

RESPONDING TO COMPLEXITY

A Case Study on the Use of “Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively”

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Abstract

Over the past 15 years, the international development field has increasingly emphasized the need to improve aid effectiveness. While there have been many gains as a result of this emphasis, many critique the mechanisms that have emerged to enhance aid effectiveness, particularly claiming that they inappropriately force adherence to predefined plans and hold programs accountable for activities and outputs, not outcomes. However, with growing acceptance of the complexity of development challenges, different ways to design, manage, and evaluate projects are beginning to take hold that better reflect this reality.

Many development practitioners explain that Developmental Evaluation (DE) and Adaptive Management (AM) offer alternatives to traditional management and monitoring and evaluation approaches that are better suited to address complex challenges. Both DE and AM are approaches for rapidly and systematically collecting data for the purpose of adapting projects in the face of complexity. There are many advocates for the use of DE and AM in complex development contexts, as well as some case studies on how these approaches are being applied.

This study aims to build on existing literature that provides examples of how DE and AM are being customized to address complex development challenges by describing and analyzing how one non-governmental organization, Catalytic Communities (CatComm), working in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, uses *DE for Managing Adaptively*, a term we have used to name their approach to management and evaluation. Drawing upon and integrating literature about DE and AM, I describe eight interdependent elements of CatComm's approach to management and evaluation, which emerged organically over the course of their 17-year history and which CatComm and I retroactively discovered embodies the eight Principles of DE, as well as aspects of Adaptive Management, providing examples of each element in practice. Furthermore, I identify factors that enable and inhibit CatComm's approach. Finally, I relate these findings to the literature on DE, AM, and related approaches in complex development contexts, and I discuss these findings in regards to the larger conclusions that may be of interests to organizations, funders, and scholars in the development field.

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Problem Statement

Many individuals, organizations, funders, and scholars in the development sector have recognized the need to change the way we think about development issues, indicating that traditional linear, planned approaches to management and evaluation may be appropriate to solve simple or even complicated problems, but prove ineffective at solving complex problems. Developmental Evaluation (DE), Adaptive Management (AM), and similar approaches by different names, have emerged as alternatives to the traditional model that can better address complex social challenges. DE and AM are broad ways of thinking about and doing management and evaluation. They are frames of mind, not tools or sets of steps that can be followed. Patton (2011) and others have written extensively on what DE is and how it is done *conceptually*, and the same can be said for AM. However, in order to internalize and effectively implement DE and AM, or any new approach, development practitioners also need *examples* of how they are implemented in various contexts.¹

The purpose of this research is to provide a case study of how one non-governmental organization (NGO), Catalytic Communities (CatComm), is applying the principles of DE in their own unique way, as well as characteristics of AM, in order to offer an example of these approaches in practice. In the first section, I review the literature on DE, AM, and other related approaches, in order to place CatComm's approach within the larger context of the development sector. Next, I analyze CatComm's approach through the lens of "*DE for Managing Adaptively*", a term I use to define CatComm's approach that builds upon the literature on DE and AM. Finally, I end with conclusions that may be of interest to organizations, funders, and scholars in the development sector.

With this research, I hope that other development actors seeking an alternative approach to managing and evaluating projects in complex contexts can learn from the experiences of CatComm and adapt what is relevant to their own contexts, so that as a field we can continue marching forward in our quest for development interventions that are more suitably aligned to the complexity of the challenges we face.

Background

In this section, I review literature critiquing the traditional approach to management and evaluation of development projects, which is characterized by designing, implementing, and measuring the value of top-down, linear, planned interventions. Next, I explain the concept of complexity and introduce two frameworks through which we can determine the level of

¹ Since this research was conceptualized in late 2015, Michael Quinn Patton and colleagues have responded to the plea of many evaluators and practitioners who requested examples of DE in practice by publishing their 2016 text, *Developmental Evaluation Exemplars: Principles in Practice*. This critical work lays out eight principles for DE and provides 12 case studies of organizations that use DE in a variety of contexts, and it is a tremendous resource for development professionals looking to implement DE.

complexity of a development problem. I argue that development projects must respond to problems in ways that align with the level of complexity. I do this in order to set the stage for the case study, which provides one example of how the Principles of DE, as well as characteristics of AM, were customized in one complex context so development actors can learn from it and adapt what is relevant to their own contexts.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, development practitioners have seen an increased emphasis on aid effectiveness. Donors want to ensure that the money they spend on development assistance is actually leading to better outcomes for target beneficiaries.² Beneath this question lie assumptions about the nature of development challenges and how change happens. The traditional approach to development, which is informed by the belief that top-down, linear, planned interventions will lead to social change, has emerged, at least in part, as a result of the Movement for Aid Effectiveness.

The Aid Effectiveness Movement began to coalesce and build in 2002 at the International Conference on Financing for Development in which the Monterrey Consensus was established. Since then, four High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness have established and developed a framework for ensuring the quality of international development assistance instead of simply focusing on financing. The final meeting in 2011 ended with the creation of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, convened under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee, to advance the implementation of four principles: (1) ownership by developing countries; (2) focus on results; (3) inclusive partnerships; and (4) transparency and accountability (InterAction, 2013).

The Aid Effectiveness Movement and its emphasis on transparency, accountability, and results-orientation have led to some important achievements, such as a decrease in extreme poverty, increase in primary education enrollment, and improved gender equality (United Nations, 2015). Despite these gains, critiques about the success of development initiatives persist. For example, Wild, Booth, Cummings, Foresti, and Wales (2015) note that only 10 of 33 sub-Saharan African countries will see all children completing primary school by 2020, and only three will see improved sanitation for all by 2030.

While many critics acknowledge the importance of transparency, accountability, and a results-orientation, they also note that mechanisms that have been developed to meet these goals—such

² The concept of *better outcomes for target beneficiaries* is laden with assumptions that warrant scrutiny: What outcomes are actually better? Better than what? Who decides? What assumptions are inherent in this question? Who are beneficiaries and who decides that? Who is truly benefiting from development? Says whom? While critically examining the Aid Effectiveness Movement (and the concepts of Aid and Development in general) is an important endeavor, the purpose of this paper is not to examine the suitability of these concepts, but rather to challenge the problematic mechanisms that have emerged as a result of them and provide an alternative. In doing so, however, I must unpack the assumptions and positionality underlying my own paper. The argument in my paper is based on the assumption that Aid and Development are, by nature, predominantly positive phenomena, which is, of course, a belief that has been purported by the West/North. Additionally, many of the concepts addressed in this paper have emerged from Western/Northern thought on Aid and Development, as did this paper's primary thesis. So, it is with this reservation that I invite you to read my argument and encourage you to critically examine its assumptions, while remaining open to the message.

as the Logic Model, LogFrame, and Results Framework, as well as traditional formative and summative evaluation—tend to force pre-planned interventions, monitor adherence to predefined activities and outputs, and measure success by how well projects meet predetermined outcomes (e.g., Maclay, 2015). These same critics explain that this linear, planned approach can be effective in contexts in which there is little change, solutions are known, and sufficient evidence suggests that implementing specific activities will result in certain outcomes. However, this approach can be at best ineffective and at worst disastrous in complex contexts where cause and effect are only knowable after the fact and courses of action cannot be predetermined (e.g., Maclay, 2015; Patton, 2011).

Maclay (2015) elaborates on the problems inherent in attempting to use traditional approaches to address complex development challenges in his critique of LogFrames:

1. **Oversimplification of problems and solutions.** Maclay (2015, p. 45) uses the term “*LackFrame*” to describe the use of the LogFrame to depict “*blueprint implementation models [that] are reductionist, falsely claiming a linear response to complex social problems*”. Oftentimes, the development field offers overly simplistic ways of looking at a challenge and its solution. Development actors assume a level of isolation from and control of the context, and they imply a unidirectional channel of influence, which suggests that the organization can and will effect change if specified inputs and outputs are adhered to.
2. **Demand for adherence to pre-planned interventions.** Following the traditional approach, implementers largely become locked into a predetermined design and are judged based on their ability to achieve results by rigidly adhering to that design, with little flexibility for adaptation. In complex environments, the ability of program staff to predict what will work best at the outset is limited. Rigidity in implementation means that programs may end up following a wrong path and potentially do more harm than good (Maclay, 2015).
3. **Reverse engineering of logic.** In order to meet the requirements of donors and contracts, which may require certain types of activities or already come with a notion of what a project will look like, practitioners may be pigeon-holed into inventing or reverse engineering program logic (Maclay, 2015). When program staff design the program first, then look for logic later, which can be the case when funding sources are targeted to certain types of interventions, it closes off the possibility of finding the most effective interventions.

Doing Development Differently³

The shift to a greater emphasis on quality of aid, which characterizes the Aid Effectiveness Movement, reflects the shared desire to better work towards the vision that all the world's citizens, particularly the most marginalized, have their basic rights fulfilled. It is on this platform that the traditional approach to development emerged, and similarly on this platform that critics of said approach base their arguments. Everyone wants to do development *better*.

Despite the many challenges that critics of the traditional approach note, these same critics acknowledge that there are times when linear, blueprint models are useful. Indeed, even in development, some problems, namely *simple* problems, require pre-planned, step-by-step interventions (e.g., Maclay, 2015; Ramalingam, Laric, & Primrose, 2014). However, critics note that most problems are not simple, or even *complicated*—they are *complex* (Ramalingam et al., 2014). In response to the critiques, new ways of designing, managing, and evaluating development projects that better acknowledge the complexity of development challenges are beginning to take hold.

Development in Complexity

Snowden and Boone (2007) explain that complexity science can help us think in new ways to address the challenges and opportunities we face. To do this, we must first be able to identify whether a development problem, or parts of a problem, is simple, complicated, or complex. Development challenges can be viewed using the Cynefin (pronounced *kuh-nev-in*) Framework (cited in Snowden et al., 2007) (see Figure 1) that distinguishes simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic contexts. Simple and complicated contexts are ordered—cause and effect

can be perceived, and solutions can be determined based on fact. Complex and chaotic contexts are unordered—there is no immediately apparent relationship between cause and effect, and solutions cannot be known but emerge (Snowden et al., 2007).

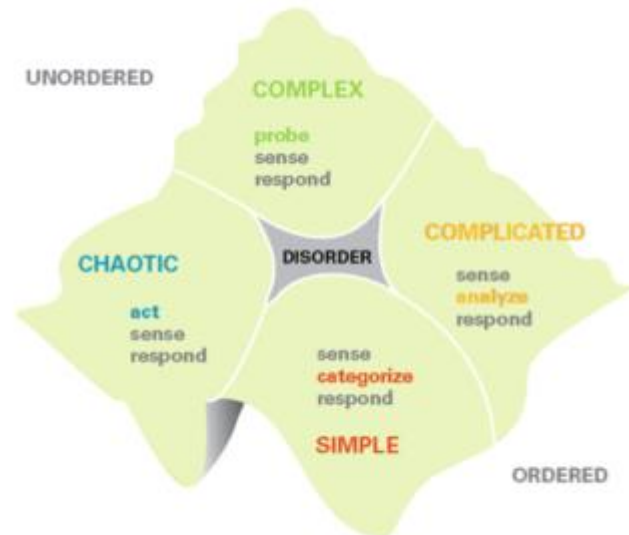


Figure 1. Cynefin Framework

³ *Doing Development Differently* is a term coined by a community of researchers and practitioners at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Harvard's Kennedy School around August 2014. The community has a manifesto, the *Doing Development Differently Manifesto*, calling for development to address locally defined problems through iteration, learning, and adaptation. For more information, see: doingdevelopmentdifferently.com. I use the term in this paper because it effectively captures the essence of the shift in how development happens without overemphasizing any one approach or tool, not because I intend to align with any particular movement.

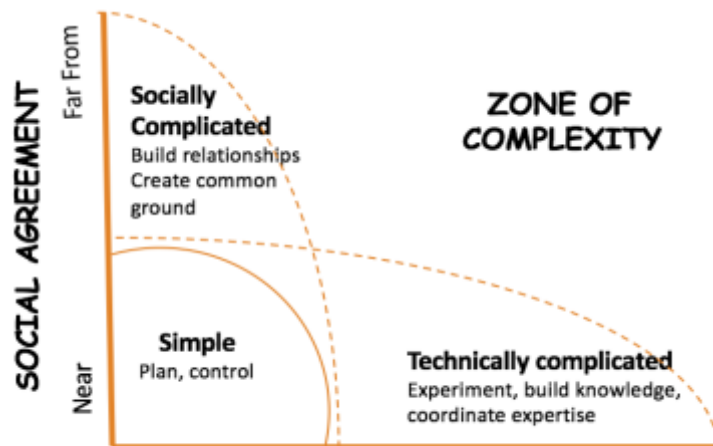


Figure 2. Social agreement-technical certainty matrix

Other experts use a heuristic developed by the late Brenda Zimmerman, reproduced in Patton (2011), that assesses the level of technical certainty and social agreement about an issue. Technical certainty describes how well-understood a problem, its causes, and its solutions are. Social agreement refers to the level of agreement or conflict among stakeholders about the desirability of solving the problem (Patton, 2011).

As shown in Figure 2, simple problems are those in which stakeholders have a high level of social agreement about

the need to solve the problem and there is a high level of certainty about the causes of and solutions for a problem.

Complicated problems are those problems in which either: (a) there is a high level of social agreement but low technical certainty (technically complicated); or (b) there is low social agreement but high technical certainty (socially complicated) (Patton, 2011).

Complex problems are those in which there is a low level of both technical certainty and social agreement about an issue (Patton, 2011). Snowden et al. (2007, para. 22) describes the difference between complicated and complex problems with a metaphor:

Ferraris are complicated machines, but an expert mechanic can take one apart and reassemble it without changing a thing. The car is static, and the whole is the sum of its parts [technically complicated]. The rainforest, on the other hand, is in constant flux—a species becomes extinct, weather patterns change, an agricultural project reroutes a water source—and the whole is far more than the sum of its parts [complex].

In complexity science, a complex system is characterized as one that:

- Has many interacting elements;
- Has non-linear and disproportionate interactions (a small change can have a large consequence);
- Is dynamic—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and solutions cannot be imposed but rather emerge;
- Has a history and evolves, and that evolution is irreversible; and
- May look ordered and predictable, but is actually unpredictable, so solutions cannot be known (Snowden et al., 2007).

Snowden et al. (2007) elaborate, “Unlike in ordered systems (where the system constrains the agents), or chaotic systems (where there are no constraints), in a complex system the agents and the system constrain one another, especially over time. This means that we cannot forecast or predict what will happen.” The implications for the development sector of this inability to

forecast what will happen are tremendous—if we cannot accurately predict outcomes and which activities will lead to such outcomes, *how can we possibly design, implement, and measure the planned, linear interventions called for in traditional development approaches?*

Considering Complexity when Developing Solutions

Frameworks such as the Cynefin Framework and the social agreement-technical certainty matrix (return to Figures 1 and 2) help development professionals describe the context within which they are operating in order to make appropriate choices about how to respond. To address simple problems, practitioners should sense what is happening, categorize the type of problem, and respond by planning and controlling an intervention. Simple problems are well-suited for a traditional management and evaluation approach.

In response to complicated problems, practitioners must again sense what is happening, analyze the problem, and then respond. Technically complicated problems require experimentation and coordination of expertise, while socially complicated demand building relationships and creating common ground. For both types of complicated problems, the goal is to move towards simplicity and then implement a more traditional management and evaluation approach.

However, that the traditional approach to development has come under scrutiny suggests that: (a) more people recognize the need to align the type of solution with the complexity of the problem; and (b) more people recognize that many development challenges are complex, not simple or complicated. Indeed, Ramalingam et al. (2014, p. 1) argue that “*the majority of development problems may well be [complex]*”. They elaborate that:

International development and humanitarian agencies face some of the most complex and challenging problems confronting humankind. The social, economic and political improvements that many aid agencies focus on are characterized by ‘novel complexity, genuine uncertainty, conflict of values, unique circumstances, and structural instabilities’ (Ellerman, 2001, p. 26). Such improvements need to be induced, shaped, facilitated and supported in situations of limited national resources, weak institutional capacity and, in many cases, endemic corruption and protracted conflict. All of this sits within an increasingly turbulent and unpredictable system of global foreign relations (Ramalingam, et al., 2014, p. 1).

Referring back to the Cynefin Framework and the social agreement-technical certainty matrix, we know that, to address complex situations, practitioners must probe for further information, sense what is happening, and respond by iterating, collecting feedback from diverse stakeholders, and adapting solutions. Therefore, in acknowledging that many (if not most) development issues are in fact complex, then the field needs to find different, non-traditional approaches to achieving our goals.

Literature Review

In this section, I review literature on different, more appropriate approaches to addressing complex development challenges, including Developmental Evaluation (DE), Adaptive Management (AM), and other learning- and adaptation-based approaches. Next, I summarize key elements of DE and AM, drawing on the literature about how programs are doing development

differently in their own complex contexts, in order to frame the basis of my inquiry in this case study.

A Different Approach to Development

Various fields have been addressing complex problems by probing, sensing, and responding iteratively for decades. Different perspectives can be traced back to the early 1900s, noted in business, experimental science, systems theory, industrial ecology, and resource management (Williams, Szaro, & Shapiro, 2009).

However, within the development sector, while some actors have been following suit, by and large it is only recently that the field is beginning to shift from the traditional, linear, planned interventions that suit simple problems to more complexity-aware approaches. Currently, many multi-national organizations such as the World Bank are advocating for the need for more adaptive programming (World Bank Group, 2015). Many funders, including foundations such as Comic Relief (James, 2011) and bi-/multi-lateral agencies such as DfID (DfID, 2017) and USAID,⁴ are working to build their capacity to support strategic learning and adaptation. And many international development projects at organizations like Mercy Corps, International Rescue Committee, and Asia Foundation, are already using evaluative thinking to manage adaptively (e.g., Patton, McKegg, & Wehipeihana, 2016; Allana, 2014; Ladner, 2015).

The literature that describes the concept of *better* programming in complex development contexts is like alphabet soup—a flurry of terms, initiatives, approaches, and tools have emerged, demonstrating the increasing acknowledgment that we must *do development differently* in complex contexts. Box 1 provides an illustrative list of some of these concepts.

| Box 1. Illustrative List of Doing Development Differently Initiatives | |
|---|--|
| Multilateral Initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doing Development Differently Manifesto• Thinking and Working Politically• Global Development Initiative• Feedback Labs |
| Donor-based Initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DfID's Smart Rules• USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting |
| Think Tanks | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aspen Institute• Overseas Development Institute• World Bank |
| Broad Approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmental Evaluation |

⁴ See [usaidlearninglab.org](https://www.usaidlearninglab.org).

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive Management • Theory of Change (Emergent Theory of Change) |
| Specific Tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRC & MercyCorps' <i>Analysis-driven Agile Programming Techniques (ADAPT)</i> • Asia Foundation's <i>Strategy Testing</i> • USAID's <i>Complexity-aware Monitoring</i> • <i>Problem-driven Iterative Adaptation</i> |

While there are differences between the terms, initiatives, approaches, and tools listed above, Algos and Hudson (2016) identify three themes that cut across them all. First, these concepts acknowledge *the political nature of problems* and the need to work politically. With low social agreement on the desirability of solving problems and political and governance constraints and complications, solutions in complex contexts must work within the political constraints of the situation to focus on making change that is politically feasible. Second, these concepts emphasize *the need to work iteratively and adaptively*. When cause and effect are unknown and unknowable, solutions must involve creatively experimenting, collecting feedback, learning, and adapting. Finally, these concepts all acknowledge *the need for locally led solutions*. The people who are closest to the problem and most affected by its solution are the best suited to lead change. This may be central or local governments, civil society, or local NGOs.

While these three themes cut across the concepts, the way they are applied and which are emphasized differ between the terms, initiatives, approaches, and tools. For example, Algos et al. (2016) explain that, “*These initiatives see adaptive learning in different ways. To some, it’s a central driver of how change happens and a core strategic pillar. Others use adaptive learning more tactically, as a way to improve traditional approaches on the margins.*” Similarly, acting politically can mean different things in the different contexts. In some contexts, acting politically is evolutionary, meaning that the aim is to get more politically savvy to have better outcomes. In others, acting politically is intended to be revolutionary—having highly flexible approaches that respond to political awareness (Green, 2014).

Elements of Learning- and Adaptation-based Approaches

To frame my research, I draw heavily from the literature on DE, as well as that on AM, supplementing it with literature on the other concepts listed in Box 1. I merge the two concepts, DE and AM, despite the usual separation between management and evaluation in the development field because I believe that, particularly in complex contexts, evaluation (or more broadly, collection of data and feedback) should not and cannot be carried out separately from management. Feedback and data collection processes should be integrated into program management. Likewise, program management should be guided by regular and ongoing feedback and data collection. Patton (2011) explains that in DE, the evaluator is part of the innovation team, and serves as “*a facilitator and learning coaching, bringing evaluative thinking to the group, [is] supportive of the innovators’ values and vision. Credibility depends on [a] mutually respectful relationship [between the evaluator and the manager]*” (p. 25).

According to Patton (2011, p. 1), DE “*supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments*”. It allows projects to strategically collect data on context, processes, and outcomes in order to manage adaptively. Many evaluators advocate that DE is more appropriate than traditional evaluation approaches in complex contexts (e.g., Patton, 2011).

Similarly, AM⁵ is a management approach for dealing with complex development challenges. Holling (cited in Allana, 2014, p. 4) defined AM as “*a structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reducing uncertainty over time via system monitoring. Adaptive management is a tool which should be used not only to change a system, but also to learn about the system.*” AM differs from traditional management in that it is “*characterised by a flexible approach involving testing, monitoring, getting feedback and—crucially—making course-corrections if necessary*” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 3), rather than strictly adhering to pre-planned scope, budget, and timelines.

Box 2 compares traditional management and evaluation to *learning- and adaptation-based approaches*.

| Box 2. Comparison of Traditional Management and Evaluation and Learning- and Adaptation-based Approaches | | |
|--|--|--|
| | Traditional Management & Evaluation | Learning- and Adaptation-based Approaches |
| Purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement evidence-based practices • Improve, test, prove, validate a model • Measure merit and worth • Accountability to planned budget, scope (activities & outcomes), timeline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and adapt new interventions |
| Situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manageable, stable, situations (simple & complicated) • Cause of problem is known or knowable • Goals are known or knowable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex, dynamic situations • Causes of problem and solutions are unknown and unknowable • No certain path forward is possible |

⁵ It is important to note that the concept, *Adaptive Management*, has been (mis)used in many instances in the development sector to describe the phenomenon of *improving* planned, linear projects. In other words, in some cases where an actor claims they are doing Adaptive Management, they are really doing formative evaluation and slightly modifying their plans (still traditional management), rather than developing their intervention as they go. The fact that the development sector often conflates Adaptive Management with better formative evaluation and subsequent improvement has contributed to my choice to use the term *Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively* in this research, in order to clarify that I am using the purist definition (Holling, cited in Allana, 2014) of Adaptive Management.

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions are reasonably well conceptualized • Key variables are controllable, measurable, predictable | |
| Mindset | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predict & plan • Control & implement • Monitor & measure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovate, collect feedback, adapt • Iterate |

Adapted from: Patton, 2011, p. 23 & Allana (2014).

Patton et al. (2016) elaborate that DE is guided by eight interrelated, mutually reinforcing principles. They articulated these principles based on the experience of 12 organizations using DE to develop their programs in the complex contexts within which they work. These eight principles are summarized in Box 3.

| Box 3. Developmental Evaluation Principles | |
|--|--|
| 1. Developmental purpose: | Illuminate, inform, and support what is being developed, by identifying the nature and patterns of development (innovation, adaptation, systems change), and the implications and consequences of those patterns. |
| 2. Evaluation rigor: | Ask probing evaluation questions; think and engage evaluatively; question assumptions; apply evaluation logic; use appropriate methods; and stay empirically grounded—that is, rigorously gather, interpret, and report data. |
| 3. Utilization focus: | Focus on intended use by intended users from beginning to end, facilitating the evaluation process to ensure utility and actual use. |
| 4. Innovation niche: | Elucidate how the change processes and results being evaluated involve innovation and adaptation, the niche of developmental evaluation. |
| 5. Complexity perspective: | Understand and interpret development through the lens of complexity and conduct the evaluation accordingly. This means using complexity premises and dynamics to make sense of the problems being addressed; to guide innovation, adaptation, and systems change strategies; to interpret what is developed; to adapt the evaluation design as needed; and to analyze emergent findings. |
| 6. Systems thinking: | Think systemically throughout, being attentive to interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and other key aspects of the social system and context within which the innovation is being developed and the evaluation is being conducted. |
| 7. Co-creation principle: | Develop the innovation and evaluation together—interwoven, interdependent, iterative, and co-created—such that the developmental evaluation becomes part of the change process. |
| 8. Timely feedback: | Time feedback to inform ongoing adaptation as needs, findings, and insights emerge, rather than only at predetermined times (e.g., quarterly, or at midterm and end of project). |

Source: Patton et al., 2016, p. 309

The eight principles of DE are not an à la carte menu—programs do not pick and choose which principles they will apply. Rather, the principles are all integral parts of DE for all programs. However, the extent and the ways in which they address the principles depends on the program (Patton et al., 2016).

Additionally, the principles are just that—principles or fundamental propositions on which DE is built. They are not intended to and do not prescribe specific practices or tools. Programs using DE create and adapt their own processes and tools that meet their developmental needs.

Conceptual Framework

While DE and AM do not offer specific methods, the literature on such approaches, initiatives, and tools listed in Box 1 reveal a number of similar elements and practices. In this section, I synthesize information from case studies on how these approaches are implemented by different organizations, as well as guidance documents that review what is understood about these approaches by the field.⁶

According to my synthesis of the literature, most organizations that use DE, AM, and related learning- and adaptation-focused approaches incorporate, to a greater or lesser extent, the following eight elements. These elements form the foundation of my inquiry.

Vision. *Organizations have a clearly articulated vision, or high-level goal for systems change.*

An understandable misconception is that organizations that use learning- and adaptation-focused approaches do not have a well-formulated goal, and in such a case, how could they possibly work towards achieving an impact? However, that is far from the case. Organizations using such approaches clearly articulate their high-level goal for change, but what is open and more flexible is intermediary objectives and activities. Organizations know and articulate their vision, but they aren't tied to a certain way to achieve it.

Maclay (2015) argues that when working to address complex development challenges, this focus on an end result is critical. As the results-based agenda implies, we must know what end result we desire, while being willing to adapt our activities along the way as we learn about whether we are headed in the right direction. Maclay elaborates, “*While the ultimate goal – poverty reduction, for example – might be clear, how to go about this is often not so apparent*” (p. 48). He explains that having a focus on the vision, or high-level goal, a link can more easily be made between program activities and impact, and management can “*more transparently enable field staff to respond to opportunities and changes in circumstances*” (p. 48).

Both Allana (2014) and Maclay (2015) explain that members of the management team need to regularly affirm and articulate the vision so all team members are able to work collaboratively towards a common goal. By clearly promoting and focusing on the high-level goal, management

⁶ As demonstrated in Box 1, not all of the literature refers to the process of “*systematically and iteratively collecting and using emergent information for strategic decision-making in the face of complexity*” as DE nor AM. For a source to be included in my literature review, the process described in the source needed to align with my definition of *DE for Managing Adaptively*, even if the process was called by another name.

can support staff to think creatively about how to achieve the goal and empower staff to experiment with new ideas, which will ultimately lead to greater programmatic effectiveness.

Contextualization. *Organizations recognize that complex problems and their solutions are context-specific. Therefore, they root their activities in the local context by continuously conducting situational analyses to identify what is happening and what opportunities for intervention are arising.*

A complex problem can be characterized, in part, as being highly context specific; therefore, you cannot just transplant one model that worked in one context to another (O'Donnell, 2016). Ober (2012) explains that “*unless the intervention addresses key driving factors of [the context], programming may miss the mark*” (p. 8).

Valters, Cummings, and Nixon (2016) distinguish between causal complexity and contextual complexity. Where causal complexity describes challenges related to understanding cause-and-effect, contextual complexity describes “*the state of knowledge about the environment in which the development programme works*” (Valters et al., 2016, p. 7). It is critical when trying to address complex development challenges to not only understand the dynamics underlying why an activity or set of activities leads (or doesn't lead) to an outcome or set of outcomes; it is also necessary to understand the changing contextual factors that influence those outcomes that have little to do with the direct link between activities and outcomes. Traditional management and evaluation approaches call this contextual complexity *assumptions*, and they are often identified and listed in a Logic Model as outside of the control of the program and therefore extraneous. However, programs using data- and learning-focused approaches not only identify these factors, but address these key contextual issues, as well as monitor and analyze them and how they influence the program over time.

Because of the nature of complexity—that cause and effect are unknown and unknowable, and because contextual factors largely influence outcomes—even if programming is grounded in a deep understanding of the context, interventions still may miss the mark. There is, therefore, a need to integrate ongoing analysis of the context. O'Donnell (2016) elaborates that situational analyses conducted at the beginning of projects are very much a requirement in adaptive approaches, but they are “*used to develop flexible intervention plans that are based on hypotheses rather than over-confident assertions about how change will happen*” (p. 8), and because organizations do not know how the context will change and how that will influence their project, situational analysis must be ongoing and contribute to iterative adaptation of activities.

O'Donnell (2016) clarifies, though, that being adaptive does not mean that lessons learned from the past or from other contexts are irrelevant in designing and implementing projects. Rather, lessons should be considered in order to make evidence-based decisions about what might work, but programs must maintain an awareness of the limitations of the applicability of this information in their current context and be open to the likelihood of needing to change course along the way in response to emergent challenges and opportunities.

Participation. *Organizations involve multiple stakeholders, particularly intended beneficiaries, in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions.*

Traditional management approaches are often top-down or based in management's understanding of best practices. In contrast, learning- and adaptation-focused approaches require that front line staff and end users take an active role in designing, managing, and evaluating projects (e.g., Allana, 2014; Ramalingam et al., 2014; Dexis 2016). Participation of other stakeholders, and particularly those who are hoped to benefit from a given intervention, can enhance program efficacy and sustainability. Participation of local stakeholders can contribute to better contextual analysis and feedback loops, and can help programs address locally identified challenges with locally led solutions. The type of participation that enhances effectiveness and sustainability is not a one-off event, but rather an iterative, dialogic process of engagement that contributes to ongoing analysis of the context, activity processes, outcomes, and impacts, which should lead to adaptation of programs in light of these learnings.

Valters (2015) cautions that even adaptive approaches can fall into a pattern of being driven from the top down. Conducting situational analysis to identify needs and opportunities, designing interventions and collecting feedback, and adapting activities and strategy can be led from back-office managers rather than front line staff and end users. While these types of interventions can still be adaptive, much of the literature notes the importance of avoiding this all-too-common trap and ensuring that solutions are developed with participation from those who are closest to and effected by the problem and its solution.

Multiple leverage points. *Organizations address problems from multiple angles.*

The nature of complex problems is such that programs cannot take only a singular, linear path towards their objectives. Thinking about problems through a systems dynamics lens can help us to understand the nature of problems and how to intervene. Systems are entities with multiple interdependent parts; a change in one part affects other parts and the whole system. Take, for example, a flock of birds. If one bird (a single part) changes its path, the birds around it (the other parts) follow suit and the shape of the flock (the whole) changes as well. The patterns that emerge in the relationships between the parts make the whole greater than the sum of its parts (e.g., Capra, 1996).

Ramalingam et al. (2014) explain that understanding how a system works can help us identify different leverage points in order to change the system. They elaborate that, *“the best way forward, short of trying to analyse and predict the system in advance—which is likely to be impossible—is to employ a portfolio approach. This involves identifying possible entry points for interventions, launching multiple parallel interventions and learning in ‘real time’ to ensure the appropriate sequence and mix of activities”* (Ramalingam et al., 2014, p. 14). To successfully intervene in complex problems, programs must look for and intervene at multiple points of entry, moving dynamically among those points (Ramalingam et al., 2014) and continually collecting feedback and adapting.

Articulation of Theories of Change. *Organizations explicitly articulate their theories of change, then test, revise, and generate new theories of change over time.*

All individuals and organizations have underlying theories of change, or hypotheses about what causes change, that influence decisions they make. Those theories of change, however, are not always made explicit. Well-articulated theories of change include hypotheses about why activities (or combinations of activities) will have a given effect, evidence that supports those hypotheses, and assumptions that must be met for those hypotheses to be proven true. Theories of change are often articulated in a Logic Model or other diagram (James, 2011), but can also be depicted in a narrative or other format. For organizations that use flexible, learning-oriented approaches, theories of change are adaptable over time since they are simply hypotheses. Having a clearly articulated theory of change locates a program within a wider analysis of how change happens, drawing on external learning about development. It explains an organization's understanding of the change process and how they will contribute to it while challenging them to explore it further by building in learning, reflection, and adaptation of the theory (James, 2011).

Even well-articulated theories of change are used by organizations that take a traditional management and evaluation approach. These are called *planned theories of change*. However, organizations that use DE, AM, and other such approaches take an *emergent theory of change* approach—they recognize that because of the nature of complexity, they do not have all of the information needed to fully know how change will occur (James, 2011). According to O'Donnell (2016, p. 9), a well-articulated theory of change “*provides a strong basis for determining what to look for to guide adaptation.*” By making hypotheses and assumptions explicit, programs can test, revise, and generate new theories of change (O'Donnell, 2016). Well-articulated theories of change also offer a way for organizations to engage in an ongoing process of reflection to understand how change happens and how they contributed to it (James, 2011). Theories of change are not static. Rather, they require ongoing collection of evidence, reflection on the assumptions, and revision of the hypotheses.

Experimentation. *Organizations create a culture of experimentation, empowering staff to develop and test creative solutions.*

Patton (2011) explains that in complex contexts, cause and effect are unknown and unknowable, so it is not possible to predict which activities will ultimately lead to an intended final goal. Planning and controlling are not possible. Alternately, programs can experiment, collect data, and adapt in the face of uncertainty.

For experimentation to be possible, a program must have a culture in which all staff, not just management, have the freedom to be creative and test new ideas. Donors and senior management need to establish this environment that allows teams on the ground to innovate, respond to problems, learn, and adapt themselves. Andrews et al. (cited in Maclay, 2015) described such a scenario as an authorizing environment, explaining that “*change is only possible if something bridges the agents with power to those with the ideas*” (p. 50). Experimentation also requires an openness to failing and learning (Allana, 2014). A program cannot pilot new and creative ideas if they are tied rigidly to “safe” or trusted activities, nor can they learn if they are not willing to try, fail, and try again.

O'Donnell (2016) notes that experiments can be sequential or concurrent. Organizations build their strategy over time with multiple experiments, some that build upon each other, trying one approach, and then adapting it or trying something new, and others that run concurrently to see which, or which combination, works best. In light of such experimentation, Allana (2014, p. 8) notes that there must be a sense that “*everyone is on the same team, working towards the same vision*”. Even when team members disagree, a sense of camaraderie can ensure that experimentation, failure, and learning can be productive.

Data collection. *Organizations use frequent, ongoing, and real-time feedback loops to collect data on needs, opportunities, program interventions, and outcomes.*

Barder (2010) claims that “*as change-makers, we should not try to design a better world. We should make better feedback loops.*” The complexity of the problems we are trying to address demands not that we better plan, predict, and control (which would be an appropriate response to solve simple problems), but rather that we create better systems for experimenting, collecting data, and adapting.

Allana (2014) explains that an adaptive approach requires “*vigilant monitoring*” (p. 7). Programs need to be constantly generating intelligence on changes in the context within which they are working. Without this real-time feedback, programs cannot justify adaptations to activities or larger shifts in strategy. Wild et al. (2015) elaborate that programs must develop “*cycles of doing, failing, adapting, learning and (eventually) getting better results*” (p. 8). This cycle allows them to collect information to test their original hypotheses and be able to adapt their theory of change in light of the feedback gathered. These feedback loops, however, do not have a strict formula. They are not necessarily formalized, centralized, and systematized. Much of the feedback programs collect come through informal but continuous and real-time data gathering channels (Allana, 2014). Additionally, feedback loops provide pathways for collecting different types of relevant data, only the data that is needed, and in ways that are most relevant and feasible.

Maclay (2015) adds that data collection for the purpose of adapting cannot be a one-off event. We need to adapt based on new information about our assumptions, the context, and the interventions we are applying, and a constant cycle of learning is required to enable this.

Reflection and adaptation. *Organizations engage in regular reflection on emergent learnings about the context, theory and assumptions, activities, and outcomes, and they adapt their activities and strategies in response to these learnings.*

Patton (2011) explains the difference between programmatic improvements and programmatic developments.⁷ All programs—both those that employ traditional management and evaluation approaches and those who use more responsive approaches—make programmatic improvements, or small tweaks in activities to stay on course. However, programs that use DE, AM, and other such approaches also make larger strategic developments.

⁷ See footnote 6 for an explanation of the difference between improvement and development.

Such programs develop over time. Activities emerge from new experiments that are tested and validated. Adaptation can occur in response to changes in context, better understanding of the processes for change, or in learnings about intervention processes and outcomes. Reflection on what is learned and adaptation in response to that learning is the key feature of DE and AM, and all of the concepts described above are incomplete if a program does not have the ability to adapt (e.g., Patton, 2011; Allana, 2014; Ramalingam et al., 2014; Maclay, 2015; Wild et al., 2015; Dexis, 2016; O'Donnell, 2016).

The eight elements synthesized from the literature on DE, AM, and other concepts listed in Box 1 form the foundation of my inquiry, through which I aim to describe how one organization implements a learning- and adaptation-focused approach to management and evaluation in their context.

Research Design

The purpose of this research is to provide a rich description of the learning- and adaptation-based approach to management and evaluation so development practitioners looking to use DE, AM, and related approaches can reflect on and adapt pieces of this example as they fit in their context. I achieve this objective by conducting a case study of one NGO, Catalytic Communities (CatComm), over the period of January 2015 to May 2017, with most data collection conducted in Spring 2015.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

- a. What do staff identify as the most important elements of CatComm's approach? How do the elements of their approach relate to each other?
- b. What specific practices comprise CatComm's approach? What specific examples do we have of CatComm's approach in practice?
- c. What conditions enable and limit CatComm to be able to implement their approach in their context?
- d. How does CatComm's approach align with the literature on DE, AM, and related approaches?

In order to answer these research questions, I conducted a review of relevant program documents, guidelines, and reports. Then, I interviewed six CatComm representatives, including two board members, the Founder/Executive Director, and three staff. I analyzed the data using content analysis to answer the research questions. Throughout the process of analyzing and drafting the report, I had regular follow-up conversations with the Founder/Executive Director to confirm my findings and fill gaps in the research. I chose the case study methodology because my goal, rather than to generalize to all organizations, was to illuminate the approach of one organization so others in the field can learn from their unique experiences.

Case Study Site

I selected CatComm for this case study because (a) I knew they were using a learning- and adaptation-based approach to management and evaluation to address complex development challenges (for which they didn't have a name before we began our research); (b) they were interested in documenting their approach to doing development and welcomed the research; and (c) I have worked with CatComm since 2012 as a volunteer translator and lived in the state of Rio for two years prior to commencing this work so my access was facilitated.

CatComm is an NGO working since 2000 on behalf of Rio's *favelas* (see Box 4, *What are favelas?*) on issues such as sustainable development, human rights, and urban planning. In many ways, CatComm serves as a human rights advocacy organization. Schlangen (2014) defines human rights work as follows:

Human rights work is organized around fundamental principles that all humans should have access to basic rights and is focused on protecting and promoting those rights. These principles, which are set out in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are backed by numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions (Schlangen, 2014, p. 2).

CatComm's mission is to “create models for effective integration between informal and formal settlements...” and to “improv[e] the quality of life for all Rio de Janeiro residents by driving a more creative, inclusive and empowering integration between the city's informal and formal communities...”⁸ To this end, CatComm “supports and empowers residents of informal settlements, evolving strategically to support their needs as they arise”⁹ and “is marked by flexibility, timeliness and a keen demand-response”¹⁰. Over the past 16 years, in response to community-identified needs, CatComm has provided requested training, helped facilitate debates, documented community voices and initiatives, facilitated media coverage, and offered a range of other programs.

Box 4. What are *favelas*?

Favelas are informal communities that arise from an unmet need for housing, are developed by individual residents without government regulation, and are continuously evolving (Williamson, n.d.). Contrary to the popular belief that favelas are places of squalor, built from precarious building materials, and illegal and marginal, “*favela residents put decades-worth of income and physical labor into the construction...of their homes*” (Williamson, n.d.). According to CatComm, citing data from 2013 from the Popular Data Institute, the vast majority of favela residents like where they live, are proud of their communities, and would continue to live there even if their income grew (Catalytic Communities, n.d., Rio Favela Facts), a finding that counters the dominant narrative that favela residents are desperate,

⁸ catcomm.org/mission/

⁹ catcomm.org/about/

¹⁰ catcomm.org/category/community-support/

unhappy, and wanting to leave their communities.

Favelas are Rio de Janeiro's version of affordable housing. Approximately 1.5 million people, 23 to 24 percent of Rio's population, live in favelas, a percentage comparable to that of people living in affordable housing in other major cities (Catalytic Communities, n.d., Rio Favela Facts). There are currently over 1,000 unique favelas, ranging from *"newer or more challenged communities with slum-like conditions and a desire to resettle, to highly-functioning, vibrant neighborhoods determined to maintain their qualities and continue developing in their own extraordinary ways"* (Williamson, n.d.).

Historically, favelas have been treated as illegal settlements, and under this justification have been targets of exclusion, segregation, stigmatization, and discrimination. The 1937 Construction Code deemed favelas *"in violation of the laws"* (as cited in Magalhães, n.d.), a declaration that has influenced the perception of favelas as places of urban disorder, precarious conditions, and negative moral character that pervades society today. The 1960s Urban Reform Movement led to the 1992 City Plan, which revised the definition of favelas but still declared them as *"in violation of legal standards"*. Since the founding of the first favela, Providência, in 1897, residents have experienced severe and ongoing violations of human rights, including police violence, forced evictions, poor education systems, and inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure (Magalhães, n.d.). Despite this general neglect by the city they call their home, however, favelas have been incubators of culture, innovation, and beauty.

Complexity and Challenges for Management and Evaluation

According to the social agreement-technical certainty matrix, CatComm works in a complex environment: there is low certainty of how to solve problems and low agreement about the need and benefits of solving the problems.

There are a number of stakeholders that make the issue of integration of formal and informal settlements in Rio socially complex. Each group holds their own perspectives about the definition of the problem, how important it is to solve, and how best to solve it, and even within groups there are differences of opinion. Take, for example, the question of preparing Rio for the 2016 Olympic Games. The government views favelas as the problem, and their political will is attached to the interests of the elite. They, therefore, view the solution as eradicating favelas, and their actions include illegal and forced evictions, promoting gentrification, relocating favela residents to substandard housing developments, and forcing favela residents out of their homes by cutting off social services, creating unbearable living conditions, and promoting out-of-reach cost of living. On the other hand, favela residents (and their allies) want to be treated as equal members of society, respected as such, and entitled to the same basic services afforded to residents of the formal city. Some residents would prefer to get a title to their land and sell it for a profit; others prefer to receive a public housing unit and indemnification money; while yet others prefer to resist eviction, stay in their community, and preserve the rich culture and heritage their community holds.

Additionally, there is (and can be) no tried and true, one-size-fits-all model to integration of formal and informal parts of the city. There is no solution, no matter how technical, that we can

come to discover through increasing expertise, since cause and effect is nonlinear, interactions are dynamic, and patterns are emergent. Again using the pre-Olympic preparations as an example, resisting evictions may work in some circumstances and in some communities, while in others it can lead to backlash. Even in the same community, we can see residents' resistance lead to better outcomes for residents until a tipping point is reached, at which time the government unpredictably lashes out at the community and enacts an eminent domain decree, removing individuals from their homes with no compensation. We can't predict what the best outcome will be (although we have a direction in which we hope to go), so we certainly cannot know how to achieve that outcome.

Schlangen (2014) elaborates on the complexity inherent in human rights advocacy work:

Advocacy is threaded throughout efforts to promote and protect human rights. Advocacy is about influencing power dynamics to secure or resist social or political change. Like others working to advocate for international development and humanitarian programs and policies, human rights advocates operate in a power-charged, contested, and constantly shifting context. Change involves complex and often fluid chains of influence, rarely linked to one action. Results often are markers of progress in the right direction, rather than a solid end state. All of these variables create challenges for traditional evaluation methodology, which prefers interventions to be more predictable, linear, and controlled (Schlangen, 2014, p. 3).

CatComm identifies many challenges inherent in a complex context that makes it impossible to manage and evaluate using a traditional approach:

- Change is long-term, unpredictable, and often unobservable. It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify results.
- Change is effected by many actors working together and building upon each other. Understanding contribution, much less attribution, is often difficult and can undermine the trust and credibility of the organization.
- Their approach is nonlinear, iterative, and adaptive. Selecting indicators and measuring their progress towards them is impossible.

The literature (e.g., Schlangen, 2014) confirms that these challenges are faced by many organizations that do human rights advocacy work; CatComm is not unique in their struggles. Therefore, in order to operate successfully in such a complex context, CatComm uses a flexible, learning-based approach to management and evaluation, making them a relevant site for this case study.

Data Collection

I collected data using a cyclical process of reviewing documents, interviewing key staff members, and returning to documents and interviews for follow-up information.

Document Review

First, I reviewed relevant CatComm documents, including CatComm's website, Strategic Plan and Operations Framework documents, research reports conducted by CatComm, and

contributor's guidelines documents. From these documents, I began to collect information on elements of CatComm's approach and take notes on how they align with the eight elements identified in my literature review. I also used the document review to formulate specific questions for interviewees.

Semi-Structured Key Informant Interviews

In collaboration with CatComm's Founder/Executive Director, I purposively selected six participants, including two board members, the Founder/Executive Director herself, and three program staff, who had in-depth knowledge of CatComm's management and evaluation approach. I then contacted participants to invite them to participate a 90-minute interview via Skype. At the beginning of the interviews, I explained the intent and process of the research and collected verbal consent.

Next, I asked a series of 10 questions developed from the eight concepts identified in my conceptual framework and aimed at understanding how CatComm implements their learning- and adaptation-based approach in their context. I began with a question that asked participants to explain what, in their opinion, are the most important aspects of CatComm's approach. I then adapted the order of the following eight questions to elaborate on the participant's response and to elicit information about elements of CatComm's approach the participant did not address. I also asked several probing questions in order to hone in on specific practices and examples of how the practices are implemented. Finally, I asked participants to speculate on outcomes that emerged as a result of their approach.

Triangulation

Many of the participants indicated further documentation or other participants with whom I could follow-up. After the initial document review and interviews, I went back to the documents and followed up with participants, particularly the Founder/Executive Director, to ask clarifying questions.

For a list of sources, see Table 1.

| Table 1. Data Collection Sources | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Document Review | CatComm Website Basic Operations Framework <i>RioOnWatch</i> Contributors' Guidelines <i>Rede Favela Sustentável</i> Facebook Group ComCat Facebook Page (Portuguese) CatComm Facebook Page (English) <i>RioOnWatch</i> Facebook Page <i>RioOnWire</i> Facebook Page Twitter handles Strategic Plan 2015-2020 Strategic Plan 2015 and beyond |
| Key Informant | Executive Director/Founder Institutional Director |

| | |
|------------|--|
| Interviews | Research Coordinator <i>RioOnWatch</i> Coordinator 2 Board Members |
|------------|--|

Data Analysis

During the interviews, I took detailed notes and recorded the conversations. After completing the interviews, I listened to the recordings and summarized the interviews. I manually coded the data from interview notes and documents reviewed using inductive and deductive techniques. First, I drafted the coding structure based on the eight elements that emerged from the literature review. Then, I immersed myself in the data to revise the coding structure, and added codes for enabling and limiting conditions for CatComm’s approach. Finally, I coded the interview content and analyzed the data, identifying patterns that emerged between the elements of CatComm’s approach. I drafted the findings and shared them with the Founder/Executive Director for a member check. The Executive Director provided comments and clarifications on the findings, and I incorporated them into the report.

Limitations

Because of lack of funding for this study, I conducted this study remotely. I conducted interviews with staff via Skype, but I was unable to further triangulate data through observation or interviews with appropriate third parties, such as favela residents and other stakeholders who are familiar with aspects of CatComm’s approach.

Additionally, this research is based on the assumption, and my belief as a researcher, that DE, AM, and related approaches are in fact more effective to address complex contexts. It does not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of CatComm’s approach, nor compare it to more traditional approaches. Instead, it aims to provide a rich description of CatComm’s learning- and adaptation-focused approach—what the primary elements of their approach are, how they relate to each other, and what factors enable and limit their approach. Further research evaluating the effectiveness of the approach would be beneficial, and could draw upon the findings from this study.¹¹

Findings & Analysis

Upon collecting data about CatComm’s approach and discussing with CatComm’s Founder/Executive Director the similarities and differences between their approach and both DE

¹¹ CatComm and I have received a General Mission Grant from the FasterForwardFund, which aims to advance the practice and profession of evaluation, to conduct a follow-up study to examine the effectiveness of CatComm’s approach. This study will be completed in May 2017.

and AM, I have titled CatComm's "*Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively*".¹² I define *DE for Managing Adaptively* as a systematic, iterative process of collecting and using emergent information for strategic decision-making in the face of complexity. Essentially, *DE for Managing Adaptively* is the process by which CatComm strategically collects, analyzes, and interprets *data*,¹³ in order to *develop*¹⁴ their programming over the course of implementation.

In synthesizing the data collected through staff interviews and document review, I have identified 8 discrete but interdependent elements of *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm and 20 specific practices that further elucidate CatComm's approach. In this section, I will describe these elements, introducing new literature on DE, AM, and related approaches to explain unexpected findings, as well as providing *snapshots*, or rich descriptions, of actual applications of *DE for Managing Adaptively* by CatComm to exemplify the elements in practice.¹⁵ Then, I will propose a model that shows how the elements are interrelated for CatComm.

How does CatComm implement *DE for Managing Adaptively*?

In CatComm's initial years, one participant explained, they did not take a *DE for Managing Adaptively* approach. CatComm's first project, the *Community Solutions Database*, was implemented when the Executive Director, who had been visiting and listening to community members for a year during her doctoral research, identified a need and offered a solution. She soon learned that community members were not using the database the way she anticipated they would. Instead, they were using it in a way that they identified was more useful to them. At first, she tried to stay the course. Over time, she learned the importance of recognizing what needs and solutions were naturally emerging from the communities, rather than imposing solutions that made sense to those outside of the communities.

Early experiences such as this formed the basis for CatComm's approach, which itself emerged organically. In fact, it was not until I, a long-time collaborator of CatComm and a graduate student studying NGO management and evaluation, introduced the CatComm Founder/Executive

¹² Although CatComm was unfamiliar with the terms DE and AM before this study, when I, familiar with the approaches and involved with CatComm's work for over five years, described them to CatComm's Executive Director, she agreed that both terms accurately portray aspects of their approach.

¹³ I define *data* broadly. It can include many types of information, including numbers and statistics, stories and anecdotes, and perceptions and constructions. It can be objective (although rarely is) or subjective, and it can be collected in any number of ways that is relevant to the context.

¹⁴ Patton et al. (2016) differentiate between program *improvement* and program *development*. Program improvement focuses on making an intervention or model better, or making slight course corrections to get back on track. Program development occurs when there is no model, rather one is being created along the way. Program developments occur in response to a significant change to the context or clientele, when learnings indicate a need to change course, or when a new need or opportunity arises.

¹⁵ The *snapshots* used for illustrative purposes often embody more than one element of *DE for Managing Adaptively*. They have been selected and written to best elucidate the respective element, and I have noted additional elements at the bottom of the box.

Director to the terms Developmental Evaluation and Adaptive Management that she began to recognize her organization in the literature on these concepts. Only then did I propose the term *DE for Managing Adaptively* to retroactively name their approach.

CatComm did not develop their approach to management and evaluation following the Principles of DE, nor any guidance on AM. Instead, their approach was developed over time to best meet their needs for collecting data, reflecting on it, and adapting. It was through this research that I was able to work with CatComm to identify eight elements of their approach and relate them back to the literature on DE, AM, and related approaches, using the term *DE for Managing Adaptively* as a framework. The following eight elements comprise CatComm's *DE for Managing Adaptively* approach and are described in further detail in this section:

- Clearly defined mission, evolving strategy
- Ongoing situational analysis and contextualization
- Locally led initiatives
- Multiple points of entry
- Culture of experimentation and non-attachment
- Network-based approach
- Ongoing, real-time data collection
- Continuous reflection and adaptation

Clearly Defined Mission, Evolving Strategy

- a. Seize timely and strategic opportunities, and leverage human, intellectual, financial, and network resources to enhance impact.
- b. Articulate a clearly defined mission, and regularly affirm the mission to ensure they are heading in the right direction.
- c. Develop a guiding five-year strategic plan; review, revise, and commit to goals and initiatives annually; and maintain flexibility to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.
- d. Employ a four-phase lifecycle within and across projects.

According to their website, CatComm's mission is:

*to create models for effective integration between informal and formal settlements in cities across the globe, based on the experience of Rio de Janeiro. Catalytic Communities is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Rio de Janeiro residents by driving a more creative, inclusive and empowering integration between the city's informal and formal communities, in which the city's favelas are recognized for their heritage status and their residents fully served as equal citizens.*¹⁶

While their mission is broad, inclusive, and stable, their strategy evolves over time. They are constantly collecting information on emerging needs and opportunities in communities, analyzing global trends, and monitoring what solutions are being applied in the favelas. They

¹⁶ catcomm.org/mission/

consider their vast human, financial, knowledge, and network resources,¹⁷ and they leverage those resources to fill critical gaps. When a major contextual change arises, they respond by seizing opportunities and responding in a timely way. They are light on their feet.

In order to make progress towards their mission via their strategy in a dynamic context, CatComm constantly reorients themselves to their mission in light of the current circumstances affecting favelas so staff are all heading in the same direction. They do this in a number of formal and informal ways. First, CatComm hires staff and interns¹⁸ based on how well their experience and interests align with CatComm's mission and current strategy, which is based on community needs. While staff and interns are encouraged to pursue their interests and creative ideas, activities are always discussed in relation to CatComm's overall mission and the current strategy.

To further define what activities CatComm will carry out, CatComm identifies where community needs meet CatComm's resources and CatComm's mission and strategy. Then, they apply their values-based *Core Evaluation Criteria* (see Box 5.) They also use this *Core Evaluation Criteria* after carrying out activities to assess to what extent their activities aligned with the values stated in the criteria.

Box 5. CatComm's *Core Evaluation Criteria*

1. Does the activity fill an important gap? Is it something that is not otherwise being done, introducing new ideas or approaches?
2. Does the activity leverage the potential of civil society and partners? Does it have ripple effects, catalyzing broader, potentially sweeping, change?
3. Does the activity align with our mission and strategy? Does it help us get where we are ultimately trying to go?

Additionally, CatComm updates their strategic plan yearly, planning for the next year as best they can. They use an approach that one participant explained was an urban planning methodology—they look forward on a five-year horizon while revising their plan every year.

¹⁷ CatComm identifies four types of resources at their disposal. *Human resources* include their core staff members (at the time of data collection, there were four core staff) and interns. *Network resources* include collaborators, volunteers, and others with whom they are connected through their vast network. *Knowledge resources* include understanding of the hyperlocal and global contexts, including the changing needs and opportunities, as well as awareness of practices that have worked in other similar situations. *Financial resources* refers to their budget of approximately 100,000 USD per year of unrestricted, primarily individual donations.

¹⁸ At the time of this research, CatComm had a core staff of four individuals. Additionally, CatComm operates largely through interns. Interns are short-term (usually 3 months) volunteers with interests and skills that align with CatComm's work.

Their next year is fairly well-defined, while the following years are meant to provide a general long-view of where the organization believes it is headed in working towards its mission. This long-view is updated annually to adjust the organization's plans to the emerging needs and opportunities in Rio's favelas.

Finally, CatComm has developed a *4-Prong Strategy* to work towards their mission. This strategy is best seen as a four-phase life cycle within projects and across the life of the organization (see Box 6). The initial phase of activities includes strategic training and networking. Next, CatComm focuses on communicating issues and values broadly. Later, they focus on developing and proving the value of participatory planning, and finally advocating for inclusive integrative and participatory policies. One participant explained that this four-phase life cycle also exists across the organization, conceptualizing the life of CatComm as beginning with strategic training and networking, and ending when inclusive, integrative, and participatory policies regarding the integration of formal and informal settlements are in place.

Box 6. CatComm's 4-Prong Strategy

- Strategic training and networking
- Broadly communicating issues and values
- Developing and proving the value of participatory planning
- Advocating for inclusive, integrative, and participatory policies

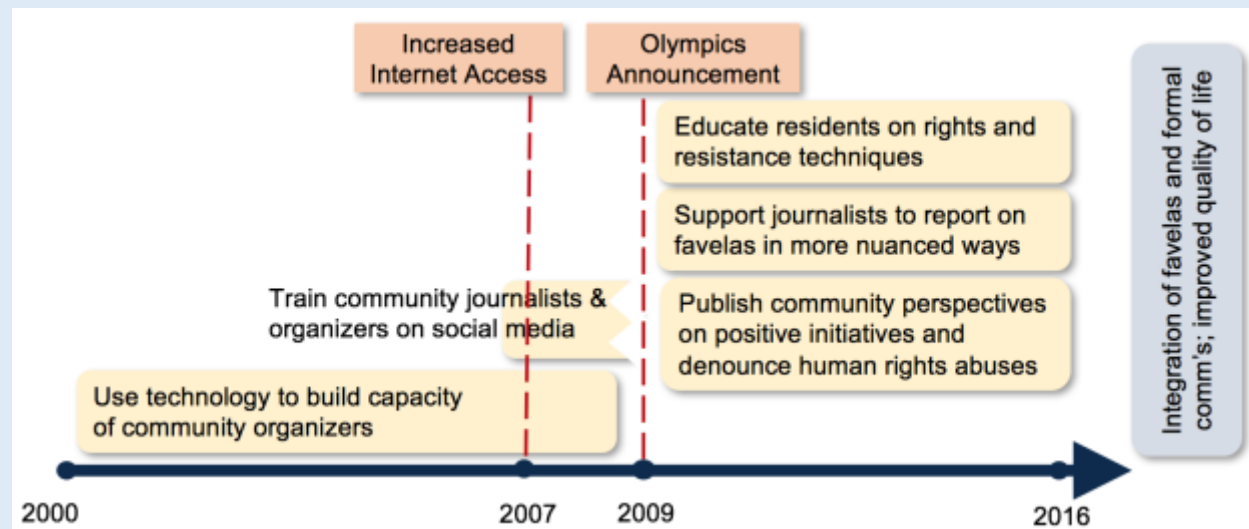
For an overview of CatComm's evolving strategies, see Snapshot 1.

Snapshot 1. Seizing Opportunities, Leveraging Resources, and Evolving Strategy for Greater Impact

From 2000 to 2008, CatComm's strategy was to foster collaboration across communities by bringing access to the Internet and physical meeting spaces to community organizers. One way they did this was by creating a community hub with a meeting space and access to the internet for community leaders. As access to the internet grew, CatComm began to transition to a new strategy—to enable community journalists to use the new social media platforms that were emerging by offering a Social Media Strategies training, in which they would publish their own articles on *RioOnWatch*, a small WordPress blog created by CatComm.

However, in 2009, when the International Olympics Committee announced that Rio would host the 2016 Olympic Games, CatComm knew of the mass evictions and human rights abuses that would ensue, and their strategy changed dramatically. *RioOnWatch* instantly evolved into a go-to resource for international audiences looking for more nuanced and accurate reporting on the favelas with a readership of nearly 400,000 people and cited by media outlets as large as the Guardian and the New York Times. *RioOnWatch* became CatComm's main priority in the lead up to the Olympics as a way for local, national, and international audiences to grapple with the evictions, human rights abuses, and stigmatization of favelas. Their larger Olympics Strategy emerged over time to include supporting international media, utilizing other social media

platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to publish, and providing information and support to community-based evictions resistance movements and individual residents.



This change in trajectory, which could be neither predicted or planned, is an example of how CatComm's strategy, but not their mission, has changed over time and in response to the changing context.

See also: Ongoing Situational Analysis and Contextualization; Reflection and Adaptation

From interviews with staff and document review, the data confirm that having a clearly defined mission (in the literature review I called it a *Vision*) was important for CatComm. However, equally important to CatComm was the need for flexibility in strategy and activities. In the literature review, I considered these concepts different from each other. However, the data suggest that these concepts, at least for CatComm, are highly interrelated and warrant inclusion together in the first *DE for Managing Adaptively* element. The evolving strategy and activities are not only a product of data collection, reflection and adaptation, but a core underlying function of the organization, along with its stable, clearly defined mission.

Ongoing Situational Analysis and Contextualization

- a. Regularly collect data and feedback to understand the hyperlocal needs and opportunities using multiple relevant and feasible data collection strategies.
- b. Track global trends to understand the local context and adapt solutions from the collective global experience to meet local needs.

CatComm uses a variety of methods to analyze the context within which they are working, collecting information about changes in the favela communities and relating those experiences to the global context. To collect information on the hyperlocal context, the team has continuous

dialogue, often via social media, in-person, or in other less formal spaces, with favela residents and community leaders,¹⁹ as well as other stakeholders who are deeply involved with the favelas.

CatComm constantly has an eye on the field, and they operate as a hub in an extensive local and global social network of people engaged with urban planning, community development, social movements, and a range of other fields. Through these connections, they incorporate continuous dialogue with members of their global networks who feed information back into the organization about global phenomena that relate to the experience in the favelas.

In this way, they are able to regularly assess what needs are emerging, what opportunities are arising, where other organizations are working (and, therefore, where there is a critical gap²⁰), and which interventions that have worked in other contexts may be beneficial if adapted to the Rio context. From there, they are able to identify and implement solutions that are tailored to the context of specific favelas, responding to real-time, individual needs and bringing in the most current understanding of how to support favela communities by integrating learnings from experiences of communities worldwide. One example of such situational analysis is demonstrated by CatComm's engagement with *Vidigal* (see Snapshot 2).

Snapshot 2. Perceiving and Responding to Gentrification in *Vidigal*

In 2012, through dialogue with community residents and leaders, as well as their continuous presence in the favelas, CatComm began to perceive that many favela communities, particularly in the South Zone of Rio, were in the early stages of gentrification. Bringing in their knowledge of the process of gentrification globally, CatComm began reaching out to residents and leaders in *Vidigal*, the favela where the process was most intense, to understand what they were experiencing, and they began introducing the global phenomenon through informal conversations.

Initially, the leaders were not interested in pursuing this issue. But over time, they reached out to CatComm and asked them to conduct a workshop for organizations and leaders in *Vidigal*. In response to the workshop, community leaders invited CatComm back to co-host a series of four community-led debates on gentrification, which aimed to engage residents to understand and identify responses to the process of gentrification.

In the case of *Vidigal*, CatComm's efforts contributed to the larger movement that changed the way the process of gentrification was talked about from an inevitable and largely positive

¹⁹ CC explains that they define community leaders as anyone who is working on behalf of the collective in a community. It can be many people, from heads of the Residents' Association, to educators, to residents who take a leadership role. In most communities, there is more than one community leader who CatComm works with. This serves to triangulate the needs of the community and opportunities for intervention, ensuring that the perceived needs and opportunities are agreed upon and representative of the perspective of the collective.

²⁰ See *Core Evaluation Criteria* in Box 5.

phenomenon to a more nuanced understanding. Had CatComm not been aware of the changing context, *Vidigal* may not have seen this change in discourse.

See also: Locally Led Initiatives

As needed, CatComm also implements a process for more thoroughly investigating the phenomenon when a change is perceived in the context. First, they reach out to community leaders and trustworthy sources in the communities, building a knowledge foundation from the local source. Then, they conduct a more rigorous study, sometimes bringing in an academic or researcher, connecting what they have found to theory and the global phenomenon. From there, they are able to decide how to respond.

In my literature review, I identified two concepts that informed this element: *Contextualization* and *Data Collection*. However, data revealed that for CatComm, collecting information on the needs and opportunities emerging in the favelas was a different process from collecting data on activities and outcomes. While CatComm often collected data on needs and opportunities at the same time as information on outcomes (for example, in the same in-person conversations), these two data collection processes occurred at different times in the lifecycle of any given change process or activity and for different purposes. For example, CatComm could be talking with a community leader on a visit to the community, and in the same conversation the community leader shares information about an emerging need, which contributes to a new activity, as well as an outcome that CatComm influenced, which allows CatComm to adapt an existing practice.

Conducting ongoing situational analysis, or regularly collecting data on the emerging needs and opportunities in the communities using a variety of informal and formal methods, is how CatComm is able to contextualize the support that they provide to favela communities. This ability to contextualize, both to the Rio favela context, as well as the context within the different favelas, is a critical feature of CatComm's application of DE.

Locally Led Initiatives

- a. Foster a space for community members to identify needs and solutions.
- b. Collaborate with and build the capacity of favela residents to carry out solutions, and compensate them for their work.

CatComm's initial project, the *Community Solutions Database*, was the first and last to be initiated entirely by the organization. While an award-winning effort, one participant stated that it was the "*least impactful thing [CatComm] did*". Every subsequent project has been either directly requested by the community or proposed by CatComm, in response to observations or community input, and affirmed and supported by communities. Furthermore, activities that CatComm carried out that received little community demand were dropped.

CatComm believes this is the only way to operate if they are to engender their value of "*supporting the communities in their development through their lens and to meet their needs*", as stated by one participant. CatComm does not impose their ideas upon communities. Rather, CatComm listens to a community's stated needs and proposed solutions. Then, CatComm decides if they can support the community, based on the proposed solution's alignment with mission and strategy, available resources, and the *Core Evaluation Criteria*. They believe that

communities are experts of their own situations, and they recognize that community members have a level of understanding that no outsider, including the CatComm, has.

CatComm implements this element in a number of formal and informal ways. CatComm communicates with community leaders via Facebook groups and messages, text and WhatsApp, in person at events, and in daily conversations in the communities and on the phone. CatComm has a general sense that more formal methods, for example a weekly call out, would be less effective, and one participant explained, *“People reach out when they want to be heard. [Even though we are] not actively seeking things out all the time, we still receive a lot of feedback, we still receive a lot of communication from residents.”*

That is not to say that CatComm doesn’t use any formalized pathways for communicating with communities. Occasionally, for example once every few months, they host meetings or workshops with the community members to discuss needs, opportunities, and possible solutions, and to action plan, as they did with community leaders in anticipation of the 2016 Olympic Games (see Snapshot 3). Additionally, they have created a Facebook group, composed of leaders of many different favela communities, in which leaders can request journalism coverage or other types of support, provide feedback on a current or past activity, or provide information on the changing context in the various communities. While these more formalized structures for community input have proven useful, in CatComm’s context, having many ongoing mechanisms for communities to provide input is often more effective.

Snapshot 3. Formalized Feedback for Combating Favela Stigma

With the Summer Olympics of 2016 approaching, CatComm hosted an initial meeting in December 2015 in which they intended to discuss three ideas for future action: 1) Tackling favela stigma; 2) Policies in light of the upcoming elections; and 3) Other topics of concern.

Residents were most interested in talking about favela stigma, and the group focused the entire meeting around that topic. Stemming from this interest in favela stigma, in late January 2016, CatComm organized a second meeting, in which they only discussed stigmatization. In that meeting, they decided that they would host a third meeting, bringing together two dozen community journalists from Rio’s favelas, with the intention of launching a campaign against favela stigma.

One participant said of the formal and informal mechanisms for community input, *“We are perhaps funneling [the ideas] forward, but the direction and ideas are community led and community inspired.”*

See also: *Network-based Approach*

Another way CatComm has promoted locally led initiatives is by hiring community members to fulfill key roles in their activities, instead of bringing in outside support, whenever local skills align with project needs. For example, CatComm has employed community members in their *Casa Community Technology Hub*, a house offering Internet access and meeting space for local leaders; they pay community journalists for articles they write for CatComm’s *RioOnWatch* news site; and they compensate community-based filmmakers and artists for the material they produce for CatComm. Hiring and compensating community members has looked different

throughout the organization's history, depending on project needs and local skills, but throughout its lifespan, CatComm has prioritized drawing upon the capacity of community residents as a way to ensure activities are locally led, to support residents in further building their skills, and to highlight the positive aspects of favelas.

In my review of the literature, I identified *Participation* as the third concept I was exploring. Interviews with CatComm staff revealed that, indeed, getting feedback from a variety of stakeholders was important. However, CatComm staff heavily emphasized getting input directly from community residents and valuing their voices above the voices of all other stakeholders.

Literature on DE, AM, and related approaches that shaped my inquiry include intended beneficiaries as one group of stakeholders (of many) who participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of projects. According to the literature (e.g., Patton, 2011), when working in complex contexts, which are characterized by a high level of social disagreement and technical uncertainty, organizations need to find common ground and build agreement about the desire to solve a particular problem, in addition to experimenting and developing technical expertise. The intent of such participation is largely, although often not explicitly, to improve efficiency and effectiveness of programming. In the evaluation realm, this is called practical participation (Cousins, 1998).

However, while CatComm's approach has elements of practical participation, it is, perhaps more closely aligned with transformative participation, which "*invokes participatory principles and actions in order to democratize social change*" (Cousins, 1998). The desired participants, in CatComm's case, are community members whose participation in their own development is stymied by those with more power. CatComm prioritizes community members' voices—their identified needs, solutions, and implementation of those solutions—above all other groups, such as government officials, non-favela residents of Rio, journalists, and academics, who also have stake in the issue.

This understanding, which I gained through the interviews, led me to reframe this element as *Locally Led Initiatives* because in the current development climate, the term "participation" is ambiguous and loaded—there is no clarity about who is participating, to what extent they are participating, and to what end they are participating. Therefore, it was important to further clarify what *participation* looks like for CatComm.

Multiple Points of Entry

- a. Leverage multiple points of entry across all levels of their work to address the complex and systemic nature of the problem.

CatComm takes an approach of leveraging multiple *points of entry*, or points at which they can intervene in the system, to work towards their mission of effective two-way integration of informal and formal settlements. This is evident in the diversity of projects they have taken on, as well as the multi-pronged nature of individual projects. CatComm recognizes that addressing an issue as systemic as exclusion of nearly one-quarter of a city's population requires multiple interventions, attacking the problem from many angles.

Throughout their 17-year history, their strategy has also included "*a combination of education, research, training, strategic communications, technology, networks, advocacy, and participatory*

planning".²¹ CatComm's major activities have included creating a database for community leaders to share their integration solutions; developing a physical space for community leaders to gather and access the internet; conducting trainings for community leaders; researching, writing, and publishing news and academic articles; contributing to and supporting international news outlets to report on the favelas; leading educational visits for foreigners to communities; and lecturing at universities.

Within projects, CatComm addresses multiple strategic and critical points of entry through which they hope to have an impact. They do this in recognition that such systemic change requires addressing the multiple interrelated aspects of the problem. During the lead up to the Olympic Games between 2010 to 2016, CatComm's strategy aimed largely to leverage the international media to shed light on issues facing the favelas. To do this, they carried out a number of strategic activities (see Snapshot 4) to highlight the positive aspects of favelas, expose the world to the nuance of favela residents' experiences, and to influence the way the government of Rio treated favelas and their residents.

Snapshot 4. Multiple Points of Entry within CatComm's Olympics Strategy

Around 2010, after the International Olympics Committee announced that the 2016 Summer Olympics would be held in Rio, CatComm anticipated the mass evictions and violence that would plague the favelas and recognized the opportunity inherent in the world's spotlight turning to the *cidade maravilhosa* as they prepared for the Games. CatComm developed their Olympics Strategy over the six-year period before and during the Games.

RioOnWatch, CatComm's primary activity during the 2010 to 2016 period, was an English- and Portuguese-language news site that published community perspectives on the urban transformations that characterized Rio in the lead-up to the Games. Within *RioOnWatch*, CatComm leveraged multiple entry points to work towards its mission. Whose articles they published, what they published about, and who they supported, while strategic, was not singular. They published stories by a wide range of sources, including community journalists, staff members, academics, and researchers. They published about different types of topics, including positive initiatives in communities, as well as human rights violations and issues of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion.

During the pre-Olympic period, CatComm also offered support to mainstream global media outlets to improve reporting on favelas. They connected international journalists with local community leaders to co-produce news articles and increase the portrayal of favela residents' perspectives in the international media; they provided trainings to international journalists to influence journalists to more accurately represent favelas in their articles; and they used Twitter and other social media to keep journalists abreast of the rapidly changing issues in the favelas so they are able to report on the rapid, often devastating changes affecting favela residents which is hidden from view or obscured by the government and Brazilian news outlets.

Simultaneously, throughout the lead-up to the Olympics they also support community leaders and residents by giving information about their rights, informing them about evictions resistance

²¹ catcomm.org/mission/

techniques that have been successful in other communities. They linked them with international media outlets who could cover their resistance efforts, and they documented and published articles on CatComm's own *RioOnWatch* site about the resistance movements happening in the favelas to increase global visibility.

CatComm believes that addressing the issue of exclusion of Rio's favela residents through these multiple points of entry contributed more effectively to improved reporting on favelas, as well as government treatment of favela residents, than focusing singularly on any one of these entry points.

See also: Network-based Approach; Adaptation and Reflection

CatComm takes the approach of leveraging multiple points of entry across projects as well. While their primary focus during the lead-up to the Olympics was on social media and the press, this did not preclude important work in other sectors. For example, during this period CatComm also supported one community by connecting them with a U.S.-based NGO that aims to create sustainable infrastructure solutions, to build a biodigester to enhance environmental sustainability solutions (see Snapshot 5).

Snapshot 5. Working Across Sectors—*Vale Encantado*'s Sustainability Initiatives

In *Vale Encantado*, a community situated high in the Tijuca Forest and known for its lush tropical environment, untreated sewage runs directly into nature, as it does in 66% of Rio. When residents communicated the desire to resolve this problem, CatComm introduced the community's cooperative to Solar Cities Solutions, a U.S.-based NGO with vast experience in implementing natural sewage treatment. Solar Cities helped the *Vale Encantado* Cooperative to build a biodigester, a sewage treatment system that captures gas emitted from sewage and food waste and transforms it into usable energy. The system was designed to clean and filter wastewater before it drains into the nearby Tijuca Lake.

To support this project, CatComm fostered the partnership between the *Vale Encantado* Cooperative and Solar Cities; provided cultural, linguistic, and logistical support for both sides; documented the project's progress; and gave visibility to the community and their sustainability practices through CatComm's *RioOnWatch* news site. Now, the community has two biodigesters, and they are continuing to realize their biosystem project, as one of many sustainability initiatives. Without the ability to work towards their mission by addressing multiple points of entry, CatComm would not have been able to contribute to this important work.

See also: Locally Led Initiatives; Network-based Approach

Consistent with systems thinking principles, CatComm knows that it is critical to address the multi-dimensional nature of the problem of exclusion of favela residents. However, CatComm also knows that they have to pick and choose the activities they are able to carry out. Again, they carefully vet potential activities using their *Core Evaluation Criteria* (refer back to Box 5) to

ensure they have as large of an impact as possible with the limited resources they have at their disposal.

Culture of Experimentation and Non-Attachment

- a. Develop creative solutions and pilot them.
- b. Foster commitment to outcomes, rather than attachment to activities.

CatComm has fostered a culture of experimentation that allows them to respond to the changing needs and emerging opportunities while testing new and creative interventions. With a constant influx of new interns and a wide-reaching network of collaborators, all with diverse experiences and training, CatComm is uniquely positioned to benefit from the creative capacities of their large network. They are constantly encouraging their staff, interns, and collaborators to conceptualize and test new and innovative ideas, given they are aligned with CatComm's mission and current strategy, and communities' needs. CatComm believes that everyone has something to contribute, and many of CatComm's most successful initiatives emerged from interns who often have just a short period of time with CatComm and offer a set of fresh eyes.

An integral part of CatComm's culture of experimentation is assessing the effectiveness of new interventions, being willing to scale their interventions up or down depending on the results. This requires a commitment to achieving impact rather than attachment to pre-determined activities. CatComm staff explain that they consider all of their activities a pilot that they test for an appropriate amount of time. With no attachment to success of any particular intervention, but rather a focus on the outcome they are trying to achieve, CatComm can assess whether or not an idea catches on and leads to important impacts. They can then make decisions to carry on, scale up, or retire an activity based on those learnings.

CatComm has had many experiments that have been successful in which they then invested increasing resources. They have also had, naturally, some that were deemed less impactful, which were consequently retired, such as the attempt to transition management of the *Casa Community Technology Hub* to the community (see Snapshot 6).

Snapshot 6. Experimenting with Transitioning Management of *The Casa* to the Community

In early 2003, CatComm opened the *Casa Community Technology Hub* in response to the lack of physical cross-community meeting space and Internet access experienced by favela organizers, which limited the potential of these leaders to effect change in their communities and the greater city. Over five years, more than 1,200 local leaders from 215 communities across Rio utilized *Casa's* space and resources to strengthen their community efforts, learning about it through word-of-mouth. By *Casa's* 5th birthday, however, the Internet had penetrated Rio's favelas. CatComm had been successful in fulfilling a critical organizing need for five years.

In 2008, a new opportunity was forming to support favelas to use the Internet in strategic ways to further strengthen their efforts, so CatComm shifted its resources to focus on this new opportunity. However, before the decision to outright close *Casa*, since it was still being widely used by local organizers in the Port Zone where it was established, CatComm experimented with the idea of community residents taking over its management. They hosted a series of meetings to gauge community members' interest in the idea; however, the meetings revealed that the group

was unable assume management of the hub, and the experiment to transition the project to the community was discarded. CatComm closed *Casa* with a celebratory party on its 5th birthday.

With a framework of non-attachment to a predetermined activity, in this case shifting the management of *Casa* to the community, CatComm was able to let go of the *Casa* at the appropriate moment and celebrate its successes, instead of holding on rigidly and continuing to spend precious resources while miss evolving opportunities.

See also: Locally Led Initiatives

Creating this culture of creativity and experimentation requires the ability to collect data, reflect, and adapt. For CatComm, experimentation and piloting creative new and innovative ideas is also closely related to having a far-reaching network of interns, collaborators, and partners. Through their network they are linked to other individuals and organizations in the field who are working towards the same goal, but with varied skills and interests. Thus, members of the large and diverse network can work across disciplines to identify out-of-the-box solutions together, rather than remaining isolated as any single individual, group, or sector alone with limited experiences and knowledge.

Network-based Approach

- a. Recognize that social change is a “*collective wave*”, and foster partnerships on the local, national, and global levels to work towards that change.
- b. Collaborate with those who are oriented towards the same mission, but with diverse knowledge and skills.

CatComm identifies itself in relation to the system within which it is situated. One participant said, “*Since we work towards the transformation of something very old, very deeply rooted, very ingrained in the mentality of Brazilian society, what we need is a process of mutation, a process of large-scale transformation, and it is vain to think that one organization can do this. This is a collective wave. And it has to be done collectively.*”

CatComm has a number of partners and collaborators—community residents, community leaders, residents’ associations, other NGOs, interns and volunteers, press organizations, international journalists, universities and academics, and global human rights groups. On a macro level, CatComm recognizes anyone working on social justice as a partner. CatComm’s partnerships arise organically, and many are established informally. They rarely have formal partnership contracts, but rather constantly stay in touch, share ideas and information, and when the opportunity arises, collaborate with them.

CatComm aims to be a bridge between collaborators, a catalyst of change, without owning the change. Another participant elaborated, “*We are more interested in the outcomes and improvements and being part of change than in saying we caused it.*” CatComm intentionally collaborates with partners who are working towards the same mission, but who contribute different skills and passions. In working with partners, they consider where a potential partner’s

passions and skills align with CatComm's mission and strategy, as well as needs and opportunities in the community.

By working with and fostering a large, diverse network, CatComm is able to leverage multiple points of entry in order to have greater impact with the limited resources they have. As described previously, this far-reaching network also increases their ability to innovate and experiment with new solutions. Many members of the network are community leaders or are rooted in various favela communities, which enables CatComm to have solutions that are locally led, as well as contributes to ongoing situational analysis. In these ways, CatComm believes that taking a network-based approach leads to improved effectiveness, as it did in *Tanque* (see Snapshot 7).

Snapshot 7. Responding to an SOS in *Tanque*

In 2013, the government was constructing the Bus Rapid Transit and TransCarioca Highway systems to accommodate traffic during the Olympics. When the construction reached the community of *Tanque*, located in the West Zone of Rio, the government went into the community and marked 50 houses for demolition in what is known as a *lightning eviction* or rapid, coercive, and legally tenuous process. Of those 50 families, 42 left quickly, accepting insignificant and unfair compensation for their homes.

After getting an SOS call for help from remaining residents via the *Comitê Popular*, one of CatComm's regular partners, CatComm organized to be in the community at 7am on the morning when the final demolitions were scheduled to occur. CatComm brought an Australian television crew and CNN photographer, also connected to CatComm through their vast network, to document the evictions, as well as talked to residents about their rights and resistance techniques that had been successful in other communities. Over the course of the day, a municipal official charged with compensating and evicting the families as quickly as possible, increased compensation offers up to eight-fold for the remaining eight families. Though still insufficient, these families received a much better offer than what those who had left under pressure the previous week had received.

In this and other similar cases, CatComm's far-reaching network allowed them to become immediately informed of situations evolving in communities and respond in a timely manner, which was critical to achieving desired outcomes.

See also: Multiple Points of Entry

Collaborating with many partners allows CatComm to have a greater reach and impact on the larger society. They explain that the more people who get involved, the bigger the movement and the impact becomes, resulting in exponential growth and change. Taking a network-based approach was an element of CatComm's use of *DE for Managing Adaptively* that was not identified in my literature review. It is, however, a critical part of the way CatComm works, and highly related to other elements of their approach. Not all organizations that use a DE, AM, and related approaches are network based. And not all network-based organizations use such approaches to management and evaluation. However, network-based approaches can be particularly valuable to address complex problems, which are characterized by high levels of uncertainty about how to solve problems and high level of disagreement about the desirability of

making a particular change, and in the case of CatComm, their expansive network enabled all of the other elements of their approach, in addition to leading to greater impact.

Ongoing, Real-time Data Collection

- a. Monitor and collect feedback on CatComm activities.
- b. Collect data on short- and mid-term outcomes.
- c. Monitor relevant long-term, large-scale, and global social change.
- d. Use multiple contextually appropriate and logistically feasible data collection mechanisms.
- e. Systematically collect feedback and data, and foster pathways for feedback and data to be received organically.

CatComm uses a variety of methods to collect *data*,²² including feedback about activities, data on short- and mid-term outcomes, and information on large-scale, long-term impact²³ in order to continually learn how to improve their processes. One participant said that “*evaluating how effective something is an important aspect of the organization.*” Through constant data collection on activities, outcomes, and impact, in addition to CatComm’s continuous situational analysis, they are able to appropriately adapt and evolve their interventions.

CatComm’s Strategic Plan identifies a focus on success tracking, which includes a variety of informal and formal methods to collect data. They not only intentionally seek out data, but also foster pathways for data to emerge organically. They receive process and outcome data daily via informal channels, such as emails, face-to-face interactions, social media reactions, and text messages from community residents and leaders, as well as journalists and the press, researchers, and activists globally.

While CatComm primarily relies on informal feedback channels, they also integrate a number of more formal mechanisms for collecting data. As needed, they reach out to their network of community organizers and ask for specific information about their process, as well as outcomes that have emerged, like after their *World Cup Media Strategy* efforts (see Snapshot 8).

Snapshot 8. Formally Requesting Feedback after *World Cup Media Strategy* Efforts

About 6 months before the World Cup came to Brazil, CatComm implemented their *World Cup Media Strategy*, in which they reached out to their network of community leaders to ask which communities were interested in receiving international media coverage. CatComm compiled a list of over 50 communities and invited journalists to visit these communities, encouraged them

²² See footnote 5 for how I am defining *data*.

²³ I use the term *impact* to describe long-term, large-scale social change, rather than to imply a causal relationship between CatComm’s activities and a particular outcome.

to collaborate with CatComm to better understand the context and receive translation and interpretation support, and supported them in contacting the communities.

Following this *World Cup Media Strategy*, CatComm called each of the 50 community leaders that requested media coverage to elicit process feedback, including what could've been done better and what CatComm could do to improve, as well as outcome data, such as if journalists worked with the communities and whether any stories were produced. These data were compiled into a spreadsheet and later a report, and in the lead up to the 2016 Olympics CatComm implemented a more extensive strategy using this feedback to improve their practices to better serve the communities through their subsequent *Olympics Media Strategy* efforts. This data collection and subsequent adaptation, they believe, led to better support to journalists and therefore improved reporting on favelas during the Olympics.

See also: *Network-based approach; Locally Led Initiatives*

Much of CatComm's data collection efforts focus on immediate constructive feedback and on short-term outcomes. That is not to say that long-term impact is irrelevant; on the contrary, it is very relevant, but slow-changing and impossible to attribute to the actions of one NGO. Therefore, with this perspective in mind, CatComm works to understand how the system is changing over time, concerned more with understanding the collective progress towards their goals and less with ascertaining their role in that progress.

Two mechanisms by which CatComm collects long-term impact data are their Perceptions Survey, a regular survey conducted in a number of global cities to assess how people perceive favelas; and the *Media Monitoring Report*, described in Snapshot 9.

Snapshot 9. Conducting a Study on Global Change—*Media Monitoring Report*

CatComm's *Media Monitoring Report*, entitled "Favelas in the Media: How the Global Narrative on Favelas Changed During Rio's Mega-Event Years, 2008-2016", is an analysis of 1,094 articles published by The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph, Associated Press, and Al Jazeera that mentioned favelas during the pre-Olympic period. The report examines how mainstream English-language news outlets reported on Rio's favelas from October 2008—one year before the Olympics were awarded to Rio—through the Olympic month of August 2016, and analyzes how the discourse changed over time. CatComm published a preliminary version of this report in 2015, and the final report was released on December 15, 2016 at *Casa Pública*, a widely respected hub for investigative journalism in Rio.

The *Media Monitoring Report*, is one example of a number of ways CatComm collects impact data on long-term, large-scale social change. CatComm collects data on impact, such as change in discourse, not to claim they contributed to change, but rather to understand how and why the situation is changing over time—to understand both how to adapt their processes and to document the impact of the collective movement.

See also: *Ongoing Situational Analysis*

At any given time, CatComm utilizes multiple mechanisms to collect process, outcomes, and impact data, and the methods they use depend on the purposes for which they are collecting the

data, the resources they have available to them (including time and skills), the appropriateness of the data collection method to the context they are working in, and the alignment of the data collection method with their values. For an example of data collection methods during the pre-Olympic period, see Snapshot 10.

Snapshot 10. Diverse Data Collection Mechanisms during the Olympics Strategy

During the 2010 to 2016 pre-Olympic period, when much of CatComm's work focused on leveraging technology, social media, and international press to improve coverage of favela perspectives regarding the Olympics and pressure the government to change their evictions tactics, CatComm used many diverse, creative mechanisms for capturing data. They used formal and informal data collection tools, and both intentionally sought out data and fostered ways for it to emerge organically.

Process data included number of readers reached, number of articles that cited CatComm's work, and number of articles that CatComm contributed to. **Short- and mid-term outcome data** included evictions stopped or delayed, changes in journalists reporting techniques, amount of content reproduced in other media outlets. **Impact data** included changes in overall number of evictions or evictions tactics, changes in global media reporting, and changes in language used to describe favelas.

Some mechanisms by which they collected this data included analyzing social media analytics and tracking media mentions, compiling beneficiary testimonies, observing and documenting changes in evictions, and monitoring global media outlets.

The diversity in the data CatComm collected and the methods by which they collected it allowed them to have a more complete understanding of their operating context, the changes that were occurring, how they contributed to it, and how they could adapt their activities.

See also: On-going Situational Analysis; Reflection and Adaptation

CatComm staff are careful to emphasize that because they constitute only a small part of a very large system addressing a deeply rooted social issue, it is impossible to attribute change to a single actor. Additionally, they note that the change they are trying to effect occurs over the long-term, and is not linear—it includes setbacks in addition to steps forward. One participant explained, *“When you work for transformation of dialogue, [which is] very rooted in a conservative society, that transformation—for people to have a higher degree of freedom, quality of life...—is hard to measure... the result is very slow, long-term... sometimes we won't even see the impact we're having.”*

Based on experience and my review of the literature, I expected that CatComm's data collection processes would be more formalized, centralized, and systematic than the research revealed. In fact, CatComm acknowledges that there could be benefits to expanding and systematizing their monitoring and evaluation capacities. Indeed, CatComm has recently engaged two consultants²⁴

²⁴ Boisvert, K. (Draft 2017). Assessing the effectiveness of using Developmental Evaluation to address complex development challenges: A case study of an NGO working in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

to use Outcome Harvesting to better understand outcomes that have emerged that can be plausibly linked to their activities. They plan to continue working with the consultants to better understand if and how they can adopt evaluation approaches like Outcome Harvesting in ways that are useful to them and feasible in their context and with their resources (see Snapshot 11). However, one participant clarified, *“If we had a big grant to do some amazing study, we could do that... But it’s all about what we can do with what we have.”* CatComm’s data collection methods are exactly that: only what they need and what they can collect given their resources.

Snapshot 11. Adapting Outcome Harvesting Approach to Capture Outcomes

From January to May 2017, CatComm and I received a grant from the FasterForwardFund to conduct an evaluation, using Outcome Harvesting as the framework, to measure the effectiveness of their 2009-2016 Olympic Strategy and the effectiveness of using *DE for Managing Adaptively* in this complex context. We identified 26 outcomes that can plausibly be connected to CatComm’s activities and use of DE, and we are currently working to analyze the outcomes.

Upon completion of the evaluation, CatComm and I will continue to work together to determine how CatComm can integrate the Outcome Harvesting approach into their larger monitoring and evaluation efforts. They are considering incorporating Outcome Harvesting as a summative evaluation at the end of major activities, as they did with their Olympics Strategy. Additionally, they are considering using the approach to continuously collect outcome data, reflect on it, and use it to adapt their activities, in order to further systematize their management and evaluation processes.

CatComm is conscious of the fact that they need to adapt the Outcome Harvesting approach in a way that is appropriate for their context (considering the culture of the communities within which they are working), as well as their organization (their needs and purposes, their resources, and their values). They understand Outcome Harvesting and other evaluation methodologies to be one of many tools that they can integrate into their monitoring and evaluation efforts, in a way that is most appropriate and useful to them.

See also: *Reflection and Adaptation*

As previously discussed, I adapted the elements from my literature review to differentiate situational analysis from data collection because the research suggested two distinct phases in an activity cycle: situational analysis that informs activity design, and data collection on process, outcomes, and impact that informs activity adaptation. Together, both types of information inform activities and overall strategy; however, in situational analysis CatComm collects information on the context and in data collection they gather feedback on their work and impact.

Continuous Reflection and Adaptation

- a. Regularly analyze and interpret data collected on activities, outcomes, and hyperlocal and large-scale change.
- b. Make strategic programmatic decisions informed by analysis and interpretation of data on activities, outcomes, needs and opportunities in the community, and prior research on similar phenomena.

Data collection and situational analysis are only parts of the equation and are incomplete without continuous and ongoing reflection and adaptation. CatComm regularly reflects on their learnings during weekly staff meetings, spending about half of the three hour meetings reviewing data and feedback and deciding how to modify their activities. Over the years, this process of experimentation, data collection, and reflection has led to a number strategic adaptations, all within CatComm's overarching mission and rooted in the needs and opportunities in the context.

Over the course of CatComm's 17-year history, CatComm has demonstrated flexibility within their larger strategy (refer back to Snapshot 1). Now, after the conclusion of the Olympics and the closure of their Olympics Strategy, CatComm is beginning to transition to a new strategy, realizing the potential of favelas as sustainable solutions, which will continue to contribute to their mission of two-way integration of favelas and the formal city.

Within projects, CatComm has also demonstrated a number of strategic adaptations, from retiring important projects when there was no longer a need for them (refer back to Snapshot 6) to developing and scaling up activities when the need changed and a window of opportunity opened. For example, CatComm's *RioOnWatch* news site, which began as an informal blog platform for a small social media training for community journalists, evolved into CatComm's capstone project during the pre-Olympic period in which they published English- and Portuguese-language news for a readership of nearly 400,000.

However, adaptation is not only a product of large-scale contextual changes, such as the proliferation of the internet or the announcement of the Olympics coming to Rio. Adaptation also includes incremental change over time in response to smaller learnings that together lead to the on-going development of a project or strategy. CatComm's Olympics Strategy, which has been highlighted throughout this paper, has developed over time as CatComm continuously collected and reflected upon information about needs and opportunities in communities; experimented with new and creative interventions; and collected and reflected on data about process, outcomes, and impact. Some significant learnings that led to adaptations to activities, and which ultimately shaped the development of the overall Olympics Strategy, are shown in Snapshot 12.

| Snapshot 12. Adapting CatComm's Olympics Strategy | |
|--|---|
| Data & Feedback | Reflection & Adaptation |
| CatComm had received feedback during their community journalism training that residents didn't want to and couldn't be responsible for documenting issues of exclusion and integration in their communities. CatComm | CatComm reflected on these learnings and hypothesized that if they could help the press cover favelas with more nuance, it would create a boomerang-effect, causing the Mayor to change his behavior towards favelas. CatComm |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>integrated that feedback with information from other cities resisting mega-events evictions, who recognized the challenges of residents documenting their own struggles. CatComm also learned about the Rio government's special concern for its image, as well as the international press' increasing presence and openness to cover favelas with a fresh eye.</p> | <p>strategically decided to focus on facilitating international press coverage of the evictions and resistance. This adaptation was facilitated by their wide reach through their connection with collaborators worldwide, and was filling a critical gap—while there were a number of organizations supporting community journalists, few had the global reach CatComm had the potential for.</p> |
| <p>One of the government's tactics was <i>lightning evictions</i>, or rapid, legally tenuous process of arriving in a community with little or no notice and forcibly evicting residents and demolishing their homes. In a few cases, CatComm learned that they were able to stop or reduce the number of evictions while they were happening if they were able to be on the scene, bringing international media coverage, immediately following a community's SOS call. In other cases, CatComm saw communities demolished to whom they weren't able to respond quickly enough.</p> | <p>CatComm reflected on the government's tactic of swiftly swooping in and removing people, and the challenges it posed to having media coverage of evictions. They also learned that in order to stop evictions while they were happening, they must be on-site, shining the international spotlight on the process. In order to do this successfully, timeliness is key. Therefore, CatComm began experimenting with having a volunteer or staff person on-call to respond to emergent, urgent evictions issues.</p> |
| <p>In 2012, the day after the London Olympics ended and the Rio Mayor was returning to Brazil with the torch, CatComm published an article in the NY Times about the evictions, which provided a critical contrast to the dominant narrative that hosting the Olympics would be good for Rio. The impact of this article showed CatComm that the New York Times is the most influential and valued news source in Rio, as well as that taking advantage of symbolic and strategic opportunities when they arise must be a critical component of their strategy if they are to be successful.</p> | <p>CatComm began to strategically seek out the New York Times and other influential media outlets that could produce the biggest effect. Additionally, CatComm worked with communities that had a strategic and symbolic importance as a way of fighting back against the evictions. For example, they worked most closely with Providência, the oldest favela in Rio, and Vila Autódromo, who were being evicted despite holding two land titles, because it was believed that if these communities can be evicted, the city can find precedence for the evictions of all communities.</p> |

Reflection and adaptation is *the* core element of DE. All of the other elements contribute to a culture in which CatComm can be flexible and responsive, and ultimately adapt their approach. For CatComm, and consistent with the literature on DE, adaptations are developments, rather than improvements. Patton (2011) distinguishes between development and improvement such that when an organization is developing an intervention, they have a vision for where they want to go, but they are not certain how they will get there. Organizations constantly experiment, collect data, and adapt (develop) until they arrive at their goal. In contrast, when improving

something, organizations know both where they want to go, and they know how they are going to get there. They collect data on their progress towards their destination, making small course corrections on the way. The difference being, in traditional management you have a course. In DE, you make the road by walking.

A Model for “Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively” at Catalytic Communities

As introduced in the sub-sections above, the elements of *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm are inter-related, cyclical, and reinforcing. Figure 3 shows a model of the relationship between the elements of CatComm’s approach to *DE for Managing Adaptively*.

Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively at Catalytic Communities

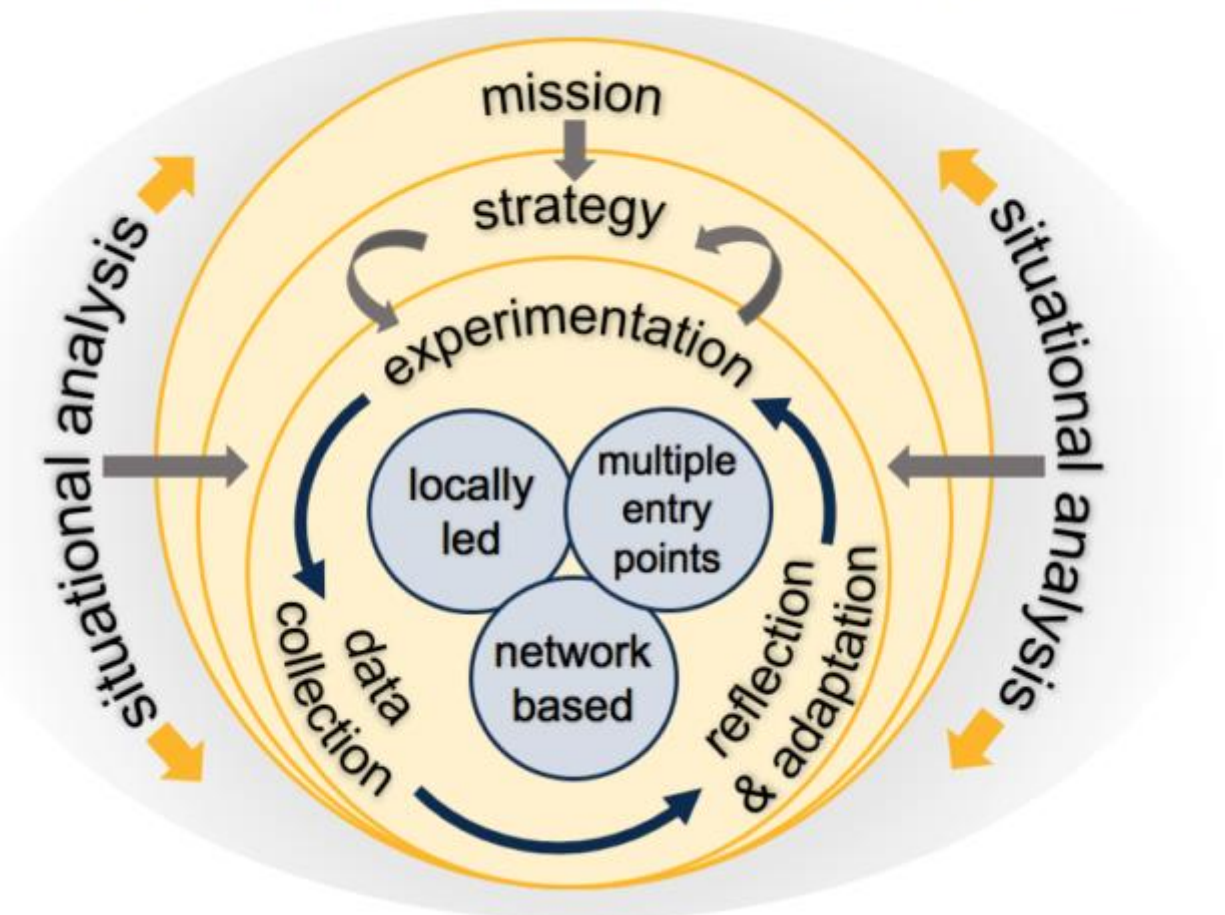


Figure 3. Developmental Evaluation for Managing Adaptively at Catalytic Communities

As shown in the model, CatComm’s work is grounded by ongoing analysis of the context within which they are working, including constantly identifying emerging needs and opportunities. They have a clearly defined, relatively stable mission, which was informed by years of

experience working in the context. Their strategy, however, is evolving over time as a result of changing needs and opportunities in the context, yet always being rooted in their stable mission.

CatComm's activities, which combined form their strategy, are all locally led, intervene at multiple entry or leverage points, and are based in extensive collaboration with their network. Having such a far-reaching yet collaborative network strengthens CatComm's ability to implement locally led solutions at diverse leverage points in the system that they are trying to influence. Additionally, their network serves to strengthen their ability to conduct ongoing situational analysis.

CatComm's activities are adaptive over time in response to the dynamic needs and opportunities identified in their ongoing situational analysis. They are implemented via a cycle of experimenting with creative and emergent solutions, collecting varied types of data through a number of formal and informal feedback mechanisms, and regularly reflecting on and learning from the data they collect in order to adapt their activities.

Finally, the learnings from this activity cycle, coupled with information about emerging needs and opportunities, inform larger shifts in strategy, as aligned with their mission.

Enabling and Limiting Conditions for *DE for Managing Adaptively*

A number of internal and external factors that enable CatComm's use of *DE for Managing Adaptively* emerged from the research. In this section, I describe these factors as they support CatComm's approach and relate them to the literature on DE and AM in complex contexts. I do this so development actors looking to adapt elements of DE, AM, and related approaches for their context can consider the conditions under which they are working in order to both determine how to foster an environment that is conducive to such approaches, as well as understand the ways in which CatComm's experience is and is not relevant for their own context.

Trusting relationships with communities. CatComm explains that trust with communities is their number one asset. One participant said, *"We have been acutely aware since day one that when working with communities of 'scalded cats', as community leaders often describe themselves, trust is our number one asset. We treat it as such in all that we do."* She elaborated that favela residents are often skeptical of outsiders—be they government, researchers, tourists, or NGOs. In founding CatComm, the director spent an entire year listening to favela residents—attending community events, asking questions, and being continuously present, without offering solutions or making promises.

For CatComm, the trust they have established with communities is fundamental to their ability to implement their approach. The trust they have built with communities has created an environment in which community members reach out to CatComm to advise them about emerging needs and opportunities, to request support on initiatives that are driven by the community, and to provide feedback on CatComm's activities. The trust established with communities has been, for CatComm, one of the most important conditions for their success, including their ability to implement *DE for Managing Adaptively*.

Flexible funding. For CatComm, their funding structure can be seen as both an enabling and a limiting factor. Since most of their funding comes from individual donors, they do not have the

strict accountability mandates that organizations who receive funds from other types of donors have. One participant explained, “*Because we are small [and we] don’t have big funding, we are able to be agile.*” Where organizations with rigid monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements might have limited ability to experiment with new activities, collect data to inform those activities, and adapt their activities and larger strategy over time, CatComm is able to do this because they are not held to the same rigid regulations that mandate organizations to pre-define their activities and intended outcomes, adhere to those activities, and measure progress against those outcomes. Instead, in recognition that in complex contexts cause and effect are unknown and unknowable, CatComm is able to experiment, gather feedback, and adapt.

In fact, CatComm has actively chosen not to pursue money from *big funders* in order to maintain the flexibility and informality that is appropriate and necessary in the context within which they work. A number of sources have emphasized the role of funders in fostering an environment that is conducive to adaptation. O’Donnell (2016) urges funders to find M&E instruments that are suitable for complexity; budget adequately for the process of monitoring, evaluating, and learning; expect and allow for flexibility and adaptation; and incentivize results and learning. Funding projects in this way requires significant changes by some funders, but it is important to find a match between funders’ capacity for flexibility and the type of flexibility required in the context.

CatComm is also able to be innovative in the ways they collect data and reflect on it. Rather than having imposed structures for collecting and using data, they are able to identify what data they need, how best to collect it, and how best to use it. This freedom, however, comes with its challenges. CatComm notes that given the constraints of their limited funding, they often choose to focus their resources on “*doing the work, not monitoring the work*”, as one participant noted. Instead of having staff dedicated to M&E, all staff members contribute to M&E as they are able with their own available time and skills. While on the one hand this structure ensures that all staff are engaged with data collection and use, it also means that their technical skills for M&E are limited and their data collection is not systematized in a way that it would be at an organization with a larger funding base.

The benefits and challenges of having funding primarily from individual donors is experienced by other organizations with similar funding structures. In a case study on Amnesty International, Schlangen (2014, p. 11) explains:

The organization’s funding structure both stimulates and stymies M&E. Individual donations are the organization’s primary funding source, and these funds are free of the M&E requirements typically attached to government or foundation grants. In the absence of donor-mandated M&E approaches... staff ‘are free to experiment’ with ways to measure impact and demonstrate accountability to supporters. However, Schlangen elaborates, The flip side is that the motivation to advance internal M&E must be largely self-generated. According to [Amnesty International’s] senior advisor, ‘The challenge is there is no pressure as such. When I work with teams who are getting grant funding there is more serious buy-in from those teams to measure and report.’

The benefits and challenges described by Schlangen (2014) parallel those experienced by CatComm.

Culture of learning. For CatComm, *DE for Managing Adaptively* is not just a set of elements and practices; rather it is a way of thinking about how change happens and how to contribute to it. To think and do things in this way requires a certain culture or emotional preparedness of being willing to try new things without being attached to them, being prepared to fail and to learn in the process. This learning mindset is only possible in an environment in which the emphasis is on achieving goals, rather than carrying out activities.

Creating a culture of learning as an enabling condition for responsive, flexible approaches has been described extensively in the literature. Valters (2015) challenges us, “*Shouldn’t we move emphasis from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to learning and adaptation (L&A)?*” (para. 14). Establishing a culture in which the emphasis is on learning, rather than accountability to pre-determined results, requires that all team members play an active role in learning. As described above, CatComm does not have a single M&E staff, but rather, all team members are involved in data collection, analysis, and use. O’Donnell (2016) explains that an essential feature of AM is that learning is not only a function of M&E staff, but requires interaction among a range of different staff.

Enabling this kind of culture is as much a cultural challenge as a technical challenge (O’Donnell, 2016). Technical skills are certainly required to ensure that adaptations are made based on sound data and analysis, and evaluation rigor can certainly be a challenge for some organizations. Yet equally important for supporting AM is creating the mindset of embracing uncertainty and a certain amount of risk, valuing learning and flexibility, and fostering open communication (O’Donnell, 2016).

The role of management. While none of the participants explicitly addressed this enabling condition, it became clear through interviews and other interactions with CatComm staff, and confirmed by the literature on DE, AM, and related approaches that effectively implementing *DE for Managing Adaptively* requires that management lead the way. At first, CatComm did not use *DE for Managing Adaptively*, but rather tried to implement a project and hold, somewhat rigidly, to the project’s original purpose. Only over time did CatComm learn that they must be flexible and adaptive, based on what they learn about the emerging needs and opportunities, and based in feedback they receive about their processes, outcomes, and impact. As a result of this early experience, CatComm’s management now has clear and consistent messaging about the culture of learning and the need for flexibility. Their leadership recognizes the value in taking an adaptive approach, particularly for addressing complex development challenges. And their staff, regardless of their role, are all equally responsible for contributing new and innovative ideas, collecting information, reflecting on it, and adapting their processes.

The importance of management’s role in establishing a culture that fosters learning- and adaptation-based approaches has been documented extensively in the literature. O’Donnell (2016, p. 16) explains that culture and leadership are inextricably linked: “[*Culture*] is often created by leaders who are in turn influenced by it... Leadership can come from many parts of an organisational hierarchy, but there is an especially important role for senior leaders to help create a conducive environment for learning and adaptation.” Management staff need to embrace and prioritize learning and adaptation, and be willing to accept the appropriate amount of risk, as described above. They must also be sure that their messaging about their prioritization of adaptation is consistent and ongoing, and they must lead by example. Finally, they can enhance the capacity for flexibility by creating a flat, non-hierarchical structure and empowering

staff to be creative in response to problems and opportunities that arise. Management's role in such approaches is to facilitate and empower, not to control and monitor (e.g., Allana, 2014; Maclay, 2014; Dexis, 2016; O'Donnell, 2016).

Best fit practices for *DE for Managing Adaptively*. CatComm's current management and evaluation practices are a result of a combination of internal and external needs and constraints. In order for *DE for Managing Adaptively* to work for CatComm, it needed to be reflective of the communities within which they are working, as well as CatComm's capacity and what information they need as an organization to be effective. For CatComm, this means that many of their practices are informal, emergent, and opportunistic.

CatComm has found, from years working in favelas, that formalized processes for collecting feedback may create barriers and erode the trust they describe as their biggest asset. For example, sending out a regular request for feedback from community members does not yield the same results as seeking out spontaneous and informal input. For CatComm, because they constantly communicate with favela communities and their broader audiences who provide feedback as part of those relationships, they are able to gauge effectiveness and adapt when they need to. Thus, it does not seem necessary, and at times may be detrimental, to impose formal processes. One participant explained:

"It really is quite informal. The feedback comes in; we're constantly processing it... I think, given the conditions [of the context we are working in], the constraints of our organization, our style of development, our approach, and the fact that we are very close with the people that are impacted and that we are trying to help... my feeling is [we] can be very effective as an organization running those regressions in [our] head, getting that constant feedback. Over time, we've developed a certain ability to work through the data, as long as [we] can be reflective and non-attached..."

Additionally, interviews with participants consistently revealed CatComm's resourcefulness. Despite having a modest yearly budget of 100,000 USD, they have been able to implement a number of tools and mechanisms for collecting and reflecting on data in order to adapt. This emphasis on informality and resourcefulness contributes to what seems to be an emerging quilt of *DE for Managing Adaptively* practices woven together. Though CatComm has no centralized M&E system, feedback and data are constantly being collected, analyzed, and integrated into the design and implementation of projects. While data collection methods often emerge independently, informally, and opportunistically, these activities are collectively integrated into the larger organizational fabric that makes up the whole of CatComm's approach.

Patton et al. (2016) confirms that is not a set of tools or steps, but rather a broad approach with eight principles (refer back to Box 3). While all organizations using DE apply these interdependent principles, the way in which they apply them depends on the needs and capacity of the organization and the context within which they are working. Allana (2014) confirms that much of the data collected by organizations is informal, and being adaptive requires this informality. Organizations make choices about the best way to use DE, AM, and related

approaches in their context to support them in meeting their objectives, and CatComm is no exception.

Conclusion

In this paper, I provided a case study of one organization working in a complex development context that describes the elements of their management and evaluation approach, which I have retroactively named *DE for Managing Adaptively* because of its application of many of the Principles of DE, as well as characteristics of AM. Additionally, I discussed how the elements of this approach are interrelated, as well as the factors that enable the application of *DE for Managing Adaptively* in this context. The purpose of this research is to provide other development actors one example of the application of a flexible, responsive approach that embodies the Principles of DE and characteristics of AM so that they can learn from the experiences of one organization to adapt it to their own context as they see fit.

The findings of this study reveal a number of conclusions that may be of interest to the development sector. In this final section, I describe these conclusions as they relate to specific actors, namely organizations, funders, and scholars.

Conclusions of Possible Interest for Organizations

In light of this study's findings and a review of the literature, I make the following conclusions that may be of interest for organizations:

- 1. Integration of management and evaluation practices.** This research suggests the importance of integrating management and evaluation practices for CatComm. Program implementers, from management to field staff, have developed the skills to think evaluatively. When conducting evaluation, CatComm works from a framework of learning and evaluation use. *DE for Managing Adaptively* differs from traditional management and evaluation in that managers and evaluators are one and the same. In *DE for Managing Adaptively*, management is incomplete without evaluation, and vice versa. Therefore, this study suggests that organizations must find ways to bridge the all-too-common divide between managers and evaluators to create a culture in which all team members are committed to and involved in learning and adaptation.
- 2. Culture of learning.** CatComm's integration of management and evaluation practices implies the need for a culture of learning. While evaluation processes may also include more traditional valuing of programs, determining merit and worth, in *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm the most essential function is programmatic learning and adaptation. Similarly, management processes may continue to track activities and process, but rather than adhering to a predetermined, linear plan, in *DE for Managing Adaptively*, activities are flexible, adaptive, and focused on achieving outcomes. The results of this study suggest that for organizations to implement learning- and adaptation-focused approaches, learning must be the responsibility of everyone in the organization, not just management or an M&E specialist. Organizations need to find ways to instill a

culture in which data collection, reflection, and adaptation are a way of life, a way of thinking and doing.

3. **Best fit application of *DE for Managing Adaptively*.** CatComm's approach to *DE for Managing Adaptively* is a broad paradigm; it is not a set of tools or steps. CatComm has developed (and will continue developing) tools and mechanisms for *DE for Managing Adaptively* that are appropriate for both their internal (organizational) and external context. In other words, *DE for Managing Adaptively* processes should align well with the communities from which they are collecting data, as well as the capacities and limitations of their own organization. The model, description of elements, and snapshots provided in this case study offer an example of what *DE for Managing Adaptively* looks like in practice at CatComm and can be learned from and adapted as needed, but *DE for Managing Adaptively* is nothing if not useful to the organization using it. Therefore, the research suggests that organizations must develop ways of managing and evaluating that are customized to meet their learning and adaptation needs.
4. ***DE for Managing Adaptively* as systematic inquiry.** *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm allows for creative and more innovative approaches for collecting, reflecting on, and using data; however, as Patton (2016) explained, DE is not *evaluation lite*—it is an entirely different approach to evaluation, not a simplified or less rigorous form of traditional management and evaluation. It has different purposes, is used in different contexts, and can have different methods. CatComm works to find a balance between what is feasible and useable in their context with what is rigorous, systematic inquiry. According to Schlangen (2014), this negotiation of practicality and rigor can be particularly challenging for organizations with small budgets and no strict donor requirements for M&E. They may lack both the motivation and resources for rigorous, systematic data collection and reflection. Yet, for CatComm, the ability to manage adaptively depends on their ability to collect high quality data and feedback and effectively make meaning of it. Therefore, this research suggests that organizations need to balance what is useful, what is considered rigorous and systematic inquiry, and what is practically feasible in developing a management and evaluation approach.

Conclusions of Possible Interest for Funders

Additionally, this study confirms prior research that highlights conclusions relevant to funders:

5. **Funding flexibility.** As described above, CatComm's funding stream, which consists primarily of individual donations, enables their *DE for Managing Adaptively* approach. With stricter requirements for monitoring and evaluation often imposed by larger funders, CatComm feels they would be less able to implement their approach. The results of this study suggest the importance of funders' increased awareness of the nature of complex development challenges, and subsequently their acceptance and enabling of more flexible approaches to *doing development*. Additionally, the research suggests that funders must also continue to question the concept of accountability—to whom and for what are we

accountable? Finally, they must continue to explore new ways to manage and evaluate projects that better meet the needs of organizations working in complex contexts.

Conclusions of Possible Interest for Scholars

Finally, this study reveals a number of areas that require further examination:

6. **Effectiveness of *DE for Managing Adaptively*.**²⁵ This study did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of using *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm; rather we described elements of the approach. It would be of interest to CatComm to better understand and describe if and how their approach has impacted the communities that they are trying to support. Furthermore, the development field is at a turning point—there are many programs that are using DE, AM, and other approaches in ways that make sense in their context. We have the opportunity, then, to examine these programs to understand more about whether these approaches truly are more effective than traditional approaches, what aspects of them are most successful and which have the least impact, and what factors enable or inhibit programs implementing these approaches. Providing further evidence to the effectiveness of using learning- and adaptation-focused approaches in complex development environments can help to legitimize the approaches so that it is more widely embraced across the field if evidence suggests it is effective, and it can steer us in a better direction if evidence shows we are mistaken.
7. **Theory of Change.** All individuals and organizations, including CatComm, operate from certain theories of change. The literature on Emergent Theory of Change, which is closely related to *DE for Managing Adaptively*, suggests that explicitly articulating theories of change, which include hypotheses about what will change and why, evidence from prior research, and assumptions about the necessary conditions, as well as regular and ongoing reflection on and adaptation of theories of change is an important part of managing adaptively. My literature review revealed that well-articulated theories of change that are explicitly tested and revised is an important feature of DE, AM, and related approaches. However, this study reveals that explicitly articulating and documenting their theories of change was not an integral part of CatComm's *DE for Managing Adaptively* approach. In fact, some participants explained that the theory, evidence, and assumptions were implicit and understood by all, and when staff had doubts about what the best approach would be, they would confirm with the director who had a better handle on the theory of change. The literature on Emergent Theory of Change abounds (e.g., James, 2011; Valters, 2014; Ober, 2012), yet further research could illuminate the connection between explicitly articulating theories of change and using DE, AM, and related approaches.

²⁵ USAID's Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity is beginning to explore the effectiveness of DE by funding and then meta-evaluating six DEs worldwide. These evaluations have anticipated completion dates of September 30, 2018. Additionally, CatComm and I have undertaken a meta-evaluation to assess the effectiveness of their use of DE, to be completed by May 31, 2017.

- 8. Time and resources required for *DE for Managing Adaptively*.** This study did not attempt to measure the amount of time and resources required to implement *DE for Managing Adaptively* at CatComm. However, many authors have indicated that DE, AM, and related approaches are time and resource intensive—even more so than traditional evaluation. However, few, if any, studies have measured the actual amount of time and resources needed to effectively implement such approaches, as compared to traditional management and evaluation. This is likely because the amount of time and resources, naturally, depends on the way in which the approaches are implemented by projects. However, just as case studies are useful to serve as examples, time and cost analyses of various projects could serve as a useful guide for organizations and donors looking to implement learning- and adaptation-focused approaches to management and evaluation.

In the development sector, we are in the (relatively) early stages of a new phase in our ongoing struggle for improved quality of life for all the world's citizens. In the early years of aid and development, we focused on financing solutions to global challenges. Then, when we realized that simply financing projects would not bring the quality of changes we desired, we began focusing on monitoring and accountability. Now we know that ensuring accountability to preplanned solutions still only gets us partly to where we want to be. We are increasingly becoming aware of the complexity of the issues we hope to address, and we are growing to accept alternative ways of managing and evaluating projects that are better suited to address complex challenges.

For CatComm, *DE for Managing Adaptively* is unlikely to be the silver bullet, just as DE, AM, and other learning- and evaluation-focused approaches are unlikely to be for other organizations. Yet it is my sincere hope that by continuing to better understand the nature of the problems we aim to address and by improving the way we develop and adapt our solutions to these problems, we can take another step forward towards our goals.

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Appendix 1. Interview Protocol

| Questions | Probing Questions |
|--|---|
| Please describe what you think are the most important features of CatComm's operating model. How does CatComm operate that is different from other organizations, and how does that affect the efficacy of its work? | |
| How does CatComm establish its vision and how does this vision guide CatComm's work? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is involved in establishing the vision? • How do future conversations, planning, and implementation relate to the vision? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm use situational or contextual analysis to understand the situation and how they can affect change? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does CatComm analyze the situation or the context? • How does CatComm involve the many stakeholders, including beneficiaries, in this process? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm use discussions of their theories of change, or their beliefs and assumptions about how they can impact the situation? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does CatComm use visuals? Narratives? • How, when, and with whom do conversations about theories or assumptions about how change happens take place? • How does CatComm test, revise, and retest these assumptions or theories? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm incorporate the voices of a variety of stakeholders, including community members who are the intended beneficiaries, at all levels of its operations? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose voices are most valued and how? How do you know? • How is stakeholder voice built into needs assessment? planning? implementation? monitoring and evaluation? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm incorporate experimentation and creativity into its model? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does CatComm empower its staff members and other community members to propose and try new solutions? |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are “experiments” tested? Revised? Retested? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How are CatComm’s projects, programs, and the organization itself adaptable, flexible, and emergent, as opposed to linear and pre-planned? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does CatComm respond to new opportunities? identified needs? • How does CatComm revise projects given new information? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm utilize multiple points of intervention or take a multi-sectoral approach? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sectors does CatComm operate in in order to achieve its vision? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| How does CatComm conduct monitoring and evaluation of their activities? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data is gathered/what questions are posed in M&E processes? • How, by whom, and when is M&E data gathered? • How fast do users receive feedback? • How does the organization incorporate this learning? • Do you have any specific examples? |
| <p>We discussed several key principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a clear vision • situational/context analysis • discussions of theories of change • stakeholder voice • creativity and experimentation • flexibility and emergence in programming • multi-sectoral approach • monitoring and evaluation <p>CatComm may or may not be characterized by all of these principles, but to the extent that you have described it, how do you think CatComm’s implementation of these principles impacts CatComm’s effectiveness of achieving its vision?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these principles help CatComm effectively impact change? How do you know? • How have you seen improvement in the community because of CatComm’s efforts? How does this relate to the principles? • What do you think community members and other stakeholders think of CatComm’s model and how it affects change? • Do you have any specific examples? |