



VEPR Pilot Review Report – Juho Uusihakala

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<p>Reviewer details Lead Reviewer <i>Full name:</i> Pam Oliver <i>Email contact:</i> pamo@clear.net.nz</p> <p>Second reviewer <i>Full name:</i> Weronika Felcis <i>Email contact:</i> veronika.felcis@gmail.com</p>		
<p>Review details <i>Date/s of review meetings:</i> 13 January 2017 <i>Medium of review meeting/s:</i> [e.g. teleconference/Skype/in person] Skype <i>Comments:</i> [optional]</p>		
<p>Review focus areas (summarised in 25 words maximum)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Choice of appropriate evaluation method and data collection and analysis tools Analysis and reporting on qualitative data 		
Capabilities explored	Learning by reviewee (total 750 words)	Reviewer comments on reviewee learning (total 500 words)
<p>Understanding programme theory and its implications for evaluation</p> <p>Assess evaluation context and identify programme logic</p> <p>Adapt evaluation designs and methods to specific contexts</p> <p>Understand the potential and limits of evaluation instruments and tools and how to communicate them</p> <p>Data collection and analysis</p> <p>Case studies, surveys, interviews</p>	<p>In filling in the portfolio, I realised that the reason for wanting to discuss evaluation methods and tools for data collection and analysis stems from a sense of disappointment in the results of my own evaluations – the feeling is that evaluations produce very little useful and/or new information for the key stakeholders. This is critical as the ethos of an evaluator is to find and convincingly argue for information that is useful.</p> <p>Part of the reason is in the client’s statutory approach to evaluations, with detailed guidelines to be followed, but not necessarily clear vision of what could and should be gained from the evaluation. The process often leads to an extensive list of evaluation questions.</p> <p>Typically, when bidding for an evaluation, consultants are required to detail the key evaluation methods, questions and tools for data collection and analysis already in the proposal. And this is often a very important part in evaluating the bids, and can be</p>	<p>PO – Juho has used the VEPR process as an opportunity to review several aspects of the ways that he operates as an evaluator generally and as an evaluation manager., including his communications with a range of other stakeholders. As a result he has identified some areas of performance that he can change, and also some external obstacles to good evaluation practice that he can influence in ways that may address the problems he encounters in undertaking evaluations. Thinking globally in this way appears to be a skill that he is now developing. The capabilities that he has identified for his immediate professional development are certainly relevant to these change goals.</p> <p>WF – Juho has made sound efforts to reflect on his own skills in managing evaluations in the best possible way. Identifying clearly which skills</p>

<p>and expert panels.</p>	<p>contractually binding. However, the first and possibly the most important step of constructing the theory of change (TOC) with the expected results and assumptions is not discussed in detail. Yet, it is the TOC that should define your detailed evaluation questions, which consequently guide the choice of appropriate methods and tools for data collection and analysis.</p> <p>In principle, the errors made in the proposal stage can be rectified when presenting the inception report that should detail and finalise the final evaluation questions and methods, based on the TOC. In practice, I have failed to fully utilise this opportunity. This implies need to improve understanding of programme theory and its implications for evaluation.</p> <p>Going forward, there is a range of skills I need to develop and change some old practices. First, more emphasis needs to be put in the inception phase. I need to improve my skills in assessing the evaluation context, the factors influencing the programme, and developing the programme logic. I would also benefit from more skills in participatory team management in general and in relation to constructing the theory of change for the subject of the evaluation. Based on TOC developed together with the key stakeholders, I would need to further strengthen my skills in designing evaluation questions and in choosing suitable data collection methods, including case studies, surveys, interviews and expert panels (see also below). Inevitably, there are potentially important issues that surface during the evaluation and cannot be tackled with sufficient detail. These should then be included and suggestions for further studies.</p> <p>Finally, I need to improve my evaluation management and communication skills to reach understanding and consensus on desired direction of the evaluation, acknowledging that some issues will receive less attention.</p>	<p>need most improvement, he has identified which new capabilities will answer these needs the best way. I believe this exercise will truly support his professional development as an evaluation manager.</p>
<p>Assess evaluation context and identify</p>	<p>Usually, the evaluations that I've conducted rely heavily on qualitative data – mostly narrative reports and</p>	<p>PO – Here Juho has again identified specific skills that he can work on to address the</p>

<p>programme logic</p> <p>Gather, use and interpret evidence with care and judgement</p> <p>Capacity to manage and deliver evaluations</p> <p>Case studies, surveys, interviews and expert panels.</p>	<p>interviews. In case there is a clearly articulated programme logic, the gap between outputs and outcomes is usually too wide and contribution of the programme towards the desired outcomes very difficult to prove.</p> <p>To complement the limited quantitative data on project outcome level targets, I would need to improve my skills in other data collection methods e.g. case studies, surveys, interviews and expert panels.</p> <p>Documentation and analysis of these key sources of information should be strengthened to make evaluation findings and consequent conclusions and recommendations more rigorous. It turned out, however, that I have a lot to improve in my basic working methods, processes and habits to ensure full transparency and disclosure of information. I need to improve my skills in gathering, using interpreting evidence with care and judgement. For example; I should pay more attention to note-taking and not get too much carried away by interesting discussions. Note-taking is a discipline that can be practised. An interesting value adding method could be participatory note-taking, where the interviewee actively takes part in taking notes. In addition, in secure environments recording could also be used to make sure everything is captured and gets duly noted. The key messages from various types of stakeholders could then be annexed to the evaluation report.</p> <p>Another basic work method that I should use more systematically is the daily wrap-up meeting with the evaluation team. This should take place every evening for all team members to reflect and tell what are the key messages and takeaways they have learned from the day's meetings. In conducting these evening "data dumps" a useful method could be to give responsibility for leading these sessions to another member of the team, especially if I am acting as the Team Leader. Again, the notes and the key messages from these could be annexed to the report, if necessary.</p>	<p>presenting problems in his evaluation practice, including some core research skills. In particular, Juho might avoid some of the presenting problems with better organisation generally and use of good systems. There are useful primers and online learning resources for many of these.</p> <p>WF – In this part of the review, Juho critically assessed his research skills, getting to the conclusion about the strong need for further improvements in a range of methodological avenues. Fortunately a wide range of courses and online databases can support him with relation to fundamentals of standards of evaluation.</p>
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<p>Other gains from the VEPR review</p>	<p>This whole process of first filling in the application, then the portfolio, then discussion and finally reporting was a great learning experience. I have had to reflect on my own working processes through which I've come to realise that the initial topics chosen were not necessarily the key issues, rather symptoms of something else that should be addressed first. I think I've learned quite a bit on how to improve my evaluations.</p> <p>During our discussion I learned that I'm not alone in my frustration with seemingly not relevant evaluation findings. If this is indeed the challenge felt by many colleagues, we should come together and discuss it with the commissioners. In Finland one option could be to suggest this as a topic to be discussed in our annual development cooperation evaluation meetings organised by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This could be part of wider discussion to analyse to what extent the current evaluation commissioning and conducting practices are conducive fulfilling evaluation standards, or if the current practices risk compromising some of them.</p>	<p>PO – Juho has used the VEPR process to challenge himself and some habitual ways of operating as an evaluator that may have been causing the presenting problems. He appears to have concluded, in a very good-humoured way, that he has significant control over addressing and avoiding the problems that he encounters as an evaluator through ongoing self-reflection. Very best wishes, Juho, in this new model for your professional development, I enjoyed working with you,</p> <p>WF – Juho's plan for his professional development starts from very critical analysis of a wide range of skills to being able to focus more on practical ways for future improvements, understanding systemically the complexity of evaluation processes and being able to better reflect on his own skills and abilities. I hope this effort will continue for him.</p>
<p>Declaration</p> <p>We declare that the VEPR review for JUHO UUSIHAKALA was completed on 20 April 2017 to the satisfaction in all aspects of the reviewee and the two reviewers.</p> <p>Signed</p> <p>Applicant: Agreed by _____ email.</p> <p>Lead reviewer: </p> <p>Second reviewer: Agreed by email.</p>		