

Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation

Magenta Book 2020 Supplementary Guide

CECAN has produced a *Supplementary Guide* for the 2020 revision of the Magenta Book.

The Magenta Book, published by HM Treasury, is the key UK Government resource on evaluation, setting out central government guidance on how to evaluate policies, projects and programmes. The *Magenta Book 2020 Supplementary Guide: Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation* is based on three years' research and development of evaluation methods by CECAN. It is published by HM Treasury and accompanies the 2020 edition of the Magenta Book.

What is the Supplementary Guide and why is it important?

Complex systems are all around us. Their characteristics make their behaviour hard to predict and they present challenges to policy making and evaluation. The *Supplementary Guide* explains what complexity is, its implications, and how evaluators and policy makers can plan, deliver and use complexity-appropriate evaluation to work with this complexity.

Who is it for?

The *Supplementary Guide* is for policy makers, analysts and commissioners of evaluations, as well as evaluation practitioners including public sector evaluation contractors.

How do I use it?

The *Supplementary Guide* is designed to be used alongside the Magenta Book. It provides further guidance on how to use evaluation appropriately as an effective management tool when policies, programmes, projects, or their evaluations are particularly challenging, intractable, or *complex*.

Inside the Magenta Book 2020 Supplementary Guide —Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation

WHAT IS COMPLEXITY

An accessible introduction to complexity and why it matters for policy-making. Describes and illustrates the properties of Complex systems with images, definitions and examples.

THE CHALLENGES OF COMPLEXITY TO EVALUATION

Illustrates why and how complexity creates challenges for evaluation, with examples.

COMMISSIONING AND MANAGING EVALUATIONS

How planning and managing can help to understand, anticipate and navigate the challenges posed by complexity. Includes a list of questions that commissioners can use to aid planning at each stage of the evaluation planning process.

SELECTING COMPLEXITY-APPROPRIATE APPROACHES

How to choose the approach or combination of approaches appropriate for a particular evaluation. Contains several useful tables including:

- Answering evaluation questions – matching evaluation questions with methods and approaches.
- Tackling different aspects of complexity – matching complexity challenges with methods and approaches.
- Circumstances affecting feasibility – exploring the strengths and weaknesses of different methods and approaches, including the specialist skills and levels of resource required.

DOWNLOAD

The Magenta Book 2020
*Supplementary Guide:
Handling Complexity in
Policy Evaluation* can be
downloaded from:

www.cecan.ac.uk/magenta-book-complexity-guide

The Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN) is a national research centre hosted by the University of Surrey that brings together a unique coalition of experts to address some of the greatest issues in policy making and evaluation.