Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation: Introducing the Magenta Book 2020 Supplementary Guide on Complexity

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Why we need a new edition of the Magenta Book and a Supplementary Guide on Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation

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Magenta Book 2020

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Why do we need the Magenta Book?

• Guidance for government policy and analysis professionals
• To help them build evaluation into an intervention’s design and delivery
• So that they obtain high quality evaluation evidence
• That helps them to:
  • better target interventions,
  • reduce delivery risk,
  • maximise the chance of achieving desired objectives and
  • increase our understanding of what works;
• To support delivering value from public spending and improved outcomes for citizens.
What’s new?

Magenta Book 2020

Rationale for updating the book
Overview of content
New supplementary guides
Capabilities
Rationale for Updating

• Experimentation
• What works
• Methods ++
• Complexity
• Green Book
• Value for spending
Overview of content

1: Why, how and when to evaluate?
2: Evaluation scoping
3: Evaluation methods
4: Data collection, data access and data linking
5: Managing evaluations
6: Use & Dissemination
7: Evaluation capabilities
Overview of content

Approaches and methods

• Process evaluation

• Impact evaluation
  • Experimental and quasi-experimental
  • Theory-based

• Value-for-money evaluation

• Synthesis

• Generic research methods
Approaches and Methods

A synthesis of existing evidence and consideration of the Theory of Change should underpin the evaluation design.

**Process**
- What can be learned from how the intervention was delivered?

**Impact**
- How and why did the impact occur?
- What difference did the policy make?

**Value-for-money**
- Is it the best use of resources?

**Scope**
- Define the rational of the intervention, what it aims to achieve & how
- Identify the purpose of the evaluation; determine the type(s) of evaluation required & define the evaluation questions

**Design**
- Agree the evaluation approach(es)*; resources and timetable
- Choose the Evaluation Method(s) [depends on many factors: data availability, resources, & time available. It may be necessary to return to the scoping stage for further negotiation]

**Conduct**
- Collect, review & synthesise data

**Approach based on collecting primary data to assess how an intervention was implemented**

**Theory based**
- Realist evaluation
- Qualitative comparative analysis
- Contribution analysis
- Process tracing (also with Bayesian updating)
- Simulation modeling

**Experimental (counterfactual approach)**
- Randomised control trial methods
- Matching methods
- Timing of events
- Interrupted time series

**Quasi-experimental (counterfactual approach)**
- Instrumental variables
- Difference in difference

**Approach weighs up costs and benefits of an intervention using monetary values.**

Use evaluation evidence to take action before, during and after implementation, and to update the Theory of Change.

**Primary data collection includes** performance monitoring, consultative/deliberative methods, observational study, surveys

**Reviews include** rapid evidence review, systematic review

**Synthesis evaluation includes** meta-analysis or meta-evaluation, realist synthesis, bayesian synthesis

* Many evaluations can also be participatory or emancipatory (e.g using developmental & action research methods). These are particularly useful in complex settings (see Complexity Guide).
New supplementary guides

• Quality in Qualitative Evaluation (remained)
• Realist Evaluation (new)
• Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation (new)
• Government Analytical Evaluation Capabilities Framework (new)
• Guidance for Conducting Regulatory Post Implementation Reviews (PIR) (new).
Capabilities

Framework and self-assessment tool

Scoping; Leading and Managing; Methods; Use and Dissemination
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