

# A Systems Perspective on Cluster, Initiative, and Multi-Site Evaluations



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# Historical Context

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- Cluster evaluation developed in late 80's
- General purpose: To learn from and determine the impact of national social change work
  - Common issue, but local variation encouraged
- Over time – many definitions, applied in many different types of programs



# Cluster Evaluation and Multi-Site Evaluation

<b>Multi-site Evaluation</b> <b>“Evaluation for confirmation”</b>	<b>Cluster Evaluation</b> <b>“Evaluation for learning”</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single intervention model, centrally designed, implemented at different sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple intervention models, designed by different sites, according to local needs, resources, and constraints.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifics of model known, pre-tested, fixed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifics unknown; “cutting edge” and evolving models.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited number of narrowly defined goals that lead to dependent variables, common across sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple possible goals, broadly defined, somewhat site specific; not all goals or benefits known in advance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good framework for testing hypotheses, causal linkages, and generalizability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good framework for strengthening programs trying to operationalize guiding philosophy or set of principles at local level.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-down project management and evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomous, locally driven project management; dual levels of evaluation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes controls can be established to maintain reliability and validity; believes in value of “generic model.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes some common goals, questions, experiences; believes that sharing information increases knowledge about “what” and “how;” values practical knowledge.</li> </ul>



# Along Came Initiatives...

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- Late 90's – WKKF and other foundations increasing focused on systems change
- WKKF distinguished between
  - **Clusters** – exploratory, designed to learn about new field of work, 3–5 year funding
  - **Initiatives** – systems change, driven by theory, developed in stages, funding for up to 10 years

# How Does Funding Strategy Influence Evaluation?

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>Multi-Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Cluster Evaluation</b>	<b>Initiative Evaluation</b>
Purpose of Evaluation	Testing hypotheses, causal linkages and generalizability	Generating Theories of Change (TOC)--Documenting	Learning about Theories of Change (TOC)
Focus of Evaluation	On intervention model, which is centrally designed, implemented at different sites. Specifics of model known, pre-tested, fixed.	On process and learning from variability of implementation and outcomes in individual sites.	On systems, evaluating systems change
Degree of Variability on Intervention and Outcomes	Limited number of narrowly defined goals that lead to dependent variables, common across sites.	Learning from particular experiences given sites' specific contexts; learning from naturally occurring variability.	Generalization of findings across all sites



# Influence...

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>Multi-Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Cluster Evaluation</b>	<b>Initiative Evaluation</b>
Level of Rigor in Evaluation Design	Assumes controls can be established to maintain reliability and validity; "generic model."	Heavily relies on qualitative measures to identify common trends among sites. Learn from natural variation.	Common criteria of success and measures across all sites; longitudinal studies; use of mixed methods.
Relationship Dynamics (Central/Project Evaluation)	Top-down project management and evaluation.	Project-level evaluations relatively independent; data generated aggregated by Cluster Evaluators.	Project-level evaluations are heavily influenced by the Initiative-level evaluation; information generated at local sites will directly inform success of initiative.
Role of Learning	Evaluation emphasis is summative.	Learning takes central role; emphasis upon formative evaluation.	Learning is focused on TOC. Evaluation provides feedback loop.



# Influence...

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>Multi-Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Cluster Evaluation</b>	<b>Initiative Evaluation</b>
Alignment with project level evaluation activities	Centrally devised and mandated data collection assures alignment.	Uses project level evaluation results as building blocks.	Using initiative TOC to guide alignment: TOC; Systems Models Logic Model Outcomes Aggregated impact indicators (could set common data elements)
Use of Systems Theories	Optional	Optional	Yes
Scope of Outcomes/Impact (to be measured)	Narrowly defined depending on the particular intervention.	Focus on outcomes of projects within cluster.	Changes in systems that will lead to different outcomes. (Final outcomes may be very long-term.)



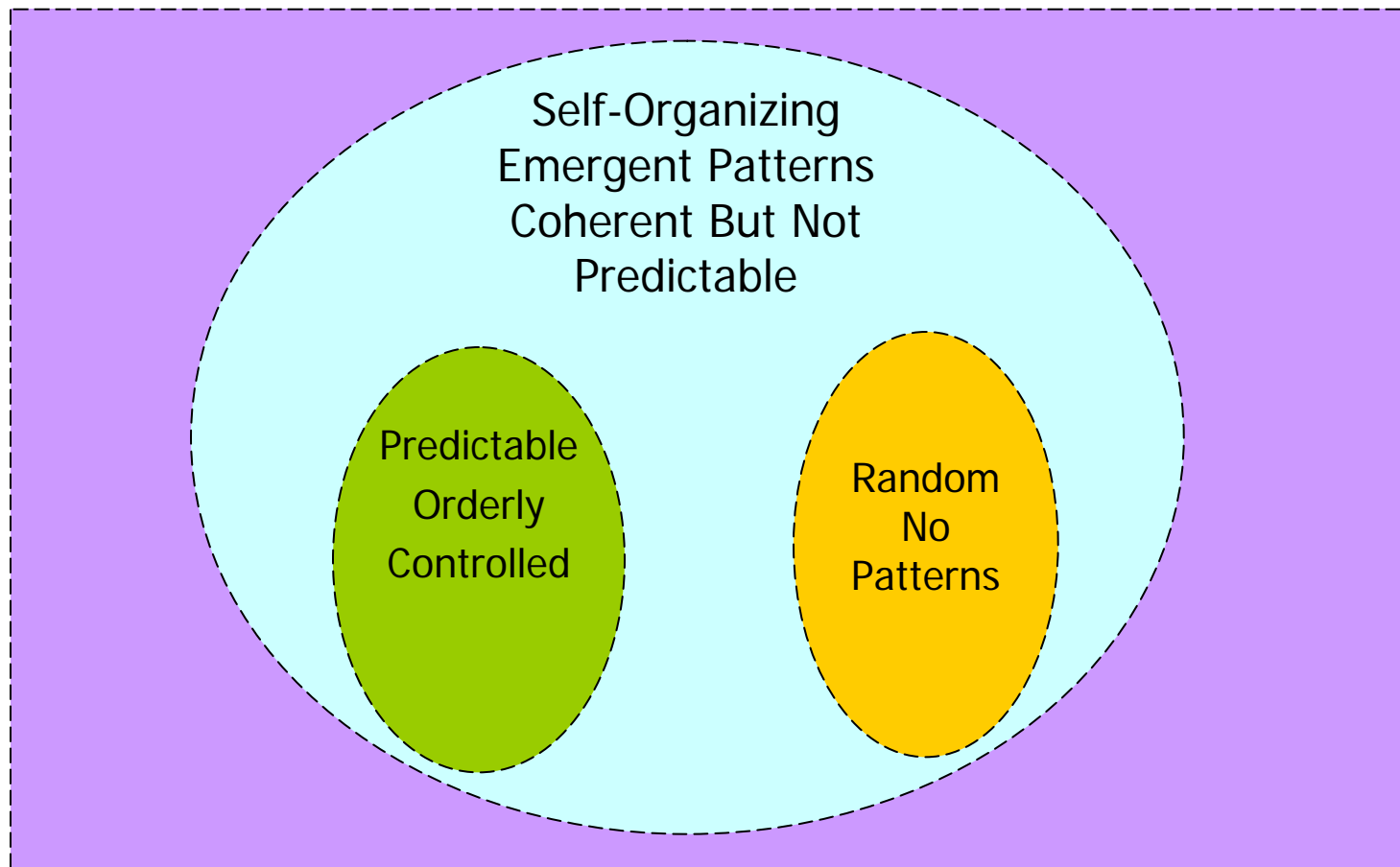
# Focus on the System

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- Funding strategies are based on state of understanding of the system:
  - Degree of specificity of TOC
  - Type of intervention – demonstration, policy, etc.
  - Where: community, organization, sector, and issue are on the diffusion curve



# Schematic of Social System





# Designs for Different System Components

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- Exploratory
- Predictability
- Emerging Change
- System Adaptability



# Exploratory: Design

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- Used to look at the seemingly random, disorderly territory of the system(s).
- What patterns are evident in seemingly random areas of the system?
- In beginning much of the system(s) may appear to be of this type.
  - There may be little agreement among stakeholders about how a system does or should operate; and
  - A system itself may be undergoing change resulting in considerable uncertainty.
  - The evaluation is designed to explore this territory to see what patterns may underlie the seeming randomness.
  - Thus results from this design are likely to enrich the TOC by reducing or shifting the amount of the system that seems chaotic and increasing the areas that show coherence, self-organization, and/or predictability.



# Exploratory: Example

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- Developing community-university partnerships to improve social services training programs.
- Evaluator conducts focus groups with leaders at each of the 10 projects, interviews project participants, and observes meetings.
- Partnerships differ in the types of community groups involved, number of years in existence.
- From the data, the cluster evaluator identifies patterns of how partnerships develop over time which helps cluster leaders to assist project leaders in refining their partnership actions and membership.



# Predictability: Design

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- Used to focus on the predictable territory of the system.
- What is the evidence that the intervention has led to the predicted changes in the system?
- Components, relationships, concepts, and/or values seem to have a fairly predictable relationship to desirable results.



# Predictability: Example

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- Projects within an initiative are using research-based training programs to help community members improve choices that affect their economic wellbeing
- Each project repeatedly measures economic wellbeing over time.
- Measures (surveys and interviews) have some common questions across all projects and other questions unique to the project.
- Looking at changes over time on common questions, the initiative evaluators show that certain features of the training are significantly correlated with improved choices.



# Emerging Change: Design

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- Used for the complex and self-organizing territory of a system.
- What principles and valued practices can be identified by observed patterns in self-organizing areas of the system?
- No overall attempt to control the situation, yet patterns emerge due to mutual adjustment among players and changing conditions.
  - Helps explain important principles of change within the particular social system.
  - Patterns and actions derived from these principles may/ may not be moving the system toward a desired end.
  - Seeing patterns and deriving principles helps to understand the system and identify ways to influence it in a desired direction.



# Emerging Change: Example

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- An initiative is designed to help multiple agencies in local communities work together to provide better health care for teens.
- No one agency is responsible for the outcomes. They are seeking to learn how they act individually and collectively to move toward their goal.
- Data gathered through focus groups, interviews, and surveys about a wide variety of actions of agencies and the results of collective complex interactions.
- From the data they identify patterns and principles of how partners work together differently depending on the complexity of the situation and the desired outcomes. Leads to general principles for use across the initiative.



# System Adaptability: Design

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- Used to look at the whole system and its context
- How does the system adapt to its environment and adjust its random, predictable, self-organizing territories?
- Seeks to understand how the system is sustained and adapts across time and changing conditions.
  - May look at how the boundaries between the territories within the system(s) shift over time and how external conditions interact with these and others shifts affecting the system as a whole.
  - Likely to see this design used late in an initiative, drawing on data collected over several years to develop a deeper understanding of how the system can productively adapt over long periods of time and changing conditions.

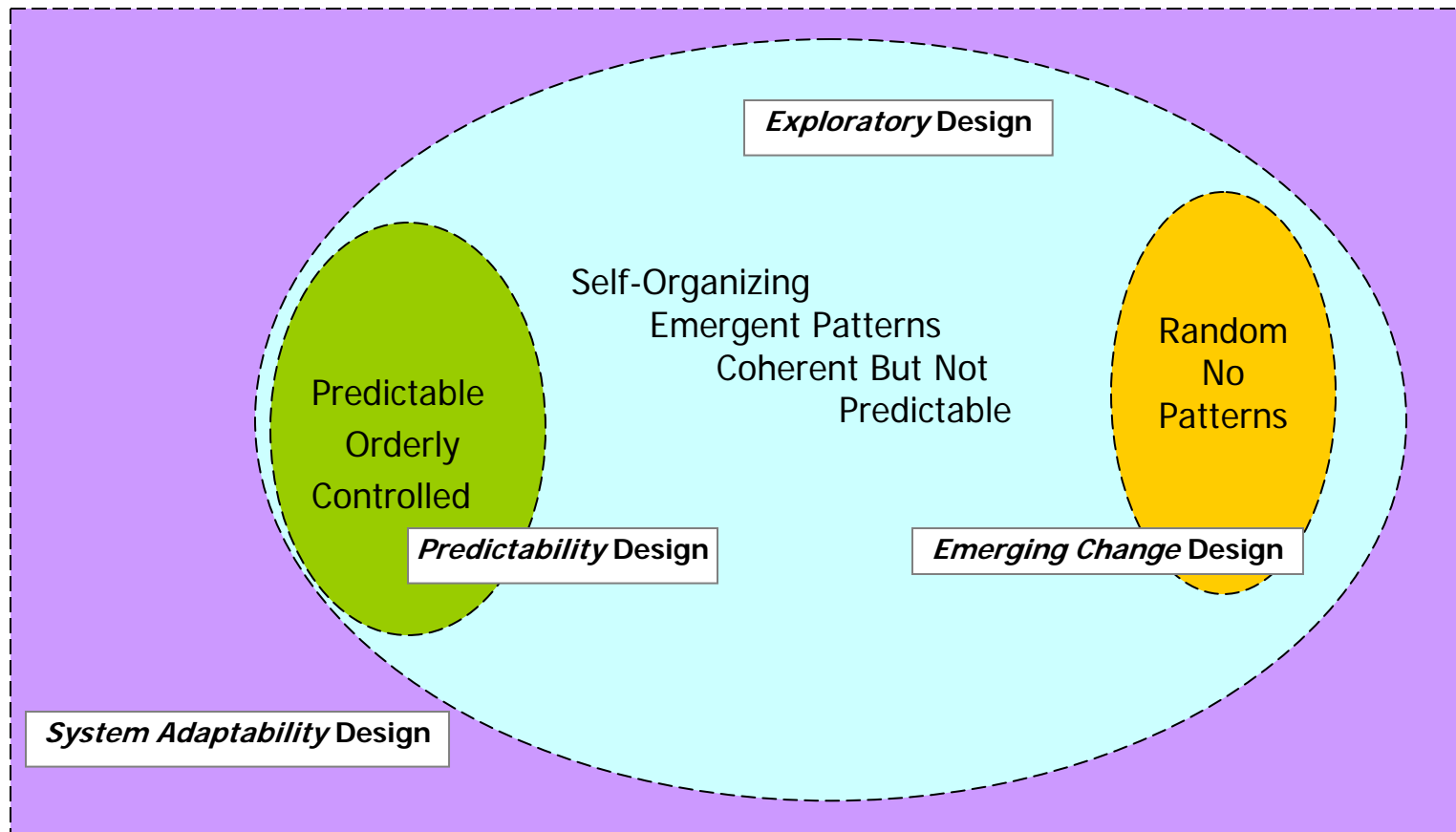


# System Adaptability: Example

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- An initiative to improve health care for teens is now in the seventh of ten years of operation.
- All projects and the system as a whole facing major changes due to new federal health care legislation.
- Drawing on data from project data-collection systems now in place, past initiative evaluation data, and learnings from other initiatives, the initiative evaluator presents alternatives to project and cluster leaders for working within these changes.
- Looking at the evaluation results with an understanding of both the stable and the continually changing aspects of the system leads to an expanded range of possible actions to support the desired outcomes.

# Mapping Designs to System Areas





# Cautions

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- Single body of work may
  - Include multiple designs
  - Change over time
- How to distinguish between
  - Our knowledge of the systems
  - The attributes of the system itself



# Questions for Discussion

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- Does the description of the social system make sense?
- Do the four designs make sense – are they really four different designs?
- Do the designs map to the areas of the system?