

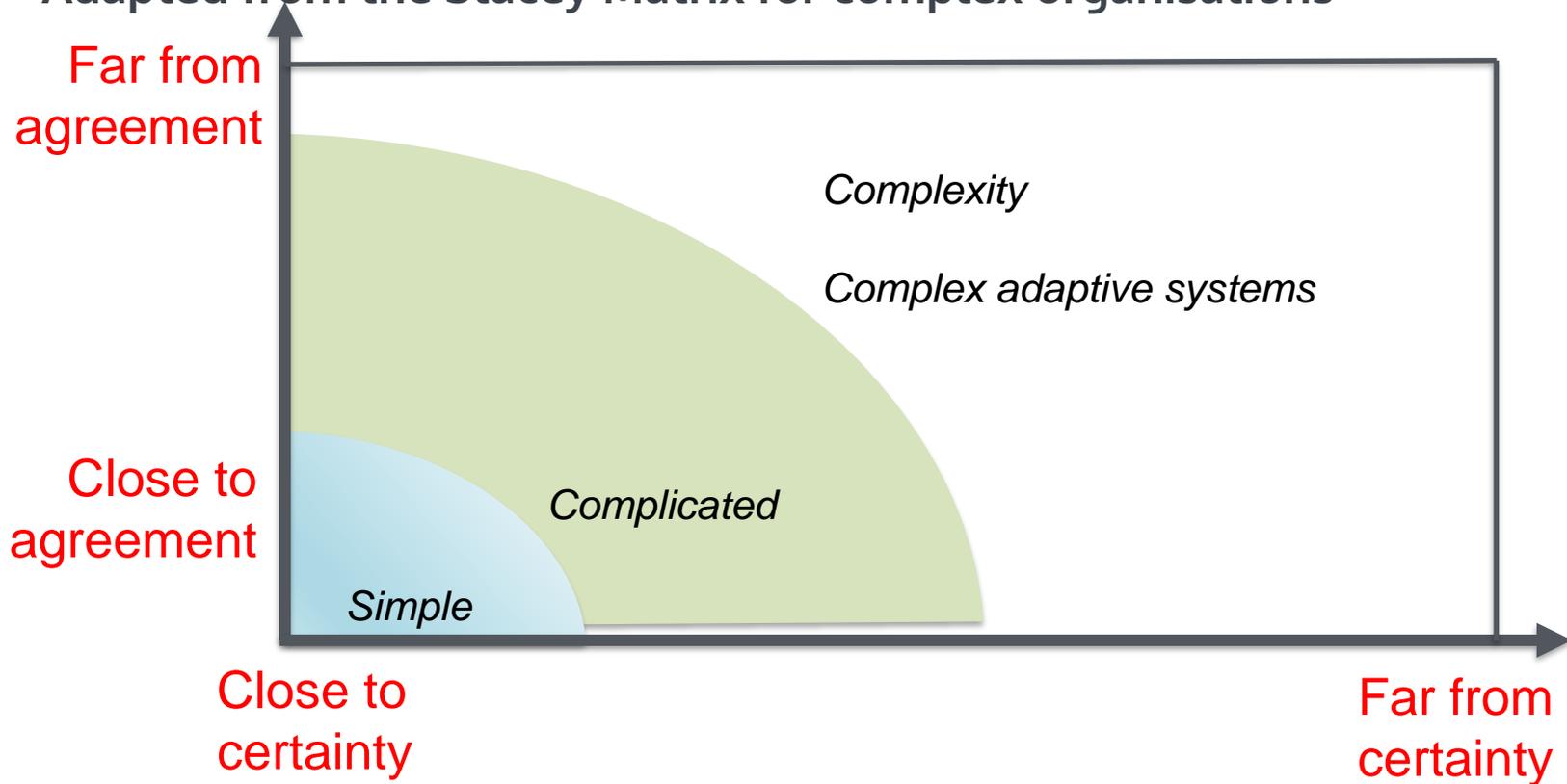
Dione Hills (Tavistock Institute)

Commissioning and Management of Complex Evaluation



Two key dimensions that increase complexity*

*Adapted from the Stacey Matrix for complex organisations



These have implications both for the design of an evaluation and for its management and commissioning

Complexity in policies, programmes and projects increases when

- These are highly innovative (**uncertainty** over outcomes)
- The environment is rapidly changing (even more **uncertainty**)
- Many layers, many organisations and individuals involved (and no one body in control of all parts of system)
- Multiple actions introduced at different levels (national, regional, local)
- Leading to potential for **diversity** of opinion and views about best actions and appropriate outcomes (and appropriate evaluation strategies)

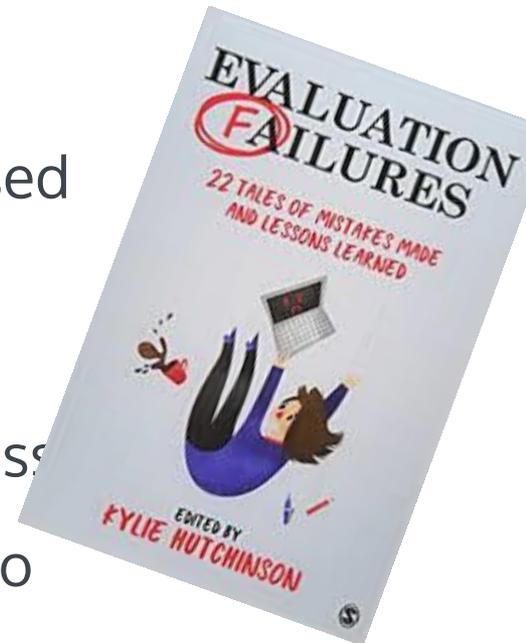


"I'm neither a good cop nor a bad cop, Jerome. Like yourself, I'm a complex amalgam of positive and negative personality traits that emerge or not, depending on circumstances."



Evaluations 'fail' in complex settings because

- The system in which they are taking place is not properly understood (System challenges -red flags- ignored until too late)
- Key stakeholders not properly engaged or consulted
- The wrong evaluation approach and methods used
- Disagreements between stakeholders about appropriate methods (and findings)
- Major turnover of commissioners and other stakeholders
- Individuals or groups of stakeholders block access to information or data
- Evaluation designs aren't (or can't be) adapted to meet changing circumstances



<https://www.cecan.ac.uk/blog/complexity-and-evaluation-failure>

Not involving key stakeholders

A communication plan was developed to increase understanding and take up of services of a government department. A theory of change map drawn up by the evaluation team identified that trust – between the public and public servants – was a key issue and the evaluation design took this as a central focus. Unfortunately, the staff involved in the delivery of the programme were not kept informed of this: the evaluation methodology was subject to closer and closer scrutiny before the whole evaluation was called to an abrupt halt.

Unable to agree on methodology

- An intervention developed by one member of a partnership was being implemented across several sites. The partner that developed the intervention wanted a Developmental Evaluation (to contribute to programme learning) but other partners wanted a more rigorous 'impact' evaluation to assess whether the programme was suitable for their own organisations. Amid considerable discomfort and conflict, an evaluation took place that included both process and impact elements, but without significant developmental elements. In the end, no one was entirely comfortable with this or benefiting from the findings.

Complexity challenges

Complex system characteristics	Issues for commissioning and management
Multiple interactions and influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Need to ensure appropriate evaluation approaches used
Systems may be in continual change, or may resist change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· May require changes to evaluation approaches as time goes by (agile management approaches)· ‘findings’ reported with caveat about possible further change

Complexity challenges

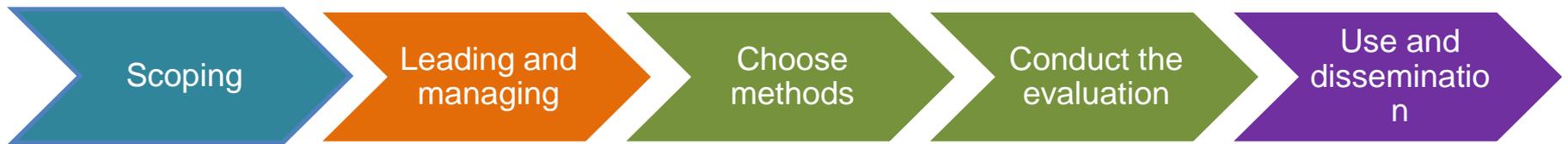
Complex system characteristics	Issues for commissioning and management
In an open system, context (and history) matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· May cross departmental boundaries· Involves multiple stakeholders· Resources required for data on context and history
Multiple perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Need to ensure alignment of understanding between stakeholders

Complexity challenges

Complex system characteristics	Issues for commissioning and managing
The nature of the change is unpredictable	· Need expertise with knowledge of range of evaluation approaches
Multiple causality	· Wide range of data sources needed to capture unpredicted features emerging
Complexity is difficult to communicate	· May need additional time to explain/ensure alignment of understanding

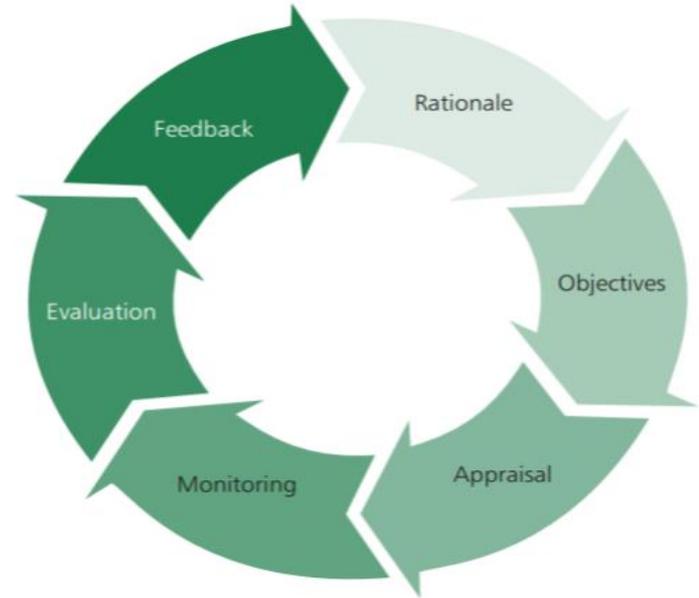
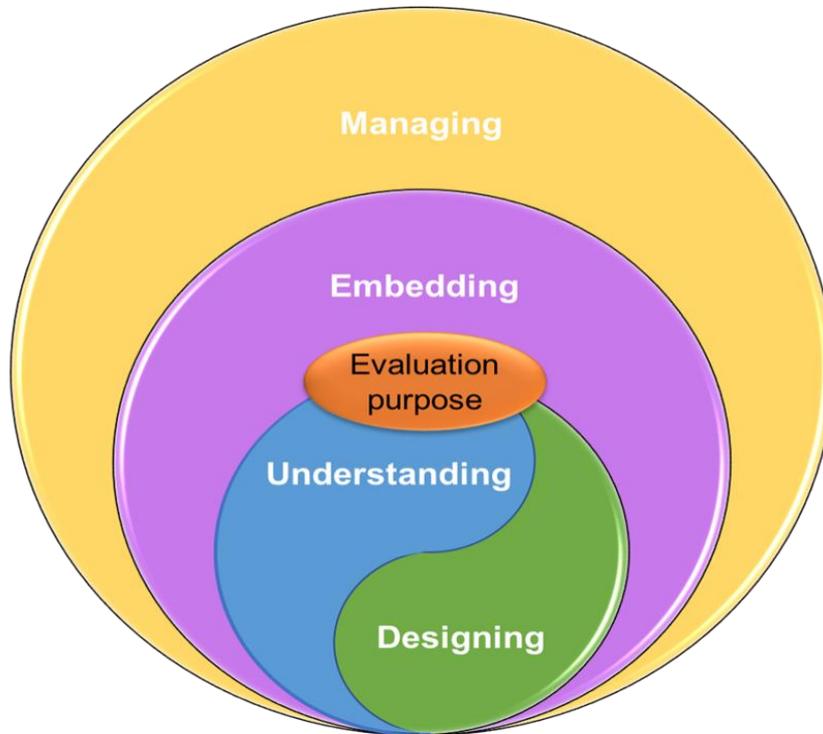
Stages in evaluation process

- The Magenta book identifies a number of key stages in planning and managing an evaluation.



- When handling complexity, the stages may be less clear cut. Throughout planning and delivering both the intervention itself and the evaluation, a central task is to gain insight into the system itself, and respond to new learning and developments as these emerge.

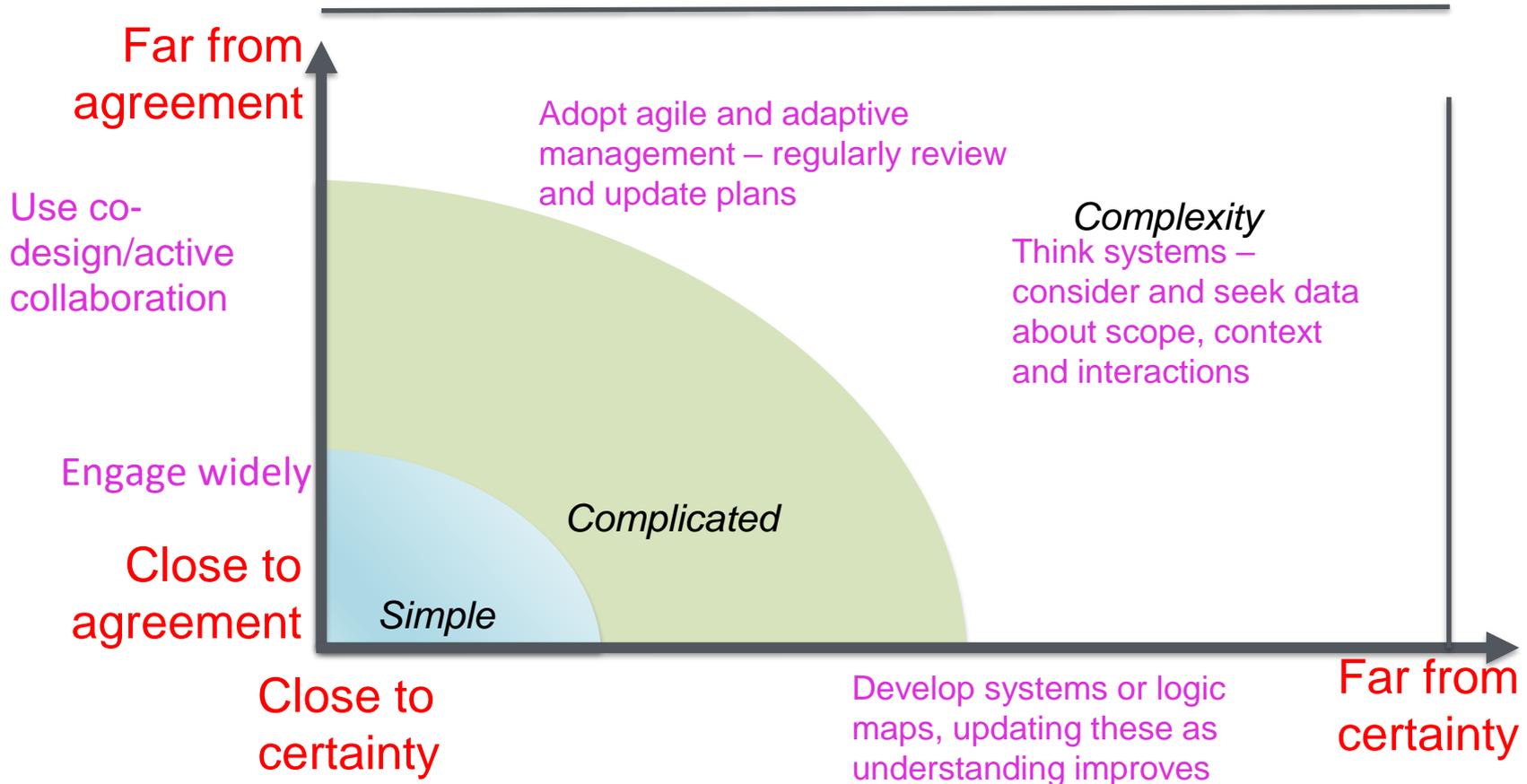
The evaluation planning and management in complex settings



* From Defra Complex Evaluation Framework

Two key dimensions that increase complexity*

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Questions for commissioners: Understanding the policy

- To what extent does the policy or programme, or its context, demonstrate the features of complexity outlined earlier?
- Have variations in the outcomes of the policy or programme, depending on the different contexts in which it is delivered, been considered?
- Would it be useful to involve additional expertise or stakeholders who can contribute to the understanding of this complexity?
- Would system modelling tools be useful for drawing up an initial 'map' of the policy or programme and how it is expected to work?

Question for commissioners: Management

- Have opportunities for regular discussion between the evaluators, commissioners and other key stakeholders about any emerging developments been built into the plans?
- Has flexibility been built in to allow for changes to be made to the approach or time scale in order to reflect these developments?
- Has an adaptive management or agile process been considered?
- Have differences of view between members of the advisory or steering group been brought to the surface and discussed?

Questions for commissioners: use and dissemination

Were recipients of the evaluation findings:

- given the opportunity to be involved in the evaluation design and dissemination?
- kept informed of any changes in the programme or its evaluation?
- given an indication of the complexity of the policy or programme, and how this might impact on the findings, or recommendations arising from these?
- alerted to the fact that there might be further changes resulting from the policy or programme which, at the time of completion of the evaluation, are hard to predict?

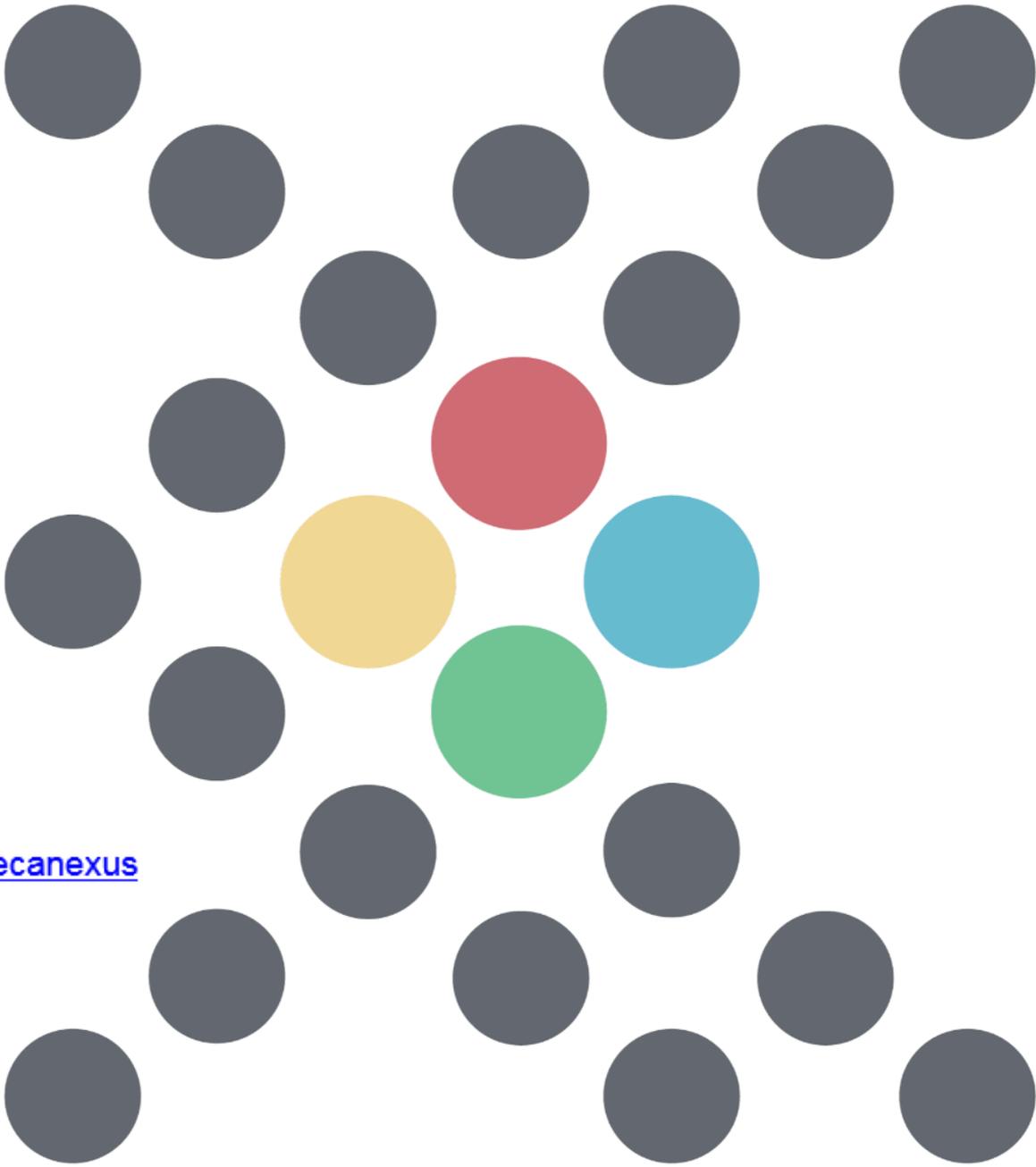
Conclusions

- Evaluation can help in understanding, and managing, an intervention by providing regular and rigorous feedback, and opportunities for ongoing learning and reflection.
- Evaluative activities need to be integrated into policy implementation, building on modelling and analysis carried out as part of policy design (the line between appraisal and evaluation may be less clear cut)
- Inclusion of key stakeholders in planning and 'mapping' the intervention helps to increase understanding of complexity and any challenges this might pose.
- Stakeholders may have different views on complexity and appropriate evaluation strategies, so expectations and assumptions will need to be managed carefully.
- Governance and management of evaluations need to be flexible to respond to emergent changes to the intervention, or to system responses to the intervention, or as new understanding evolves.

And above all



Any questions?



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