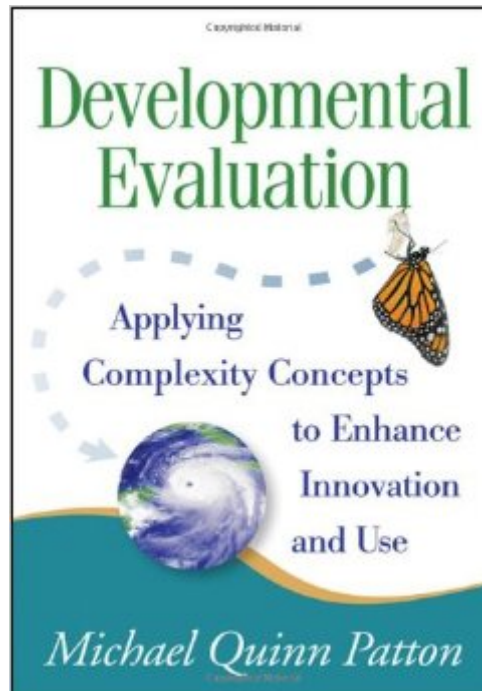


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# Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts To Enhance Innovation And Use



## Synopsis

Developmental evaluation (DE) offers a powerful approach to monitoring and supporting social innovations by working in partnership with program decision makers. In this book, eminent authority Michael Quinn Patton shows how to conduct evaluations within a DE framework. Patton draws on insights about complex dynamic systems, uncertainty, nonlinearity, and emergence. He illustrates how DE can be used for a range of purposes: ongoing program development, adapting effective principles of practice to local contexts, generating innovations and taking them to scale, and facilitating rapid response in crisis situations. Students and practicing evaluators will appreciate the book's extensive case examples and stories, cartoons, clear writing style, "closer look" sidebars, and summary tables. Provided is essential guidance for making evaluations useful, practical, and credible in support of social change. See also *Developmental Evaluation Exemplars*, edited by Michael Quinn Patton, Kate McKegg, and Nan Wehipeihana, which presents 12 in-depth case studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A book for academics, great source of references and great if you need to write an article on evaluation. The book is also a sad reflection on the profession of evaluation. Having stuffed evaluation into two neatly labeled boxes, Formative and Summative evaluation, Patton outlines the need for thinking outside the box. He introduces many fine concepts including emergence and systems thinking but then proceeds to revert to creating a new box with rigid boundaries and labels

this new box Developmental Evaluation. Now we have three neat boxes to choose from and spend time musing over which is the appropriate box for a particular evaluation. Very disappointing! Why do we need a Phd thesis to tell us that life is messy or the difference between simple, complicated and complex? Why is the author so surprised by everyday truths? The concepts in the book while valid, remain disconnected and separated out and the author clearly needs neat simple solutions that are defined, confined and documented by academics. What is really missing in the book is awareness, a true openness to discovery, a large splash of humility and a commitment to accountability. So much could be learned from Paulo Freire and his Praxis concept or from Jane Vella's great book "How do They know They know" yet neither get a mention. The greatest asset with this book is that it gives the evaluator permission and the authority from academia to move from the twin cells of Formative and Summative Evaluation for brief excursions into the defined and confined exercise yard now claimed and named as Developmental Evaluation. So sad that we need this permission to move towards reality !

I've always liked the observation by George Box that "All models are wrong, some are useful." It fits here in helping describe Patton's thoughtful and passionate treatment of developmental evaluation, which is essentially a learn-as-you-go approach to program evaluation. It's definitely useful, which is high praise. PROS: What I appreciate most about Patton's developmental approach is that it applies nicely to navigating messy, real-world situations where folks are building new programs in changing environments and really don't know what's likely to work and what isn't. The developmental approach embraces the idea that we do the best we can in these situations, recognizing that we can collect and use feedback along the way to figure out what works, what doesn't and to change accordingly. The approach also acknowledges that it's often unrealistic to "freeze" a program to evaluate it. Overall, Patton's wealth of experience comes through in a text that is filled with rich analysis and sprinkled liberally with useful examples and meaningful insights of when and where the approach can be used. In addition, there are good summaries after each chapter and readers in a hurry may want to skim these first to find the parts most relevant to them. CONS: Though well written, this is not a breezy read. The text is focused on practical matters but the writing style will strike some as "academic." Patton also takes a number of tangents to highlight issues he believes are relevant. While I generally appreciated these side trips and reasons for them, it's worth noting that those looking for a how-to book shouldn't expect a step-by-step flow to the discussion. Finally, I agree with a previous reviewer who noted that Patton takes a great deal of time providing rationales for some points in the book which seemed almost obvious. My sense here is that he does this b/c

he's writing for several audiences at once. One of these likely consists of traditional evaluators who may see developmental evaluation as some kind of abomination. Where the text appears to go overboard in defending the devel approach, it's probably just a bit of armor plating to ensure that critics see and understand the rigor underpinning the approach and under what circumstances it's sensible to use. To wrap up, there are several good and free primers on developmental evaluation out there (for example, Preskill & Beer), but if you're looking to go in depth on the topic, Patton's book is well worth the time.

Michael Patton brings together the rich thinking about complexity and systems approaches and shows how, and why, we can apply this to evaluation. While not all types of interventions need developmental evaluation, increasingly our interventions are non-standardized, adaptive and emergent, and evaluation approaches based on comparative agricultural plots cannot provide the evidence we need to develop policy and practice. Developmental evaluation shows ways to learn from and inform what we do.

Patton stops at nothing in his quest to reveal just how critical stakeholder participation is. He is clear, as evaluators we can be objective, but know little about the client's business. Further, he encourages us by extolling the virtues of the need to continually improve our evaluation capability and to be adaptive within the evaluation process. He has brought to the forefront the contribution that developmental evaluation can bring to an evaluator's practice. His book brings together theory and practice of evaluation in a very useful manner.

Good book. Patton has a very engaging writing style. He uses a lot of stories and analogies to get his points across. If you need to know a little more about Developmental Evaluation, this is a good one to read.

Patton's approach to evaluation is relentlessly pragmatic. It breaks free from formulaic constraints and offers models calculated to account for complexity. He weaves concrete experience throughout the text to illustrate and fortify his points. A wonderful read.

This is an excellent introduction to Developmental Evaluation by the person who coined the term. This book should be in every evaluator's library.

I use it all the time. Great reference for key evaluation concepts and working with complexity.

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