

# The Birth and Adaptation of Evaluation Theories

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**Background:** Evaluation theories as we know them are prescriptions by prominent evaluators about what they believe to be an appropriate way to conduct evaluations. How do these prescriptions come about? In this paper we examine the various influences on the creation and subsequent modification of these prescribed evaluation theories. Inquiry into evaluation theories has a long history. What is new is inquiry into the evolution of theories. This makes theory formulation dynamic rather than static. Influences identified by Alkin in a National Society for the Study of Education yearbook (1989) serve as an initial guide to this inquiry. An examination of Michael Q. Patton's writings and shaping experiences provides further case study insights about the evolution of his utilization-focused evaluation theory and its offshoots.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to gain further understanding about the way in which evaluation theories are developed, evolve, and take new directions, and the influences that shape the theorists' understandings and prescriptions.

**Keywords:** *evaluation theory; theory; utilization-focused evaluation; developmental evaluation; principles-focused evaluation.*

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**Setting:** Interview discussion with Michael Q. Patton and synthesis of interview data.

**Intervention:** Not applicable.

**Research design:** Not applicable.

**Data collection & analysis:** Not applicable.

**Findings:** Factors that have influenced Michael Q. Patton's initial theory development as well as subsequent modifications, adaptations, and offshoots offer insights into the connection between personal history and professional perspective. Specifically, these factors were: early personal experiences, professional training, interaction with professional colleagues, field evaluation experiences, interaction with non-evaluation academic colleagues and research conducted by Patton.

## Introduction

Do evaluation theories just arise from nowhere? What are the events that lead to the birth of a theory? When does a scholar's prescriptions about evaluation become a "theory"? Further, we know that evaluation theories get modified over time, what kinds of events lead to adaptations being made?

## What is an "Evaluation Theory"?

First, a word about evaluation theory. What we have come to call "evaluation theories" differ from what are called theories in the scientific world. Alkin and Ellett (1985) referred to the latter as descriptive theories. Many of the critical theories in evaluation were created in the 1960s in response to social developments, such as the establishment of the various Great Society programs. These programs typically required the conduct of an evaluation of programs. Attempts at evaluation by academicians and others trained to do research failed to accommodate to field contingencies. Thus, prominent evaluation academicians *prescribed* what they believed to be an appropriate way to conduct evaluations—"prescriptive theories."

The nature and character of prescriptive theories have been studied by various scholars. Worthen and Sanders (1973), Popham (1975), House (1978), Glass and Ellett (1980), Alkin and Ellett (1985), Williams (1988), Alkin and House (1992) and others produced systems to categorize theories. Mark examined how such evaluation theory classification, as well as empirical research on evaluation, helps in building an evidence base for evaluation theory—and for the field of evaluation as a whole (Mark, 2008). Alkin noted the impact that a book by two Belgium philosophers (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1973) had on House's theoretical views. He conducted a simulated study to further examine how reading the works of scholars outside the evaluation field might impact theory development. Students studied the work of a particular theorist and they role played those theorists—indicated the impact of the reading on changing their views. In an American Educational Research Association

(AERA) conference session Egon Guba, as a discussant, commented that the student presenter (Elaine) knows his views as presented in his theoretical writings of seven or so years ago better than he does. "I think she has done a fine job of sensing where I was then," Guba reflects, but "that Egon Guba was the one working and writing seven to 10 years ago" (Guba, 1979, p. 139). Simply stated, theorists' views change and their written words may not be their current thinking. Another insight from that AERA session was a comment by Ernest House about how he had been influenced by Guba's writings and views from ten years ago, even though Guba's evaluation theory had since evolved: evaluation scholars are influenced by the writing of their colleagues (cited in Alkin & Ellett, 1979, p. 154).

Christie (2003) examined the evaluation theory to practice relationship, and Alkin and Christie (2005) produced a *New Directions in Evaluation* volume (#147) where they presented a case scenario of a program to be evaluated and asked four prominent scholars to indicate how they would do the evaluation. In essence, they examined the extent to which theorists practice their own theory. This study was repeated in a forthcoming *New Directions in Evaluation* volume (Christie & Alkin, in press).

In this paper we further examine the various influences on the creation and subsequent modification of evaluation theories. We use as a partial guide the influences identified by Alkin in a National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) yearbook *Evaluation at a Quarter Century* (1989). The volume identified evaluation theorists who had been active in the early stages of evaluation theory development (the mid 1960's) and asked them to indicate how their views had changed in the roughly 25 year period. Alkin noted revisions of his theoretical views and indicated factors that contributed to each of the changes (Alkin, 1989). He identified: scholar's own research, professional reading, general reading, field experiences and interaction with colleagues. The focus of this inquiry is an analysis of the origins of the theoretical writings of Michael Patton. The initial part of the inquiry was a phone discussion interview in the context of Alkin's graduate seminar. A further interview

was conducted by follow-up discussion. Because of the overlap of comments in the first and second interviews, materials will be integrated while still maintaining the original verbiage.

## Interview/Discussion

*Alkin:* I have a group here, of graduate students and my colleague, Felipe Martínez. We have read your pioneers article (Patton, 2016). We have also read your oral history (Oral History Project Team, 2007). We would like to explore some questions with you.

What I'd like to explore with you is how a theory is born and subsequently revised. And I think we see pieces of Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) in your many experiences. The question is, when is the theory born? Is it born when you first write your book? Or do we trace it back to something earlier and say, hey, there really was a theory here, it just hadn't been publicized. Maybe I gave some speeches and that was really the birth of the theory. We would like to look at the kinds of experiences that you've had. For example, in all of your youth preaching (see pioneers article; Patton, 2016) there must have been a sensitivity to stakeholders—well, not to stakeholders, to the people you were...to your audience...especially since you were getting a cut of the take. I had forgotten about that piece of it until I reread it now. But that is definitely motivation for understanding your audience.

Okay, so you look at that, and there you had a situation where the whole notion of understanding people and where they are coming from—that is classic needs assessment and understanding the needs and dealing with stakeholders. So that influenced UFE and really of most or many evaluation theories as well.

*Patton:* Yes, I agree.

*Alkin:* I know that you were in the Peace Corps. Tell me about your experiences there.

*Patton:* When I went to Peace Corps in Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), I was assigned to the agricultural extension service. The director was a Gourma man in his 40s who had been trained by the French through military service.

Extension had very few resources and only a handful of agents with mopeds to cover the East Central part of Burkina Faso where about half-a-million subsistence farm families lived. The French were introducing cotton throughout West Africa and I was trained in how to teach farmers to grow cotton. I had no formal training in extension, but I was involved in the practice of persuading African peasants to adopt new approaches. We also did well-digging, a school-to-school project (American school adopts and helps an African school), improving the chicken varieties, and mosquito control.

*Alkin:* What did you do after the Peace Corps?

*Patton:* After Peace Corps, I went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in a new program in the Sociology of Development, which was housed in the Department of Rural Sociology. My Master's degree involved an archival study of all the ways in which the colonial British government in Tanzania had attempted to get nomadic herdsmen, the Wagogo tribe, to settle. Meanwhile, I was taking courses in agricultural extension, sociology of change, quantitative methods, sociological theory, and organizational sociology, in which I eventually majored.

*Alkin:* Were there readings in the academic coursework that were particularly influential in forming your later evaluation views?

*Patton:* The work in extension and social change was heavily influenced by Everett Rogers and his classic work on Diffusion of Innovations and later Communication of Innovations. In sociology of knowledge. I found that extension and diffusion of innovations were part of a larger sociological field that involves studying knowledge and how it is transmitted, generated, and changed over time, including the influential work of Kuhn on scientific revolutions.

*Alkin:* What applications related to sociology of knowledge and what from your agricultural experiences and training influenced your subsequent evaluation views?

*Patton:* The entire history of the extension service over a hundred years in land-grant institutions was based upon the theory/research to practice ideal, what was called the two communities theory was, namely, that universities and research institutions constituted one community with its own language, perspectives, reward systems, ways of making sense of the world, while practitioners, farmers, homemakers, and the other stakeholders in agricultural systems (implement salespeople, rural bankers, agricultural products, suppliers, farmers cooperatives, commodity markets, and grocery stores, to name but a few) had different frameworks and perspectives. Extension attempted to cross that gap to increase knowledge use.

In writing the first edition of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, I placed the issue of getting evaluation findings used within that larger sociology of knowledge framework of getting knowledge moved from one community (in this case, evaluators) to another community: program staff, program, funders, policymakers, and government agencies. The difference was that there is, was not, and did not seem likely to ever be, an evaluation extension service, so evaluators were going to have to play dual roles in both generating knowledge and passing it on. At the time this was an outlier idea. Evaluators produced reports, sent them to whomever they were responsible for reporting to...end the story. What happened to the findings was not the evaluators' concern.

*Alkin:* Were there other aspects of your academic training that may have led to subsequent evaluation understandings?

*Patton:* University of Wisconsin, Madison, sociology's department in general and rural sociology was heavily Marxian in orientation. These were the Vietnam War years. Wisconsin was a major arena of anti-war activity on campus and in the city of Madison. Studying social movements in sociology had the real-time parallel of experiencing and being involved in the antiwar movement, seeing that from the inside on campus, and comparing it to sociological theory and research on social movements throughout history. This included significant attention to power dynamics,

political economy, social class distinctions, and the sociology of economic change.

*Alkin:* Michael, as part of your doctoral program you did some work in North Dakota. How did that come about?

*Patton:* My dissertation looked at efforts to introduce progressive open education into rural schools in North Dakota where my wife was teaching. My research was funded by evaluation funds given to the program, which was a federal initiative called "Trainers of teacher trainers," and was an effort to improve rural schools.

*Alkin:* Michael, tell me about your time at the University of North Dakota during your dissertation years. Did that have an influence?

*Patton:* Oh, yes. Very much so. And, I mean, the part of the reading that had an influence was being in North Dakota with Vito Perrone and with the open education people...and the very different perspective on education that they brought. And the books...the first big challenge which was more the methodological side of utilization-focused evaluations, came from for the first time having a strong counter to what endures today, and that is the notion of methodological hierarchies. My preliminary exams, my doctoral prelims, that I had to take at the University of Wisconsin, one of the questions involved reproducing the hierarchy table from Campbell and Stanley's book: *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs*, one of the most influential books in methodological history. We had to reproduce that table which put case studies at the end, and in fact, there is a quote in that book that case studies in dissertations were unethical. Not only methodologically inferior, but unethical. And I reproduced that. I accepted that. That was the perspective and that was what I was taught in doctoral studies and just as sociology gave me a certain perspective on people, it gave me a certain perspective on methodological hierarchies and the very notion that there was a hierarchy. Which I now consider horrific...that has done huge damage to the field. Yet it endures.

The North Dakota people were very much into educational paradigms and understanding paradigms...and I had not

been exposed to that in grad school. And so, paradigm thinking and then utilization itself becoming a paradigm. Related to this is that the big debate that is ongoing in evaluation and epitomized with Daniel Stufflebeam's work on the Standards and you were involved with that...is the debate between accuracy and utility. And there are still really a substantial number of folks in our field that their first criterion is methodological quality and they are operating off of a hierarchy of methods. And putting utility first in the standards, and making utility the foremost criteria remains controversial and it's tension with methodological qualities. And so those readings around methods embraced both a change in thinking about paradigms in methods and embraced utility as a paradigm issue.

*Alkin:* Yes. That is interesting that you mention that because I was chair of a meta-evaluation team on one of those Standards books, and I remember being in a meeting with the committee and they wanted to put accuracy first. I argued strongly for utility being the first listing in the Standards. And I and others managed to be sufficiently persuasive—so that, utility did become the first standard.

*Patton:* It's revisited every time there is a revision...every ten years...so Dan Stufflebeam in the last revision felt that they were about to make that change. So, he elicited me and you and probably others to write letters to get involved and to say "no, don't change this."

*Alkin:* Tell me about your participation and subsequent leadership of the Minnesota Center for Social Research. What did that experience contribute to the creation of UFE?

*Patton:* Because of the congressional mandate to begin to do evaluation in greater society and world poverty programs, NIMH funded five evaluation methodology training programs. Northwestern got one, John Hopkins, I think, Carol (Weiss) had one at Columbia, and Minnesota got one in the Institute of Public Affairs which is where I came as a post doc. Post docs are really rare in social sciences and they had post docs, just as I was graduating from and leaving North Dakota—having done

my dissertation on what turned out to be an evaluation. So I came as a post doc. In the second year I became director of that program and was working towards some way of providing coherence. To do this, I proposed that everyone participate in studying how evaluations were used. To me this was a natural extension of diffusion of innovations research, extension outreach, sociology of change, and sociology of knowledge, with some philosophy of science thrown in.

I created the Minnesota Center for Social Research (MCSR) as a place to conduct evaluations in order to get participants in the program concrete field experience. We found there was opportunity and demand into local market for evaluations and I treated the evaluations we were doing through MCSR as case studies for ongoing study of utilization. In the seminars I led, as a part of student projects, both doctoral students and postdocs, we focused on factors that affected use. Subsequently, from the time *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* was published, I had committed to following up all my evaluations and those which I supervised to find out how they were used, what would now be called reflective practice, but was then aimed at getting better at what we did. Especially, I had found that our attention to, and commitment to making evaluations useful, was a major attraction to philanthropic foundations, nonprofits, and government agencies for whom the evaluation was being commissioned. They responded well to the values and message of utilization-evaluation, which, in classic systems reinforcement, built momentum for doing more utilization focused evaluations and following up those evaluations to learn more.

*Alkin:* One of the major studies you conducted with your students was on evaluation use in federal programs. Which, I believe, was a major influence on the development of UFE.

*Patton:* It was. Early on there were two other post docs that came in, and so that is what really gave rise to the federal use study, it was something that we could all, together, kind of look at. And, at the same time even then, as a new profession, somehow realizing that the future credibility and viability and financial possibility of the field is going to somewhat

depend on you. So, we did that federal study not knowing what was going to turn up in it.

And the really significant piece there, for me personally, has endured—I was trained as a sociologist, as you know, and in sociology the whole point is that people don't matter. It is the institutional structures, roles, positions, responsibilities. And so my whole training as a sociologist was that people fill positions, they get socialized into roles, they get organizational structures created to kind of keep the people they need. And so it was hugely eye-opening, drawing upon those other experiences that you have identified—that made me ready for this revelation—but the personal factor was so strong, so clear, that that actually ran against my sociological training. That it wasn't just people in positions and roles, but the individual interests and motivations and caring and connections of people.

*Alkin:* And so you had moved from a general recognition of the importance of evaluation to a focus on the personal factor. So, when you finished that study, what was your thinking, “hey, you know, I got something here, I ought to write a book?”

*Patton:* It was that transformation of insight that began me on the path of trying to integrate what I had brought from sociology—which has had an enduring influence—what came out of my experiences with people and then the personal factor. I think as much as anything, that is what made me think there was a book there. It was the clarity of the personal factor as a finding that wasn't in any of the literature. We were, as part of the training program, reviewing the existing literature at the time. We were looking at what was out there. The study itself had like fifteen factors that we were interviewing people about, and then this thing called the personal factor emerged. And in the theory shifts, or in thinking there was something to say, that was what really came up. What then magnified that was... well, let me stop there, but I want to talk about...each stage and...you... how you came into the picture...

*Alkin:* I earlier mentioned the NSSE chapter where I talked about factors that lead one to change their views. One of which is research.

That one's own research leads one to think about change of views. And in your case, research didn't lead you to change, it led you to create—well it did lead you to change your views—because you talked about it as quote: “transformation.” Which I had never really thought about it in those terms that is, you were coming to it from quantitative sociology and so this was really kind of a revelation to you. If you'd been a psychologist and doing that study, yah, you would have noticed it, but it would not have been as startling. Is that right?

*Patton:* Yes. I think that's fair.

*Alkin:* Yah. And so this research might have then motivated you to then go on and write a book.

*Patton:* Yes, that's right. So, I had never done a book. Now I don't know, I don't remember if this is in the stuff you have read...I haven't gone back and read it. So stop me if you just read this. But, when I went I went to the American Sociological Association meetings in '77, which was in Chicago, and had a prospectus of the book, and the first couple chapters of it, and handed it around to the different booths, and all the major publishers were there, there was this one little table that had no books on it that said, Sage Publications. And I had never heard of them, because they hadn't done anything. But I was giving out my prospectus everywhere, so I dropped one off there, and went back to my room. A half an hour later I got a call from Sara McCune, the publisher of Sage with her husband, George—and the word Sage is the first two letters of their names, Sara and George, I learned. And they had read the prospectus, and Sara invited me to have a drink with George and her. She understood the book and offered me a contract. And I had no idea who they were, and all these other publishers, well...I said, so let me wait and hear from the others. And she said, “everyone else here is a sales person, not editors. So they will take your prospectus back to the editor who may or may not look at it, who you may or may not hear from, and who will then send it out for reviews, and then maybe in a year or two you may hear something, or not. I can offer you a contract now, tell you how we are going

to market the book, and tell you why it is important.”

And that was a breakthrough moment. I had no idea about how publishing worked, I had no idea if they were going to do anything. But it was a bird in hand, and then, she did send the book out for review and sent it to one professor, Marvin Alkin, at UCLA...she wanted to see what he thought of it. And the idea that there was *theory* there came from you. I wasn't thinking about a theory, I was just thinking about a finding. And your questions and the subsequent Malibu Conference (Alkin, 1990) really is what led this to be a theory.

*Alkin:* Okay. I accept the role. Thank you. (*laughter in room*)

*Alkin:* You mentioned the Malibu conference as an impact on your theory development. Comment on how those colleague interactions impacted your views.

*Patton:* It is...so often we do not realize in a moment of time that something extraordinary is happening and think that it is going to happen again. And that this is just one of what will be a series of events. And the Malibu Conference that you convened was like that. I mean, that was such an extraordinary gathering and so important to my development. Getting challenged both by Carol and by Ernie, and by everybody interacting around critical issues...and your facilitation and what did we have? Two and a half or three days?

*Alkin:* Yes, it was about three days.

*Patton:* And that has never occurred again. That was a one off that was...to actually get together with a number of people in a facilitated session focussing on evaluation with colleagues. That was just a hugely unique thing. It was energizing. It was provocative. And it really framed the ongoing development, both ethically—the challenges from Ernie and the variety of kinds of uses from Carol—and the different people, people brought together who were working in different places and who had different windows into evaluation. Just an extraordinary opportunity. It is unfortunate that more such things don't happen, because they really can be transformative.

*Alkin:* Well, what was the key statement there? You can't do that? Or you can't say that?

*Patton:* Yes, Ernie said, “You're wrong. You can't say that.” I said that my job was to serve the interests of my clients. And he said, “You're wrong, you can't say that. That is not what your job is.” And I was shocked because then I was starting—I had a consulting practice—I was getting grants and I had really gotten into the client centered perspective completely. And Ernie pulled me back, and you know, these days I am really further, way further, along on this. But it was shocking to me, at that moment, and the rest of the group that we have other responsibilities: to society...And the inevitable comparison of, would you help them—Nazis, to provide evidence to make their program more efficient? And so that was a real framing time.

*Alkin:* *Developmental Evaluation* (Patton, 2010). What led you to move from UFE to say here is another category of evaluation? Was it perhaps the fact that you were consulting with foundations at that point and they were less (I'm just speculating here) that they were less focused in terms of what their objectives were?

*Patton:* Well, let me first reframe what you said. I don't think of Developmental Evaluation as separate from UFE. I think of it as...

*Alkin:* Oh I don't think of it as separate, Michael. I just...

*Patton:* Okay. It's just flows from UFE, and that's my point. That what I was involved, in particular, was at the foundation as we were working together and as I was doing the classic formative/summative evaluation in the contract I was running in the evaluation center at the Research and Evaluation Center at the University of Minnesota. The rigidity of the formative summative distinction and menu of intended uses did not cover what people needed. And especially didn't cover the ongoing model of development and adaptation and change. This is another paradigm piece that comes together, because the paradigm that has dominated evaluation—from Scriven, from the beginning, from the way evaluation

has been funded and contextualized—is that our job is to test models. It is a model mentality...model paradigm. We are thinking in models that can be generalized and taken to scale. And so formative is to get the model ready for summative and summative is to define how that model works...and then that model, in a high-fidelity way, gets disseminated to scale. What didn't exist and what still does not exist much was that the model was adaptation. That there is not a fixed—in education, curriculum, or an educational approach that is standardized and high-fidelity. That in a turbulent and complex world that doesn't hold. And so the paradigm shift there was working with people—getting close enough to them, the personal factor—because I am not just dropping in here and there, I'm getting to know their situation well and what they need, that they needed ongoing feedback to adapt.

*Alkin:* What was the specific program you were working on there?

*Patton:* This was a leadership program where developmental evaluation really emerged and became clear...a community leadership program in rural Minnesota across the state...working with a new community every month, and so they were constantly updating their approach because policies were changing, technologies were changing, the issues in rural communities were changing: transportation, agriculture...all these changes were going on. And so, they were needing to be constantly updating what they were doing and I have formative summative contracts and we did a lot of those changes under the formative notion, but then we got to the summative and I said, "Now for the next two and a half years, while we are doing the summative evaluation, you can't change the program so we can know what the 'it' is that is getting you guys evaluated." And there was pushback because they had really gotten into the changes and the adaptation and not seeing themselves as developing a model but as changing what they were doing—and expected to keep doing that. The director of that program, when I said you can't change the program for the next two and a half years, said during the steering committee meeting of the evaluation, in the middle of a blizzard in February in Northern

Minnesota, and he looked at me with unusual hostility (because I had gotten to know him quite well) and he looked at me and said, "formative evaluation, summative evaluation, is that all you people have?" And he said, "we don't want to do the summative thing. It doesn't make sense, we are not trying to create a model." And that is where I ended up saying in the moment, well, we could... we'd have to change your contract, your board would have to approve, we'd have to think about this, but we could do uhm...and I said...developmental evaluation. And he said, what's that? And I said, I guess that's where you keep developing.

*Alkin:* Are you saying you just made the word up then?

*Patton:* Made the word up. In the moment.

*Alkin:* You made the word up in that moment!

*Patton:* And, uh, and the word choices turned out to be unfortunate, but that horse is out. If I was redoing it with thought and with consultation I would call it adaptive evaluation.

*Alkin:* That sounds better. (*laughter*) No, no, I'm serious. Developmental Evaluation seems to have other connotations and I agree.

*Patton:* Yes. Because Developmental Evaluation is confused with development evaluation, because the "al" escapes attention. And it turns out that it doesn't translate into any language including French and Spanish. Only in English can you add an "al" to a verb and get an adjective. And so it is simply...everytime I do speeches with simultaneous translation, we have a problem of what to call it.

*Alkin:* Okay good. So that's the category that I talked about, change related to field experience.

*Patton:* Yes. Absolutely. I feel the experience in response to, is still, utilization focused, because I was trying to put what the client needed...[first]...and that gave rise, that is what's given rise to each of the new things I've done: is the experience of having a client that



needed something that was new. And so, I had to figure out how to provide what they need.

*Alkin:* Okay. How about Principles-Focused?

*Patton:* So that...it emerged out of Developmental Evaluation because if you don't have a model, what do you have? Models are a sort of pretty fairly prescribed practice. Especially high fidelity models. And so what I was finding, and again began with this leadership program, is that they were strongly principles based and not tied to a particular set of practices. And once I started noticing that, the Developmental Evaluation book actually has ongoing references to principles, but I hadn't made that as central in evaluation as it subsequently became. But the anchor for Developmental Evaluation is, in complex dynamic situations, in fact principles. That is how people navigate complexity.

The other, again chance encounter that happened out of this is that, at about that time (and this is one of those pivotal moments in my career) was I was asked to do a one-day workshop on UFE in Canada for a leadership program there. That was being done by the McGill University and the McConnell Foundation. And I went up and did my one day on UFE and this was a very prestigious program. They were bringing national leaders from across Canada: leaders from non-profits together on an extraordinary leadership program. They requested and I did an evaluation training for them. They found me and I went up to do UFE. I did it with the program director and the foundation president that night, and they told me about their difficulties finding an evaluator for this program. And they went through a bunch of major names in North America and Europe and Canada, all of whom told them they had to begin with a logic model and indicators. And they... their principle for running the program was cocreation with the participants. They did not want to pre-determine indicators and they did not want the rigidity of a logic model. And they also were not trying to create a model. They were trying to be an intervention. This program cost \$250,000 per participant over a two-year period and they were running it to try to make a difference in Canada, in what they call the voluntary sector. They were not trying to create a training model, they were trying to

make a difference. And their plan was to run three cohorts of this program and then be done with it, and they knew no one else would ever try to do it because it was too expensive. So there was no summative question and without that there was no formative question. So in the course of talking with them I offered Developmental Evaluation, and that led to my relationship with Frances Westley and Brenda Zimmerman, who were in that program with them, and to the book, *Getting to Maybe: How the World Has Changed*. (Westley, Patton, & Zimmerman, 2007). Which I coauthored, and that was a study of social movements...successful social movements like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and micro finance program, and what we found in studying those social movements was that these are people who are deeply principles based, they saw problems...they saw things that were unacceptable, they didn't begin with a strategy or a logic model or organization, they began with a deep sense that the way things were was wrong. And they wanted to begin trying to change how things were. But they didn't have a very clear outcome of what that was going to be. It's just that the existing situation was wrong and they were operating on principles. So that work, with Brenda and Frances, and the work with Developmental Evaluation, I kept running into this alternative way of understanding what would be evaluated in a developmental, complex, dynamic kind of situation. It was from Brenda and Francis that I got into the complexity stuff. Brenda taught complexity. Francis taught innovation. Their combination of attention to innovation and complexity were the two themes that gave rise to Developmental Evaluation which gave rise to Principles-Focused Evaluation.

*Alkin:* So it was not only the field experience there, it was the literature that you had not previously been particularly familiar with.

*Patton:* Especially the complexity innovation. I knew sociology innovation, but Frances was coming at it from a different way. And yes, that literature, especially the complexity and systems part of that (I treat those as parallel, not the same). This was about the time when systems started coming into evaluation. That's when Bob Williams' book came out, and Molly

Engel had the conference theme on systems, and so it intersected with the beginning emergence of evaluation... evaluating systems, using the system perspective. And my work coincided with that trend in evaluation.

*Alkin:* Good. Michael, this has been great. I Understand that the research conducted through MCSR led to the identification of the stakeholder “personal factor” as a main factor in attaining evaluation use. Where did the phrase “intended use by intended users” come from?

*Patton:* A major critique of the first edition of utilization-focused evaluation was that we never defined use. That first edition was entirely descriptive. We presented the case studies, looked for patterns, discovered the personal factor, but the field was looking for a definition of use. Discussions at the Malibu conference, particularly with you, along with more output from Eleanor in particular, led to the utilization-focused evaluation definition: intended use by intended users. Eleanor Chelimsky at GAO was generating a similar definition.

*Alkin:* So that is another instance of influence on theory through conversations with evaluation professional colleagues.

## Final Thoughts

Theories in evaluation are the prescriptions of prominent evaluation scholars. These theories basically “prescribe” how the writers believe that an evaluation should be conducted. Where do the prescriptions come from? What experiences did the writers have that led them to believe that they understood the best way to conduct an evaluation? How did interaction with colleagues, both in evaluation and in other academic fields, influence their writings? Is there some research basis for the evaluation perspectives that theorists propose? Do the writings of others, in evaluation or other academic fields, influence theory development?

We sought to provide some partial insights to these questions through a set of case study interviews with Michael Patton. The interview comments have been analyzed and depict, for each theory influencing event, the change in evaluation thinking or in the perception of evaluation that ensued. For each of these we have defined the theory influencing factor—what kind of stimulus influenced the creation or change in the evaluation theory (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Some Factors Affecting Evaluation Theory**

Theory Influence Events	Evaluation Activity/Thinking	Theory Influence Factors
Youth Preaching	Sensitivity to stakeholders and their thinking, their needs	Early personal experience
Peace Corps	Dealing with stakeholders, persuading stakeholders	Early personal experience
Graduate Study: Reading Everett Rogers and Kuhn <i>Issue of Knowledge Transmission and Use</i>	Knowledge transmission related to evaluation use	Professional training—general academic
Graduate study: History and nature of the extension service	Recognition of evaluator role not only of generating information but also packaging it for use	Professional training—general academic

Theory Influence Events	Evaluation Activity/Thinking	Theory Influence Factors
Graduate study: Rural sociology with Marxian orientation	Power dynamics within systems	Professional training—general academic
North Dakota: Research study and interaction with Vito Perrone	Rethinking methodological hierarchies—quantitative/qualitative. Understanding paradigms—particularly utility as a paradigm	Interaction with professional colleagues Field experience
Participating in the process of reviewing during the process of developing the Evaluation Standards	Reinforcing the recognition that the utility standard is of higher importance over methodological qualities	Professional experience Interaction with professional colleagues
Minnesota Center for Social Research (MCSR): Developed a unifying experience for post docs (from prior university study of diffusion of innovations/extension outreach/sociology of change)	Further understandings of evaluation use through group focus on joint study of how evaluations are used	Field evaluation experience
Minnesota Center for Social Research: Large study on evaluation use in Federal programs	Discovery of “the personal factor” heightened by prior conceptions about the importance of groups, institutional structures etc. “If he had been trained as a Psychologist it wouldn’t have jumped out at him so strongly”	Field evaluation experience Impact of prior academic training
Finding a publisher: Sage	Coming to understand that what he had was more than a research report—it was a prescriptive theory	Professional interaction
	Weiss: disagreement leading to an understanding that there are different types of use	
The Malibu Conference	House: disagreements leading to a reaffirmation of belief of evaluation as a service to stakeholders/clients  Other participants: further refinement of evaluation views	Interaction with professional colleagues

Theory Influence Events	Evaluation Activity/Thinking	Theory Influence Factors
Interactions with colleagues at Malibu Conference and subsequently with Eleanor Chelimsky	"definition"—intended use by intended users	Interaction with professional colleagues
Evaluation of a Minnesota leadership program	Developmental evaluation	Field experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Workshop at McGill University</li> <li>B. Relationship with Westley and Zimmerman</li> <li>C. Joint study of social movements</li> <li>D. Readings on complexity and systems</li> </ul>	Principles-focused evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Field experience</li> <li>B. Interaction with non-evaluator academic colleagues</li> <li>C. Research</li> <li>D. General academic readings</li> </ul>

In Table 1 we see a number of factors that have had influence in shaping Patton's evaluation theory views. One of these, early personal experiences, is a topic also very prominent in the reflections of each of the evaluation theorists writing in Williams (2016) *New Directions for Evaluation* volume on evaluation pioneers. In Patton's case these early experiences heightened his interpersonal skills, particularly as related to evaluation stakeholders. Interaction with professional colleagues also proved to be extremely important in the development of Patton's evaluation theory views. This was apparent in the way that his interaction with evaluation colleagues broadened his perception of the way that size of program had an influence on the type and possibilities of use. Professional interaction also strengthened his belief in client service as the primary evaluation motivation. Professional evaluation interaction also contributed to the development of his definition of evaluation. Interaction with colleagues, not specifically in the evaluation field, particularly Perrone, Westley and Zimmerman likewise influenced his evaluation views in important ways. Field evaluation experience, in the conduct of an evaluation or by interacting in a workshop training session was likewise important. A primary example is

the way in which it contributed to the creation of both Developmental and Principles-Focused Evaluation. General academic training had both direct and indirect influence on Patton's theory development. Direct influence was found in his academic training related to knowledge use, rural sociology and extension services. Indirect use was found in the way that prior academic training in Sociology magnified the importance of the personal factor finding in the federal evaluation use study.

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