



Rippling Out!

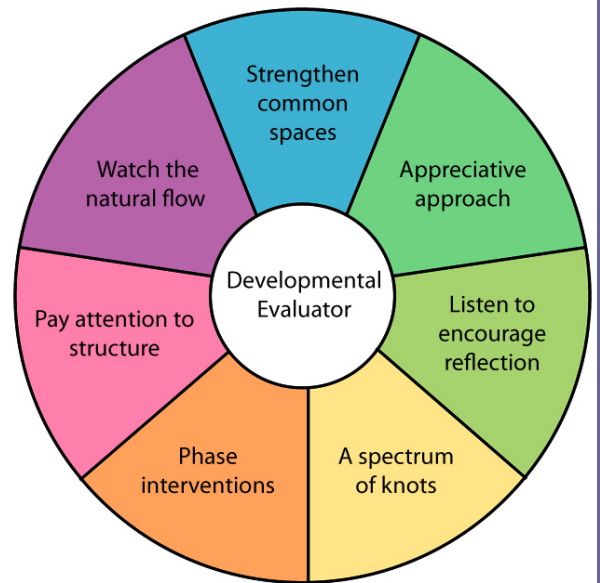
The Art of the Nudge: 7 Practices that Guide Developmental Evaluation

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Developmental Evaluation is a process of observation and intervention designed to support the real-time development of complex initiatives. Developmental Evaluators encourage generative group learning, interconnections, and decision making, specific to the context at hand. A relevant and current example of Developmental Evaluation, in action, is the "YouthScape" initiative.

YouthScape's intent is to increase the resiliency of communities by leveraging the capacity of marginalized young people in planning and implementing community development initiatives. The initiative is based on the belief that the meaningful involvement of excluded and disengaged youth in their communities, makes stronger communities. The expectation was that YouthScape would not only be emergent, but also innovative and transformative. This is exactly the kind of conditions Developmental Evaluation was established to support.

In each of the five YouthScape communities, there is an individual Developmental Evaluator, with myself as coach and Developmental Evaluator for the national-level systems. This group has learned and worked together, creating distinct applications of Developmental Evaluation for each site.



This issue of "Rippling Out" introduces seven significant practices that have emerged from our collective work.



Strengthening common spaces

There are various ways people organize to create *common spaces* (e.g. meetings, committees, conference calls, action groups).

When common spaces work with principles of cooperation, trust and respect, there is increased capacity for group learning and development. A common space with these qualities encourages a diversity of skills and perspectives, and creates optimum conditions for innovation.

"I created a space to let people talk about what they felt needed to be talked about."

Developmental Evaluator

An appreciative approach

The appreciative approach focuses attention on people's strengths and potential. It builds capacity in individuals, organizations and communities. It also draws on those resources that already exist in an individual or group. An appreciative approach looks past threats and constraints, for strategies and ideas that stimulate collective action.

"We often talk about negative things; we also need to give a positive perspective to things."

Developmental Evaluator

Listening, to encourage reflection

Creating moments of *pause*, to listen carefully, can cut through the surface layer of busyness common to complex initiatives. This intentional listening, allows the *heart* of issues to surface, as well as the genuine motivation of individuals. When followed by caring questions and easily understood written documentation of the exchange, *listening* will build the learning capacity of an organization.

"I heard an idea in the meeting and then encouraged others to listen to it because I sensed it had energy. Otherwise, the idea could have gotten lost."

A spectrum of knots

Misunderstanding, frustration, disagreement, and other points of friction, are a natural part of dynamic and unpredictable initiatives such as YouthScape. At times, the problems are straightforward, and resolving them takes just a moment's pause to listen to someone's perspective. Other *knots* are far more entangled and complex; requiring careful untangling, sometimes over an extended period of time.

"I acted on the issue a couple of times. I thought it was resolved but it kept coming back. Not until I got the two primary players in the room together, was any real progress made." Developmental Evaluator

Pay attention to structure

There are many forms of structure, including: words, the flow of power and resources, patterns of authority, and an organization's norms, rules, routines, and procedures. Communication and understanding within organizations can be strengthened with adjustments to its structure. Organizations do, however, have various degrees of receptivity or resistance to changing their structure.

"This has involved risk taking for us, we are not use to this. We have had to stay flexible."
Administrator, Community Organization

Phased approach to intervention

To support the resolution of more complex *knots*, a phased approach is appropriate: 1) identifying what, specifically, requires more clarity, 2) consideration of how to collect the information, 3) collecting the information, 4) reflecting on how to effectively share the information, 5) sharing the information, and finally, 6) following up on the results of the intervention.

"Once I found out, it became really important to think through how the information would be received, before I shared it."
Developmental Evaluator

Watch the natural flow

Every system (e.g. organization, program, initiative) has things they are searching for - things they want to do, or stop doing. Whether these things are large or small, and whatever their stage of progress, their search holds pockets of energy that can fuel change. A system will provide indicators of the things it wants to change; sometimes only glimpses, at other times bold proclamations (e.g. a poorly attended or “flat” meeting, an animated conversation, conflict, strategic reports, spontaneous laughter). A Developmental Evaluator must learn how to read these cues in the system - constantly listening, and watching for leverage points to release pockets of energy to fuel positive change.

The place for Developmental Evaluation, in the Changing Landscape of Youth Engagement

Most attempts to involve young people in decision-making within adult-led systems will, by nature, face significant obstacles. This is because established ways of operating generally impede change. During YouthScape, each of the five convening organizations, along with their community partners, the national convening organization, and the funder, have all been challenged to reconsider various aspects of their operation.

YouthScape’s Developmental Evaluation has assisted its affiliated organizations, both formal and informal, to understand the changing landscape of youth engagement, and adapt to its new challenges and opportunities.

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YouthScape is about working together to create a national movement to strengthen youth engagement and build resilient communities. Embracing bold visions for change!

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