Michael Bamberger, Jos Vassen, and Estelle Raimondo. (2016). *Dealing with complexity in development evaluation: A practical approach*. **Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 429 pages.**

Reviewed by Brittany D. Chambers

Development evaluation is an effective approach in establishing a collaborative effort to address social injustices experienced by marginalized groups of people. As such, funding has been allocated to support collaborative efforts among evaluators, organizations, and the targeted population in underdeveloped countries to develop, implement, and evaluate programs to address defined needs. Within a developmental evaluation context, there are multiple parties involved in the process, which may cause more rigorous evaluation methods to be needed. Nonetheless, currently no methods are available to evaluators that allow them to assess the complexity of their programs and determine which methodological tools will be most appropriate to address evaluation questions. Michael Bamberger, Jos Vassen, and Estelle Raimondo's book, *Dealing with Complexity in Development Evaluation: A Practical Approach*, provides a timely and practical addition to research and evaluation, providing us with a complexity in development evaluation framework and associated methods to conduct more complexity-responsive evaluations.

In *Dealing with Complexity in Development Evaluation*, Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo define complexity and how it can be used in development evaluation to better address a spectrum of complex research and evaluation questions. They wrote the book for an academic audience, using in-text citations and examples from case studies, when applicable, to engage the reader. Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo authored or co-authored the majority of chapters; however, other scholars such as Patricia Rogers, Leny van Oijen, Frans L. Leeuw, and more have contributed to the book. The book is 429 pages long and includes 20 chapters, separated into five parts: framework, methodological approaches, emerging data and innovative techniques, institutional challenges, and case studies. Case studies used different methodological approaches discussed in the book to address issues such as microcredit for women as an empowerment intervention, developing policy against human trafficking, and a structural intervention to prevent gender-based violence. Each chapter begins with an overview and ends with practical applications. There are boxes, tables, and figures providing greater details for information presented in the text, probing questions to further engage the reader, and examples of issues from real-life evaluations.

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The practical framework to address complexity in development evaluation is informed by complexity sciences, acknowledging that interventions are embedded in larger systems and are interdependent on interactions among people, organizations, and institutions. There are five dimensions to complexity in development evaluation: embeddedness and the nature of the system, intervention, institutions and stakeholders, causality and change, and evaluation. This approach causes the evaluator to engage with targeted populations and stakeholders, and understand historical and contemporary laws and regulations that may impact program development, implementation, and evaluation. Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo argue that the framework should be used as a first step in answering the question, "How complex are a program and its context given the purposes and (potential) uses of the evaluation?" (p. 22). Complexity sciences utilize a top-down approach that allows examination of the system as a whole by accounting for the roles of social factors, context, time, and space (Resnicow & Page, 2008), and have been used in fields other than development evaluation such as public health, management, physics, health research practice, and economics (Levin & Roberts, 1976; Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 2001).

The practical framework to address complexity in development evaluation overlaps with constructs of participatory research evaluation, specifically Chouinard and Milley's (2016) five dimensions of spatial and contextual characteristics of participatory practice. The significant overlap lies within acknowledgement that there is an interconnectedness between structural-level (e.g., historical, economic, political, sociocultural, administrative and organizational, climatic and ecological, legal and regulatory context) and individual-level (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, behaviours) factors and programming that collectively impacts evaluation. However, Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo provide readers with a quantitative checklist, the most practical aspect of the book, to assess programs' complexity using the five-dimension framework, where evaluators can determine if their program has high or low complexity. Although the Likert point system, defining 1 as *low* and 5 as *high* with no definition for scores in between, is arbitrary, the checklist can prompt evaluators to think about interdependent relationships within programs and the surrounding context. Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo stressed that "complex interventions do not always warrant complex evaluation designs and it is possible to strengthen established evaluation designs and techniques to make them complexity-responsive" (p. 27). Established research designs used in the field that can be strengthened to be more complexity-responsive were experimental, statistical, theory-based, participatory, case-based, mixed methods, and review and synthesis. Bamberger and colleagues introduced unpacking approaches, emerging technology (i.e., geospatial mapping), complex mapping, and using Big Data (e.g., active maps, population data) as effective methodological tools that can be used to conduct more complexity-responsive evaluations.

While the Bamberger, Vassen, and Raimondo book continues the conversation of the use of complexity science in evaluation research, it also provides a new tool and methodological approaches to conduct more complexity-responsive

evaluations. As such, the book is a significant contribution to research and evaluation literature related to marginalized populations in developed and underdeveloped countries, as it builds on principles and methods associated with critical theories, participatory evaluation research, anthropology, transformative research and evaluation, theory-based evaluation, and more. This book challenges us to move away from linearity and reductionist approaches to more holistic methods by redefining existing evaluation methods and employing new methods such as complex mapping. As such, I would recommend *Dealing with Complexity in Development Evaluation: A Practical Approach* to all researchers and evaluators working with marginalized populations, as well as those interested in "starting a voyage of discovery" to use complexity-responsive evaluation to develop, implement, and evaluate impactful programs.

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