VEPR Pilot Review Report – Sofia Avdeitchikova

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<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Reviewee details
Reviewee name: Sofia Avdeitchikova
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Lead Reviewer
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<tr><td colspan="3">Review details
Date/s of review meetings: April 27th, 2017
Medium of review meeting/s: Skype
Comments: Nil</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Review focus areas (summarised in 25 words maximum)
1. Managing evaluation assignments where the clients have little prior experience and knowledge of evaluations
2. Finding a more structured way to conduct and communicate results of evaluations of complex interventions/evaluations in complex contexts</td></tr>
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Capabilities explored	Learning by reviewee (total 750 words)	Reviewer comments on reviewee learning (total 500 words)
1. Better assessing evaluation capacity of clients	Many of evaluation assignments I get are the ones where the client does not have prior knowledge or experience of evaluations. While I have always sensed that this creates wrong expectations about what the evaluation can deliver, and barriers for the organisation to make use of the knowledge that the evaluation provides, I realize that I have not devoted enough energy and time to assess the organisations' evaluative capacity and adjust the approach accordingly. A learning point for me is to more systematically include assessment of evaluative capacity in the design of my evaluations, and to develop own/adopt existing materials for capacity-building towards clients. A point to reflect on further is – how do I appropriately conceptualize the "evaluation readiness" or "evaluative capacity" of these clients – what are the key aspects and how do I assess them?	**WF:** Sofia's aim for our discussion was to reflect more on what she does now and what she could do better in realistically performing her role as an evaluator without having to meet unrealistic expectations. We discussed this issue in length and her own considerable knowledge plus common moment of reflection helped her to realize what could be some solutions – networking better with other struggling about the same thing evaluators, creating common solutions and common voice, preparing tools for evaluation capacities in client's organizations etc. I hope some of them will truly help Sofia in her practice. **DG:** The approach described here by Sophia reflects the discussion on this topic. She was able to identify some initial actions to minimise the misunderstanding of her role and clarify the

	Next step for me would be to identify/develop appropriate materials, start introducing this stage more systematically in my evaluations and assess whether it contributes to better outcomes. Another potentially fruitful step in such a capacity-development activity would be an introductory workshop where the national agency managing the ERDF funds participate and can communicate their position and expectations.	expectations of the client. Proposed actions should assist and can be verified in reality shortly. The kick-off meeting should provide sufficient space to discuss these issues and get the mutual agreement on details missing in the ToR.
2. Reaching out to stakeholders/engaging in the evaluation community	While reflecting on specific cases together with the reviewers, where low evaluation capacity has caused problems in conducting evaluations (and reduced the potential value of these to the clients), I understood more clearly the potential of engaging with key stakeholders to work towards common/joint solution. Some of those are – the community of evaluators who struggle with the same issues, the community of implementing organisations that experience frustration with the evaluation process and are not able to benefit from the process and the results of evaluations, as well as the national and regional agencies that ultimately get worse results from the projects that they might potentially get. Getting actively involved in a dialogue about problems and potential solutions would allow to increase awareness about the issues and perhaps developing common/joint tools to tackle these situations when they arise. Potential solutions may include development of a course in commissioning evaluations and working with evaluators for all organisations that implement ERDF-financed projects for the first time; supporting the agency administrating the ERDF funds in Sweden in defining and communicating its intentions with how project evaluations are to be performed and used, and aligning those with international standards and good practice. Next step for me is taking contact with some evaluations	**WF:** Indeed very often it is researchers (supply side) who search for professional development and mentoring options. Having an example in EES' President who is a commissioner, more commissioners should be interesting in openly discussing their own problems and pitfalls and commonly look for solutions. It does seem that the blockages and limitations that Sofia was describing will not be eased without more involvement from the evaluation community. Her proactive approach to generate ideas for the community were sound and I hope she will manage to attractive more attention to them. **DG:** Sofia has identified possible solutions to this problem (very common across countries). Contacting the evaluation society should lead to better understanding of the local situation and sharing experience with her colleagues in the country. Developing the course is rather longer-term solution with several risks. If organised by Sofia it may cost a lot of effort and time but does not have to attract sufficient interest. Provided that the National agency is organising such an event, they need to have clear strategy and understand what approach is chosen – standard template as uniform approach to all project evaluations – to make it comparable, or to focus on different issue for every single

	professionals in Sweden and discuss possibilities to develop such forum. The Swedish evaluation society (SVUF) might be a good base for this, but there are also other, informal forums for professional evaluators in Sweden, that also might be good to start with.	project evaluation etc. This will very much depend on the client perception of the problem.
3. Conceptualizing relevant intervention and context variables	My experience is that, despite an increased understanding of complexity of interventions and the context in which they are implemented, most evaluations are still based on simple, linear, intervention logics. This does not allow for adequately capturing relevant aspects of the intervention and of the context, which results in outcomes of the evaluation being either overly simplistic ("A led to B") or overly imprecise ("We don't know if change in B depends on A because many other factors may have affected…"). When reflecting on this issue, and having a dialogue with the reviewers, I came to an understanding that linear intervention logics are not an adequate tool for me when conducting some of the evaluations that I am commissioned to do, and that adopting a systemic approach might be useful. In doing this, I can benefit from my existing knowledge of system theories, such as "innovation systems" (systems around innovation creation) and "socio-technical systems" (system around development and diffusion of a certain technology). The system theories conceptualize key actors, processes and critical stages of system development and might be useful for building a framework for an evaluation. Next step for me would be to study the available literature on systemic thinking in evaluation/system mapping, assess whether I need more formal training on this, and take contact with evaluators working with this approach to get specific tools and advice. After that, it might be useful to do a "pilot" systemic	**WF:** As we discussed the current level of complexity of the world does not allow us to see and analyse problem linearly anymore, which should not mean we cannot try for clear mechanism explanations. Nevertheless, we might not be able to spot immediately all the unintended results leading to disturbance of system's equilibrium. **DG:** The proposed solution is a very good starting point for complex evaluation. This topic is well described by Michael Q. Patton, so it would be worth to study it http://www.academia.edu/ 11677277/Evaluating_the_Complex Possible solution also includes a good evaluation team composition involving technical experts (not necessarily evaluators). This widens the methodological scope, which cannot be covered by a single evaluator.

	evaluation with a client that is up for it. We did one such pilot for an agency working with regional growth policy two years ago and it was rather successful in terms of the quality of the report we delivered, which might be a good selling argument.	
Other gains from the VEPR review	Other learning or gains for the reviewee from the review process. • Just to take a step back a reflect of one's challenges and why they arise was very useful and thought-provoking. • Understanding differences in evaluation practices in different countries. • To think in terms of "what can I learn/develop/do differently?" is certainly a more productive approach that to focus on how others can do better. • Realization that "I am not alone"	Other learning or gains for each of the reviewers from the review process. • Understanding differences in evaluation practices in different countries. • Discussing women's role in evaluation culture. • Interesting to see how EU funded initiatives are managed in other countries with much smaller scope of assistance.
Other comments on the review outcomes or process	Nil	Nil

Declaration

We declare that the VEPR review for Sofia Avdeitchikova was completed on 16/08/2017 to the satisfaction in all aspects of the reviewee and the two reviewers.

    Signed
    Reviewee:

    Lead reviewer:

    Second reviewer: