the current state of evolution of the program.

A developmental evaluation approach, influenced by empowerment evaluation and principles-focused evaluation, has effectively supported the ongoing development of the three-year Dementia Friendly Communities program. The foundation for success has been the trusting relationship between the program and evaluation teams. Having the evaluation team involved from the outset enabled this trust to be established. Trust has enabled the evaluation team to walk alongside the program team, supporting critical reflection on their ideas in the initial design phase, and then on the data once rollout commenced. Trust also enabled us to overcome funded community project teams' concerns about evaluation and support open

conversation and a reflective process to strengthen their initiatives. Trust has also been important to moving beyond a traditional contract management relationship in which milestones are ticked off. This foundation has enabled us to continually evolve our evaluation plans, responding flexibly and adaptively to what emerges as the most important focus for program development at any given time.

However, a developmental approach may not be suitable in all contexts, as it is not without challenges. It requires time, sufficient budget and budget flexibility, a program team open to being challenged, organisational leadership support, and an evaluation team with strong skills in mixed methods and engagement, as well as agility. Likewise, principles-focused and empowerment evaluation are suited to particular contexts and rely on certain enablers.

To ensure that evaluation is useful rather than a burden, or an inhibitor, to community development, there is a need for funding bodies to recognise the need for methodological appropriateness rather than seeing randomised control trials at the top of an evidence hierarchy. Evaluators and community development practitioners may need to argue the case for appropriate approaches. By focusing on measuring what matters and what is meaningful, evaluation can support accountability to communities, funding bodies and policy makers.

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