

Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton. 2006. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Random House Canada.

Developmental Evaluation

“Many forms of evaluation are the enemy of social innovation if applied at the wrong time or in the wrong way. But, serious social innovators want to make a difference and need some way to determine whether what they are doing is actually working. The right kind of evaluation can be a powerful tool to help the social innovator stand still and take stock” (82).

“Most conventional evaluators insist that an effort cannot be judged without clear, measurable goals. . . . A road map specifying where you’re going and how you’ll know when you get there is essential, evaluators insist, for effective action and accountability. They are especially critical of grand schemes that vaguely envision systems change and transformation. But social innovators in complex systems learn to eschew clear, specific and measurable goals because clarity, specificity and measurability are limiting and can lead to tunnel vision. In contrast, when astute social innovators tackle an issue or a problem, they realize that they don’t yet know enough to set specific goals or measurable targets; they also understand that different participants have different aims in the change process—and that those participants themselves should play a major role in goal setting” (83-84).

Developmental evaluation is essentially the process of looking back and ahead in order to gauge progress, lessons learned, and to determine what is working and what isn’t. Empower those who habitually ask questions and suggest areas of inquiry. Bring together interdisciplinary teams to examine complex issues. Engage in “ongoing data collection and assessment to help policy makers adapt their decisions and implement their principles in the face of changed conditions” (87).