Complexity and Collaboration

How to Evaluate Integrated Governance Projects
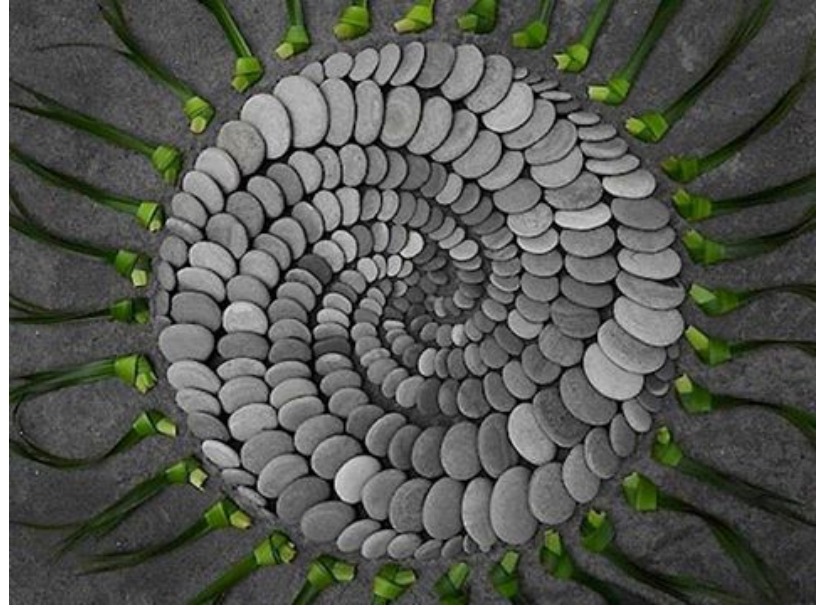
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democracy
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We know a lot more about complexity than we used to…

…The science has changed. If we are to continue to draw from science to create and manage organizations, to design research, and to formulate ideas … then we need to at least ground our work in the science of our times…
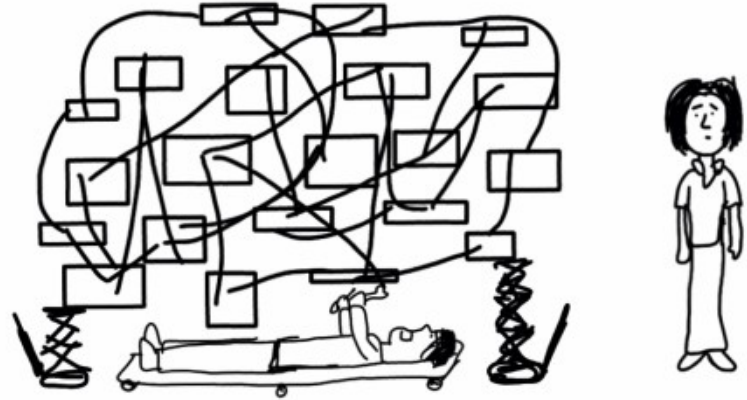
- Margaret Wheatley

So what does this mean for evaluation?

▶ *Evaluation is a <u>systematic</u> process of gathering information and making judgments based on information to guide decision-making and action.*

We have traditionally applied complicated solutions to complex problems.

At the logic model repair shop …

So, I'm guessing this is for a comprehensive program-level intervention

freshspectrum.com

We need better metaphors for evaluation in complex settings.

Old Metaphors:

- Machines, linear and predictable change

- Business, "bottom-line"

- Physics, "laws"

New Metaphors:

- Living systems, non-linear and unpredictable change

- Social change, "bottom-up"

- Biology and ecology, "principles"

Applying complexity lens to evaluation would mean thinking differently about…

1) What we evaluate

2) How we evaluate

3) How we learn

1) What we evaluate

Not Just…

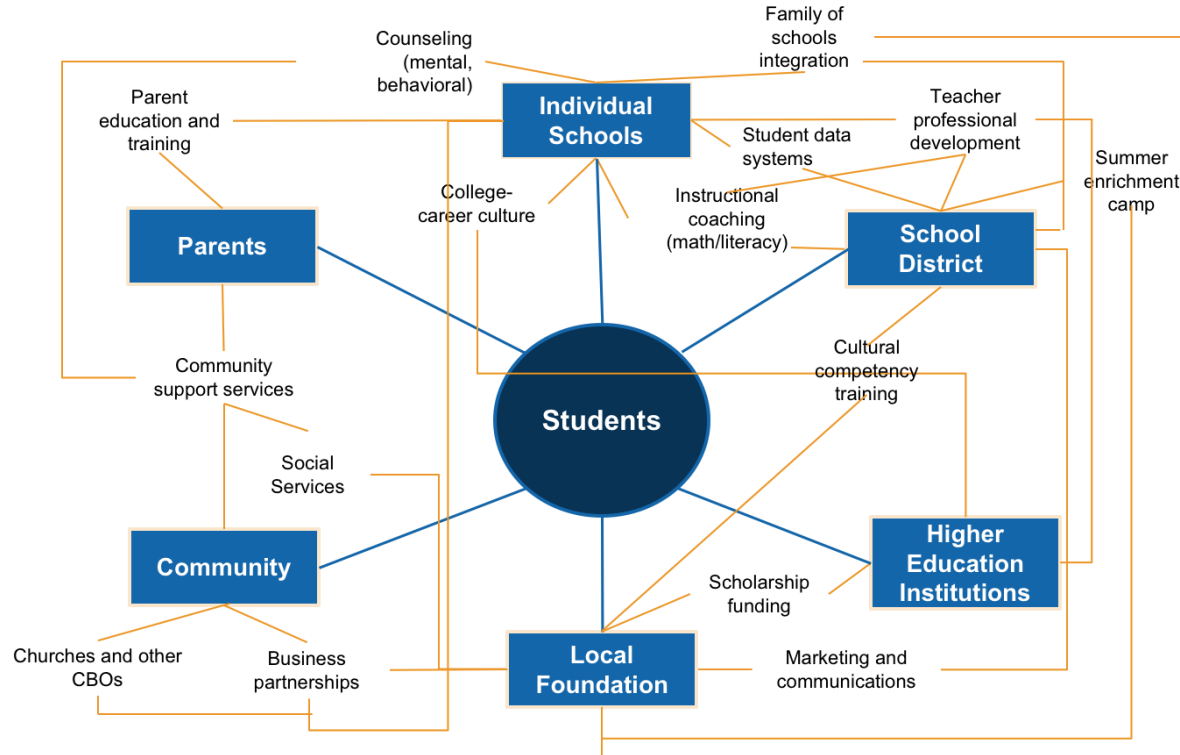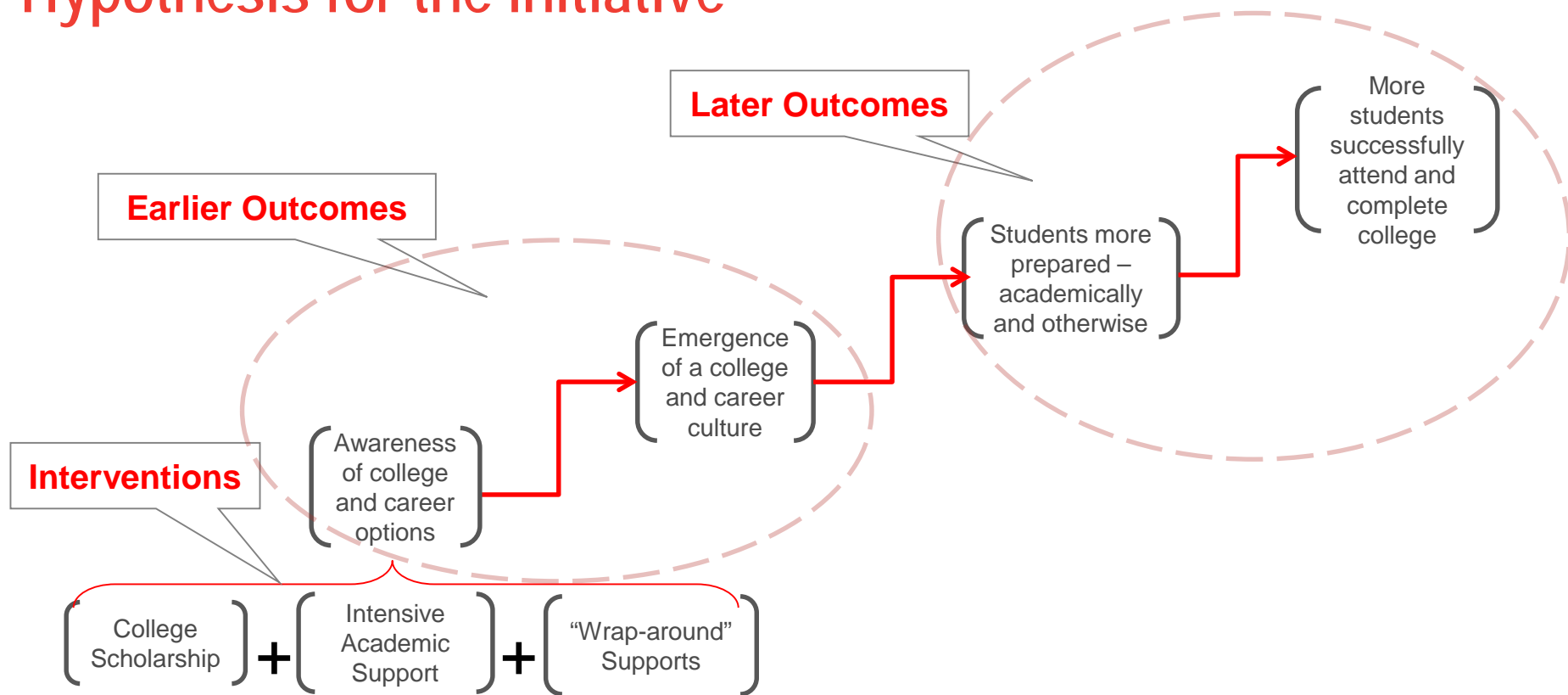|		**But also…**
Individual programs and initiatives	→	The "system," including context
The entities (i.e. people, organizations)	→	The relationships between entities
The result of the change	→	The hypothesis for the change

Example: Addressing the "wicked problem" of college access and success in the U.S.
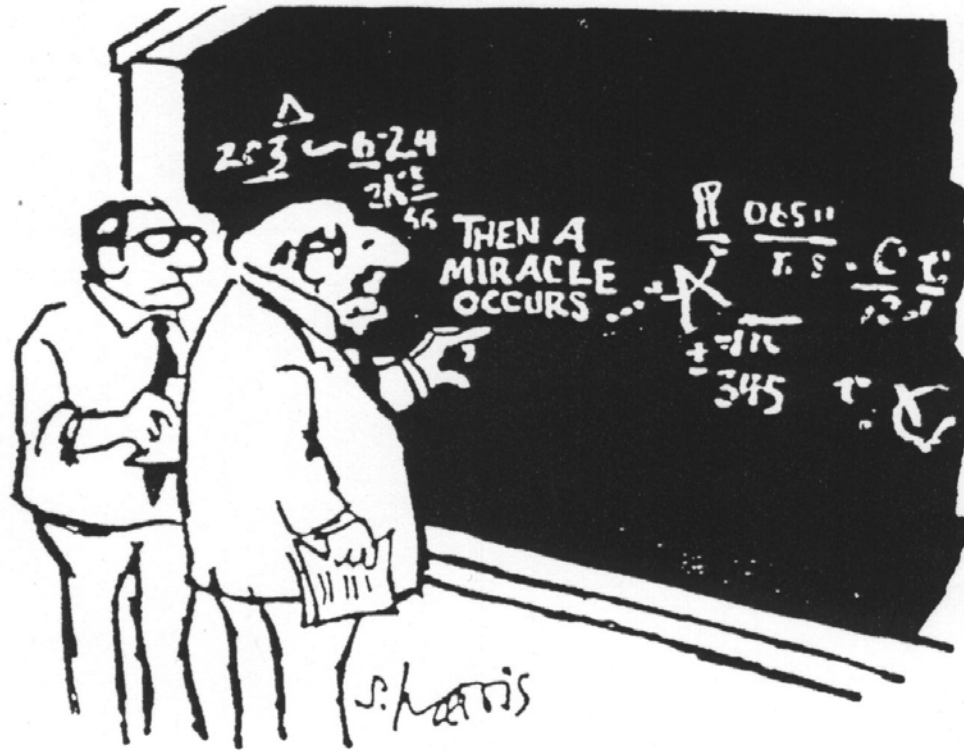
- College access, completion, and success is a significant issue in the United States

- High School (Grade 12) graduation rates, especially in poor urban and rural areas, are often below 50%

- Only half of those graduating High School go on to college, and less than half of those complete college successfully

- Scholarship programs for students help, but only address one part of the problem

A systemic initiative to improve college access and success in the state of Michigan

Hypothesis for the initiative

I think you should be a little more specific, here in Step 2

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2) How we evaluate

Not Just…

But also…

Metrics	→	Questions
Traditional evaluation approaches	→	Next generation approaches and methods
A comprehensive evaluation plan	→	Being adaptive, flexible, and iterative

Example: Improving the quality, relevance, and usefulness of local journalism

- Robust news and journalism is an important cornerstone of democracy; done well, it fosters civic engagement and public participation

- However, the disruptive forces of technology and the changing landscape of legacy news outlets have left many communities without reliable and trusted sources of local news

- Without trusted local news, the dangers of "fake news" and "echo chambers" become even more pronounced

- The Democracy Fund is taking a systems approach to engendering sustainable local news ecosystems in communities

Learning questions for the local journalism initiative

Impact:
To what extent and how is our work on local news and information affecting the public's civic participation?

Interim outcomes:
To what extent and in what ways did journalism culture and practices shift?

Design/ implementation:
To what extent are we investing in the right practices (e.g., tools, platforms, data) that are worth spreading?

Assumptions:
To what extent do journalists *want* to change their practices to better serve public needs?
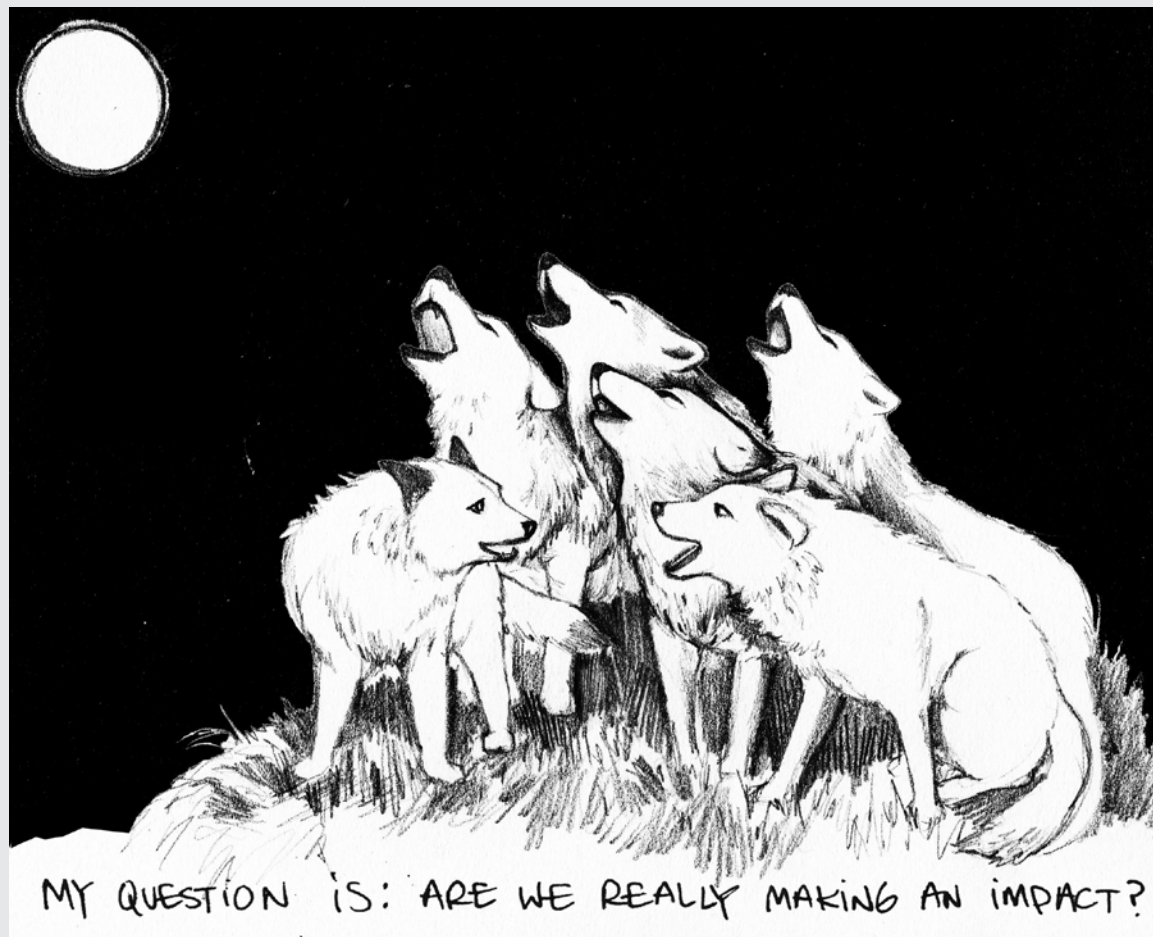
Context:
In what ways is the economics of the news industry affecting the transformation of local journalism?

Different approaches and methods provide a "basket of evidence" to answer the learning questions

Research

Developmental Evaluation

Monitoring & Performance Measurements

Formative Evaluation

Summative Evaluation

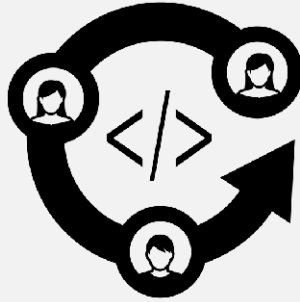| Traditional Methods	Alternative Methods		
	Mapping-based	Story-based	Conversation-based
• Quantitative • Surveys • Interviews • Focus Groups • Observations	• Actor mapping • Causal loop diagramming • Ripple effect mapping	• Appreciative inquiry • Reflective practice • Story harvesting	• World café • Open space • Design lab

MY QUESTION IS: ARE WE REALLY MAKING AN IMPACT?

Applying complexity lens to evaluation would mean thinking differently about…

1) What we evaluate

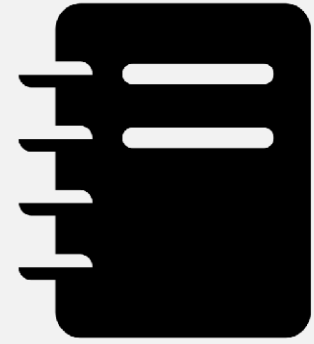2) How we evaluate

3) How we learn

3) How we learn – Practices

| Ongoing debriefs and check-ins | Before and after action reviews | Learning briefs and topical memos | Summary reports and review conversations |

3) How we learn – Principles

1) Learning does not happen by chance; it needs to be nurtured

2) Learning is a continuous process; not episodic

3) Trust is often a byproduct of learning together, not a precondition

4) Intentional structures can create the right conditions for learning

Additional Resources

Evaluating Social Innovation (2012)

Next Generation Evaluation (2013)

Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact (2014)

Strategic Philanthropy for a Complex World (2014)

Evaluating Complexity (2015)

Evaluating Ecosystem Investments (2016)

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