



THE EES EVALUATION CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

This document outlines the rationale and content of the EES Evaluation Capabilities Framework for the conduct of quality evaluation. It has been endorsed by the European Evaluation Society Board following extensive consultations with the membership. The Framework seeks to promote a culture of professionalism and to encourage good evaluation practice. It responds to a rising demand for high quality evaluation services in the public, private and voluntary sectors in Europe and beyond.

Background

Evaluation professional and ethical guidelines issued by various evaluation societies are predicated on the assumption that they will encourage evaluators to meet appropriate standards of good evaluation practice. Equally diverse initiatives have emerged towards strengthening education and training dedicated to evaluation excellence. These twin developments have triggered a wide ranging debate about the knowledge, skills and attitudes that evaluators should be in a position to demonstrate.

A growing literature has emerged regarding evaluators' competencies. Diverse approaches underlie the design of evaluation competencies frameworks. Some may be labelled *input based* since they focus on evaluators' qualifications. Others are *outcome based* since they consider competencies in terms of the results of evaluators' activities. The main advantage of the input based approach is its accessibility and simplicity and its deliberate use as a guide for professional development. The outcome based approach aims to make competencies testable.

But threats to the validity of competencies as performance indicators arise when, as is frequently the case, evaluation outcomes are affected by the behaviours of other actors (commissioners; other stakeholders, etc.) let alone by the characteristics of the enabling and evaluation governance environment. Judging evaluators capabilities solely through examination of the quality of evaluation products and their results is therefore risky.

This said, both the input based and outcome based competency frameworks interrogate competencies or capabilities in terms of disciplinary content as well as delivery, social interaction and/or management skills. Equally, both models consider theory as well as practice; knowledge as well as experience. Finally, both acknowledge that competency assessments can be directed at different competency levels ranging from basic entry level requirements to higher order and/or specialized knowledge and skills.

Role of evaluation societies

Many evaluation associations have acted as platforms for cross-disciplinary dialogue about 'what it takes' to be a competent evaluator. This is because they are mandated to promote and improve the theory, practice, understanding and utilisation of evaluation and its contribution to public knowledge. By now several associations have secured agreement on a set of evaluator competencies. The German Evaluation Society was first. It produced a framework aimed at the design of evaluation training programmes.

The Canadian Evaluation Society's own published set of competencies came next: it is geared to professional designation. The International Development Evaluation Association's competencies framework dated January 2012 followed: it was designed to promote high ethical and professional standards in development evaluation. The UK Evaluation Society board ratified an Evaluation Capabilities Framework in June 2012.

The EES Capabilities Initiative

The European Evaluation Society (EES) is no exception to this trend. EES too entered the fray and posted its Evaluation Capabilities Framework on the web in 2011. Four fifths of respondents to a 2009 membership survey wished the European Evaluation Society to pursue work on evaluation competencies in the European space. Accordingly EES sponsored panel discussions at the 2010 Prague evaluation conference and held consultations with the Network of Evaluation Societies in Europe (NESE).

Next, a proposed capabilities framework that took account of comments received following the 2009 survey was posted on the EES website together with a follow up questionnaire in 2011. The EES Helsinki Conference offered another opportunity to exchange views about evaluation professionalization. The results of the 2011 survey confirmed broad based support for the overall structure as well as the substantive content of the framework, a far cry from the opposition to the very concept of competencies evinced by the 2004 EES Conference in Berlin.

Most members visualize that multi-faceted benefits will flow from the initiative conceived as a tool for individual self assessment and/or the systematic design of evaluation training programs. Some members opined that an agreed framework would also help achieve public recognition of evaluation as a profession and an agent of positive social change. Others that it would help guide eventual designation initiatives.

Rationale

The pursuit of evaluation quality beyond the application of ethical guidelines, standards and codes underlies the need for an agreed capabilities framework. As evaluation commissioners, practitioners and clients became increasingly conscious of the public interest dimension of the evaluation discipline they became more demanding about evaluation quality and more discerning regarding the qualifications needed to practice evaluation.

Strengthening a sense of identity among evaluators is another critical dimension highlighted by EES survey respondents. Finally accountability considerations help explain the imperative of reaching a workable consensus about evaluator capabilities. Evaluators have a responsibility to society and to one another to deliver value to their clients and the society. For all these reasons an agreed capabilities framework is now widely perceived as a key pillar of evaluation professionalism.

Scope of EES Framework

Both EES surveys validated the structure of the framework and helped to hone its actual content. Knowledge, practice and dispositions were confirmed as the three main clusters of evaluation capabilities. Evaluation work requires knowledge, skills and attitudes honed through experience. Mastery of core knowledge elements is intrinsic to evaluation excellence. So is a basic understanding of evaluation methods and an understanding of the potential and limits of evaluation tools. On the other hand, a person can have all the knowledge needed for evaluation and yet fail to perform as a good evaluator.

The capacity to deliver quality evaluation implies skills acquired and refined through experience: practice is central to evaluation competencies. Without a capacity to deliver, evaluation quality falters. Equally, evaluators should aspire to intellectual virtues like honesty and precision of language that are relevant to the quality of evaluations. From this perspective, evaluation practice is closely associated with the scientific method and familiarity with it is desirable if only because evaluators are increasingly called upon to assess the validity of scientific claims on which public policy rests.

Finally, evaluation is not for everyone. Good evaluators are endowed with a distinctive mindset. Knowledge can be imparted and systematic training can enhance the quality of practice. But it is far harder but no less important to instil in evaluators the special dispositions of character and attitudes that make for evaluation excellence.

The EES Framework

The EES capabilities framework aims to raise awareness of the attributes required to conduct quality evaluations. It takes into account that responsibility for evaluation quality and for the integrity of the evaluation process does not rest solely on the shoulders of individual evaluators. Several evaluators are often involved in the conduct of an evaluation so that it is the combination of individual characteristics as well as the ability of the evaluation manager to weld diverse attributes into an effective team that ultimately matters. The rules of the game imposed by commissioners may also enhance or hinder evaluation quality. Last but not least the social and political context also impacts on evaluation results.

Nevertheless generic evaluator competencies are major contributors to the quality of evaluation as a social practice. Three major categories of capabilities make up the EES framework:

- **Evaluation knowledge** addresses the adequate comprehension of evaluation history, approaches, models and theories and their implications with respect to evaluation governance, design, purposes, practices and methods and the diverse uses of evaluation in society
- **Professional practice** has to do with what actually goes on in the field. Carrying out a credible and valid evaluation based on sound technical principles is essential but so are the communications talents and the interpersonal attributes involved in designing and managing the evaluation process. Listening and negotiation skills, a capacity to listen, a readiness to adapt to diverse political contexts matter a great deal.
- **Dispositions and attitudes** refer to personal qualities that enable evaluators to practice the discipline not only in receptive circumstances but also in difficult contexts where vital conflicting interests are in play and evaluation capture is a threat. Grace under pressure, independence of mind and independence of appearance as well as strong ethical principles are vital attributes for evaluators.

Towards professionalization

The EES surveys brought out the notion that complementary initiatives would be needed to promote evaluation excellence. Towards enhancing the quality of evaluation practice the surveys disclosed exceptionally strong support for harmonized evaluation guidelines across borders, sharing of good practices through connectivity among evaluators, mentoring and improved access to quality assurance advice. Next in line was enhanced access to quality training and greater availability of academic offerings at the MA and PhD levels. The final piece of the puzzle is evaluator peer review and designation.

THE EES EVALUATION CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

1. Evaluation knowledge

1.1 Appreciates the distinctive role played by evaluation in society

- 1.11 Exhibits familiarity with evaluation theories, schools and approaches
- 1.12 Shows awareness of evaluation history and trends
- 1.13 Appreciates the linkages between evaluation and the social sciences
- 1.14 Understands program theory and its implications for evaluation
- 1.15 Aims at evaluation independence and excellence in all contexts

1.2 Masters the antecedents of evaluation quality

- 1.21 Uses appropriate evaluation concepts and correct evaluation terms
- 1.22 Displays a capacity to identify relevant evaluation questions
- 1.23 Knows how to engage constructively with all stakeholders
- 1.24 Comprehends the value of diverse evaluation approaches
- 1.25 Adapts evaluation designs and methods to specific contexts

1.3 Understands the potential and limits of evaluation instruments and tools

- 1.31 Data collection and analysis
- 1.32 Experimental and quasi experimental methods
- 1.33 Qualitative, participatory and mixed methods
- 1.34 Case studies, surveys, interviews, expert panels
- 1.35 Indicators, rating and monitoring systems

2. Professional practice

2.1 Demonstrates capacity to manage and deliver evaluations

- 2.11 Responds to legitimate stakeholders' needs and concerns
- 2.12 Assesses the evaluation context and identifies the program logic
- 2.13 Manages resources and skills prudently so as to achieve results
- 2.14 Gathers, uses and interprets evidence with care and judgment
- 2.15 Reports fairly and encourages effective use of evaluation results

2.2 Displays interpersonal skills

- 2.21 Writes fluently and communicates clearly
- 2.22 Values team work and leads by example
- 2.23 Uses sound negotiating and conflict resolution skills
- 2.24 Demonstrates gender awareness and cultural sensitivity
- 2.25 Nurtures professional relationships

3. Dispositions and attitudes

- 3.1 Upholds ethical standards and democratic values in the conduct of evaluations
- 3.2 Reaches out to clients and stakeholders
- 3.3 Evinces independence of mind and appearance
- 3.4 Displays self-awareness and pursues continuous professional development
- 3.5 Contributes to the evaluation community