SEVAL

Schweizerische Evaluationsgesellschaft
Société suisse d'évaluation
Società svizzera di valutazione

Evaluation Managers Competencies Framework: Tasks, Challenges and Competencies

Working Group "Competencies in Evaluation"[1]

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Contents

0   Summary

Over the past decade, the professionalization of evaluation has been of growing interest to a number of evaluation societies around the world. Identifying the competency needs of evaluation practitioners has played an important part in this work. The Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) has contributed to the debate by producing a list of competencies evaluators need for professional practice in Switzerland. More recently, however, the focus of attention has shifted to another actor in the evaluation process – that of the evaluation manager, often times the contractual partner for an evaluation, acting on behalf of the commissioning organisation. Evaluation managers are key in ensuring that evaluations are useful and used within their organisations (see e.g. Love, 1993; Mayne, 2008; Owen, 2003; Preskill and Torres, 1999, Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009). Their role is often poorly understood, under-resourced and undervalued so that inevitably, there is no clear career path for them to follow. Little effort has been made to professionalize their work and provide them with training in the competencies they need to effectively carry out their tasks.

This latest SEVAL project has been developed to respond to this challenge. It is part of the SEVAL drive towards the professionalization of evaluation practice and was carried out under the auspices of the SEVAL's working group on competencies in evaluation. The competency framework presented in this brochure sets out the specific needs evaluation managers consider they need in the Swiss context.

1 Why this competencies framework, and why now?

The aim of this framework is to clarify the key competencies needed to quality manage evaluation studies and promote a more effective return on evaluation investment. The framework is a complementary addition to the SEVAL's previous work on professionalization; in December 2000 it published the SEVAL Evaluation Standards. These define the quality standards of how evaluation should be planned, conducted and delivered. The Standards provide the criteria for quality evaluation, but they do not directly take up the issue of what knowledge, skills or competencies are needed in practice. SEVAL's List of evaluators' competencies together with this present Competency Framework for Evaluation Managers address this gap.

SEVAL's efforts are part of international efforts to professionalize evaluation. To a great degree this has been in response to such questions as, "Who is an evaluator? Who is an evaluation manager, and what is needed to assure their professional practice?" With a rise in evaluation activity over the last three decades, the need to clarify these questions has been receiving considerable attention, not least from the evaluation community itself. Several national and international evaluation associations have therefore taken up the issue and developed their own specific competency frameworks.

1.1 Why focus on evaluation managers?

Little by little over the past thirty years, governmental and non-governmental organisations in many countries, including Switzerland, have introduced evaluation units to deal with its organisation's evaluation demands. Typically, these units (which sometimes is only one person specifically dealing with evaluation issues at 50% or less) engage in developing some kind of evaluation strategy (what is to be evaluated, why, how and when?), in steering the commissioning process, in attending to each evaluation project to assure its quality and use of findings, in developing tools and structures to assure learning across evaluations, and in supporting the organisation's appreciation of what evaluation is and how it can be best put to use. In short, the evaluation manager's responsibilities are twofold: (1) contribute to and assure the quality and thus credibility and usefulness of individual, discrete evaluation studies, and (2) support the organisation's evaluation culture from within - a culture that implies the desire to know what the organisation is achieving and where and how

improvements can be made. Thus, the evaluation manager plays a vital role in shaping the quality, the use and value of evaluation.

1.2   Who are the potential users of this framework, and how might it be best used?

The Evaluation Manager Competency Framework can be used for…

- individual assessment: help evaluation managers (and/or personnel departments) assess current knowledge, skills and competencies (professional knowledge and practice) so as to determine specific training needs and develop appropriate career options
- training: help the SEVAL, universities, training organisations to develop basic and professional development training programmes
- hiring new staff: help personnel departments to develop job specifications for hiring evaluation managers
- assessing salaries: provide personnel departments with a comparable basis for determining relevant salary classification and scales
- promoting better evaluation quality and use: for SEVAL (and others') activities aimed at raising awareness of how evaluation may be better used

1.3   Contacts for more information on professional development and training courses

- Basic, continuing education and professional development courses are posted on the SEVAL Website at http://www.seval.ch/fr/veranstaltungen/ausbildung.cfm
- The SEVAL's working group "Competencies in Evaluation" deals with education, training and professional development. Contact address http://www.seval.ch/fr/ueberuns/arbeitsgruppe.cfm

1.4   Overview of the competencies framework

The structure of the document reflects the procedure used to develop the framework, which is described in more detail in the Appendix. Briefly, it comprised discussions and workshops with a number of evaluation managers. However, as our study was mainly limited to the

views of mangers at federal level, the final list of competencies also includes some that were drawn from the professionalization literature and accepted as being relevant during the consultation process.

Chapter 2 lists the *key tasks of evaluation managers, their major challenges*, and what they consider to be the *success factors*. In keeping with our understanding of the two key roles evaluation managers play, that is (1) managing discrete evaluation projects and (2) institutionalising and managing supportive structures and processes within their organisation (managing the evaluation function) we have distinguished between these two levels (evaluation project level and institutional level) when presenting the information.

Understanding the tasks, challenges and successes as a whole then helped to identify *the competencies* presented in chapter 3; that is to say, those thought to be essential for effectively managing evaluations and the evaluation function within an organisation.

2 Evaluation Manager Tasks, Challenges and Success Factors

2.1 Tasks

Evaluation project level

☐ Defining evaluation concept, developing specification and terms of reference, engaging and managing external evaluation team – ensuring evaluability of questions asked, ensuring projects take into account the socio-political environment and are gender and culturally sensitive

☐ Coordinating with relevant stakeholders / internal and external

☐ Supporting data needs of evaluators

☐ Classic project management tasks including budget control

☐ Guaranteeing support and implementation of evaluation standards and legal clauses

☐ Mediating different conflicting interests of various internal / external stakeholders

☐ Quality control over commissioning, process and products

☐ "Valorising" findings – more than just distribution – changing findings into action – assuring strategic findings reported to policy level

Institutional level

☐ Managing / coordinating between different external and internal stakeholders

☐ Managing / coordinating between evaluation and other internal management tools e.g. project management, quality control, knowledge management, performance control etc.

☐ Establishing evaluation policy and instruments with clear procedures and rules to govern evaluation function and practice – institutionalization of process and procedures

☐ Motivating internal / external stakeholders to participate in, and support evaluation

☐ Demonstrating utility of evaluation

☐ Establishing multiannual evaluation plan, albeit with space for responding to spontaneous, priority requests

☐ Assuring support and implementation of evaluation standards and legal clauses

- ☐ Drawing out meta lessons from evaluations/several evaluations – identifying "gaps"
- ☐ Assuring complex information is summarised into clear policy messages for institution's senior management
- ☐ Supporting ways of applying new knowledge gained through evaluation and ensuring lesson-learning
- ☐ Keeping abreast of institutional strategic and political context to continually review relevance of evaluation policy and projects
- ☐ Engaging with strategic planning and development
- ☐ Making use of evaluation trends and patterns to determine staff resource and professional development needs

2.2   Challenges

Evaluation project level

- ☐ Politicisation of the project – by commissioners and/or stakeholder accompanying group members
- ☐ Hidden agendas
- ☐ Lack of relevant data available / quality of data / baseline data
- ☐ Commissioners' unrealistic expectations
- ☐ Pressure of time / timeliness of results
- ☐ Insufficient funds available for an evaluation to be able to respond to all expectations
- ☐ Dealing with complexity in the terms of reference and evaluation design
- ☐ Balance of evaluation recommendations
- ☐ Institutional processes are too rigid / lack of flexibility in adapting to individual project needs

Institutional level

- ☐ Recurring threat to evaluation function resulting from internal re-organisations / political reactions / budget cuts
- ☐ Actual benefits of an evaluation can be difficult to predict; scepticism over evaluation's utility

- [ ] Internal partners' fear of evaluation as "controlling" measure
- [ ] Unrealistic expectations from evaluation
- [ ] Weak hierarchical position of evaluation function
- [ ] Tensions between evaluation for proving and evaluation for improving – different needs at different levels
- [ ] Political pressures can make or break evaluation cultural development

2.3   Success Factors

Evaluation project level

- [ ] Institutionalised processes and procedures – establishing shared understanding of role and function of evaluation manager and staff
- [ ] Expertise and competence of the evaluation manager and evaluation team
- [ ] Openness and transparency is guaranteed
- [ ] Assuring the participation and commitment of internal and external stakeholders in an evaluation project
- [ ] Establishing stakeholder group to support and accompany the evaluation – especially for diffusing the findings
- [ ] Clarifying and agreeing role and tasks of stakeholder accompanying group
- [ ] Trust and partnership between stakeholders, external evaluation team and evaluation manager
- [ ] Clear, mutual understanding of the intended use of the evaluation, by and for whom, and contractual arrangements (terms of reference) between commissioners, stakeholders, evaluators and evaluation managers
- [ ] Agreeing realistic expectations for evaluation
- [ ] Quality assurance / control (also controlling of evaluation's implementation as per the proposed design)
- [ ] Securing sufficient resources, in particular enough time for evaluation managers to accompany and manage evaluation projects

Institutional level

☐ Various stakeholders have a common understanding of the evaluation function, its role and utility. They also have a clear understanding of the similarities and differences between evaluation and other instruments e.g. performance management, controlling, audit, monitoring, policy analysis, etc.

☐ Difference between project, programme and strategy is clear to all

☐ Executive / Senior Management interest is secured

☐ Continuity in the management of projects and evaluation function is assured

☐ Evaluation-friendly environment is critical (commitment "from above," existing evaluation culture)

3   Evaluation Manager Competencies

A. Leadership and Contextual Related Competencies

A1	**Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the organisation's strategy and "policy" in relation to the evaluation function**
A2	**Shows strategic and political "savvy"**
A3	**Demonstrates vision and perseverance to steer evaluation through institutional change**
A4	**Can identify opportunities for positive change and develop appropriate responses (new ways of doing things)**
A5	**Understands and respects gender and cultural diversity and ensures that the evaluation team demonstrates such sensitivity in conducting evaluations**

B. Methodological Competencies

B1	**Has basic knowledge and capabilities in scientific skills, knowledge of social science qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods**
B2	**Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of different evaluation approaches**
B3	**Can judge the relevance of a proposed evaluation approach to the demands outlined in the terms of reference**
B4	**Understands and promotes the benefits of using mixed methods in evaluation when appropriate and relevant for responding to the evaluation questions**
B5	**Capable and competent in determining the validity, reliability, relevance and limitations of different methods and data sources**
B6	**Can appreciate that different criteria are used for validity, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness according to methodology**
B7	**Has analytical and synthesis skills**
B8	**Takes part in the professional evaluation community**
B9	**Keeps updated through attending courses for professional development in evaluation and evaluation management**

C. Evaluation project management competencies

C1	**Understands the components of evaluable interventions**
C2	**Demonstrates effective and efficient management of financial and human resources**
C3	**Capable and competent in mediating between "programme logic" and "evaluation logic»**
C4	**Has market knowledge (who are the evaluators, their experience, their expertise)**
C5	**Supports the integration of a strategic communication plan into the evaluation design**
C6	**Assures the dissemination of evaluation findings and recommendations to appropriate stakeholders**
C7	**Follows up on use of evaluation findings and recommendations**

D. Communication, Social and Personal Competencies

D1	**Capable of creating a favourable working climate based on confidence, trust and impartiality**
D2	**Demonstrates social and interpersonal communication competencies**
D3	**Competent in negotiating and mediating with a wide range of stakeholders**
D4	**Demonstrates ability to manage conflict**

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5   Appendix

Procedure for Developing the SEVAL Evaluation Manager Competencies Framework

Marlène Läubli has been very much involved with the subject of evaluation manager competencies for more than two decades. Given the growing international interest in evaluation competencies, and evaluation managers' competencies in particular (please see References for relevant literature), she initially presented the project to the SEVAL working group on competencies for approval in late 2012. A small project team was subsequently established to conduct the work.

Our initial aim was to elicit information from evaluation managers working at all three levels of public administration (federal, cantonal, municipal) as well as in NGOs. However, since much of the pioneering experience in evaluation had taken place at federal level, we limited our enquiry in the first instance to this level for developing the framework. The perspectives of others will be sought during a later consultation phase.

To develop the framework, three workshops were organised to bring together a small number of evaluation managers (N=17) who were mainly selected from the membership of the Swiss Federal Administration's Evaluation Network. The selection criteria used by the Project Group in agreement with the President of the Network, was several years of evaluation management experience of the organisation or person and/or person recognised by peers as being a driver of evaluation within her/his organisation. Participants were asked to spontaneously identify what they considered to be the success factors and challenges based on their experience of any given project. Participants then used this information to identify the relevant competencies. The outcome of each workshop was summarised and sent to all participants for comment.

The results of the three workshops were collated and some additional key competencies from the relevant research literature (see References) were added and indicated in red. These additions were proposed in recognition of the fact that our study was limited to mainly federal agency evaluation managers. The literature, on the other hand, used a wider base in formulating the recommended competencies. The summary was then circulated for comment to all evaluation manager members of the Federal Administration's Evaluation Network. All remarks were taken into account, and the resulting framework was then sent to the SEVAL working group on competencies and then later to the whole of the SEVAL and Network membership for comment. Other relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs and cantonal authorities, will be consulted in a later phase.