
Evaluation Competencies and Evaluation Use: Some Reflections

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Background: Most evaluator competencies target the evaluator. Presently, there is very limited academic training for evaluation users. There is a need for defining competencies for evaluation users.

Purpose: This paper, through a review of evaluation frameworks of national evaluation societies and associations, including the framework developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group, argues for more emphasis on directly use-related competencies, and for extending the competencies beyond evaluators to users.

Keywords: *competency frameworks; evaluation competencies; use of evaluation; evaluation training; development interventions*

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Evaluation competency development has been fraught with many challenges. Evaluation competencies have been a subject of much debate and discussion in the broader context of professionalizing evaluation as a social practice (Picciotto, 2011). Stevahn et al. (2005) have proposed four reasons for defining and adopting evaluation competencies: (i) better training, (ii) better reflective practice, (iii) moving forward the research agenda on evaluation, and (iv) better opportunities for continued professionalization of the field. These competencies are intended to produce competent evaluators and, thereby, quality evaluations. Arguably quality of evaluations is a prerequisite for their use.

Evaluation Competencies

Evaluation competencies have been defined as “clusters of related knowledge, skills, abilities and other requirements necessary for successful job performance” (United Nations Evaluation Group [UNEG], 2008, p. 5). In a literature review, Wilcox and King (2014) affirm that competency is associated with knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes form the basis of developing competencies. Adapting an example from Wilcox and King (2014), understanding utilization-focused evaluation is knowledge, and using that knowledge to develop a utilization-focused evaluation design is a competency.

Competencies are the defining characteristics of an evaluator. They provide a road map for an evaluator to progress and help to improve the evaluation practice. (American Evaluation Association [AEA], 2018). An agreed-upon set of competencies is a prerequisite to professionalizing the field of evaluation (AEA, 2018). Specifying evaluation competencies requires requisite professional foundations and technical skills to design and implement evaluations that meet expected standards, norms, and ethics and to ensure effective communication of evaluation findings (UNEG, 2016).

However, competencies in development evaluation were slow to develop. Unlike in other professional fields such as health care and teaching, competency development did not follow the typical procedure of a group of experienced expert practitioners articulating the necessary competencies, followed by validation and making the validated competencies available for practitioners to follow (Stevahn et al., 2005). The vast diversity of fields, such as health, education, and business, and contexts, such as internal and external, led to long and protracted debates about

the feasibility of defining competencies for evaluation (Wilcox & King, 2014). However, a taxonomy was proposed by King et al. (2001), which Stevahn et al. (2005) revised to include additional competencies following the standards and guidelines of evaluation societies in North America.

The revised taxonomy by Stevahn et al. (2005) focused on three main aspects of competencies: knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be an effective evaluator. The competencies were organized into six categories: (i) professional practice, (ii) systematic inquiry, (iii) situational analysis, (iv) project management, (v) reflective practice, and (vi) interpersonal competence. Since the publication of these competencies, several active evaluation societies and associations have developed evaluation competency frameworks reflecting these competencies. Generally, frameworks have benefitted from reviews of previous frameworks, which appear to have confirmed previously recognized competencies and brought in some modifications and additions.

Purpose and Use of Competencies

The intended purpose of competency frameworks developed by evaluation associations or societies is mainly to facilitate the professionalization of evaluation (e.g., AEA, 2018) and to help members advance in their profession. Competency frameworks can also facilitate quality assurance for evaluations and evaluators, enhancing evaluations’ credibility and use (UK Evaluation Society [UKES], 2012). They inform and guide the professional training that a professional body can offer its members (Australasian Evaluation Society [AES], 2013). Professional organizations and training institutes can develop training programs for mid-career professionals to advance their competencies and prepare new entrants to the field (UKES, 2012). Individual evaluators and commissioners can reflect on their requirements and how they can be met. (For a review, see Podems [2013]).

However, individual frameworks intend to serve varying specific purposes, e.g., professionalizing evaluation as a social practice and serving as guidelines for good practice (UKES, 2012). For the AES, the framework serves a learning purpose by guiding and supporting members to produce quality evaluations, thereby contributing to the quality of evaluation practice (AES, 2013). A somewhat different purpose is served by the United Nations Evaluation Group’s framework (UNEG, 2016), which is a revised version of the 2008 framework (UNEG, 2008). Its

purpose is primarily to guide the evaluation function within the United Nations system. Similarly, the framework created by the government of South Africa's Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) is designed to serve the evaluation function within the government.

Some evaluation frameworks specify gradually deepening levels of competencies for different roles or positions within the evaluation function. The evaluation competency framework for the government of South Africa differentiates levels of competencies for three roles within the government—program manager, M&E advisor, and evaluator—while recognizing the existence of overlaps (DPME, 2014).

In a similar vein, considering that competency levels must be commensurate with the level of responsibility, complexity, and authority assigned to the position, UNEG (2016) specifies levels of competencies for an officer, intermediate officer, and senior officer. The underlying principle is that all competencies are required at all levels, but to gradually more advanced extents. For example, integrating human rights and gender perspectives is identified as a competency, and its levels are defined as follows: At the officer level, the human rights and gender perspectives are consistently integrated into simple settings; at the intermediate officer level, integration is required at most settings; and at the senior level it is required in all settings.

Use of Evaluation

However, I propose that the ultimate use of evaluator competencies should be to produce evaluations that are used. The use of development evaluation should be to improve the criteria of successful interventions to deliver development results successfully. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD's) Development Assistance Committee (DAC; 2019) defines six such criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact, and coherence.

Recognizing the enabling role of evaluation use in development programs, the UN General Assembly Resolution *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

specifies that the review processes “will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations” (2015, Article 74[g]).

Despite the global recognition of evaluation's role, it is not well used in implementing national development interventions. Evidence of low use can be seen in the voluntary national reports (VNRs) on progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The syntheses of voluntary national reviews by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for various years (UNDESA, n.d.) rarely report evaluations used in them, probably because they are not included in these reports. (See UNDESA synthesis reports, various years.) There have been only occasional references to how managers have used evaluation to understand complex contexts, adapt to changing situations, or strengthen policy coherence between administrative bodies such as local government authorities. Limited evidence, which could be interpreted as due to limited evaluations, remains a challenge as reported by UNDESA in its review of 2021 VNRs (UNDESA, n.d.).

Further evidence that evaluation is not adequately used is seen in the briefing reports published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). One such report points out that the VNR seems to have been a missed opportunity for using evaluation (Simon et al., 2017). It is possible that evaluations were used to influence development interventions but not reported. Or it could be that knowledge from the evaluation was used but not recognized as a use of evaluation specifically. However, significant uses of evaluation would have been important events and are likely to have been reflected in the reports.

Concurrent with the low use of evaluation, the progress toward the SDGs has been too slow. The SDG index, a composite measure of SDG progress, is far off track (Sachs et al., 2023). For the definition and trends of this index, see Harmacek and Krylova (2023). The Social Progress Imperative (2020) estimates that given past trends, the SDGs may take at least until 2082 to be fully realized—or until 2092 if effects of COVID-19 are not managed urgently. Slow progress could be due to many reasons. One important reason could be the poor use of evaluation. Timely evaluations could produce the knowledge to make necessary program adjustments to better yield the planned results.

¹ VNRs are country reports of progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presented to the international community at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) for review at its annual meetings under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. All member states of the United Nations (UN) have pledged

to achieve SDGs as per the UN General Assembly resolution *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015).

Users of Evaluation Competencies

In discussing evaluation use, it is relevant to identify users of evaluation processes, findings, and recommendations, if made. Users determine the nature and extent of use. Evaluation users are a wide range of stakeholders, including beneficiaries of the intervention, implementers, managers, funders, legislators, government officials, and civil society representatives (UNEG, 2016). Evaluation competencies can therefore be considered as competencies not just for evaluators but also for evaluation managers such as commissioners or heads of departments or units that manage the evaluation and other stakeholders (UNEG, 2016). UNEG (2016) states that evaluation competencies should be considered as part of performance development tools to some extent for internal evaluation users, not only for evaluation managers and commissioners.

Evaluation users play a key role in determining the need for and purpose of an evaluation, obtaining funding, communicating findings, and promoting their incorporation in decision-making. Good quality of an evaluation is not merely the result of a good evaluator (Wehipeihana et al., 2014). It is also determined by the competencies of those who commission and manage evaluations. Poorly formulated terms of reference, poorly managed processes, and insufficient resources could be reasons for low-quality evaluations (Wehipeihana et al., 2014).

One competency among others that users need is evaluative thinking (UNEG, 2016). Therefore, those whose obligation is to use evaluation, such as parliamentarians, senior staff of government and non-governmental institutions, and other key stakeholders, should be able to think evaluatively. Such evaluative thinking would help evaluation commissioners and program managers to integrate evaluation into program cycles, commission evaluations in a timely manner, and manage the evaluation process to ensure that the evaluation achieves its intended purpose.

Aim of This Paper

This paper aims to explore how evaluation competencies focus on evaluation use. The purpose of the review is to identify the competencies included in competency frameworks that could be influencing the use of evaluations. I focus on evaluation of development interventions. I do not include other types of evaluations, such as employee evaluations, education evaluation, or

psychological evaluations. The review is limited to the evaluation frameworks of national evaluation societies and associations. It includes the framework developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group, as it brings together previous experiences and reflects a global context.

Following a description of the review process and its results, I propose a theory of change for evaluation use and suggest that evaluation competencies of users merit attention in evaluation frameworks. This is followed by a discussion of implications for the training and teaching of evaluation. The paper ends with a summary and suggestions for future research.

Review of Evaluation Frameworks Focusing on Evaluation Use

A sample of eight frameworks was reviewed, including frameworks produced by seven national bodies: (i) the German Evaluation Society (DeGEval), (ii) Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), (iii) the UK Evaluation Society (UKES), (iv) the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), (v) American Evaluation Association (AEA), (vi) The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, government of South Africa, and (vii) Sri Lanka Evaluation Association (SLEvA). Additionally (viii), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) framework was included, as it has built on previous frameworks and reflects a global experience. Where a framework had been updated, the updated version was used, e.g. the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) 2010 evaluation framework was updated in 2018. The 2008 UNEG evaluation framework was updated in 2016.

The objective of the review was to identify competencies related either to aiding evaluation use or to actual use. Competencies are grouped into several domains, within which specific competencies are identified. Among the common domains are the following.

- i. Professional practice
- ii. Technical knowledge and skills
- iii. Contextual skills
- iv. Interpersonal skills
- v. Engaging in evaluation-relevant activities

Different frameworks label these domains somewhat differently. For example, technical knowledge and skills are named as “technical evaluation skills,” “technical practice,” and “methodology,” although they include more or less the same competencies. The terminology varies as

knowledge, skills, practice, and competence within domains and across frameworks. The Canadian Evaluation Society (CES, 2018) framework labels each domain as a type of practice. Some frameworks have included certain unique domains, which include “reflective practice” (CES, 2018), and “focus on utilization-focused approaches” (UNEG, 2016).

Competency frameworks have also recognized that proper techniques and methodologies alone do not assure evaluations’ usefulness or effectiveness. DeGEval highlights the role of interpersonal skills, including with users, as essential for the success of evaluations. The UKES (2012) competency framework recognizes that evaluation needs to be useful in decision-making within a democratic framework. It emphasizes qualities, attitudes, and dispositions as reflected in the statement, “However it is often just such attributes that ensure, however technically skilled and knowledgeable an evaluator is, that evaluation fulfils its public function in a democracy to provide *useful* [emphasis added], relevant and timely evidence to inform decision making.” (UKES, 2012. p. 7).

Within specific domains, some competency frameworks explicitly refer to the competency for promoting the use of evaluations. In some, it is implied; for example, “Produces well-structured, potentially useful, plausible evaluation reports that trigger actions and learning” (SLEvA, 2021). Table 1 shows the domains and the competencies within them that include references to evaluation use. In Column 3, the competencies given in the second column are categorized into two groups: supporting evaluation use or actually using evaluation. Supporting evaluation use is taken here to mean considering evaluation use in any stage of the evaluation process or in general.

Table 1. Domains and Competencies Relevant to Evaluation Use Across Competency Frameworks

Competency framework	Domain / competencies relating to use of evaluation	Relevance to evaluation use ^a
German Eval Society (DeGEval), <i>Recommendations on Education and Training in Evaluation: Requirement Profiles for Evaluators</i>	<p>Competencies are identified in terms of the JCSEE evaluation standards.</p> <p>Competence 3. Organizational and Subject Knowledge</p> <p>Evaluation Utilization and Use U8² Concern for Consequences and Influence: Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against unintended negative consequences and misuse.</p> <p>Competence 4. Social and Personal Competencies</p> <p>Evaluation Utilization and Use (U8) (As in the previous competency)</p>	S: Promoting use and preventing misuse
Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), <i>Evaluator Competencies, 2011</i>	<p>Domain 1. Contextual Analysis and Engagement</p> <p>Taking into account the intended use, and any issues relating to the use of the evaluation.</p> <p>Domain 2. Systematic Evaluative Inquiry</p> <p>Planning for use of the evaluation and developing communication and dissemination strategies.</p> <p>Report evaluation findings in a variety of ways that are credible, useful, and actionable for the commissioner of the evaluation and others (stakeholders) who are involved in and affected by the evaluation, answers their questions, and is clear and transparent about methodological choices and evaluative interpretations made</p>	<p>S: Planning, reporting, communication, and dissemination take into account the intended use.</p> <p>S: Considering use in planning, communication, and dissemination</p> <p>S: Reporting findings to be useful to stakeholders.</p>
UK Evaluation Society (UKES), <i>Framework of Evaluation Capabilities, 2012</i>	<p>The scope of the framework includes “Attributes that ensure evaluation fulfils its public function in a democracy to provide useful, relevant and timely evidence to inform decision making.”</p> <p>2. Professional Practice</p> <p>2.17 Disseminates evaluation findings and promotes their use</p>	<p>S: Providing useful information for decision making.</p> <p>U: Actually disseminating and promoting use.</p>

² These codes refer to the codes of the evaluation standards. For details see (Joint Committee Standards for Educational Evaluation, n.d.).

Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), Competencies for <i>Canadian Evaluation Practice</i> , 2018	<p>2. Technical Practice</p> <p>2.10 Produces complete and balanced evaluation reporting to support decision-making and learning.</p> <p>3. Situational Practice</p> <p>3.7 Uses evaluation processes and practices that support reconciliation and build stronger relationships among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.</p>	<p>S: Reporting in a usable manner in decision-making.</p> <p>U: Actually using the evaluation process</p>
American Evaluation Association (AEA), <i>The 2018 Evaluator Competencies</i> , 2018	<p>3. Context</p> <p>3.8 Promotes evaluation use and influence in context.</p> <p>4. Planning and Management</p> <p>4.4 Plans for evaluation use and influence.</p>	<p>S: Promoting evaluation use to suit the context</p> <p>S: Planning for evaluation use and influence</p>
South Africa Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME), <i>Evaluation Competency Framework for Government</i> , 2014	<p>2. Evaluation Leadership</p> <p>L2. Strategic Leadership</p> <p>Ability to promote a culture of use of evaluation that supports the planning cycle.</p> <p>L6. Stakeholder Mobilization</p> <p>Ability to motivate stakeholders to commit time and resources and work together to undertake evaluation and ensure use.</p> <p>L7. Evaluation Use</p> <p>Ability to provide guidance to others within and external to the organization on how to reflect on and use evaluation findings effectively.</p> <p>L10 Use:</p> <p>Understands how to promote evaluation use through follow up and tracking of evaluation recommendations and mobilization of stakeholders.</p>	<p>U: Promoting a culture of use of evaluations</p> <p>U: Motivating users</p> <p>U: Guiding the users to use evaluation</p> <p>U: Understanding of follow up on recommendations</p>
	<p>3. Evaluation Craft</p> <p>ED 5. Use</p>	

Understands how to use evidence-based data to inform recommendations.

S: Understands use of evidence in recommendations

4. Implementation of Evaluation

4.1. Evaluation Planning

P7. Use

Ability to ensure that evaluation planning considers how to assess the potential unintended effects of the interventions, both positive and negative, as well as intended effects.

S: Incorporating assessment of intended and unintended results in evaluation planning

4.2. Managing Evaluations

M2. Government Context

Ability to manage stakeholders' interests in the intervention and the evaluation including identifying potential barriers and the facilitators of the evaluation process and its intended use.

S: Ability to identify potential facilitators and barriers for intended evaluation use

4.3. Report Writing and Communication

RW1. Writing:

Ability to write clear concise and focused reports that are credible, useful, and actionable and address the key evaluation questions.

S: Ability to make reports useful and actionable.

RW5. Use:

Ability to identify, articulate, and support the strategic use of data in the report for the evaluators' intended use and users.

U: Supporting the strategic use of data available for the intended uses and users.

4.4. Improvement

I1. Management Response

Able to develop Management Response and mobilize support.

U: Mobilizing support to prepare Management response to evaluation findings.

I2. Develop Improvement Plan

U: Making Improvement plans based on findings and Management Responses

I3. Implement Improvement Plan

Able to implement an Improvement Plan.

U: Ability to actually implement the Improvement Plans

I4. Monitor Improvement Plan

Able to monitor the Improvement Plan.

U: Monitoring the improvement Plan so that evaluation findings are used.

United Nations
Evaluation Group
(UNEG), *Evaluation
Competency
Framework*, 2016

Technical Evaluation Skills

Defining Evaluation Purposes and Design-

...Looking at who will use the finding and what types of decisions will be made based on the finding.

Has knowledge about and is able to support the dissemination and use of evaluation findings to feed into programme and policy decisions

Interpersonal Skills

Is able to assist evaluation commissioners and users in setting evaluation priorities and methods that are consistent with the purposes of the evaluation and the resources available

Knowledge-Sharing Skills

Is able to build networks and partnerships with various stakeholders in order to leverage greater results and use of evaluations

Promoting a Culture of Learning for Evaluation

Using Utilization-Focused Approaches: Is able to consistently promote the engagement of users and beneficiaries in evaluation processes in order to promote evaluative thinking and the wide use of evaluation findings

Sri Lanka Evaluation
Association (SLEVA),
*Professionalization of
Evaluation in Sri
Lanka: Competency
Framework for
Evaluators*, 2021

Technical Competencies

TC10: Produces well-structured, potentially useful, plausible evaluation reports that trigger actions and learning.

S: Identifying users and potential decisions to be made on the basis of findings.

S: Supporting the use of evaluation findings in programs and policy decisions.

U: Assisting commissioners and users to set priorities thereby making the evaluation useful.

U: Networking to promote evaluation

U: Promoting evaluative thinking and wide use through utilization-focused approaches.

S: Ability to produce potentially useful reports

^a S = Supporting use; U = Actually using

All reviewed competency frameworks have recognized that competencies should support the use of evaluation. The DeGEval framework (n.d.), which is among the early-developed frameworks, includes competencies that map onto Utility evaluation standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, n.d.). Other frameworks mostly specify competencies within various domains and at various stages of an evaluation process that contribute to the use of evaluation. The more recent frameworks relate to the actual use of evaluations.

For example, planning of evaluations considers the intended use and users (ANZEA, South Africa), use and influence (AEA), and understanding the assessment of intended and unintended results (South Africa). Reporting is a common stage in which competencies have a use focus. Reporting in a useful manner and providing information for decision-making (ANZEA, UKES, CES, South Africa, SLEvA) are some examples.

Competencies related to the actual use of evaluations are found, for example, in UKES's framework, which identifies the ability to disseminate and promote evaluation as a competency. CES includes the ability to use evaluation processes and practices to support reconciliation and strengthen relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which places competencies in context. The framework for the government of South Africa includes a set of practical and direct use competencies outlining a process of using recommendations to improve development interventions. These include making a management response for evaluation recommendations, making improvement plans to implement the agreed-upon recommendations, and monitoring the implementation plan to ensure improvements are made to the evaluated intervention. In addition, they include competencies for promoting a culture of evaluation, and "ability to motivate stakeholders to commit time and resources and work together to undertake evaluations and ensure use" (DPME, 2012, p. 7). UNEG includes a unique competency of promoting evaluative thinking and wide use through utilization-focused approaches.

Competencies of Users

However, evaluators alone cannot ensure use. Users are key players in the process of using evaluations. Users' competencies to commission evaluations, manage the process, and utilize the recommendations are essential for evaluation use.

Hence, in the context of national development, users, mainly governments, need to institutionalize evaluation and integrate it into the program cycle. Institutionalization requires provision of positions to manage the evaluation function. Evaluation managers and other users need to have required competencies to incorporate evaluation as part of the program cycle, commission evaluations, manage them, and finally use them to improve development interventions.

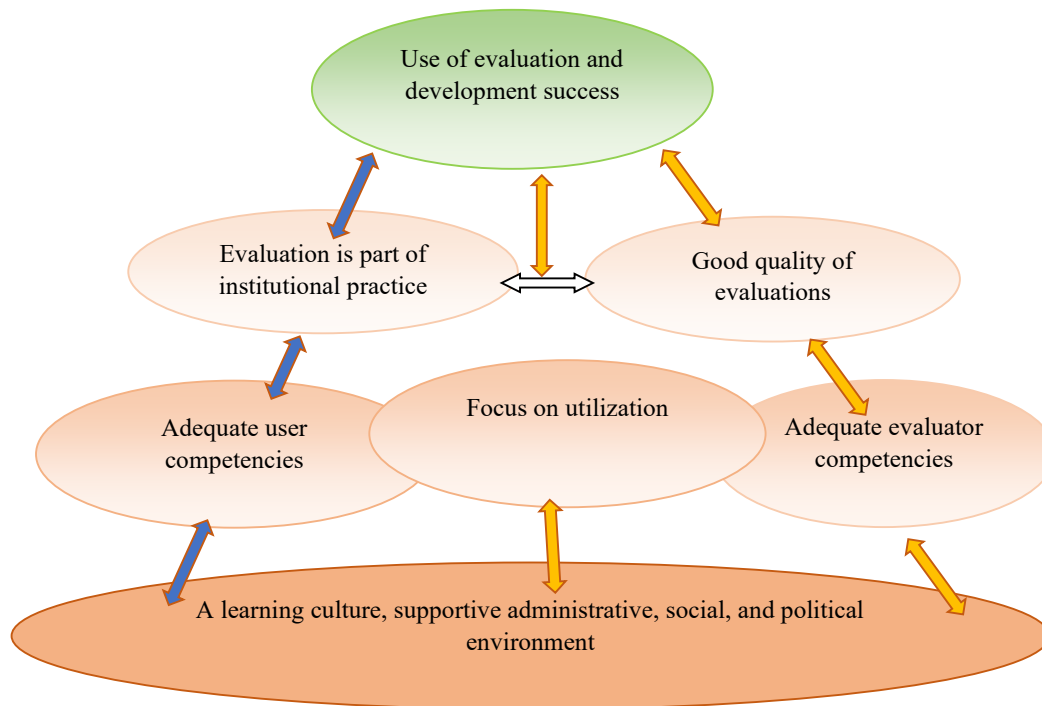
In response to the growing recognition of the role played by evaluation managers, the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) in 2014 developed a set of competencies for evaluation managers. In a consultative exercise with managers and drawing from the professionalization literature, they identified a set of competencies for managers to effectively manage their functions (SEVAL, 2014). These competencies consider the tasks, challenges, and success factors for managers at individual, project, and institutional levels under four domains. The competencies identified under each domain support effective management of the evaluation process to yield good quality, useful evaluations. Two competencies, "Follows up on use of evaluation findings and recommendations" and "Assures the dissemination of evaluation findings and recommendations to appropriate stakeholders" (SEVAL, p. 13) directly facilitate use.

However, most competencies given in SEVAL's framework involve advanced technical skills. For example, they involve basic knowledge and capabilities in scientific skills, and knowledge of social science qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Another example is understanding the components of evaluable interventions. In countries where the evaluation field is in its nascent stages and professionals are not available, these competencies could be too demanding. Appropriate, gradually scalable, and context-specific competencies need to be identified through consultative processes and developed to reach higher standards.

A Conceptual Framework of Evaluation Use

To understand the ways to promote evaluation use, this section proposes a theory of change that situates evaluation competencies in the context of using evaluations. This causality framework depicted in Figure 1 is an expression of initial reflection. It needs to be further discussed and validated theoretically and operationally in different settings.

Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework of Evaluation Use



The framework identifies two immediate causes of use. The first is the institutional requirement for evaluation. If evaluation is not institutionalized, it is unlikely to be a mandatory part of the program cycle and evaluations will not be used. The second is the good quality of evaluations. Evaluations can be used for learning and improving the quality of interventions only if they are of good quality. The use of evaluation has traditionally been linked with recommendations (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2016). A good quality evaluation provides credible evidence to support recommendations that are sufficiently specific and within the ability of their intended users to implement. These two factors are interlinked. Institutional requirements demand good quality evaluations, and good quality evaluations support the institutional practice of evaluations.

The two immediate causes could result from three underlying causes. The first is the adequate competencies of evaluators. Second, adequate user competency is needed alongside evaluator competencies. Third, a clear focus on utilization is needed for use. These three factors are also interlinked. All underlying causes result from deeper causes, commonly called structural, basic,

or root causes. These root causes span a spectrum of social, cultural, economic, administrative, and political influences. For example, a culture that demands knowledge-driven evidence-informed decision-making would support the use of evaluation. Political influence may come from the appreciation of learning practices, decision-making that demands evidence, and a need for identifying dysfunctional interventions. An administration accountable for delivering value for money is likely to support evaluation competencies more than one that does not. Similarly, established procedures for utilizing evaluation recommendations may respond readily to recommendations. Follow-up mechanisms and human resources need to be in place (ILO, 2016).

The above proposed conceptual framework argues for the need for competency of evaluators to produce usable evaluations and critical users to use evaluations. The relationships are not only upwards and horizontal but may also be downward. For example, lack of competencies and absence of a use focus may perpetuate the root causes of poor administrative support structures and mechanisms. Each causal factor needs to be unpacked into its context-appropriate components.

Most existing competency frameworks emphasize the causality chain that runs through good quality evaluations and evaluator competencies (the rightmost chain in Figure 1). More recent frameworks tend to address the other two causal links, namely the institutional requirement and user competency chain and the utilization chain as seen earlier.

Moving Forward

The above discussion identified that evaluation competency frameworks have increasingly recognized the need to ensure evaluation use as an evaluator competency. However, the evaluation function in the public sector, which requires institutionalization and user competencies, remains underdeveloped. Several actions could be considered in moving forward.

One action is to identify the evaluator competencies related to use as a separate domain, or to add a use-relevant competency within each relevant domain of the competency framework. Emphasizing this competency in more detail could help develop it in evaluators. The underlying reason is that the use of evaluation is not limited to implementing recommendations but includes using the entire evaluation process, from planning to final reporting. This process is articulated in the International Institute for Environment and Development (Simon et al., 2017) recommendations that the evaluation community convince senior politicians of the necessity for and usefulness of evaluation and the need to design evaluation policies for the 2030 Agenda. AEA competencies 3.8 and 4.4 articulate this need as planning for evaluation use. A core competency of evaluators should be to promote evaluation use in all aspects of the evaluation process.

A specific competency in this regard is to engage in early and continuing communications and discussions about the evaluation among critical stakeholders to encourage active participation, ownership, and hence motivation for use. Such discourses about the evaluation's key aspects help stakeholders prepare to use the evaluation from the beginning of the process. Most importantly, early use provides opportunities for evaluators to promote evaluative thinking to improve programs. When programs respond to the needs for improvement and accountability, the demand for evaluation is demonstrated (Wilcox & King, 2014). This assertion implies that evaluators' work and hence their competencies are expected to help the users of evaluations.

A second action is to develop user competencies. As seen earlier, there has been an emerging consensus that evaluation competencies are not only for evaluators but also for evaluation commissioners and other users (DPME, 2014; SEVAL, 2014; UNEG, 2016). Evaluation commissioners could range from program managers to donors to secretaries of ministries. Evaluation users also include decision-makers at the national level, parliamentarians, and program implementers (UNEG, 2016). They could also include the intervention's beneficiaries and media. Competencies need to be context specific. What is relevant in the context of a well-developed evaluation culture cannot be implemented in a developing cultural and professional context. Context-specific strategies for developing competencies among different user categories need to be developed.

Implications for Training and Teaching

Evaluation training and teaching at universities and tertiary education institutions are mainly confined to developed Western countries. Short training programs are available in the rest of the nations, mainly in forms such as workshops, seminars, and webinars. Recent years since the COVID-19 pandemic have also seen the emergence of other opportunities, such as webinars. An example is the various free webinar series conducted by the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association in collaboration with UN agencies, the International Organization for Collaboration in Evaluation (IOCE), and other evaluation associations. These learning opportunities help with knowledge sharing, updating, and continuous learning. However, like any other professional field, evaluation requires systematic academic training followed by working under the supervision of experienced evaluators.

I argue, therefore, that full-fledged academic training be made available in all countries. This could be a high value-for-money investment. Estimating the costs of short-term ad hoc training programs over decades versus comprehensive training in universities could be worthwhile. A strategic, results-focused plan for doing so could guide the process. A known successful example of such a catalytic intervention is the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) intervention to introduce academic training on demography and population studies when demographic consequences of population explosion demanded training interventions.

In the late 1970s, UNFPA helped set up demographic training and research units in

universities in many countries. The project provided experienced teachers and initial infrastructure facilities for about three years. Some support was also provided for students to receive master's-level training from well-established universities. In Sri Lanka, for example, at the end of the project, several batches of students were trained in postgraduate diploma courses. The training unit was integrated into a university faculty and later became a full-fledged department that offers graduate and postgraduate programs. Students who have obtained masters degrees and PhDs are serving on the faculty. Senior demographers working in universities and the UN have been trained in these facilities.³ A similar intervention could be a strategic solution to professionalize evaluation.

Many UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF, and other development partners, such as the World Bank, have a mandate to and do promote evaluation. Institutionalizing academic training could be one strategic high-impact, low-cost, and above all sustainable intervention. The costs involved would be developing high-quality teaching and learning materials and deploying resources for a few years. Professional and well-qualified teachers could deliver training in at least one university in each country at postgraduate diploma level. The graduate students could thereafter obtain their masters degrees and PhDs in other universities offering such programs. On their return, they could be teachers and employees in the public and private sectors. The process would take a few years but is a likely way to professionalize the field.

Once available, a core minimum of competent professionals would have the capabilities to establish an evaluation function in the government, provide human resources to occupy professional positions, and integrate evaluation as a critical function to take the development processes forward. Once such a system was in place, accountabilities for evaluation use would be easier to obtain.

Training offered in these programs needs to be competency-based. Stevahn et al. (2005) observed that guidance for curriculum development comes mainly from the competencies. Competencies provide the basis to align training programs with the needs of the field (Galport & Azzam, 2017). Competency-based training could help newcomers to the field to acquire competencies at a basic level;

practitioners could develop their career paths (Stevahn et al., 2005).

One approach to acquiring competency is the educational and behavioral psychology approach (Wilcox & King, 2014). This approach uses the four stages of learning new skills and techniques (Howell, 1982, as cited in Wilcox & King, 2014). The first stage is when someone is incompetent but unaware of that incompetence. This is the unconscious incompetent state. The second stage is the conscious incompetent state, when the person is aware of the incompetence. The third stage is conscious competence when the person is competent but needs to attend consciously to every aspect of the activity. Finally comes the unconscious competence state of being competent and not having to attend consciously to all aspects of performing the task. Evaluation training could benefit by planning the training so that the novice aspiring evaluator moves from the unconscious incompetence stage to unconscious competence in the domains of evaluator competencies at specified levels.

Besides training for evaluators, it is necessary to have regular training modalities for users. The training arms of governments could provide basic training related to competencies for evaluation use to new entrants to public service and advanced training to middle and senior officials. This process could happen synergistically in parallel to academic training. Some examples could be Master of Business Administration programs and modules in regular development-related university courses such as those focused on the environment and the humanities.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify the inclusion of evaluation-use-related competencies in evaluation competency frameworks. Evaluation frameworks have, in general, incorporated use-related competencies directly or implicitly. More recent frameworks, especially that of the government of South Africa, have direct, explicit use-related competencies and even lay down procedures for use.

Ensuring evaluation use cannot be the responsibility of evaluators alone. Doing the evaluations in a manner that yields useful, credible, high-quality evaluations is the primary role of the evaluator. Using the evaluation process and its

³ <https://www.unfpa.org/jobs/consultancy-strengthening-population-and-demographic-training-developing-countries>

products is primarily the users' responsibility. However, evaluators and users need to have complementary competencies to act cohesively to produce usable evaluations and use them. Therefore, greater emphasis on use-promoting competencies for evaluators and competencies for managing and using evaluations for users is needed.

The currently available competencies have been developed to serve specific purposes serving a particular community. For example, the CES competency framework was developed as part of a credentialing program and intended to serve the needs of Canadian evaluation practice. UNEG's competency framework was intended to guide the evaluation function within the United Nations. For most non-Western countries, no competency frameworks are available. (An exception is the recently developed framework by SLEvA [2021].) This gap needs to be addressed, perhaps facilitated by a global organization or by regional professional bodies. Further, competencies cannot be fixed. They need to evolve in response to evolving demands and development contexts and therefore need to be reviewed and revised periodically.

It would be a high-return investment for development partners to focus on institutionalizing evaluation training. An outflow of a steady stream of academically qualified graduates would provide the human resources to make evaluation a recognized profession. Thereby, governments could establish the evaluation function staffed by qualified evaluators. Continuing training opportunities are also necessary for professional growth, as in other professions. Most important, teaching and training need to be competency-based and utilization-focused.

Competency-based evaluation training is also essential at government institutes for training government officials. The method of training and the focus on specific competencies which they need as commissioners or other users may need to be shaped according to context and needs. Galport and Azzam (2017) noted in their study with members of the AEA that competency lists could set expectations between evaluators and clients. Evaluation use could be a domain of competency that sets a strong background for such expectations. Special training approaches may need to be adapted for parliamentarians within parliamentary training procedures.

This study has some limitations. First, the cross-referencing of competencies given in Table 1 was done solely by the author. It requires the consensus of a few others for validation. Similarly, the theory of change is a proposal only; it needs discussion, modification, and verification by

various stakeholders in different contexts. Each causal factor in a chain needs to be unpacked within specific social contexts, and its causal links to multiple other factors need to be empirically derived.

Future research could benefit from qualitative research to understand the perspectives of influential decision-makers on evaluation. Teaching and training programs that are competency-based and utilization-focused are needed to make effective and efficient training across countries. Research on competency training provides the direction for the future development of theory and practice.

However, research in this area is limited (Galport & Azzam, 2017; Podems, 2014). Empirical evidence to understand how evaluation competencies lead to useful and high-quality evaluations is not yet available (Wilcox & King, 2014). Empirical research is needed to establish these links and demonstrate the value of articulating competencies and using evaluations. King and colleagues (2001) affirmed that competency frameworks developed up to that time had not been based on systematic processes or empirically validated. Further, Wilcox and King (2014) have noted that there is a lack of empirical studies that demonstrate relationships of evaluation frameworks to useful evaluations.

If the ultimate purpose of the evaluation is to use it, then enabling that use is an essential quality or a competency of an evaluator. Wilcox and King (2014) proposed that psychological qualities such as cognitive abilities can produce skills that high-quality evaluators need to possess.

Training public sector officials, parliamentarians, and other evaluation users needs substantially more exploration. Evaluation competencies are context specific. They need to be adapted to social and administrative practices. Future research could focus on gaining consensus on the broader applicability of and required adjustments to the current frameworks developed mainly by Western societies with advanced evaluation practice. "There have been no empirical studies connecting evaluator competencies to usefulness or quality of evaluations." (Wilcox & King, 2014). Research could also focus on effective strategies for education and training systems based on competencies, focusing on evaluation use for both evaluators and users.

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