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THE ART OF THE NUDGE: FIVE PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATORS

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Abstract: This article focuses on developmental evaluation, based on an action research study involving a group of developmental evaluators in a three-year comprehensive community initiative on youth and community change. The study presents five practices found central to the *art of the nudge*: (a) practicing servant leadership, (b) sensing program energy, (c) supporting common spaces, (d) untying knots iteratively, and (e) paying attention to structure. These practices can help developmental evaluators detect and support opportunities for learning and adaptation leading to right-timed feedback.

Résumé : Cet article se penche sur le concept d'évaluation de développement, dans le cadre d'une étude recherche-action menée durant trois ans lors d'une initiative communautaire étendue au sujet des jeunes et le changement communautaire. L'étude présente cinq pratiques centrales pour développer « l'art de la persuasion » : (a) mettre son *leadership* au service des autres, (b) se montrer sensible à l'énergie du programme, (c) soutenir les espaces communs, (d) défaire les « nœuds » de façon itérative, et (e) poser une attention particulière à la structure. Ces pratiques peuvent aider les évaluateurs de développement à décerner et soutenir les opportunités d'apprentissage et d'adaptation, et à élaborer la rétroaction opportune.

Conventional program evaluation is a poor fit for the uncertain and emergent nature of innovative and complex initiatives (Conlin & Stirrat, 2008; Reeger, Hoes, Amstel-van Saane,

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Caron-Flinterman, & Bunders, 2009). It can fail to return timely data about how an unpredictable system is responding to new inputs, leaving innovators in the dark about how to adjust. Increased attention is being paid to developmental evaluation to provide right-timed feedback and data that are necessary for supporting adaptation and reorganization in highly dynamic, multidimensional and interdependent interventions (Patton, 2011). To date, few published studies examine what developmental evaluation looks like in practice (Gamble, 2008). If evaluation is to play an integral learning role in complex social innovation, we need more grounded research drawn from the experience of developmental evaluators (DE) themselves about the roles and skills required for closing feedback loops and facilitating evaluative thinking in complex social change initiatives.

How can evaluators learn to provide a quicker and more effective information feedback loop to support adaptation while remaining mindful of the human dynamics of learning? To answer this question, a learning community of DEs conducted an action learning project during their involvement in YouthScape (YS), a three-year comprehensive community initiative focused on building community resiliency through youth engagement in Canada. Their action learning project explored the *art of the nudge*, or how developmental evaluators can provide real-time feedback that subtly supports shifts in policies, practices, resource flow, and programming in a way that is sensitive to context and to the energy of the people involved. The phrase *art of the nudge* describes the unique skill required of an evaluator taking on a developmental approach: *nudge* refers to the intentional yet subtle interventions that a DE employs to feed data and insights back into the system for consideration; *art* refers to the well-honed sensibility and craftsmanship of deciding if and how to do so.

Based on the concrete experience of DEs in YS, this article explores five practices that the action learning team found central to the *art of the nudge*: (a) practicing servant leadership, (b) sensing program energy, (c) supporting common spaces, (d) taking an iterative approach to untying knots, and (e) paying attention to structure. These practices can help DEs detect and support opportunities for real learning and adaptation. Prior to presenting the practices, we situate developmental evaluation in the context of current literature on evaluation.

THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION IN COMPLEX SOCIAL CHANGE

The philanthropic and nonprofit sectors are increasingly investing in initiatives that aim to trigger transformative change in communities or systems, as evidenced by a burst of philanthropic literature on best practices in building cross-sector collaboration, community-driven change processes, social innovation, and comprehensive systems reform (Preskill & Beer, 2012). Such innovative initiatives that bring many independent players to the table are bound to develop over time in ways that cannot be planned or orchestrated at the outset. In a range of fields, such as sustainable development (Regeer et al., 2009), health promotion (Fagen et al., 2011) and international development assistance (Conlin & Stirrat, 2008), it is recognized that new modes of evaluation are required to address the complexity of today's social problems. Social problems confound many of the practices that are hallmarks of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations' "best practices" and are premised on predictability: charting clear linear logic models, tracking performance against predetermined outcomes, and—perhaps most significantly—using traditional approaches to program evaluation.

Both formative and summative evaluation are designed to answer questions about relatively stable program models with fixed core components that are designed to reach a predicted set of outcomes, rather than highly dynamic environments in which pathways to change cannot be predetermined (Patton, 2008). In fact, formative and summative evaluation can constrain initiatives that seek innovative change as they hold implementers accountable for following a program logic that may lose its relevance as the system shifts around them (Fagen et al., 2011). Instead, innovators need flexibility to adapt, as well as space for outcomes to emerge and evolve (Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006). Perhaps most importantly, innovation in a complex situation requires that evaluation and learning be intrinsically linked, with evaluation contributing to learning and vice versa (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008; Gasper, 2000).

In contrast to formative and summative evaluation, developmental education supports innovation by providing timely and actionable data about how a complex system is responding to an initiative (Gamble, 2008). It is about "asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and gathering real-time data to inform ongoing decision making and adaptations" (Patton, 2011, p. 1). This type of

evaluation challenges the disciplinary conventions and mindsets of traditional program evaluation, yet is the most fitting approach for facilitating the re-entry of data and information into a system in actionable ways at the right time and place (Fagen et al., 2011). It defies assumptions and uncovers connections and ambiguity between intent and actions so that novel ideas and solutions are brought to the forefront, furthering social change. Ultimately, the evaluator is guided by the *purpose* of developmental evaluation: the exploratory *development* of a social change approach rather than the fine-tuning of a program (formative evaluation) or definitive judgement about a program's impact (summative evaluation).

As a result, developmental evaluation challenges the convention of traditional evaluation that positions the evaluator as objective and distanced from the program implementers (Skolits, Morrow, & Burr, 2009). Conversely, in developmental evaluation, the evaluator takes an active role with a close relationship to the team—and is even viewed as part of the team (Dozois, Langlois, & Blanchet-Cohen, 2010). Not only is this positioning disconcerting for many evaluators who are trained to refrain from intervening in the implementation of a program, but it can also confront practitioners in novel ways, given their unpreparedness for this role. Gamble (2008) identifies in a primer about DE skills to consist of building relationship, process facilitation, pattern recognition, listening and communicating, and a tolerance for ambiguity.

Formal training, professional development, and even textbooks concerning the discipline of program evaluation primarily focus on the mastery of the technical skills required to conduct rigorous evaluation, such as planning, formative and summative design, qualitative and quantitative methods, data analysis, and report writing. (See, for example, the curricula for certificates in program evaluation offered through The Evaluator's Institute housed at George Washington University, the Graduate Certificate in Program Evaluation at the University of Ottawa, the Ph.D. in Evaluation and Applied Research Methods at Claremont Graduate College, etc.) While these technical skills are also crucial for developmental evaluation, there is little evidence that evaluators have access to training or mentoring in knowing when, where, and how to nudge a team of program implementers to reflect upon or take action in response to evaluative data and information. As identified by Gamble (2008), development evaluations—like any evaluation—require technical tools and to be rigorous and systematic, but they also need to be

invested and to value a project, comfortable in moving forward despite ambiguity. This study deepens our understanding of the skills and roles based on a three-year experience with DEs. We suggest a framework of practices—the *art of the nudge*—that DEs may find useful.

METHODS

Background on the Study and DEs

This article is based on experiences with YouthScape, an initiative with the broad objective of building resilient communities by engaging youth in planning and in implementing community development initiatives. Over a three-year period, the J. W. McConnell Foundation committed $2.1 million to four communities across Canada. Spearheaded by a local convening organization, community proposals brought together multiple stakeholders ranging from youth centres to city departments and schools to create opportunities for young people to engage in local projects and decision-making around self-identified issues affecting youth. The funded communities proposed to address an array of issues: strengthening relationships among young people of Haitian, French, and Italian heritage; creating community among Aboriginal young people migrating from northern communities; and tightening community and intergenerational relationships in the context of an economic boom.

The initiative was named YouthScape to capture the overarching goal of transforming the landscape and creating "new reflexes" for working with young people among community organizations and institutions (Blanchet-Cohen & Cook, 2012). The initiative was a departure from conventional youth engagement work, which has tended to operate in silos without involving youth as partners (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2010). There were steep learning curves for the community-based convening organizations as they grappled with the new approach to youth leadership, the use of convening rather than direct program delivery as a community change strategy, and the emergent nature of the groups' goals and projects.

As a comprehensive community initiative, this was recognized by the foundation to be a complex initiative that was not appropriate for a traditional evaluation, and the foundation therefore selected developmental evaluation as a way of continually reassessing the notion of being "on track" (Cawley, 2010). In addition to mandating

each community to hire a part-time local DE, the foundation funded a national DE. Local DEs were hired by each site, but there was a level of dual accountability, given that DE reports were also submitted to the funder and issues were shared across sites with the national DE. After receiving guidance about the qualifications and role of a DE, each convening organization employed its own local DE. From the beginning of YS, it was clear that for the participating organizations, developmental evaluation was a new approach.

Given turnover, there were nine evaluators over the course of YS who contributed to the study. They ranged in age from 25 to 60. Six had experience in conventional forms of evaluation and qualitative methods, while three had no prior experience in evaluation but had effective facilitation skills. None had participated in or conducted developmental evaluation beforehand. Half were external consultants with no prior relationship to the convening organization nor any experience with the issue of youth engagement. The others were hired from within the organization because their skills were thought to correspond to those of a DE. The first author of this article was contracted as the national DE to provide mentorship to local DEs embedded at each site and to liaise with national actors. The second author worked closely with the developmental evaluators as a researcher, documenting and distilling learning at each site and nationally. Our position as "insiders" meant that we were also participants, allowing for the joint meaning-making most relevant to action research (Hertz, 1997).

Local DEs were introduced to DE through a two-day orientation at the start of the project, with Gamble's (2008) publication serving to introduce the skills and tools. The national DE later provided on-the-job coaching, including one-on-one calls, group learning calls, and retreats (described below). The national DE observed that the local DEs with previous experience in traditional evaluation or research methods tended to require more coaching related to the "soft skills" of facilitation and interpersonal dynamics, while those without evaluation experience needed support with data collection, management, and analysis. Although this variation presented challenges to the management of the overall evaluation, it also provided a rich learning context in which the DE team could coach one another and identify core practices that were relevant to the art of the nudge regardless of the background of a DE.

Procedures

This study is based on an action research initiative, which included action to contribute to the project itself, active participation of the first two authors, and research to understand the practice of developmental evaluation more broadly (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). At the base of the action research was a learning community intentionally created to allow DEs to work collaboratively through issues they faced at each site, as well as reflect on broader implications of their experience for the wider field. As an iterative cycle of learning and action, the learning community served to both improve the members' immediate practice and generate knowledge on the nature of developmental evaluation (Gloster, 2000). As they were given consent to gather data 24/7 during the study, all phone calls and meetings with the DEs were recorded.

During the project, there were 18 bi-monthly group learning calls facilitated by the national DE, lasting on average one hour each. The focus of the calls varied depending on the need, mostly starting with a general check-in where DEs would present to the groups observations or challenges their site was facing in moving forward. The lead DEs' role was to listen carefully, and to facilitate by posing questions (e.g., "Does that ring true for others?", "How do we leverage that?"), identify patterns between sites and experiences (e.g., "Redesigning steering committees may be a story that is emerging"), and offer subtle advice (e.g., "You can't be everywhere," "Go with the ones that have the energy, some are going to get some energy," "Our job is to create the conditions to open up communication"). The reflections and discussions helped DEs to decide how best to move forward. In addition, there were four in-person structured learning retreats to support DEs in grappling with the evolving questions raised in their practice. In the second retreat, for instance, the agenda focused on reflecting back on what had been done, identifying challenges, and the type of interventions and tools for change, such as appreciative inquiry. Activities included finishing the sentence of a statement such as "If you are DE, where do you want to position yourself …" In the last year of the project, a two-day learning retreat included discussing their role in each site and commenting on a draft of the practices, which provided the basis for this article (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Feeding data and observations back to YS communities through sharing of field notes helped them take action and move forward, as well as generate knowledge on the practices that the DEs found most helpful. In addition, at mid-point and at the end of the initiative, the

lead and second author carried out 15-minute one-on-one interviews with the directors and coordinators of the convening organizations at each site, asking for their views on the role and impact of the DE.

FIVE PRACTICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR

As noted above, the *art of the nudge* requires the sensitive touch of a DE when providing real-time feedback. According to the YS funder, the *art of the nudge* "allowed us to modify program designs, provide training, convene partners, and create spaces for airing concerns in ways that could never have been anticipated" (Cawley, 2010, p. 15). A *nudge*, then, is the moment when a DE brings data and observation to a team of innovators and decision-makers so they can move closer to their goals. Five practices emerged from the learning community that helped the YS DEs create opportunities for groups to find their collective way, to recognize patterns within complex systems, to help take stock of how the team was doing, and to name design flaws or blockages in a supportive manner.

1. Practicing Servant Leadership

Though the disciplinary conventions of program evaluation suggest that evaluators historically do not play a leadership role in the programs or initiatives they are evaluating (Skolits et al., 2009), developmental evaluators demonstrate leadership by opening pathways for new understanding and addressing program blockages, thus influencing aspects of a program's development. In YS, we found the philosophy of "servant leadership" coined by Greenleaf (1976) to be helpful in sensitizing the DEs to the subtlety of their role. At the heart of servant leadership is the idea that the act of leading, or in this case nudging, must always be in service to the group achieving its goals and living its principles. It is a DE's task to draw out data and observations that help actors realize what they collectively believe to be the best path forward at any given time. Using an appreciative lens, listening deeply, and integrating reflection and practice were three indispensible skills in servant leadership.

Using an appreciative lens

Applying a servant leader approach involved the DE using an appreciative lens to bring into focus the strengths and promising patterns that could be leveraged to support the initiative. In the case of YS,

some conveners were initially overwhelmed and discouraged by the low number of youth involved. With the DE applying an appreciative lens, the focus switched from problem to opportunity with an emphasis on how to engage those few young people they *did* know. As these young people helped the conveners with creative ways to broaden their reach, new spaces for positive thinking were opened.

Use of an appreciative lens by a servant leader resulted in DEs presenting feedback in a manner that left the program actors feeling energized and ready to move forward. This was not always easy, and at times the YS DEs were unable to do so. A program coordinator reflected, "Feedback was not always appreciative … I never felt I was doing something right. I am avoiding [the DE] now because of the anxiety it causes … It is as though a DE sits at a higher moral ground." In another instance, a YS DE gave feedback, about the lack of youth involvement, to program leaders at an inappropriate time and in a reprimanding way; instead of opening up the system, it created tension between her and the staff. Since the context within which DEs typically work is highly emergent and uncertain, it is critical to be aware of when and how information is presented back to the group. The fast-paced decision-making, messy collaborations, and steep learning curves of comprehensive initiatives such as YS create stress, increasing the risk that a DE's nudges could be perceived as threatening, not only to the program team but also to an organization's formal leadership. Bringing an appreciative lens to feedback serves to mitigate this risk.

Listening deeply and actively

A second critical aspect of servant leadership is deep and active listening to allow DEs to find synergies, identify decisions inconsistent with the group's stated intent, and detect when and how to intervene with an effective nudge. In YS, the DEs intentionally created "pauses" for listening in order to reach beyond the surface layer of busyness that can threaten fast-paced initiatives. At one point, it was the YS funder that the national DE encouraged to pause and listen when conveners expressed concerns regarding the time needed to complete the reporting requirements. As a result of the DE's nudge to the funder to pause and listen to the concerns, the reporting process was redesigned to support the communities' reflection and sharing of stories. This kind of interaction is generally beyond the bounds of a more traditional evaluator, but in a developmental context, the DE is well-positioned to gently nudge individuals and groups to ac-

tively listen, perhaps eventually bringing about changes in program implementation.

A tactic for putting both the appreciative lens and active listening into practice is the use of carefully crafted questions that encourage transformative group reflections. Because *giving answers* runs the risk of causing program actors to disengage, the DEs' practice of using effective questions through an appreciative lens can engage actors. Questions can serve as reminders to illuminate an initiative's principles or collective intent.

Integrating reflection into practice

Ironically, to serve others well one needs to also look after oneself. Being a servant leader requires a great deal of presence and sense of personal balance. There is an intuitive element to the work of developmental evaluation that is aided by the DE practicing some form of personal centring (e.g., journaling, exercise, play) and aligning that with an intentional reflection on the program being evaluated. The intent is that the DEs regularly take a fresh look at the program they are evaluating; to be able to do that, each DE needs to clear his or her mind. It may be as simple as the DE holding a perplexing question and, over time, bringing that question to the forefront. When considering interventions, a pause that comes with a practice of reflection opens the DE's awareness of how best to proceed, if at all, to a next step. A reflection practice can help a DE uncover hidden synergies in a program and ways to nudge with the lightest of touch. In one site, for instance, a DE concerned about whose ideas prevailed in meetings wrote a reflective piece entitled "Damned by our egalitarian impulse" that she shared with the DE team. With fast-moving program landscapes, it is critical that a DE keep his or her head clear and feet planted, and avoid jumping into the fray in a reactionary way. To attempt interventions at any point without being personally centred, DEs risk compromising the effort, their credibility, and the program's energy.

When a DE follows the philosophy and practice of servant leadership—keeping an appreciative lens, listening deeply in order to improve what is seen, and questioning effectively rather than giving answers—it releases the kind of energy that inspires engagement. The group can grow its capacity to look beyond the threats and constraints that hold back innovation and focus instead on ideas that fuel collective action and on opportunities for purposeful variation to

accelerate learning. It is the DE as servant leader that establishes a foundation to carry out the remaining four practices below.

2. Sensing Program Energy

In complex change initiatives, the amount of information and the number of strategic options a DE could consider can be overwhelming. A DE could easily overload decision-makers with too much feedback, like smothering a flame with too much fuel. To prioritize which feedback to emphasize, the YS DEs found value in focussing on the ideas and actions that carried energy—either the ones the project participants were most excited about or the points of conflict that were blocking forward motion. Such program energy can be sensed in a multitude of ways, including the way the team interacts, that is, the quality of participation, tension, conflict, animated conversation, nervous laughter, body language.

One could easily dismiss these indicators as insignificant, and they may be. Or they could signal leverage points to fuel a program's development—embers ready to be fanned. A common management response to unrest, tension, and conflict is to suppress it. But it's not always necessary or advisable to stamp out these sparks, as it is in the place of conflict and tension that innovation lies (Westley et al., 2006). As an observer and "critical friend" who can stay calm and outside the fray, a DE who is perceived credibly, without a personal or organizational agenda apart from the project, can be well-positioned to identify an issue that is blocking program energy, especially when others may be unwilling or unable to voice such concerns.

Opening channels of communication

While it is not the DE's role to create change, the DE can facilitate change by opening channels of communication and interaction. During a YS gathering, the local sites expressed frustration with the national convener's choice and imposition of a contractor for web-based communications—a concern at first largely disregarded by the national convener and funder. Recognizing that the tension was occupying the group's energy and creating barriers in other aspects of the project, the DE brought the sites' concerns to the surface. As a result of dialogue between actors, more appropriate options for web support were explored. For the DE as servant leader, helping to appreciatively bring attention to tensions and alternative views helped the initiative advance.

During YS, the DEs drew out answers, released hidden group assets, and helped name assumptions—all critical to understanding the mental frameworks underlying group dynamics and the program team's capacity to implement the initiative. A diversity of people and mix of ideas, opinions, and skills is part of any comprehensive community initiative (Fullbright-Anderson & Auspos, 2006), but in reality, opinions can be suppressed by personal dynamics, voices that are too silent or assertive, autocratic leaders, and positional authority.

Bringing interpersonal dynamics to the surface

Interpersonal dynamics are a realm of observation that evaluators often avoid or treat as background context for the "real" activities of program implementation. However, because they are a key factor in successful multi-stakeholder innovation and transformative systems change, and also because they affect the ability of the group to make use of data and information for strategic decision-making, they cannot be left out of a DE's realm. Effective questioning with respect and compassion for the actors involved can help a DE nudge individuals and groups to tackle interpersonal issues that block success.

During a two-day YS national meeting in which the facilitation was not working particularly well, the resulting tension was being directed at the national convener. At the lunch break, the national DE simply asked the facilitator: "Do you want to continue the facilitation?" The emotional reply made it clear that someone else should take on the role, and thereby allow the meeting to proceed more effectively. The DE's question helped bring to the surface an issue that was quite easily resolvable.

3. Supporting Common Spaces

Common spaces is a term the DEs used to conceptualize the physical places, moments in time, and virtual spaces where key actors interacted. Amid the wide range of programming being carried out, it can be difficult for the DEs to know where to focus their attention. Common spaces became a focal point to create conditions that encourage quality relationships. In YS, the DEs found that in common spaces, both formal and informal, they could most easily observe a program's energy, and locate fertile ground for co-creation, learning, and innovation. As described below, the idea of common space served to identify observations and to prioritize interventions.

To identify observations

Data collection and reporting in traditional evaluation approaches often occur through specially planned formal interactions, but for DEs embedded in the initiative, formal and informal common space served as organizing principles. YS's formal common spaces included meetings, phone calls, national forums, and workshops for planning, education, and team-building. The informal common spaces consisted of program actors coming together over coffee, on Facebook, on a cell phone, over e-mail, in one-on-one conversations, or in a discussion forum on a project web page. These informal common spaces tended to have a spontaneous nature; positional authority was downplayed, and informal language was used by all. For YS, these spaces presented opportunities for interacting in ways that were different than in the structure of more formal spaces. The free flow of ideas and opinions in these spaces, paired with supportive critical thinking, should not be underestimated for their value in helping a DE find and understand the energy of the program.

With the actors within YS programs constantly changing, the common space concept also reminded the DEs to keep a whole-systems view of the initiative. For instance, when the YS steering committees began to break down as a useful structure and partners began to disengage, the DEs needed a way to make sense of the reorganization. The concept of common space helped the DEs pay attention to identifying an alternative space, which in the case of YS became making the youth-led grants the focus of action, given the foundation's emphasis on needing to move forward on implementing the youth-granting requirement (Blanchet-Cohen & Cook, 2012). This is where the innovation and accompanying issues would be happening.

To prioritize interventions

Because the purpose of developmental evaluation is to support the ongoing development and adaptation of an initiative, system actors need the space and opportunity to digest data, solve problems, generate ideas, and make choices about next steps in the intervention. Common space nurtures learning, shared problem-solving, and celebration critical to the creativity and innovation required in complex initiatives aimed at social change (Westley et al., 2006). Amidst the hierarchy, structure, roles, policies, and procedures of a project, the importance of this collective space for learning and making shared decisions can be forgotten. Using the common spaces concept, the DE

helped continually draw attention to the need for being purposeful and strategic. For example, the DEs encouraged the creation of common spaces for web-based communications, for site coordinators to confer, design a national forum, and provide for youth and adult as well as peer-to-peer coaching. The DEs also brought attention to the importance of the local convening organizations' giving young people the means for more control over the functions of planning and action in the grant selection committees.

4. Untying Knots Iteratively

Misunderstanding, ambiguity, and disagreement are part of the landscape of complex community initiatives (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003). YS was no exception; the DEs encountered a wide spectrum of problems, given the ambiguities, concerns, and interpersonal dynamics that got tied up in what we refer to as *knots*. Some knots were simple and straightforward and required little or no intervention from the DE, while others were more complicated. The more complicated knots required an iterative or multiphased approach with intentional pauses along the way as the DE worked through the knot.

YS's youth grants fund, for instance, got tied up in a large knot that required an iterative approach. The problem concerned ambiguity about whether projects that received grants had to be youth-led projects, or if adult-led services for youth were acceptable. The knot was created by a combination of ambiguous communication about the allowable uses of the funds and frustration from the funder on the relatively slow movement toward tangible program action at the sites. The knot was big and important. It contributed to a spiraling of YS into a period of disenchantment early in its project life cycle. To address the knot, the DE first had to recognize different perspectives. Intervening involved the DE first hearing from the primary decision-makers, and then conducting key one-on-one conversations with program actors, reviewing original documentation, and finally convening the primary decision-makers to discuss ways of addressing the confusion. Each step provided more information for the next step and informed the resolution. But as large knots can, this one left a kink in the line. Though the intervention helped to move the grant strategy forward, ongoing attention from all concerned was required to avoid recreating the knot. A DE commented on her contribution in untying the knots through a series of interventions in her site:

> Well—I think the main difference was that it bought us at least six months (which in a three-year project is fairly significant) … Our initiative could not have afforded another 6 to 12 months of wandering in the wilderness … the ability to surface and channel the intelligence that is distributed throughout the system in a complex initiative is one of the advantages of having a developmental evaluator.

The experience from YS demonstrates the iterative approach a DE can use when addressing complicated knots: (a) identify what specifically requires more clarity, (b) consider how to collect information about the challenge and its potential solutions, (c) collect the information, (d) reflect on how to gracefully bring the information back into the system, (e) put the information back into the system, and, finally, (f) follow up on the results of the intervention. As many of the DEs found, there is no one recipe; not all knots can be untied in a sequential process. The DE may need to pause to give time between interventions for the system to respond. There is temptation to continue nudging until change is evident, which can become an irritant and backfire—creating a much larger knot than the initial one. At other times, a DE's task is simply to untie the first layer of a knot and let the rest untangle on its own. It is the DE's reading of the situation that will determine how best to approach the untying of knots.

5. Paying Attention to Structure

If DEs are to focus their work and position themselves for effective nudges, they need to understand the structure within which they are located. By "structure," we mean both the formal decision-making structure as well as the culture of decision-making that includes an organization's written and unspoken norms, rules, routines, and procedures. With a complex initiative such as YS, the structures were multilayered. There was structure at a national level, which included the funders, national convening agency, and advisors. At the community level, there were local organizations with their own management structures, as well as steering committees and youth grantees. As a complex initiative, the relationships between these multilayered structures were themselves evolving, as they adapted to the changing needs of the project.

Observing structure

In YS, convening agencies at various times called upon DEs to consider structural changes. This suggested that the DE's role was not only to understand the structure but also bring observations about its challenges to the fore so that changes might be made to better meet program goals. This was particularly the case during the first year of the YS initiative when the structure itself was being built through trial and error. DEs had to ensure that they not only understood the formal structure, but that they also brought forward observations about how it might be improved to better meet program goals. Understanding the structure involved seeing how these elements shaped the project's direction. For instance, the DEs became aware that the local convening organizations felt hemmed in by the imposed structures. The funder had mandated certain elements of structure, including steering committees and a small grants fund, and perceived site coordinators as mandated, but not all were beneficial in practice.

In the case of the coordinator position, for example, it became clear that the coordinator role had limited potential to foster broad knowledge transfer between and within sites. The difficulty was that it left a great deal of decision-making responsibility in the hands of one person, which ran counter to the core principles of the collaborative design of the initiative. A combination of vague direction and loose supervision and support allowed some coordinators to assume a great deal of autocratic authority over the direction of project activity at their sites. The DEs observed how these sites reflected the character and personality of their coordinators. One administrator of a convening organization reflected, "They [coordinator] can run everything out of their back pocket." It is this kind of concern for structure to which a DE must stay attuned.

Steering committees were mandated by the funder in the hopes that the sites would use steering committees as a means for bringing together community organizations and youth to guide the project in a participatory process. The steering committees were a primary place for project action and interaction. As a result, the DEs had intended to invest a significant amount of their time with these committees from the beginning. However, they too became another problematic element of structure because young people were unable to meaningfully participate, and lots of time was spent on planning or discussing management issues rather than realizing the project goal of building

resilient communities through youth engagement. Eventually, four of five sites disbanded their initial steering committee structure. The DEs helped review the structures and offered an array of alternatives that better fit the program goals. In three YS sites, this led to community actors creating alternative structures. The new structures had a variety of functions and form designed to encourage more democratic and cooperative principles while welcoming more youth. In the words of one of the DEs involved, "We were striving to create a more balanced structure."

Structure is a crucial factor affecting how complex, adaptive initiatives unfold—as well as whether the initiative's participants can absorb and interpret evaluation data and feedback—so DEs must pay careful attention to how structure guides actors' decision-making and action, as well as identify when structures may be preventing the program from working toward its objectives.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Developmental evaluation is designed to nurture developmental, emergent, innovative, and transformative processes. The approach encourages the integration of the various components of good program development—planning, action, and reflection. For YS, with its outcomes, directions, and processes uncertain, developmental evaluation was up to the task of generating learning and direction at the pace required for its complexity. The YS experience confirms what others have argued: that there is a need for broader skills and practices in an evaluator's toolkit to address these kinds of programs (Conlin & Stirrat, 2008; Preskill & Beer, 2012). This study points to the benefit of an evaluator having experience in organizational development, whole-systems change, pattern recognition, interpersonal dynamics, conflict management, and facilitation—all skills that are crucial for helping innovators know when and how to use data and feedback to adapt strategies as they go. While these may have been identified beforehand (Dozoiset al., 2010; Gamble, 2008), YS offered an opportunity to verify and deepen our understanding of their significance and application.

Besides the question of the skills required to practice DE, this study contributes to deepening the understanding of DE, which has been critiqued for lacking rigour, given the blurring of lines between development and evaluation. As Patton (2008) contends, "What we lose in conceptual clarity and purity with regard to a narrow definition

of evaluation, we gain in appreciation for evaluation expertise … the valuable role evaluators can play in design and program improvement based on cumulative knowledge" (p. 290). In YS, we found that the expanded role was particularly useful at the early stage of the project, when there was no predetermined pathway to lead to community resiliency through youth engagement.

In the introduction to this article we introduced the question, "How can evaluators provide a quicker and more effective information feedback loop to support adaptation, while remaining mindful of the human dynamics of learning?" This study suggests that a developmental evaluator has to hone a variety of skills and sensitivities to improve his or her abilities to detect the right moment and approach for feeding evaluative data back to participants. With a team of six YouthScape DEs, valuable insights were generated on developmental evaluation practice that have informed what we referred to in the article as the *art of the nudge*. The practices that emerged from this action research—practicing servant leadership, sensing program energy, supporting common spaces, untying knots in phases, and paying attention to structure—helped guide the evaluators to ask important and sometimes difficult questions that challenge assumptions and uncover ambiguity or unexpected connections between ideas and people.

Ultimately, the art of the nudge used by YS DEs resulted in changes to a number of program strategies and processes, which kept the program on track. Their work resulted in increased participation at learning events; process and design learning for the funder; clarification of key terms including granting mandates; improved reporting processes, relationships, and communication between the funder and grantees; and enhanced human resource management. In the midst of YS's emergence and complexity, the DEs were also successful in reminding participants about the initiative's principles and collective intent.

In an era that prioritizes efficiency, measuring impact, and accountability (Fulton, Kasper, & Kibbe, 2010), it is unclear to what extent conditions for an evaluation such as that of YS can be replicated. Acceptance of evaluators as critical *partners* in social change challenges normal views of evaluation and the role of the evaluator. Perhaps traditional evaluators may disagree with these being "evaluative practices," as opposed to facilitation or organizational development skills. However, we contend that without this perspective, evaluation efforts will offer too little information too late to be useful for inno-

vation. With the growing complexity in dealing with contemporary issues that are multidimensional and highly dynamic, espousing new forms of evaluation and training people with the specific skills to carry them out will be necessary. The five practices of the art of the nudge we have introduced point out a pathway to address the necessary skills and practices for developmental evaluation.

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