



Exploring Developmental Evaluation: Reflections on Two Case Studies

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i. Abstract

International Development programs often face significant challenges when confronted with complex and rapidly changing conditions that do not neatly fit within traditional models of evaluation. Developmental Evaluation (DE) has emerged in recent years as an alternative approach, seeking to create structured feedback mechanisms that can effectively support innovation. This document describes two DE experiences in International Development projects. DE has shown promise as a means of focusing programs on outcomes, process and strategy together, which might be its biggest contribution. However, evaluators wanting to embark in DE must be prepared to face a number of challenges, such as the need of clarifying many concepts and implications that program managers need to understand from the beginning. Embedding the DE in a Utilization-Focused Evaluation framework can be a good strategy to ground the process around practical use and thus make it less abstract for the people involved. DE seems to be more suitable for nimble projects that seek to make incremental gains consistently and have a high tolerance for failure.

ii. Executive Summary

International Development programs often face significant challenges when confronted with complex and rapidly changing conditions that do not neatly fit within traditional models of evaluation. Rather than try to reduce complexity, Developmental Evaluation (DE) seeks to create structured feedback mechanisms that provide the guidance to programs seeking to evolve, adapt and thrive in complex conditions.

The purpose of this document is to share some reflections and lessons learned on the authors' experience conducting DE in two different International Development projects, which aimed at innovating – i.e. developing “something new” – in the fields of e-Government and e-Health in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the leadership of both projects had bought into the idea of adopting DE prior to the start of both projects, the evaluators experienced many difficulties conducting their respective evaluation processes.

Most of the difficulties related to the fact that DE deals with many abstract concepts that need to be co-defined and negotiated between the evaluator and the project stakeholders on an on-going basis. What do terms such as “innovation”, “real-time”, “developmental thinking” or “complexity” mean to the different members of a team? What does it imply for a project to have an evaluator who is actively engaging key stakeholders in order to support their decision-making process? Is this good? Do people have time for this?

ii. Executive Summary Continued

Defining the developmental nature of the project – i.e. what the projects seeks to develop – is crucial in order to assess the suitability of DE. One of our first lessons was that DE is not easy for people to understand and requires substantial clarification, especially around scope and implications. To effectively support innovation, DE also requires clear learning objectives and milestones from the outset of the project. In our experience, framing the DE process around the Utilization-Focused Evaluation framework proved to be an effective way of making DE less abstract by grounding it around practical use in the specific context of a project.

However, there does not seem to exist a recipe for conducting DE in a straightforward, simple way. Therefore, the developmental evaluator must be prepared to deal with many unresolved tensions that go beyond the often confusing language of innovation. For instance, giving excessive attention to documentation can become a trap that may unfairly guide projects away from innovating. Sense-making through large volumes of documentation can also be a challenge, so the developmental evaluator needs to learn to select the relevant pieces of evidence and the best ways to feed them back to users who are usually very busy. These skills seem to be more an intuitive, learn-as-you-go instincts than things that can be easily conveyed through theory.

While challenging, DE has shown promise as a means of focusing programs on outcomes, process and strategy together, which might be its biggest contribution. DE seems to worked best when small, continuous adaptations were made, so nimble projects that seek to make incremental gains consistently and have a high tolerance for failure seem to be the best suited to DE. The two case studies presented here illustrate the benefits of thinking small, while acting on a larger stage in support of a bigger set of goals.

iii. Acronyms

DE: Developmental Evaluation.

e-GOV: The Citizen and e-Government in the Americas project.

e-Government: Electronic Government.

e-Health: Electronic Health.

e-SAC: The Public and e-Health Innovation and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean.

ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies.

ID: International Development.

IDRC: International Development Research Centre.

IOHE: Inter-American Organization for Higher Education.

LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean.

OAS: The Organization of American States.

PAHO: Pan-American Health Organization.

U-FDE: Utilization-Focused Developmental Evaluation.

U-FE: Utilization-Focused Evaluation.

YP: Young Professionals.

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1. Introduction

International development faces enormous challenges when confronted with complex and rapidly changing social conditions, fitting programming to the demands these conditions present and the diverse stakeholders (funders, citizen groups, governments) involved and building accountability frameworks that address the genuine need for innovation and adaptation while still ensuring programs are delivered appropriately. Complex conditions also produce streams of diverse information that do not neatly fit within traditional models of evaluation that rely on controls, consistency and stability. Yet without useful feedback integrated in a meaningful way, programs are left without the guidance to navigate through this complexity. Rather than try to reduce complexity, developmental evaluation seeks to create structured feedback mechanisms that provide the guidance to programs seeking to evolve, adapt and thrive in complex conditions.

Traditional evaluation models are limited when approaching such programs due to the scale and scope of change that commonly accompanies programs aimed at supporting innovation – development of something novel for social benefit – due to the absence of clearly linked processes and outcomes, the adaptive nature of programming, and evolving or unclear benchmarks for success. The path to innovation is not straight or predictable and yet the role of systematic data collection and feedback systems that evaluation brings are as important as ever. Developmental evaluation is a means of evaluation that suits this context and represents an approach to evaluation that supports programs in the innovation process, while providing a structured means for accounting for decision processes and program outcomes in a manner that is in harmony rather than conflict with complexity (Patton, 2010).

The purpose of this document is to share some reflections and lessons learned on the authors' experience conducting DE. The document is structured in short sections on the topics that seemed most relevant. As they conducted the evaluations of the e-GOV and e-SAC projects, the authors noticed that they learned most when speaking with each other to exchange experiences, to compare notes on process and provide updates, and to ask questions so they have attempted to re-create these enriching dialogues within some of the sections as 'conversations'. These conversation pieces also helped place the evaluation within the context of the programs themselves as a means of helping the reader gain deeper understanding of the social, political and structural dynamics that influenced



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the evaluator's decisions and the program context.

The document closes with some conclusions and recommendations. This paper is intended for practitioners, development agencies and social innovators who may find in DE a useful means to generate strategic learning.

1.1 Program Context

During 2011 and 2012, IDRC funded two projects related to the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to enhance governance and access to health services in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The Citizen and e-Government in the Americas project (e-GOV) aimed at strengthening democratic governance in the region through the advancement of e-Government and the implied use of ICTs. The Public and e-Health Innovation and Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean (e-SAC) project aimed at addressing public health challenges of special relevance to the region promoting the implementation of innovative, low cost ICT-based solutions. Both, the e-GOV and the e-SAC projects had research purposes and sought to influence public policy in the region.

Developmental evaluation is a relatively recent approach that aims at supporting innovation by providing real-time feedback in order to help adapt interventions to emergent and dynamic conditions (Patton, 2010). DE can be particularly useful when developing new models under highly uncertain conditions. The e-GOV and e-SAC projects were complex in the sense that they dealt with multiple stakeholders across countries and multiple influences on the intended outcomes, and no clearly delineated, universal pathway to each outcome. Further, these programs were implemented in an environment of great social complexity, whereby multiple actors had to interconnect in novel ways. Given these conditions, a developmental evaluation (DE) project was proposed. The project had two dimensions. The first dimension was the evaluation of the e-SAC and e-GOV projects in order to facilitate innovation.

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The second dimension was the advancement of knowledge on how to appropriately apply DE to evaluate dynamic, evolving projects that are attempting to influence policy based on applied research findings and recommendations. From this perspective, this research dimension also tried to determine the effectiveness of DE when it comes to supporting innovation in the context of International Development (ID) projects. The purpose of this document is to share our experience as evaluators and the main findings of our DE research.

1.2 Exploring Developmental Evaluation

Developmental evaluation is receiving attention from funders and international development programs seeking to learn about ways to adapt to complex conditions and circumstances.

A review of the literature finds a remarkable dearth of published examples of DE in use, complicated by the problematic overlap the name has with multiple areas of human development and clinical evaluation. A search of major academic databases as well as the grey literature found few valid examples of developmental evaluation in practice. The Canadian Evaluation Society's Grey Literature database had no published articles indexed with the term developmental evaluation. A review of the social science and education literature using Scholars Portal yielded nine articles with the term "developmental evaluation" used in the title or abstract or using the term "evaluation" as the keyword. Of these, five relevant articles were pulled (Fagen, Redman, Stacks, et al., 2011; Honadle, Zapata, Auffrey, et al., 2014; Patton, 1994; Ramstad, 2009; Rey, Tremblay, & Brousselle, 2013; Reynolds, 2014). Three additional articles were found through a hand search of six key evaluation journals: *Evaluation*, *Evaluation & Program Planning*, *American Journal of Evaluation*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, *valuation Review* and the *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* yielding four articles from the *CJPE* (Delage & Poulin, 2006; Patton, 1999; Poth, & Howery, 2012; Rey, 2013) with three of these articles published in French.

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A further literature search using Google Scholar was able to detect an additional two articles from the social welfare literature that referenced developmental evaluation (Grasso & Epstein, 2008; Solomon, 2002), while a third article used the term developmental evaluation without any reference to the seminal texts or work (Carswell, Manning, Long, & Braithwaite, 2014) like that of Patton (1992, 2010).

Among the central problems with the literature base is the terminology of developmental and evaluation, which creates confusion with evaluation of programs focused on human development in children within a clinical or educational context.

Of this small corpus of relevant literature, most articles wrote about the developmental evaluation process in general terms. So far, the authors who perhaps address the practice of DE in more concrete terms and in greater detail are Langlois, Blanchet-Cohen and Beer (2013). In their article, these authors make a case for the use of DE in complex scenarios related to social innovation and action research. They describe DE as the art of nudging, which relates to the idea of bringing innovators and decision-makers closer to their goals by presenting data and observations as real-time feedback. They also link this art of nudging to the practice of servant leadership, meaning that unlike in traditional evaluation approaches, the developmental evaluator is required to act as a leader in order to help innovators navigate through complexity. However, the current DE literature makes little reference to principles of complexity and only a modest reference to utilization-focused evaluation. More recent articles in the grey literature on evaluating social innovation show some promise (Preskill & Beer, 2012), yet these are few in number.

The seminal texts for developmental evaluation remain those produced by Michael Quinn Patton (2010) and Jamie Gamble.



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2. The e-GOV and e-SAC Projects

IDRC provided funding to support development of two programs that explored the use of ICT's as vehicles for engaging professionals across the LAC in two key priority areas: governance and politics and public eHealth. The model that tied these two projects together centred on the use of young professionals as networking agents to promote the programs within specific regions. Both programs were seeking to use models that were highly innovative in their composition of elements and in their total package of offerings. ICT's are still highly emergent, novel vehicles within governance and health and combined with using young professionals as change leaders, the level of innovation was high. Developmental evaluation was chosen as a means of understanding how these programs innovated and evolved over time.

2.1 The e-GOV Project

The Citizen and e-Government in the Americas (e-GOV) Project aimed at strengthening democratic governance in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by "improving living standards and providing equal access to public services for the citizens of the countries in the region (in particular, the more vulnerable classes), placing them at the centre of the emerging policies and national initiatives regarding electronic government" (OAS, IOHE, 2009). The Project's specific objectives were:

1. To generate knowledge based on applied research which offers e-government solutions to improve citizens' living standards, provide equal access to public services and strengthen the processes of democratic governance in the region.
2. To promote the creation of a network of research centres dealing with the problems of electronic government and providing support for the actors implementing electronic government in LAC.
3. To develop and implement a systematic process to influence public policy (based on the empirical evidence supplied by applied research) in order to (a) place the citizen and



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in particular the more vulnerable classes at the centre of this initiative, and (b) respond to the specific needs identified by the governments themselves regarding the need to improve public management and democratic governance.

In order to achieve these objectives, the project had a research component and a policy influence component. The research component consisted of four applied research projects that could help countries focus their e-Government policies on citizens. The overall project's research question was: "What policies and practical solutions are most appropriate (within different national contexts) when attempting to place the citizen, and in particular those who are most vulnerable, at the centre of government reforms arising from the adoption of electronic government in LAC?" The policy influence component was about developing a mechanism to effectively influence policy - mainly by using the results of the research projects - in order to provide evidence of the need and ways of putting the citizen – particularly the vulnerable classes - in the centre of e-government policies.

The main element of the policy-influence mechanism was the "Liaison Officer Role", which consisted of young professionals who were hired to work from the e-government offices of their respective countries as OAS representatives. Their main duty was to disseminate the findings and recommendations coming from the research projects, hoping that some of these recommendations would be adopted into e-government policies. Another important duty was to facilitate relationships between Government officials and researchers in order to create some collaboration, such as conducting pilot projects.

2.2. The e-SAC Project

The e-SAC project was designed with the intent to nurture and promote innovation in the field of Public eHealth while enhancing equity in health within the LAC region. The project was created to emphasize innovation through the application of ICT's to matters of public health and health equity by combining the creation and synthesis of evidence, public and health sector engagement, and the development of a platform for collaboration on issues of Public eHealth and equity. The multi-year

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program was organized as a partnership between the Centre for Global eHealth Innovation with the University Health Network and University of Toronto and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). The e-SAC project specific objectives were:

1. To support the development of a regional virtual community of practice, comprised of innovators, entrepreneurs, researchers, policy makers, the media and the general public, to increase awareness and capacity around Public eHealth and equity in health;
2. To foster the conceptualization, design, field testing, optimization, evaluation, and dissemination of highly innovative, effective, and low-cost Public eHealth solutions in the region to enrich the range of solutions available today;
3. To support the use, at the appropriate level, of successfully developed Public eHealth solutions to maximize e-SAC's impact; and
4. To assess the overall effectiveness of e-SAC's integrated approach.

e-SAC defined itself as an applied research project that attempted to answer the following research question: “what social and technical arrangements are most conducive to promoting equity-oriented public health outcomes through the development and application of innovative, effective, and low-cost ICT-based solutions?”

In order to help answer this question, e-SAC hired five Young Professionals (YPs), who were expected to “play a pivotal role by working as researchers, knowledge managers, and networkers in the region; developing and populating an online platform that represents the project main public ‘agora’; and designing and launching an innovation competition aimed at acknowledging and promoting in the region highly innovative, effective, simple and pleasantly ingenious Public eHealth solutions” (e-SAC Extension Application, 2013).

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3. Stakeholder Engagement

IDRC and the managers of the e-GOV and e-SAC projects agreed on implementing DE as a suitable evaluation approach prior to launching the projects. This decision had a relatively negative impact on the DE implementation of both projects as some stakeholders did not understand the rationale behind the decision (e-GOV) and others seemed to understand it but had difficulty foreseeing the implications of the decision (e-SAC).

3.1 The e-GOV Project

IDRC and the project managers' a priori decision of conducting DE was somewhat problematic because some of the key stakeholders who had not been part of the initial conversations could not understand the reasons for conducting DE. In order to overcome this issue, the evaluator chose to embed the DE process within a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) framework (Patton, 2008). This resulted into what the authors called a U-FDE process, whose validity as the name of a distinct evaluation practice is later discussed in this document. The evaluator covered the first three U-FE steps as thoroughly as possible. One of the first activities was to identify the key stakeholders and understand their roles, both in the project and in the evaluation process. e-GOV had multiple stakeholders based in different countries and belonging to very different organizations, which added additional layers of complexity to the project.

The main stakeholders of the projects were:

- The Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE).
- The Secretariat for Political Affairs of the Organization of American States (OAS).
- Red Gealc (The Latin American and Caribbean e-Government Network).
- Four research groups located in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico.
- The e-Gov offices of Colombia, El Salvador, Panama and Dominican Republic.
- Four Liaison Officers (one per participating e-Gov office)
- The International Development Research Centre (IDRC).
- Three different consulting groups.



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At the project level, the IOHE was responsible for coordinating the research component, overseeing and constantly interacting with the research groups that received funding from the project, which were located in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. The Secretariat for Political Affairs of the OAS was in charge of coordinating the work of the Liaison Officers through Red Gealc, with headquarters in Uruguay. The Liaison Officers were located in Colombia, El Salvador, Panama and Dominican Republic. Given the fact that the project managers, the researchers and the Liaison Officers were located in different countries, most of the interaction happened virtually. IDRC helped fund the project, including the monitoring and evaluation component. From the evaluation standpoint, it was important to determine the roles of the different stakeholders, as well as their respective level of engagement.

This information is shown in Table 1.

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3.1 The e-GOV Project Continued

Table 1: Stakeholders roles in the U-FDE process of the e-Gov project

Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder	Country	Role in the U-FDE Process	Level of Engagement
Project managers	Organization of American States	United States	Evaluation client	Low: read and commented reports.
	The Inter-American Organization for Higher Education	Canada	Evaluation client	Low: read and commented reports.
	Gealc Network	Uruguay	Primary intended user	Critical: helped formulate the key evaluation questions, reviewed reports, helped with data collection.
Liaison Officers	Liaison Officers	Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, Dominican Republic	Primary intended user	Critical: helped formulate the key evaluation questions, reviewed reports, helped with data collection.
e-Government offices	Participating e-Government offices	Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, Peru	Audience interested in the report	Low: Provided data when required. Received report.
Researchers	Participating research groups	Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Mexico	None	Very low: Provided data when requested.
Consultants	Developmental evaluator	Paraguay	Evaluator	Critical: facilitated evaluation process.
	Other evaluator	Chile	None	Low: Exchanged data sporadically.
	Communication consultant	Chile	None	None
Funder	IDRC	Canada	Audience interested in the report	Minimal: read the reports and provided some feedback.

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3.2 The e-SAC Project

The e-SAC project had multiple stakeholders throughout the Americas and across different institutions. In general, most of the stakeholders supported the idea of conducting DE.

As shown in Table 2, the evaluator identified the stakeholders, their respective role and level of engagement within the evaluation process.

Table 2: Stakeholders roles in the U-FDE process of the e-SAC project

Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder	Country	Role in the U-FDE Process	Level of Engagement
Principal Investigators	PAHO & U of T	The Americas	Evaluation client	Worked closely with the project managers at a high, strategic level.
Project Managers	PAHO	LAC	Primary intended user	Critical. The project aimed to work as an integrated partnership between all members of the larger operational team.
Project Managers	U of T	Canada	Primary intended user	Critical. The project aimed to work as an integrated partnership between all members of the larger operational team.
Young Professionals	Young Professionals	Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, Peru	Primary intended user	Critical: helped formulate the key evaluation questions, reviewed reports, helped with data collection.
Innovation Developers	No identified party	LAC	None	Focus for the competition, applicants (participants)
Public Health Professionals	Public health professionals across the region, government	LAC region & North America	None	Engaged with the program, not the evaluation.
Funder	IDRC	Canada	Audience interested in the report	Minimal: read the reports.

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3.3 Political implications of the DE process

Some of the political implications associated with introducing and implementing a DE process are illustrated in the following interchange between the evaluators.

J - Hello Cameron. As we had talked, I completed my stakeholder analysis and was able to talk to some of the project managers of the e-Gov project.

C - That's great, Joaquin. I also was able to do mine. Did the project managers raise any concerns about the DE process and your role as evaluator?

J - Yes, I talked to some of them. There were a few concerns. The first concern is that a close interaction between the liaison officers and I - as the evaluator - could skew the conclusions on the effectiveness of the liaison officer role in the sense that the evaluator's intervention could become one of the success factors of the role. The question they had was "How effective would the role be in future projects that would not have enough funding to hire a developmental evaluator?" The other concern was that the DE process would only focus on the Liaison Officers. They asked me how would the other project components be evaluated?

C - How did you respond to that?

J - Well, I told them that the purpose of DE is to help develop a new model, so my role as the evaluator would not be to tell the Liaison officers what to do, but to help them reflect on some key observations so that they and their supervisor can make adjustments. If we document these decisions, the model could be replicated without the need of hiring developmental evaluator every time. Regarding the second point they made, I said that as the funder, IDRC was fine with evaluating just the liaison officer component. But given the fact that this was brought up in front of other people, some project managers seemed nervous about DE not complying with accountability requirements. So they want to hire another evaluator in order to evaluate the other project components.

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C - *These can be some of the challenges that one can have as a developmental evaluator. In the case of e-SAC, they didn't have the same questions, but I, as the evaluator, have some questions of my own. The biggest challenge I see is that there seems to be a problematic fit between the desire to develop something and a set of goals and objectives that are not developmental in nature. The project is progressing toward a specific goal that was laid out in the proposal, which is more reflective of traditional program planning. I think there is a misalignment between the language of DE (and the perceived fit it had with the project) and the plans and structures for project development put in place by the management team. There is both an overt and a tacit assertion that the e-SAC project will deliver what it set out to do, thus leaving little room to shape what is actually being done, limiting the utility of DE. It is unclear how DE will add value to this project as it is currently laid out.*

J - *Well, let's see how this all unfolds as the projects evolve.*

C - *Sure, we need to keep an eye on these issues and try to document them as much as we can.*



4. e-GOV and e-SAC from a DE Perspective: What was developed in each project?

At the heart of both projects was a desire to create and assess the impact of two innovative programs that sought to leverage three key change facilitators: 1) Young professionals, 2) ICT, and 3) public engagement using a blend of scientific, policy and practice-related topics to generate interest across the LAC region.

Both projects began with an interest in inviting in developmental evaluation as a possible method for assisting the teams and their stakeholders in learning more about the evolution and possible impact they were having on advancing innovation related to ICT and public engagement on government and eHealth issues respectively.

DE is intended to support innovation and the development of new models in real time. Thus, when embarking in a DE process, the key question is: what is being developed? This question is problematic, particularly with programs that are seeking to initiate or execute a novel project. What is being developed may not be entirely clear at the outset of the project and may change as the project evolves. A review of the literature on DE also suggests that innovation is not well defined within the scope of practice. None of the articles on DE clearly articulate the link between a definition of innovation and the activities used to develop and sustain the innovation as envisioned.

This lack of clarity around innovation posed challenges for the program evaluators as well as the programs as the evaluations were aimed at support evaluation of a thing. What thing was developed for each program varied and took different forms throughout the programs' life cycle.

e-GOV funded four research projects that were looking at different e-Government topics with the common objective of finding ways to place the most vulnerable in the centre of e-Government policies in LAC. The e-GOV project served as the coordinating means of connecting these funded projects. The most significant challenge researchers had was getting the attention from policymakers in order to share their findings. As a strategy to overcome this challenge, e-GOV hired five people (initially called Young Professionals) who sat at the e-Government offices of their countries and acted

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as liaisons between researchers and policymakers. These five people were given the title of Liaison Officers and their main duty was to disseminate relevant research findings and promote their incorporation into e-Government activities, plans or policies. However the Liaison Officer role was totally new to everyone and no actor within the project knew how to make it work effectively. Therefore, what was developed in e-GOV was the Liaison Officer role, and it became the focus of the DE process.

The e-SAC project had a clear operational definition of innovation from the start: the application of new knowledge to produce value. While appropriate for some contexts, the definition was too abstract to use as a guide for the DE because both new knowledge and value could be defined in many ways, depending on the audience and their place within the larger system. This problem of defining innovation in a clear, operational manner is far from unique to e-SAC and became an ongoing point of discussion for members of the project. From the outset, the e-SAC project sought to include DE as a central feature of its process, even if the answer to the question regarding what was being developed was still in an emergent state.

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5. Moving from DE theory to practice

Both programs initially sought to have DE play a role in guiding their development; however the realization of DE differed greatly between the two programs providing a unique pair of case studies that illustrate practical application of theory into practice.

5.1 Focusing the DE process on use

For many of the participants in the project, DE was a new concept. The 2010 publication of the seminal book on developmental evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton brought the approach to light within the evaluation and international developmental world. While the practice of using evaluation findings to guide program evolution and innovation was familiar to some, the explicit use of the term developmental evaluation was new to most of those involved in the project, including IDRC.

IDRC representatives had met with the e-GOV and e-SAC project managers before the evaluators came onboard, and they had agreed to use DE. Based on these previous conversations, the evaluators approached the project managers and other stakeholders assuming that there was enough buy-in to conduct DE. Such an assumption was wrong and led to some questioning about the suitability of DE, especially in the case of the e-GOV project. The evaluators' first lesson was that DE is not easy for people to understand, especially when it comes to understanding some of its implications. For instance, the developmental evaluator's role is very different to an evaluator's conventional role. In DE, the evaluator becomes actively engaged and becomes part of the team, requiring on-going interaction with specific stakeholders. Such an interaction needs substantial clarification around scope, duties, authority boundaries and workload.

During the first year of the e-GOV and the e-SAC projects, the evaluators took part of a DE mentorship program offered by the Social Innovation Generation at the University of Waterloo (Canada), which was extremely helpful to sort many of the initial challenges. It became quite evident that there was little readiness at the project level to implement DE, so one of the most valuable pieces of advice that came out of the mentorship was to conduct DE following a Utilization-Focused Evaluation process. This resulted into what the evaluators called Utilization-focused Developmental Evaluation (U-FDE),

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through which they covered (and adapted) the original twelve steps of the U-FE process (see Figure 1 on next page) to make DE more accessible and appropriate within each project. The twelve steps were covered in ways that were deemed necessary, but not always outright.

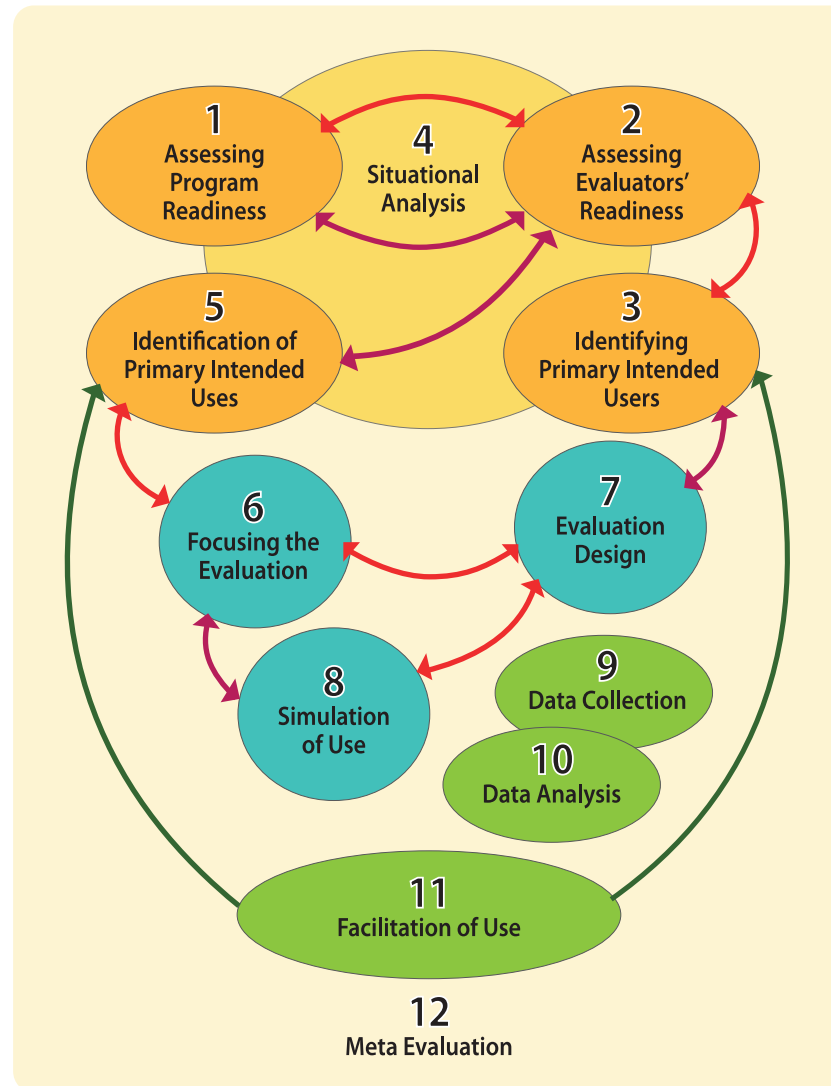
Adopting the U-FDE approach afforded the evaluators the following benefits:

1. Clearly identify the evaluation's primary intended users and understand the roles of the different stakeholders.
2. Define "help develop a new model" as the main purpose of the evaluation and "generate/ document strategic learning" as the primary intended use.
3. Define the evaluation scope and formulate relevant key evaluation questions.
4. Focus on collecting the data that seemed most relevant.
5. Provide on-going feedback in a systematic way in order to facilitate findings' use.

These contributions were helpful to stakeholders in their efforts to better understand the "developmental rationale", as DE is often too abstract to many audiences when explained in the absence of a context of use. Figure 1 outlines the 12 steps that a U-FE adopts and served as a guide for the work.

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Figure 1: the U-FE 12 steps (Patton, 2008; Ramirez and Brodhead, 2013)



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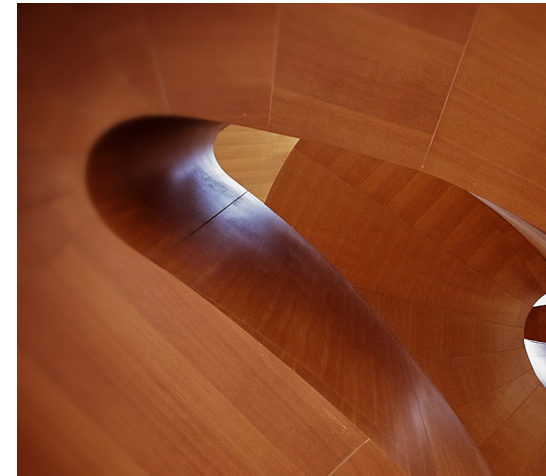
5.2 Defining the evaluation scope

Although the evaluators of the e-GOV and e-SAC projects tried to follow the U-FDE process in similar ways, at Step 6 they and their primary intended users ended up defining very different evaluation scopes. In the case of the e-GOV project, the scope was limited to the Liaison Officers (originally called Young Professionals, a term that was retained for the e-SAC project) component. In contrast, the e-SAC evaluation process was focused on the entire project, by request. Such a difference had a significant impact in terms of process implementation and probably on the results as well.

The evaluators explain their decisions and their implications as follows:

Joaquin: *In the case of the e-GOV project, the primary intended users (i.e. the Liaison Officers and their supervisor) and I decided to focus just on the Liaison Officer component, mainly based on three reasons: (i) that's what I understood I was meant to do when IDRC hired me as the project evaluator; (ii) the Liaison Officer role was the only "thing" that was being developed within the project; and (iii) the project managers hired another evaluator to evaluate the other components of the project. Although this was not required by any of the funding agencies, this took off all pressure from the DE process to deliver something related to the overall project.*

The main implications of working with this narrow scope were that we (i.e. the primary intended users and evaluator) were very focused on learning about the Liaison Officer role only, and we did it with total confidence because we knew that we were not expected to report on anything else. For me, another advantage was that I had total clarity on whom to engage and when, as I was interacting with a very specific group of users and could easily stay alert on the activities that I was monitoring. The main risk of adopting such a scope, which Michael Q. Patton wisely flagged as he mentored me, was that the Liaison Officer role could end up being evaluated as a standalone element, totally detached of what it was supposed to accomplish as part of a larger system, which was the e-GOV project. In order to avoid this from happening, I implemented two strategies within the evaluation process.



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The first strategy was to formulate a key evaluation question that linked the role to the overall purpose of the project. This led the primary intended user to the following evaluation question: To what extent does the Liaison Officer role help achieve the purpose of e-Government? How does it help? Such a question forced us to collect and analyze data related to the project's general objective, which was the advancement of e-Government in Latin America and the Caribbean. The second strategy was to establish some collaboration with the evaluation process that was looking at the overall project progress, so we agreed to collect and discuss data that would be relevant to the other evaluator. This helped us stay informed about the other components of the project without losing our primary focus.

Cameron: *The e-SAC project team, from the first encounter, was enthusiastic about the possibilities that a DE perspective could bring. The leadership team had seen a presentation on DE by a leading evaluator that introduced the general premise of the approach and its potential to support programs that were operating in environments of high complexity and focused on innovation. These two conditions were seen as key qualities to what e-SAC was planning to do so the idea that DE could be an integral part of the process was ingrained/instilled in the project's DNA.*

Certainly innovation is a common term used when speaking about eHealth so there was a natural fit at the outset with what DE had to offer. Yet, while there was enormous enthusiasm for the idea of DE, there was less clarity around what was being developed within the program itself where DE could provide a tangible benefit. This was a more complicated issue, because the project had established ambitious goals and a project that was to revolve around two specific goals being met (namely the development of an online knowledge repository platform and the establishment and launch of an innovation competition) that had clear specifications laid out in advance and were deemed to be critical to the success of the project. This left little area to develop if the DE was to be focused on the entire e-SAC initiative.

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The e-SAC project operated using a decentralized leadership model that aimed for consensus-style decision-making and encouraged wide participation in decisions from all members of the team, not just the leaders. This had substantial implications for determining who the primary intended user was to be, particularly because there were different accountability systems in place for each group of participants even if the decision making was shared. Further investigation into the manner in which decisions were made about specific areas of the project suggested that the primary intended user was to be the e-SAC operational leadership team.

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6. U-FE and U-FDE: Are they really different?

The evaluators of the e-GOV and the e-SAC projects opted to apply DE through the lens of a U-FE process, referring to it as U-FDE. The evaluators reflected on this distinction in light of the choices they made and the challenges they had in communicating with others about what DE was and how it could be used. This led to the question: is there a real need to call such a practice a different name? Or will U-FE suffice?

The only justification for coming up with a new name would be that U-FE and U-FDE would in fact be two different things. This section provides the following reflections in order to determine how different they are.

6.1 The work pace:

Given that the use of DE is providing on-going feedback in order to generate strategic learning as a new model is developed, the first difference that stands out between U-FE and U-FDE is the pace of feedback and its (potential) integration. Since primary intended users expect continuous feedback, U-FDE tends to have a much faster pace. One of the evaluator's duties is to describe to the primary intended users what he or she is seeing as the project unfolds, so there is a constant pressure to report something. A very relieving piece of advice that Michael Q. Patton gave the evaluators when they did not know what to report at the beginning of e-GOV and e-SAC because none of the projects were making notable progress in developing their products was "well, if nothing is happening, you still have to tell them that nothing is happening because that is what you are seeing." So in the case of e-GOV and e-SAC, U-FDE covered the same first seven U-FE steps that lead to the design of the evaluation system, but at very fast pace due to the increased pressure to start reporting.

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6.2. The evaluator's engagement level:

Because U-FDE is about providing on-going feedback, the level of engagement between the evaluator and the primary intended users is much higher than in non-developmental U-FE and there can potentially be more informal interaction than in non-developmental U-FE due to the more frequent exchange of e-mails, calls, etc. Developmental evaluators are often part of the team or heavily involved in consultations, communication flows (e.g., email conversation chains) and team meetings, even if it is simply to review and report back findings from the evaluation.

6.3 Data simulation criticality:

Step 8 of U-FE is about simulating the use of findings in order to determine how useful the data that primary intended users intend to collect would be. In non-developmental U-FE processes, the simulation of data use is critical because collection of the same type of data occurs over a longer period of time and there would typically be fewer chances to make adjustments than when conducting U-FDE. This does not mean that simulation of use is not important in the case of U-FDE, but it is not critical because due to the higher frequency of reports, the evaluator can adjust the data and the way he or she presents it throughout the project. Although there is an initial simulation of use, U-FDE process seems to incorporate an extra step in which the data is constantly tested and adjusted according to its relevance and usefulness. This extra step could be called "data usefulness assessment" and it requires the evaluator to be very attentive to how primary intended users use the data and should constantly seek feedback with questions so like "is this type of data being enough useful?", "how do you think it can be enhanced?". It would also be beneficial to start each report with a short reflection on how the previous report was used.



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6.4 Data collection and analysis timing:

In non-developmental U-FE processes, data collection and analysis occur as separate steps. Data analysis, in particular, occurs at very specific moments, which is just at the moment of preparing a report. In contrast, in U-FDE data collection and analysis occur more as an integrated step because in order to provide useful feedback, data needs to be constantly collected, analyzed and interpreted. Therefore, the evaluator seldom has time to do data collection and analysis as separate steps.

6.5 On-going versus static facilitation of findings' use

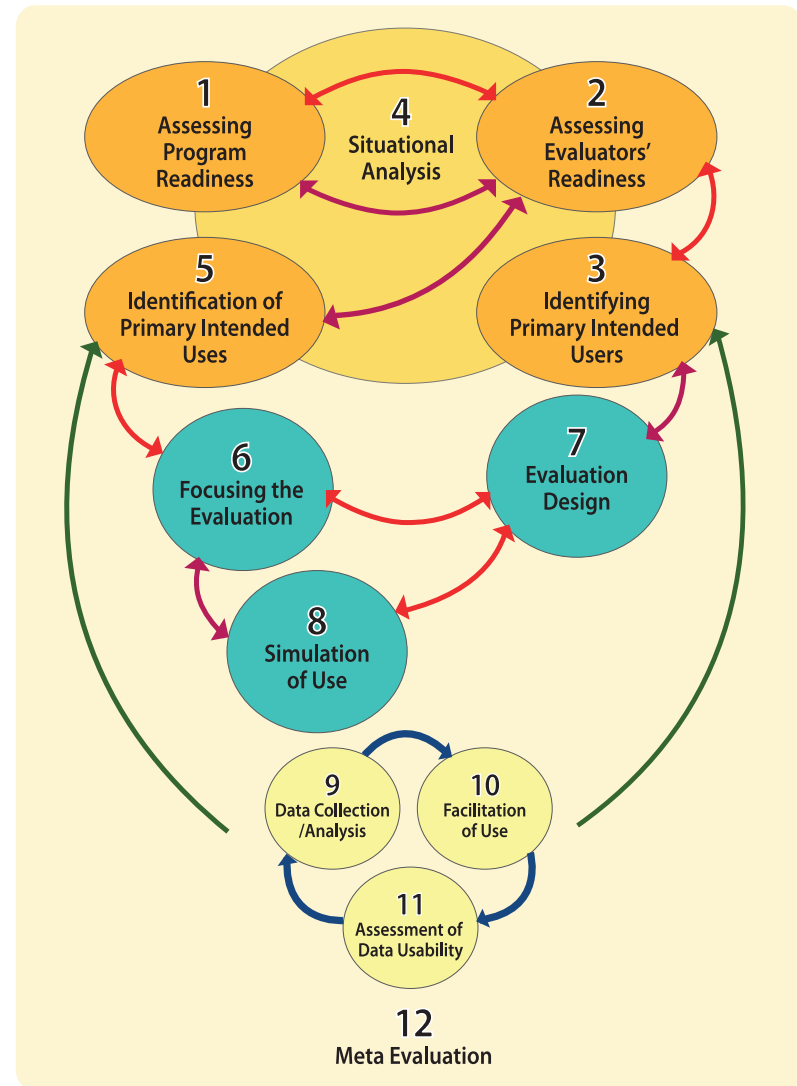
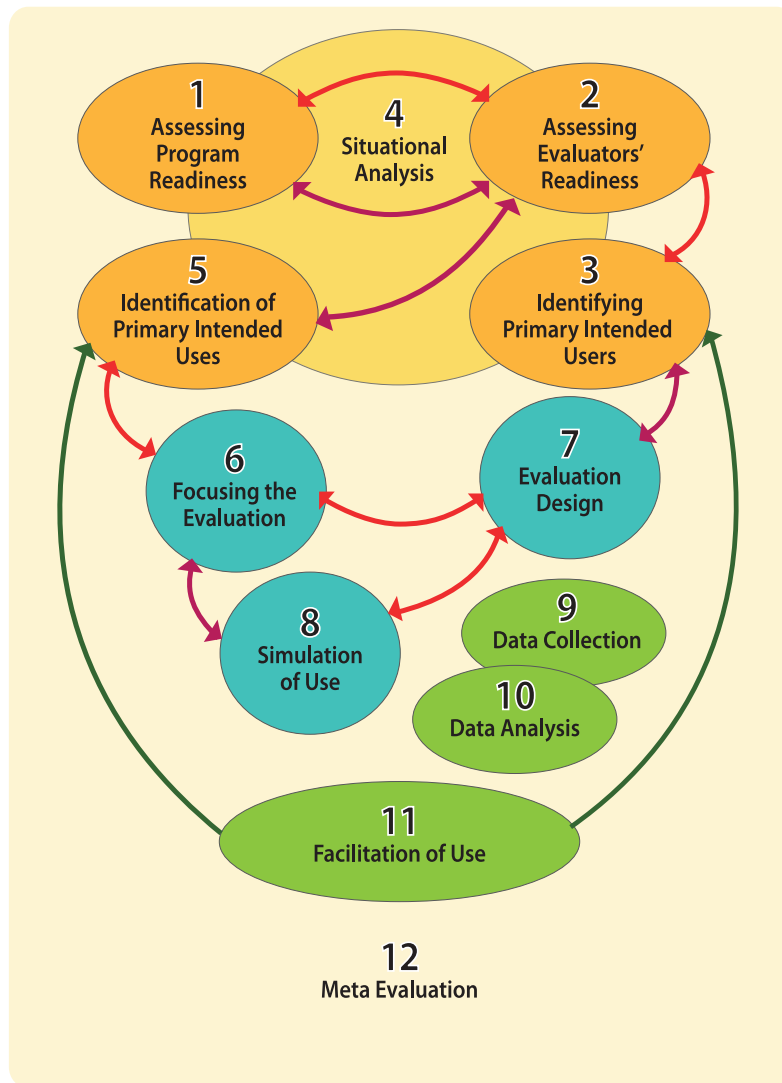
The facilitation of findings' use corresponds to U-FE's step 11 and it usually occurs toward the end of the evaluation process (Figure 1). However, in order to effectively support strategic learning related to the development of new models, the U-FDE process forces the evaluator to facilitate the use of findings continuously and right from the moment data collection begins.

6.6 Different data collection, analysis and use process:

Based on the outlined differences, after the steps that comprise the design of the evaluation system (1 through 7), U-FDE incorporates an on-going cycle that involves (i) data collection/analysis; (ii) facilitation of findings use; and (iii) assessment of data usability. This cycle (see Figure 2) does not normally occur in a non-developmental U-FE process and very much relates to the art of nudging or helping innovators move closer to their goals by providing relevant real-time feedback (Langlois, Blanchet-Cohen & Beer, 2013).

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Figure 2: The U-FE process (left) and the U-FDE process (right)



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6.7 Deliverables:

The U-FE and U-FDE are also different in terms of deliverables. In non-developmental U-FE users typically expect a mid-term and a final evaluation report. These reports tend to follow a standard format, tend to be rather long documents (at least 25 pages) and are considerably spread in time (at least six months). In the case of U-FDE reporting occurs much more frequently and the reports seem to be more practical when they are short (8-12 pages). For instance, in the case of the e-GOV project, the evaluator provided reports every 3 months. Additionally, the evaluator compiled the highlights of these reports into a final report. In the e-SAC project, reporting was more often done as part of ongoing participation in team meetings. In this case, reporting resembled any other standing item on the meeting agenda and allowed rapid discussion of issues on a regular basis (e.g., every 8-12 weeks). Due to the innovative nature of U-FDE, the learning process that results from it lends itself to other non-conventional deliverables. For example, the Liaison Officers who acted as primary evaluation users in the e-GOV project, became motivated to write a document that they called “The Liaison Officer Handbook” hoping to leave a legacy that can guide future generations of officers. To them, this was a more valuable contribution than the reports themselves.

6.8 Emphasis on emergence and complexity:

One of the central features of a U-FDE is a focus on complexity-oriented concepts as a key mediator in the programming environment and context. In both programs there was little mention of complexity in shaping the program, managing processes and focusing outcomes. U-FE does not specify such a context. The emphasis on complexity and concepts like emergence, self-organization, feedback and path dependencies is an often overlooked, but critical difference between U-FDE and U-FE. For example, in the e-SAC project the initial communications and knowledge translation plan relied on standard tools like websites and webinars with less of a focus on social media like Facebook, Twitter and

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Google+. The Young Professionals soon found they could reach other interested parties in ways that couldn't have been planned in advance and that these parties self-organized around e-SAC content to create a small community of learners. By paying attention to the deviations from the plan and the emergent properties that came from this complexity, new value was made evident and innovation was facilitated in that part of the program. Is it necessary to coin the term U-FDE as a distinct evaluation approach?

Here is another exchange of opinions between the evaluators...

Cameron - Joaquin, given the differences and similarities that we observed between U-FE and U-FDE, what is your opinion on the language? Should we call them each something different?

Joaquin - I am not sure. On one hand I think that it could make sense because although they are similar, U-FDE has some unique elements that make it different to U-FE. Although both are based on an iterative, non-linear process, they have very different dynamics. From this perspective I would say that U-FE is more static than U-FDE. So I think that having two separate names would capture this difference in the process dynamics. However, I don't see it as something very important, as long as we can convey the message that U-FDE is an adaptation of U-FE that works well when evaluating projects that are developmental in nature. Having separate names is not so important as long as practitioners understand the conceptual differences between the two modalities. What do you think?

C - I come back to the fundamental nature of the systems that we are exploring as the starting point followed by the manner in which stakeholders envision program evaluation data being used. If the program context is dealing with immense complexity and data is required to inform ongoing decision-making and adaptations based on this complexity, then a U-FDE approach is necessary; a U-FE approach will be insufficient. However, identifying complexity and discussing programs in term like "self-organization", "emergence", "attractors", and "co-evolution" is not common nomenclature for program developers and managers, let alone evaluators. Without attention to these concepts in practice, it is more useful to focus on U-FE.

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J - Well, we are making a point about the differences and perhaps we should leave it to each one to call them what makes most sense to them.

7. Other key findings and reflections

7.1 Problematic nature of the 'developmental evaluation' concept.

The concept of Developmental Evaluation proved to be highly problematic from the start of the project. The e-SAC and e-GOV leadership teams were first exposed to the concept of DE prior to the original application for IDRC funding at an event in Washington, DC. After seeing DE presented, the teams specifically requested that it be considered for use in the project, which led to the development of the parallel project that became the DE evaluation. Once funded, the evaluators made several presentations to the e-SAC and e-GOV teams on the nature and general approach of DE. Although theories, methods and strategies were discussed on multiple occasions, it was evident that there were barriers that made difficult the adoption of DE as an evaluation approach. Such barriers were related to both of the words in DE: developmental and evaluation.

In the case of the e-SAC project, the term developmental was problematic because of the structure of the goals of the project and the way outcomes were specified at the outset and provided the focus for the project. Although the project team was allowed to alter their goals, the framing of these goals as key to the project and highly desirable to achieve shaped scope and organization of these projects that created a problematic position for the DE proposition. By framing the goals as all-or-nothing enterprises it limited the value in what DE could offer and, as these goals were defined in absolute terms, alternative outcomes were not considered. A further issue was the size of the goals, which made them difficult to scale back in a manner that allowed for smaller, incremental goals. For example, the online knowledge platform had to have content, functionality and security simultaneously as a complete (even if not 'finished') product. This prompted DE-related questions about what was being developed in the first place.



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In the case of the e-GOV project, most of the components were not non-developmental in the sense that most of their implementation mechanisms and outcomes were clearly pre-defined and did not allow significant adjustments, so applying DE to evaluate the entire project was unrealistic. It was for that reason that the opportunity to look at a sub-component of the project – the Liaison Officers professional development – was chosen.

The term “evaluation” is also problematic in that it invokes long-held preconceptions about what the activity is about, namely performance measurement, outcome and impact assessment, and determining adherence to program objectives. Although alternative phrases like strategic learning were introduced during the e-SAC and the e-GOV projects as a way to re-frame the concept, the term evaluation continued to provoke reactions that implied that DE could produce some of the same kinds of outcomes as a traditional evaluation. For example, DE was not an approach that could tell program teams what “worked” and what did not. Alternative choices of phrasing such as strategic learning, real-time evaluation, or utilization-focused evaluation were used.

In the case of the e-SAC project, these terms did not help overcome barriers to engagement, in part because they introduced confusion about what the role of the evaluator and the nature of the evaluation data. For example, the idea of learning was problematic because it appeared to be linked with ideas around instruction as in teaching content rather than as in fostering an adaptive, ongoing process for the team. Further, the DE was treated as something separate from much of the project’s day-to-day evolutionary development, which further isolated learning and integration of feedback into a discrete activity rather than a part of a symbiotic process. DE was not something that could provide learning that was discrete from the program’s evolution.

In the case of the e-GOV project, embedding the DE process within a larger utilization-focused evaluation framework was particularly helpful to reduce some of the barriers because it allowed to clarify the evaluator’s role, as well as the purpose and intended uses of the evaluation process. This allowed the evaluator and the primary users to focus their attention on the only component of the project that was truly developmental, which was the implementation of the Liaison Officer role. However, the term evaluation remained problematic because it limited the degree of trust that the

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evaluator could build with some of the actors, who occasionally feared being judged on their individual performance. This limited trust at time hindered the learning process because it prevented issues and events to be discussed more openly.

To illustrate the challenges, we present our further dialogue between the evaluators:

Cameron: I am thrilled that the two projects are interested in developmental evaluation, but I am a bit concerned that they think they are getting something a little different than we are offering.

Joaquin: I feel the same way. There is a clear sense among the program team that there is something in developmental evaluation that has benefit for them, but I am not sure they know fully what it is. Often when we talk about developmental processes there is a sense that we are on the same page, but when the term evaluation is used the confusion sets in and the discussion often turns to ways to assess value and impose judgment on the data regarding the program's effectiveness or efficiency in process – typical evaluation talk.

C: One of the challenges is that the language of evaluation for years has been about that imposition of judgment and assessment on programs and this is a new way of looking at how evaluation can be used as a form of feedback for looking at programs as they develop.

J: It's about documenting the evolution of a program and making strategic decisions along the way and then documenting what comes from those decisions and adaptations. I find that the program staff worry that we're jeopardizing the integrity of the evaluation by messing around with the program while it's running. Even more problematic is when we adapt the actual evaluation methods to accommodate changes in the program, which strikes some as not being true to evaluation.

C: That's why anchoring our approach to U-FE is useful as it grounds something unfamiliar

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like DE in something that is at least somewhat familiar given that U-FE has been around for many years and is considered a legitimate approach within the evaluation community.

J: Agreed.

7.2. Innovation and the developmental evaluator.

An external evaluator working closely with a team brings a useful perspective as an informed outsider. At the same time, by providing detached counsel on evaluation matters alone, the evaluator removes her/himself from the politics, procedures and investment in particular courses of action, encouraging a (potentially) more objective assessment of activities. However the evaluator may find herself/himself in a position of great struggle with questions about whether and when the evaluator should play the role of innovation facilitator more directly rather than the one of a neutral supporter. Many questions remain, such as:

- If the developmental evaluator is facilitating the collection and presentation of data to support strategic learning, what role does he/she play in supporting the integration of that information into strategy and learning?
- If the developmental evaluator identifies areas that are challenging learning and knowledge integration, what responsibility does he/she have for facilitating discussion of these issues beyond simply pointing them out?
- What role does the developmental evaluator play in supporting education about DE to stakeholders and program participants?

Since DE is largely related to strategic learning in real time, the developmental evaluator ideally needs to be proactive at integrating the learning process into relevant program's activities. The evaluator's approach to working with e-SAC was project-centred, thus the benefits of the DE were to be largely defined by the e-SAC team. The evaluator would ask questions like: What do you want to learn? This made the potentially incorrect assumption that the e-SAC team knew what it wanted or needed to



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learn in support of its project goals and how DE would aid that learning. The result was a lack of full engagement with the DE process on the part of e-SAC and a lack of full engagement with the e-SAC activities by the evaluator as there was not a common ground to work from. Without a clear sense of what was to be developed, the DE was limited.

7.3 Proactive integration DE into programming

Drawing on the experience of the e-GOV project, the evaluator made efforts to adapt the strategy towards a U-FE approach. This helped ground learning around use, which is more practical than development and makes it easier for most people to engage in the process. The evaluator and the primary users were able to clearly define that the purpose of the evaluation would be to support the development of the Liaison Officer role as a new policy influence mechanism. Defining such a purpose had at least two major benefits: (i) Agreeing on a very specific evaluation scope; and (ii) Determining that the findings of the learning process would be used to adapt the Liaison Officer role so that it would be more effective. Based on the intended purpose and use, the primary users formulated key evaluation questions and proposed a data collection schedule that guided the learning experience and allowed to integrate the DE process into the daily activities of those engaged in the learning process.

7.4 Developmental duties for DE sustainability.

In large projects, such as e-SAC or e-GOV, the division of labour tends to be complex and certain jobs, like the ones of the YP's or the Liaison Officers, can end up positioned in the middle of overlapping duties and responsibilities. While these duties and activities may increase throughout the project, they may lack a developmental nature, so making adjustments along the way based on the DE process feedback can become difficult, if not impossible. For example, in the e-SAC project, social media activities like conducting Google Hangouts were additional tasks taken on by the YP's, but did not seek generating any networking change. Organizational structures should also incorporate some flexibility in order to allow adaptation if required.

7.5 DE as a collective learning journey.

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Among the central issues with strategic learning outcomes is the tie to the idea of a project as a uniform group of learners. In the e-SAC project there were clear differences among actors in terms of years of experience, disciplinary backgrounds, and roles. Such differences suggest that there were different learning needs within the project. The team's approach to the project as a team made it more challenging to find learning goals that crossed all roles and still were meaningful within a DE context. For example, areas of high learning potential like social media, were not activities that were engaged in any depth with anyone other than the YP's. Additionally, the concepts of academic and practice learning were entangled, which complicated the process of extracting and documenting what was learned, when, by whom and for what purpose.

A related problem is that public e-Health is both an academic and a practice-based phenomenon that can introduce both synergies and conflicts because of this dualistic role. Having academic experience in e-Health for example, did not necessarily imply the ability to use the technologies for engaging others in public e-Health communications well. Thus, there was a gap between the use and understanding of tools of social media between the leadership team and the YP's. A more nuanced approach to the evaluation would have possibly recognized the distinct learning character of the team and potentially developed a DE approach that supported the staff in different ways. While this might have still been problematic given the specificity of the goals, such an approach might have been able to be more effective and could be applicable to other DE projects. The same learning differences were identified within the e-GOV project. However, the very narrow focus of the DE process on one single project component helped overcome the challenge, as well as working with a group of primary users that only had five members.

7.6. Learning objectives and milestones to effectively support innovation.

DE is also about integrating the feedback of the learning process into decision-making as a means of supporting innovation development. Specific milestones are necessary in order to achieve such integration. In the case of the e-SAC project, the approach to allowing innovation 'to happen' might have been more appropriate if there had been greater alignment between the various participants and the

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goals set for innovation. The e-SAC project team largely viewed the innovation as being something catalyzed by the products, not as something fostered during the creation process of those products. With two key target goals -- the launch of the platform and the launch of the innovation competition -- being the focus and both of them delayed, the opportunity to assess innovation and related learning was reduced given that the platform was launched in an incomplete state and the innovation competition launched as a request for applications, yet those applications not approved until almost one year later.

7.7. Defining real-time learning within the DE process.

The DE is meant to be a mechanism that supports real-time learning. The focus of the learning and the definition of what “real time” means should be co-defined along with key terms like “innovation” and “development” to ensure that they are appropriate for the context and situation. In the context of the e-SAC project, this left tremendous ambiguity over what was to be learned, when and by whom. The key issue and main challenge was treating the e-SAC team (as comprised of the leadership/management team and YP’s together) as a singular entity. While it was acknowledged that everyone would learn different things in different ways, it was assumed that the knowledge would be shared and integrated as a team. This was not a helpful assumption.

For the e-SAC leadership team, the lessons were largely organizational and logistical. Learning how to co-create across two different organizational cultures, one that had responsibilities to units across the Americas and the other with responsibilities for generating a certain type and quality of research knowledge, with a great deal of shared spaces in between proved difficult. Furthering the challenge was the matter of operational responsibility and timing with team members virtually located across the Americas, in different settings, and over multiple time zones. For the YP’s the learning was about professional development and outreach to public health innovators. The YP’s were the front line of communications and dialogue with the network of professionals who represented the community of interest for e-SAC. YP’s were able to learn how to negotiate the organizational complexities of different jurisdictions, regions, professional disciplines, and organizational cultures within and beyond PAHO. The YP’s direct connections with these professionals and innovators provided a key source of learning.

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7.8 Developmental evaluation foundations on complexity.

DE is something that is primed for interest. One of the often neglected aspects of DE is the connection to complexity and its role in supporting innovation and systemic intervention. A missing element from the discourse on DE is its reliance on complexity science as a foundation. Too often this is left out of the discussion. Failure to embrace and acknowledge complexity into the program is a fundamental flaw in terms of DE, which is intended to support learning and development within complex systems. Mapping the patterns of change that are observed or desired in relation to the interconnected systems in place is one of the ways in which DE can support meaningful, productive change strategies. Patton (2010) recommends starting with a baseline analysis of the system fundamentals and mapping these to provide a means to guide and test ideas against system dynamics (p.224). A look at the literature on DE finds little mention of this process or positioning programs within a systems frame, presumably because there is an assumption that the baseline system dynamics are largely known.

The idea of 'evaluating for innovation' sounds appropriate for a project like e-SAC, but practically is wrought with difficulties. Environmental scans, literature reviews and previous collaboration histories with the participants are but three sources of system dynamic information and all were known prior to e-SAC being launched. Beyond the fact that the individuals working in leadership roles had some collaborative history as individuals, not as teams, there was little in this source of data to suggest that there would be some challenges with DE. Both groups had experience working on issues of innovation using novel techniques and technologies, however what wasn't considered at the beginning of the project was the ability of these groups to innovate within a process, repeatedly and together, within a context like the one that e-SAC posed. Doing so may have raised useful questions to focus the evaluation and development strategy of the project early on.

e-SAC's approach to creating its initiative was based on an ordered systems approach, so a traditional logic model and monitoring framework would have provided the evaluative feedback to e-SAC that might have been more conducive to learning. The focus on specific, achievable outcomes framed the learning process for e-SAC, which undermined a learning approach based on DE and opened an opportunity for learning based on more traditional program monitoring feedback. Thus, data was sought that supported the goals set forth, rather than open opportunities for adapting the goal trajectory, which is

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consistent with viewing the project as fitting an ordered system. Consequently, this perspective drove the strategy for using evaluative feedback to support the project.

In the case of e-GOV, the theoretical discourse around complexity was not made explicit when DE was discussed as a learning approach. However, in practice, but most of the actors acknowledged the complexity of implementing the Liaison Officer role due to the fact that it was something new to all the actors involved. Since the Liaison Officer role was the sole focus of the DE process and nobody knew to how to make it work, there was openness to using data to learn and make adjustments, as opposed to proving the achievement of pre-established outcomes. Once again, the learning scope between e-SAC and e-GOV made a significant difference in the effectiveness of DE.

7.9. DE is not the right approach for all projects

Following the previous point, the issue of delivering feedback, provoking thought on developmental issues, and facilitating discussion on project scope and focus was made more challenging by the leadership models used in e-SAC. The hybrid leadership structure of the project combined with team members located throughout the Americas, convening for group meetings electronically every few weeks, combined with a quest for a consensus approach to decision-making made it difficult to find the appropriate space for presenting, processing and acting on information that could potentially transform the direction of the project. Although the focus of a project may be on innovation, one of the means for innovation is design thinking, an iterative and developmental process of problem framing, finding and solution exploration. Design thinking is about testing out innovations and assessing their fit with the audience and objectives. Some projects cannot adopt such type of thinking due to the non-developmental nature of the project itself, organizational culture or time constraints, among other factors. DE is not meant for every project and its suitability needs to be assessed based on the conditions and objectives of each individual project.

7.10. DE and the design challenge.

A fundamental assumption built into much of the discussion of DE is that programs know how to de-

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sign. However, design while the program is in progress requires a different set of skills, knowledge and sense-making capabilities than designing something prior to launch. In the case of e-SAC, much of the effort was poised to create a platform on the Internet. The investment in the project was anchored towards programming support and content development. As such, the initial movement to development was curtailed. The same applied for the launch of the program itself. The intention was to create a large profile at the level of the Americas. This may have been too ambitious to initiate a project that was novel on so many levels. Without an established track record of 1) using a YP model, 2) innovation competitions, and 3) implementing across the myriad regions, countries and local public health contexts, the number of variables impacting the intervention was too high. A question is: was the PAHO unit of analysis the right one? Should a smaller experimental unit of one of the member countries been more appropriate for experimentation? One of the lessons here is from the Lean Start-up approach (Reis, 2011) and Agile development community where small, workable models are developed and tested and then modified. e-SAC sought to develop a large program with relatively few options for testing small. The potential to pivot was limited beyond the earliest stages of the project.

Designing and developing a model in complex environments takes time. In the e-GOV project the evaluation primary users also struggled with the issue of “designing on the go”, especially because the duration of the project was too short to acquire the required design skills and allow substantial changes. Although the Liaison Officers were on 18-months contracts, the DE process only lasted 13 months. This was enough time to help shape the role to a point where it seemed to work, but certainly was not enough time to stabilize and test the model, so it is difficult to predict the long-term effectiveness of the design. A possible way to deal with this issue would be to define the scope of the design activity for the duration of the project. Although the evaluator did not make it explicit in advance, the design scope of the DE process of the e-GOV project was to discover and describe the main patterns of effectiveness of the role. The fact that these patterns have not been fully tested does not mean that there was no design activity or that the evaluation approach was not developmental.

7.11. Risk assessment and tolerance for failure.

Promoting a high profile innovation competition and aiming at transforming the use of ICT's for social

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determinants of health and health equity across a region is an example of an overly bold objective for a project intending to adopt a DE approach. There is nothing wrong with projects having a tacit spirit of wanting to do something big and bold, but DE seems to be better suited for smaller, incremental projects that can have high levels of tolerance for failure. Is your risk tolerance for failure high enough for embarking in DE?

Like e-SAC, projects seeking innovation can produce an enormous volume of content, procedure manuals, and documentation. Activity and particularly process documentation is very important to DE, but excessive attention to documentation may unfairly guide projects away from innovating. Sense-making through large volumes of documentation can become a challenge. Furthermore, e-SAC adopted a consensus-oriented preference for decision-making coupled with geographic distance among actors. This contributed to generate enormous volumes of email messages that paradoxically lead to less communication. Developmental evaluators need to be wise at selecting the right information and at filtering out whatever may distract her or him from what really matters to innovation. Developmental evaluators also need to learn to choose the right media and time to communicate relevant feedback in such a way that it does not get lost as background noise. These skills seem to be more an intuitive, learn-as-you-go instincts than things that can be easily conveyed through theory.

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7.12. Managing and prioritizing the language of innovation

Developmental evaluation brings enormous potential and challenges to the evaluation environment that need careful consideration before adopting it as an approach. The experience with two case studies presented in this document reflect that the very idea of DE is a challenge to communicate and it is hard for programs to understand what it entails for operations, decision-making, and outcomes. For instance, terms that are inherent to DE, such as “innovation” “developmental” and even “evaluation” need to be clarified and their meaning needs to be negotiated along the way. The developmental evaluator’s role is quite different from that of a conventional evaluator. Programs need to consider what it means to invite an evaluator more fully into the program and what it means to be actively engaged in the evaluation. DE also requires on-going interaction with stakeholders, too and such interaction demands substantial clarification around scope, duties, authority boundaries and workload. DE is about integrating the feedback of the learning process into decision-making as a means of supporting innovation development, so specific learning objectives and milestones are necessary in order to achieve such integration.

The shift from episodic to regular reporting is another key difference between DE and other evaluations. DE is meant to be a mechanism that supports real-time learning, however the definition of what “real time” means should be co-defined. DE is not meant for every project and its suitability needs to be carefully assessed based on the conditions and objectives of each individual project and its capacities (and desire) to learn and adapt their everyday approach to their work.

For developmental evaluators, there is a need to be judicious in their information handling approach. Developmental evaluators must be selective in what information they gather and ensure that they foster the sense-making capabilities in themselves and the team to filter out extraneous information that can distract her or him from what really matters to innovation. Developmental evaluators also need to learn to choose the right media and time to communicate relevant feedback in such a way

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that it does not get lost as background noise. These skills seem to be more an intuitive, learn-as-you-go instincts than things that can be easily conveyed through theory.

8. Conclusions

In agreement with Langlois et al (2013), developmental evaluation can be thought of as “the art of the nudge”, bringing innovators and decision-makers closer to their goals by presenting data and observations in smaller, persistent ‘bites’ that allow programs to shift and pivot on the go without the need for massive upheaval and change. The practice of servant leadership is one well-suited to the developmental evaluator who helps innovators navigate through complexity.

Big, bold shorter-term goals for a program are exciting. However, DE might be best suited to those whose goals are bolder in the longer term. Smaller, nimble projects that seek to make incremental gains consistently and have a high tolerance for failure are well-suited to DE. The two case studies presented here illustrate the benefits of thinking small, while acting on a larger stage in support of a bigger set of goals. DE worked best when small, continuous adaptations were made instead of seeking to make major innovations happen at once. While challenging, DE has shown promise as a means of focusing programs on outcomes, process and strategy together, which might be its biggest contribution. For programs operating in areas of high complexity and demand for innovation, DE might serve the role of catalyst for change and support the kind of accountability and servant leadership that brings results and not just rhetoric.



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An abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous small triangles in various colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, pink) arranged in a larger triangular shape, set against a black background.

Thank you.

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