



Commissioning Complex Evaluations

The practitioners' perspective: how to make things better

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risksolutions

leave nothing to chance

Outline

- Key challenges for commissioning evaluations complexity presents
- Some shifts / tensions in the commissioning landscape ?
- What I would do! A personal perspective

Perspective

Risk Solutions is a small (v. small) specialist consultancy – and like ICF mostly work in partnership

Rarely asked to do an evaluation these days that is not in some way complex

Focusing here where:

- The environment is really tricky, and
- Where evaluation can be most challenging but also most useful – supporting adaptive management ...

Focusing here on Steps 1 and 3

But totally endorse Andrew's ideas for risk sharing and building community

Complexity challenges to commissioning

Complex system challenges	Evaluation challenges
Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to establish a clear boundary around the evaluation
<p>Systems may be in continual change, or may resist change</p> <p>The nature of the change is unpredictable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intervention and the objectives may change over time • Evaluation plans may need to change to address emergence of unexpected features
Multiple interactions and influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme (or system change) may not be at a 'final state' when the evaluation comes to an end
Context (and history) matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, indirect causal chains between the intervention and outcomes • Outcomes may vary from one context to another
Multiple causality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New approaches needed for causality and attribution
<p>Multiple perspectives</p> <p>Complexity is difficult to communicate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need data from multiple sources/informants • Difficulties in communicating methodology and findings

Need for flexibility/agility

Need for different/new approaches

Commissioning context

Tighter budgets



Push to increase standards



But different perspectives on what quality means:

- Discomfort with some complexity appropriate methods
- Standards of certainty desired may be unattainable

Increasing recognition of the value of:

- New methods (innovation)
- Adaptive, flexible, and evaluation approaches



But barriers to commissioning

- Risk aversion, and
- 'Hardening' of interpretation of procurement rules (?)

Making things better ? The specification

Flexibility/agility and innovation

- Commission for flexibility not a fixed methodology
 - More open specification
 - Commission a team
 - ▲ Access to breadth of knowledge and skills, and depth of experience
 - ▲ Skill in hybrid approaches and synthesis
 - ▲ Collaborative and responsive working arrangements
 - Evidence could include:
 - ▲ Examples of successful delivery in complex changing environments
 - ▲ Description of the approach the team consider appropriate at this stage and how this may need to change
 - ▲ Description of how they will work with you to identify and respond to the need for change and manage risks and uncertainty
- Post award have effective governance in place to manage change e.g.
 - Steering boards
 - Interactive peer review

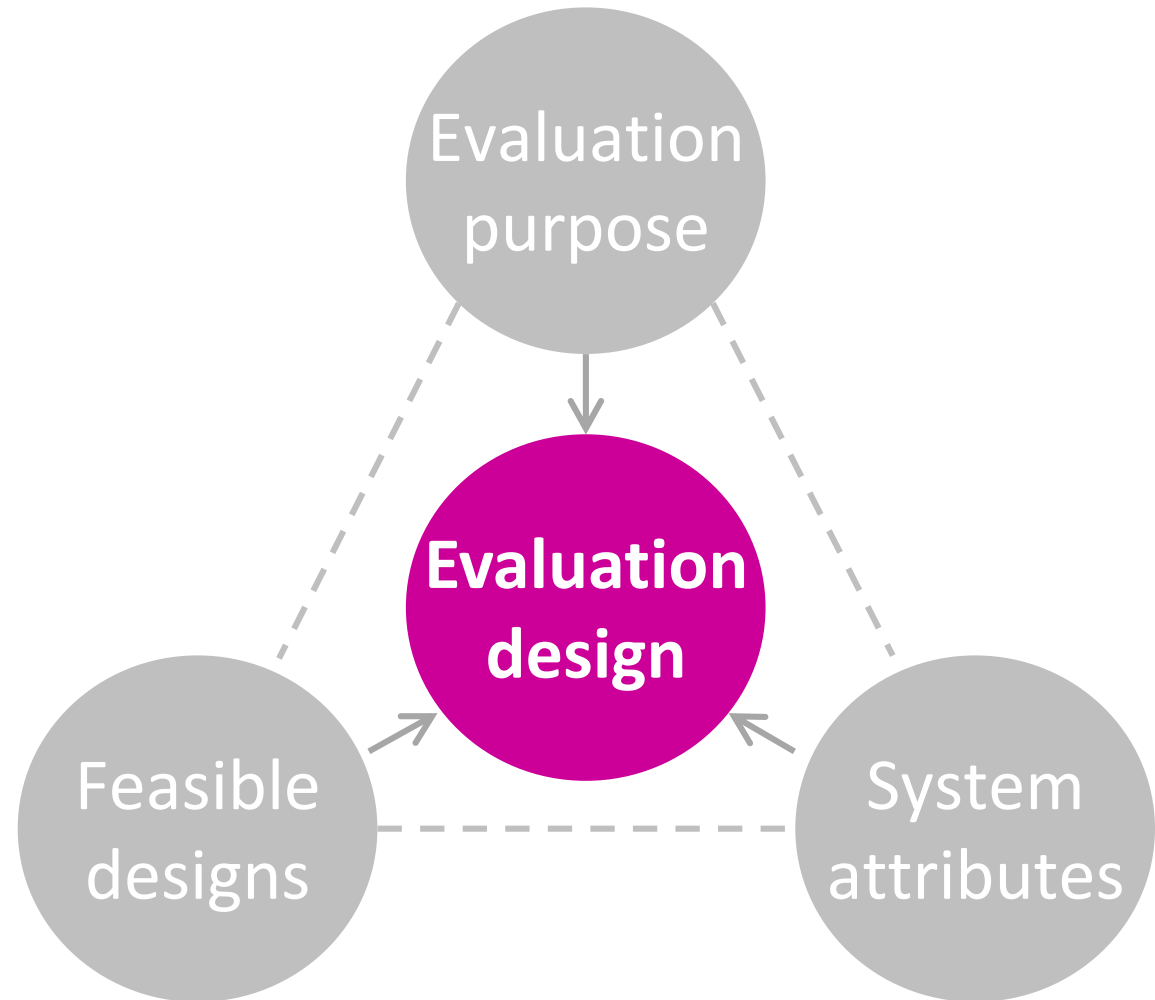
Making things better ?

Open specification - What we need to know

What evaluation results will be used for – noting that the emphasis may shift over time ...

Set out what is known about the system – note that the evaluation should improve understanding and that the system may change ...

Set out the timings, existing sources of data etc and critically the budget...



Making things better ?

Let us know how much money you have

- Without an idea of budget the evaluators cannot know what is affordable
- With a more open specification - the commissioner can have no firm basis for comparison of bids where wildly different assumptions have been made on budget
- Setting the budget at a realistic level, and giving it low weighting, makes sure proposals can be fairly compared on quality
 - the confidence they provide that the need will be met as far as is possible
- Not stating a budget risks tender failure

Making things better ? The process

Time and talk

- Give us time to respond effectively:
 - Give us sufficient time to assemble a team and prepare the proposal
 - Make sure the amount and complexity of information requested is commensurate with the value of the work
- Allow for genuine dialogue before finalising the selection
 - Information days prior to tender deadline
 - A genuine opportunity to sit down and discuss options post submission

Making things better ? Embedding evaluation

Breaking down barriers

- Be joined up ...
 - Start thinking about complexity and evaluation at design stage
 - Commission evaluation alongside implementation
- Get commitment from users from the start
 - Involve them in designing the specification and throughout to
 - ▲ keep focussed on the need, and
 - ▲ re-set priorities as needs change over time
 - Plan for, and reflect in the specification, for lots of interactions between evaluators and users

And finally a plug ...

CECAN as a catalyst for capability building ...

Refer to, at all times, but especially when commissioning:

- The new magenta book annex on complexity ...
- CECAN web-site resources



THANKYOU

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