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“What is the Merit of the ‘Evaluation Standards’?”

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1. Introduction

Standards for evaluations were first developed by the American “Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation” and later adapted by the Swiss Evaluation Society (Schweizerische Evaluationsgesellschaft – SEVAL) as well as by the German Evaluation Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation – DeGEval).

First their development will be described, then the four groups of the Standards (Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, Accuracy) will be introduced. Afterwards it will be interesting to take a look on the international applicability of the Standards, because this can be said to be a quality for itself. For they could stimulate the professional dialogue and exchange of experiences and thus help to safeguard and develop the quality of evaluations.

Therefore this paper refers to examinations by professionals, who dealt with the aspect of applicability.

Finally, a comparison will be drawn between evaluations which followed the Standards with such which followed different evaluation models. So thesis can be postulated about the specific merit of the Evaluation Standards.

2. The Development of the Evaluation Standards

2.1 The Program Evaluation Standards by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation

The DeGEval Evaluation Standards have emerged from the “Standards for Evaluations for Educational Programs, Projects and Materials” by the “Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation”. The thirty Standards were published in 1981, in 1989 they were authorized by the “American National Standard Institute” (ANSI) and thus became the first standards in the social sciences which were accepted.

The Standards were examined by two panels of about sixty persons, nominated by the organisations which support the Joint Committee according to

- their requirement,
- their responsiveness to the requirements in the field,
- the reach of the Standards,
- the validity as regards content
- practicability, political propriety, legality, clarity and depth in content, and

- adequacy in language.

Then they were tested about forty times in evaluational fields to make their content more precise and to have the first examples of application. After a series of public hearings the final version of the now called “Program Evaluation Standards” has been passed in 1994.

The Joint Committee does not put the Standards into an order of precedence, but Stufflebeam, former chairman of the “JC” said in an interview:

“The standards that will be published essentially call for evaluations that have four features. These are *utility, feasibility, propriety* and *accuracy*. And I think it is interesting that the Joint Committee decided on that particular order. Their rationale is that an evaluation should not be done at all if there is no prospect for its being useful to some audience. Second, it should not be done if it is not feasible to conduct it in political terms, or practicality terms, or cost effectiveness terms. Third, they do not think it should be done if we cannot demonstrate that it will be conducted fairly and ethically. Finally, if we can demonstrate that an evaluation will have utility, will be feasible and will be proper in its conduct then they said we could turn to the difficult matters of the technical adequacy of the evaluation, and they have included an extensive set of standards in this area”

[Stufflebeam, 1980: p. 90; quoted in Patton, 1981: p. 21-22].

2.2 The Evaluation Standards by the DeGEval

The “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation” (DeGEval) made an opinion poll among its members in 2000 about the requirement of standards for evaluation and guidelines for evaluators respectively. A commission (7 evaluators, 2 customers) of different fields and scientific disciplines made a first suggestion, which was revised several times and examined by thirteen commentators. After two years the Evaluation Standards were ratified by the general assembly of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation” on October 4th, 2001. The thirty-page document includes a clarification of the aims and the scope of the Standards, definitions of evaluation and other key concepts, an overview of different approaches to evaluation, twenty-five Standards in four groups, comments on the application of the Standards, and a description of the development of the document itself as well as information

about the planned review process. Moreover one will find a table which compares the German, Swiss and American Standards.

The twenty-five “Standards” are organized in four groups. This structure like many Standards, including titles and descriptive statements, were derived from the Program Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee and adapted to the requirements of evaluation in Germany and Austria. Moreover, the DeGEval-Standards are influenced by the Swiss adaptation (SEVAL-Evaluationsstandards) of the Joint-Committee-Standards.

The American Standards also contain guidelines to fulfil a Standard, frequent mistakes and examples for the practical use of a Standard and a glossary. The German Standards booklet shall be extended by these points.

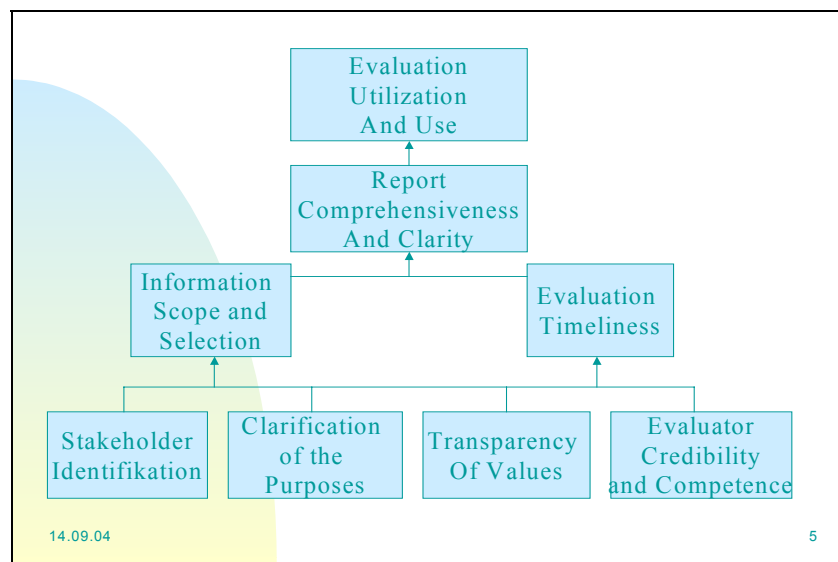
By the end of 2004, the DeGEval-Standards will have been subject to a second review process which will include research societies as well as professional associations.

The four groups of Standards:

UTILITY

The Utility Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation is guided by both the clarified purposes of the evaluation and the information needs of its intended users.

What makes an Evaluation useful:



Basically, the persons or groups involved in or affected by the evaluand should be identified, as well as the purposes of the evaluation should be stated clearly, so that the stakeholders can

provide relevant comments on these purposes, and so that the evaluation team knows exactly what it is expected to do. The persons conducting an evaluation should be trustworthy and professionally competent. Furthermore the values, perspectives and assumptions of the stakeholders should be described.

The collected information should make it possible to answer relevant questions about the evaluand and consider the information needs of the client and other stakeholders. The evaluation should be initiated and completed in a timely fashion, so that its findings can inform pending decision and improvement processes.

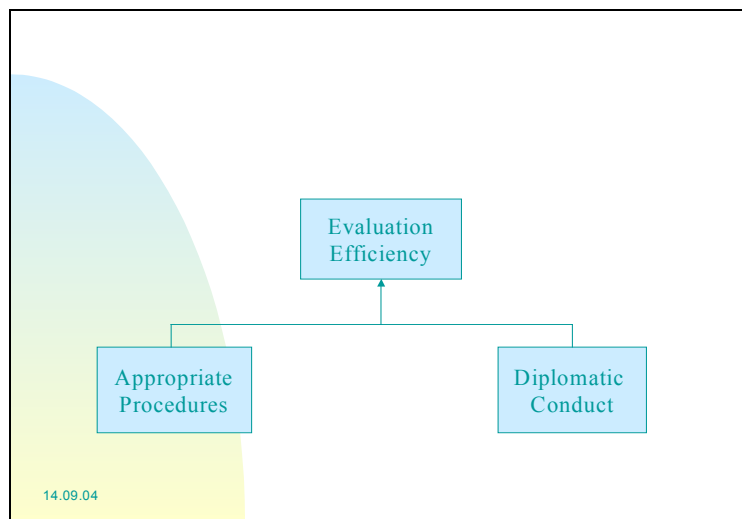
Evaluation reports should provide all relevant information and be easily comprehensible.

The evaluation should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage attentive follow-through by stakeholders and utilization of the evaluation findings.

FEASIBILITY

The Feasibility Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation is planned and conducted in a realistic, thoughtful, diplomatic, and cost-effective manner.

What assures the ability to act:



Evaluation procedures, should be chosen so that the burden placed on the evaluand or the stakeholders is appropriate in comparison to the expected benefits of the evaluation.

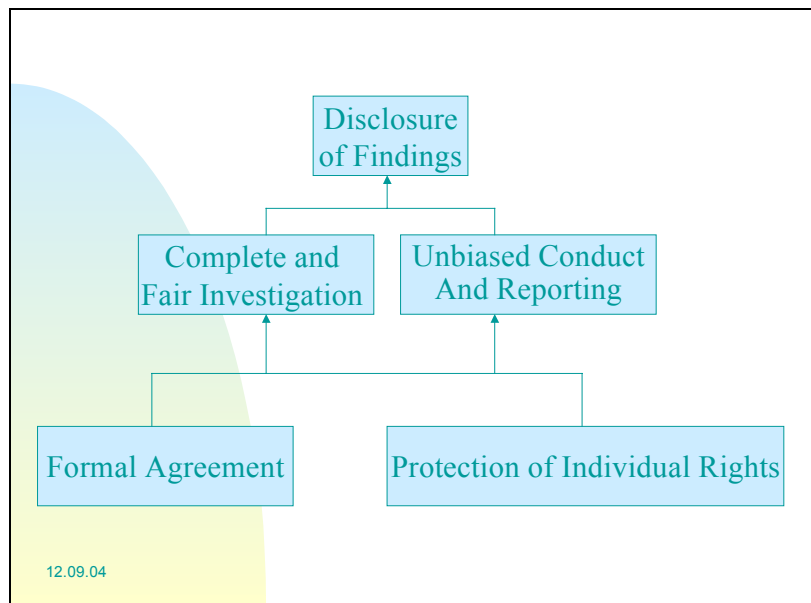
The evaluation should be planned and conducted so that it achieves maximal acceptance by the different stakeholders.

Finally, the relation between cost and benefit of the evaluation should be appropriate.

PROPRIETY

The Propriety Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

How to assure ethical conduct:



Basically, obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or to renegotiate it. Moreover the evaluation should be designed and conducted in a way that protects the rights of all stakeholders.

Then the evaluators should undertake a complete and fair examination and description of strengths and weaknesses of the evaluand.

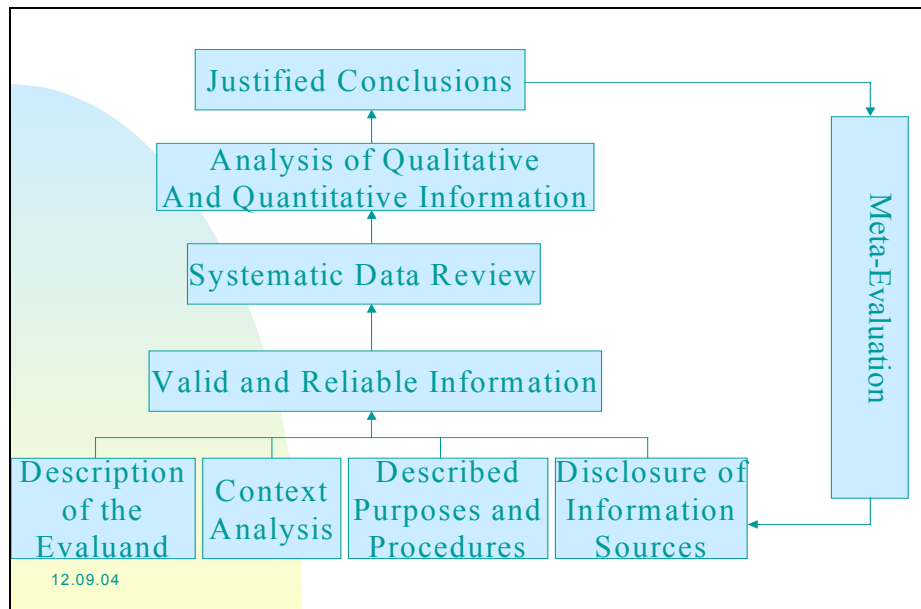
The evaluation should take into account the different views of the stakeholders concerning the evaluand and the evaluation findings. The evaluation report should evidence the impartial position of the evaluation team. Value judgments should be made as unemotionally as possible.

Finally, it is important that to the extent possible, all stakeholders should have access to the evaluation findings.

ACCURACY

The Accuracy Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation produces and discloses valid and useful information and findings pertaining to the evaluation questions.

What makes an evaluation accurate:



These standards deal with the inevitable basis of an evaluation.

The evaluand should be described and documented clearly and accurately, its context should be examined and analyzed in enough detail, and object, purposes, questions, and procedures of an evaluation should be accurately documented and described, so that they can be assessed. Moreover the information sources should be documented in appropriate detail, so that the reliability and adequacy of the information can be assessed.

The data collection procedures should ensure the reliability and validity of the data with regard to answering the evaluation questions.

In a next step the data should be systematically examined for possible errors.

Both, qualitative and quantitative information should be analyzed in an evaluation.

The conclusions reached in the evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that the audiences can assess them.

Finally, the evaluation should be documented and archived, so that a meta-evaluation can be undertaken.

2.3 The Aims of the Standards

The DeGEval-Standards claim to be applied to a diverse set of evaluation approaches, various evaluation purposes and a variety of evaluation fields.

They are addressed to and are supposed to be useful for evaluators, persons and institutions asking for an evaluation and stakeholders of an evaluation.

They want to safeguard and develop the quality of evaluations, to contribute to the methodological and professional knowledge about evaluation and to promote the professional as well as the public dialogue about this topic.

The Standards are intended to give concrete advice on the planning and implementation of evaluations.

They also can be used to guide evaluation training and meta-evaluations.

As stated above, the Standards themselves should be subject of critical assessment to optimize the expressive clarity, interdisciplinary applicability and comprehensibility of the Standards for the users of evaluations.

The Standards formulate important aspects and aims to strive for. They should help to implement and assess evaluations, but they cannot be applied mechanically. There will be evaluations for which singular Standards cannot be used. This should be substantiated shortly. Evaluations which do not use the Standards should not be devalued!

The Standards are directed at evaluations in general, but not for personnel evaluations.

3. International Applicability

The international applicability of the original Standards by the Joint Committee has been examined in several studies. In this chapter some examples shall be mentioned.

Marklund (1985) suggests the application of the “Standards” for Sweden, Levy (1984) as well as Nevo (1985) recommend their use for Israel. Adaptations are regarded as necessary.

Forss & Carlsson (1997) use the “Standards” by judging the quality of evaluations in the Swedish developmental co-operation.

The Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) welcomes the “Standards” as well (1996) and refers to them in respect of their ethical guidelines.

Smith et al (1993) examine the applicability of the “Standards” to Indian and Maltese contexts. They come to the result that it is possible, but much more problematic to apply them

in these cultures. One point is that these cultures are more collectively organised whereas in the American culture individualistic thoughts dominate. Another point is the role of professional judgement: In India and Malta the trustworthiness of a person is most important. In the USA however documentation and transparency of the procedures are inevitable for professionalism.

In German speaking countries like Switzerland, Austria and Germany the cultural closeness to the US speaks well for an application in these countries. In 1996 Widmer stated the applicability of the Standards in a variety of domains besides the field of education in Switzerland.

Adaptations of the Joint-Committee-Standards exist in Switzerland (SEVAL), Germany (DeGEval) and in Africa by the African Evaluation Society.

4. Case studies

In a pilot study four summative evaluations have been assessed so far, to generate thesis about the specific merit and worth of the Evaluation Standards. The method is document analysis of the evaluation reports and technical appendices.

There are six Standards which distinguish the Evaluation Standards from other models: the Utility Standards U1 “Stakeholder Identification”, U6 “Report Comprehensiveness and Clarity” and U8 “Evaluation Utilization and Use” as well as the Accuracy Standards A4 “Disclosure of Information Sources”, A8 “Justified Conclusions” and A9 “Meta-Evaluation”. The tables in the following chapters show the operationalization of these Standards by checkpoints (CP) and the results the evaluations reached relating to the checklists.

4.1 Evaluations which were Conducted According to the Standards

- 1) Evaluated: “**A World of Difference**”. Program to support tolerance; used at schools.
Evaluators: Univation – Institute for Evaluation (Cologne).
Purposes of the evaluation: Assessment of the capability of the program; decide about spreading its implementation.
Methods: Case studies, questionnaires, opinion poll by telephone
- 2) Evaluated: **Lecture timetable** (summer 2002) of the University of Osnabrück.
Evaluators: Students and Professor Müller-Kohlenberg.

Purposes of the evaluation: Assess the utilization of the lecture timetable for the different groups of users; (evaluation training for the students).

Methods: Questionnaires, expert interviews.

U1 Stakeholder Identifikation		
Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World...	Timetable
1. Clearly identify the evaluation client	+	+
2. Stakeholders and their interests are identified	+	+
3. Address stakeholders information needs	+	+
4. Engage stakeholders in planning and implementing	+	+
5. Detect those who are handicapped by or excluded from the evaluand	-	+
Total	4	5
Percentage	80%	100%
Assessment	good	very good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2 CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

U6 Report Comprehensiveness and Clarity

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World...	Timetable
1. The evaluation report contains all relevant information	+	+
2. Report in the language(s) of stakeholders	+	+
3. Key terms are defined	+	-
4. The results are presented in a comprehensive way (graphics, tables, summary)	+	+
5. Focus on contracted questions	+	+
Total	5	4
Percentage	100%	80%
Assessment	very good	good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

U8 Evaluation Utilization and Use

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World...	Timetable
1. Involve stakeholders throughout the evaluation	+	+
2. The evaluation focusses on stakeholders' needs	+	+
3. Give permanent and frank feedback	+	+
4. Conflicting expectations of different persons or groups are stated clearly	+	-
5. Make arrangements to provide follow-up assistance in interpreting and applying the findings	+	+
Total	5	4
Percentage	100%	80%
Assessment	very good	good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

Concerning the chosen Utility Standards the evaluations reach the assessments “good” or “very good”. The stakeholders’ information needs are identified and addressed, and stakeholders are engaged in planning and implementing the evaluations.

The reports contain all relevant information and the results are presented in a comprehensive way.

Moreover permanent feedback about results and follow-up assistance in interpreting and applying the findings is given.

This means, it is likely that the different stakeholders of the evaluations pay attention to the evaluation findings and use them.

A4 Disclosure of Information Sources		
Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World...	Timetable
1. Document and report information sources	+	+
2. Obtain information from a variety of sources and compare them	+	-
3. Include data collection instruments in a technical appendix to the evaluation report	+	+
4. For each source, define the population	+	+
Total	4	3
Percentage	100%	75%
Assessment	very good	good

4 CPs (100%) = very good, 3 CPs (75%) = good, 2 CPs (50%) = fair,
 1 CP (25%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

A8 Justified Conclusions

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World	Timetable
1. Accurately reflect the evaluation procedures	+	+
2. Conclusions are well-founded and the information that supports each conclusion is cited	+	+
3. Limit conclusions to the applicable time periods, contexts, purposes and activities	+	+
4. Report plausible alternative explanations of the findings and explain why rival explanations were rejected	-	-
5. Warn against making common misinterpretations	-	-
Total	3	3
Percentage	60%	60%
Assessment	good	good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

A9 Meta-Evaluation

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	A World...	Timetable
1. The evaluation is completely documented and archived	+	+
2. A self-evaluation is conducted and documented	-	+
3. An extern meta-evaluation is conducted and documented	-	-
4. The evaluation including procedures, problems and results is published	+	-
5. The standards to be used in judging the evaluation are defined	+	+
Total	3	3
Percentage	60%	60%
Assessment	good	good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

Information sources are reported and documented, as well as data collection instruments are included in a technical appendix.

The evaluation procedures are reflected, conclusions are well-founded and the information, which supports each conclusion is cited.

The evaluations are completely documented and archived, so they can be assessed. Moreover the standards which the evaluations used and which are to be used in judging the evaluations are defined.

So these evaluations are very credible, and this is the foundation for use.

4.2 Evaluations which Followed Different Evaluation Models

1) Evaluand: Social work at the universities in Baden-Württemberg

Evaluators: Evaluation agency Baden-Württemberg (evalag)

Purposes of the evaluation: Assess the situation in Baden-Württemberg and assess the course of studies at each university.

Methods: Self-report, visitation, document analysis.

2) Evaluand: “Olympic Games 2012 in Germany”. Applications of German cities for the Olympic Games 2012.

Evaluators: Committee consisting of members of “Nationales Olympisches Komitee” (NOK), former participants at Olympic games and experts for e.g. finances

Purposes of the Evaluation: Assessment of the applications.

Methods: document analysis, visitations, opinion poll.

U1 Stakeholder Identifikation

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social work	Olympics
1. Clearly identify the evaluation client	-	+
2. Stakeholders and their interests are identified	-	-
3. Address stakeholders information needs	-	-
4. Engage stakeholders in planning and implementing	-	-
5. Detect those who are handicapped by or excluded from the evaluand	+	+
Total	1	2
Percentage	20%	40%
Assessment	poor	fair

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2 CPs (40%) = fair, 1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

U6 Report Comprehensiveness and Clarity

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social work	Olympics
1. The evaluation report contains all relevant information	-	-
2. Report in the language(s) of stakeholders	+	+
3. Key terms are defined	-	+
4. The results are presented in a comprehensive way (graphics, tables, summary)	-	-
5. Focus on contracted questions	+	+
Total	2	3
Percentage	40%	60%
Assessment	fair	good

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair, 1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

U8 Evaluation Utilization and Use

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social work	Olympics
1. Involve stakeholders throughout the evaluation	-	-
2. The evaluation focusses on stakeholders' needs	-	+
3. Give permanent and frank feedback	-	-
4. Conflicting expectations of different persons or groups are stated clearly	-	-
5. Make arrangements to provide follow-up assistance in interpreting and applying the findings	-	-
Total	0	1
Percentage	0%	20%
Assessment	failed	poor

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

Concerning the chosen Utility Standards both evaluations have a lack in stakeholder participation. The stakeholders are not engaged in planning and implementing of the evaluation and the reports say nothing about stakeholders' information needs, so they miss some relevant information. The reports should be written in a more comprehensive way, using graphics, for example.

Furthermore, no feedback is given to the stakeholders, conflicting expectations are not stated clearly and no follow-up assistance in interpreting and applying the findings is given.

This means, the evaluation results are unlikely to be used by the different stakeholders.

A4 Disclosure of Information Sources

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social work	Olympics
1. Document and report information sources	-	-
2. Obtain information from a variety of sources and compare them	-	-
3. Include data collection instruments in a technical appendix to the evaluation report	-	-
4. For each source, define the population	-	+
Total	0	1
Percentage	0%	25%
Assessment	failed	poor

4 CPs (100%) = very good, 3 CPs (75%) = good, 2 CPs (50%) = fair,
1 CP (25%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

A8 Justified Conclusions

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social w.	Olympics
1. Accurately reflect the evaluation procedures	-	-
2. Conclusions are well-founded and the information that supports each conclusion is cited	-	-
3. Limit conclusions to the applicable time periods, contexts, purposes and activities	+	+
4. Report plausible alternative explanations of the findings and explain why rival explanations were rejected	-	-
5. Warn against making common misinterpretations	-	-
Total	1	1
Percentage	20%	20%
Assessment	poor	poor

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

A9 Meta-Evaluation

Checkpoint	Evaluation	
	Social work	Olympics
1. The evaluation is completely documented and archived	-	-
2. A self-evaluation is conducted and documented	-	-
3. An external meta-evaluation is conducted and documented	-	-
4. The evaluation including procedures, problems and results is published	-	-
5. The standards to be used in judging the evaluation are defined	-	-
Total	0	0
Percentage	0%	0%
Assessment	failed	failed

5 CPs (100%) = very good, 3-4 CPs (60-80%) = good, 2CPs (40%) = fair,
1 CP (20%) = poor, 0 CP (0%) = failed

Concerning the chosen Accuracy Standards both evaluations have a lack in transparency. The information sources are not documented, there is no technical appendix and the information sources and the results they deliver are not compared. Evaluation procedures are not reflected (regarding their limitations, for example) and conclusions are not well-founded, one has to believe them or not. Concerning Standard A9 “Meta-Evaluation” both evaluations fail.

4.3 The Evaluations at a Glance

Percentage of Checkpoints and assessment.

	U1	U6	U8	A4	A8	A9
„A World of Difference“	80%	100%	100%	100%	60%	60%
	good	very good	very good	very good	good	good
Lecture Timetable	100%	80%	80%	75%	60%	60%
	very good	good	good	good	good	good
Sozial work	20%	40%	0%	0%	20%	0%
	poor	fair	failed	failed	poor	failed
Olympic Games 2012	40%	60%	20%	25%	20%	0%
	fair	good	poor	poor	poor	failed

Whereas the evaluations which followed the Evaluation Standards are assessed as “good” or “very good”, the evaluation of social work at universities in Baden-Württemberg and the evaluation of the applications of German cities for the Olympic Games 2012 reach significant worse results. Only the Olympic-Games-evaluation reaches the assessment “good” (60%) concerning the Standard U6 “Report Comprehensiveness and Clarity”, but it does not reach the score of the evaluations which were conducted according to the Evaluation Standards, even though the lecture-timetable-evaluation (80%) was conducted by students, not by professionals.

Although these results cannot be generalized, as the number of meta-evaluations is far too little, it speaks well for the Evaluation Standards, that they demand to involve stakeholders in the evaluation process and to meet their needs within an evaluation. So stakeholders are more likely to use evaluation results.

Their demand for transparency and comprehensibility strengthens the credibility of an evaluation, and credibility again is the foundation for use.

5. Conclusion

The Evaluation Standards are applicable to a variety of evaluation fields in western, democratic, industrialized countries, but need to be adapted for the specific circumstances and purposes.

The quality of evaluations can be developed by using the Standards, as they formulate maximum demands, so they raise the complexity of demands towards the evaluator.

And they are a frame of reference and thus can stimulate the dialogue between professionals, so these can learn from each others experiences, and this could help develop the quality of following evaluations.

For the future of evaluation an international accepted set of standards could help to compare and discuss the quality and use of evaluations; but to get this set of standards, again a broad discussion among (international) professionals would be necessary. The Evaluation Standards could be a basis for this discussion.

Theses are that the use of the Standards broadens the focus of an evaluation, they help to take important aspects into account like stakeholder interests and thus they raise the effectiveness of an evaluation. The Standards demand to involve stakeholders in the evaluation process and to meet their needs within an evaluation. So stakeholders are more likely to use evaluation results.

Their demand for transparency and comprehensibility strengthens the credibility of an evaluation, and credibility is the “foundation for use”.

The strong emphasis on the stakeholder’s needs and their involvement in planning and implementing an evaluation as well as the demand for transparency and comprehensibility are characteristics of the Standards which have a strong link to democratic principles. This means that they cope with the demands of evaluations of *democratic* governance, thus they could be a helpful instrument in this evaluation field.

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