



Evaluator competencies in the context of diversity training: The practitioners' point of view

Benjamin Froncek*, Agostino Mazziotta, Verena Piper, Anette Rohmann

Department of Community Psychology, University of Hagen, Universitätsstr. 33, 58084 Hagen, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Evaluation
Diversity training
Evaluator competencies
Evaluation practice

ABSTRACT

Evaluator competencies have been discussed since the beginnings of program evaluation literature. More recently, the *Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators* (Ghere et al., 2006; Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a) have proven to be a useful taxonomy for learning and improving evaluation practice. Evaluation is critical to diversity training activities, and diversity training providers face the challenge of conducting evaluations of their training programs. We explored what competencies are viewed as instrumental to conducting useful evaluations in this specific field of evaluation practice. In an online survey, $N = 172$ diversity training providers were interviewed via an open answer format about their perceptions of evaluator competencies, with $n = 95$ diversity training providers contributing statements. The Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators were used to conduct a deductive qualitative content analysis of the statements. While *systematic inquiry*, *reflective practice*, and *interpersonal competence* were well represented, *situational analysis* and *project management* were not. Implications are discussed for evaluation capacity building among diversity training providers and for negotiating evaluation projects with evaluation professionals.

1. Introduction

Program evaluation comprises the systematic collection of information about program activities, characteristics, and results in order to make assessments, improve or develop the program, and increase understanding or inform decision-making about the program (Patton, 2008). Evaluator competencies may be important to providing high-quality education, conducting useful research, and enacting best practice in the field of evaluation. They contribute to the evaluation profession and can be considered part of the professionalism portfolio (Picciotto, 2011). Although evaluator competencies are frequently discussed in the evaluation literature, they still have untapped potential to further enhance evaluation professionalism. For example, in a recent study, Galport and Azzam (2016) highlighted a gap in competence training among practicing program evaluators who were members of the American Evaluation Association. They concluded that more specific training on evaluator competencies is needed, since competencies such as project management are more important for novice evaluators than they are for experienced evaluators. Training programs on project management would thus be more beneficial to novice evaluators than to experienced evaluators.

Since evaluation is carried out in a variety of contexts, including nonprofit, government, and community settings, knowledge of the

specifics of evaluator competencies in diverse contexts can contribute to broader understanding and more appropriate development of evaluation practice within these contexts. At present, the scholarly literature does not provide insights into the specifics of evaluator competencies in areas such as the emerging field of diversity training activities (for example Bendl, Bleijenbergh, Henttonen, & Mills, 2015; Roberson, 2013). As will be discussed later, evaluator competencies are considered to be applicable to all contexts. But every context involves unique framework conditions that shape how evaluation should be carried out. This leads to questions such as who is responsible, capable, or simply assigned to conduct evaluations and what does this mean for evaluator competencies within a specific context?

This study aims to investigate evaluator competencies (a) in the specific field of diversity training activities (b) with a specific stakeholder group who are not primarily evaluators, but are oftentimes assigned evaluation tasks – diversity training providers. This group appears relevant because they are experts on diversity training who are at the same time evaluators of their own training activities.

Diversity training providers were asked about their perceptions of important evaluator competencies in their specific context using a qualitative approach to data collection and data analysis. The *Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators* framework (Ghere, King, Stevahn, & Minnema, 2006; Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a) was then

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Benjamin.Froncek@fernuni-hagen.de (B. Froncek).

used to analyze diversity training providers' views on evaluator competencies and draw conclusions for evaluation practice.

2. Essential competencies for program evaluators

Evaluator competencies are of interest within the context of program evaluation because they contribute to improving evaluation quality (Cooksey & Mark, 2011) and can be used for basic education and training, professional development, information and advocacy about the skills required for conducting competent evaluations, and assisting evaluation commissioners in choosing evaluators (Perrin, 2005).

Competencies describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct effective evaluations (Ghere et al., 2006; King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001). Several empirically or conceptually developed models or taxonomies of evaluator competencies exist (e.g., Mertens, 1994; Russ-Eft, Bober, de la Teja, Foxon, & Koszalka, 2008; Worthen, 1975; Zorzi, McGuire, & Perrin, 2002), the most prominent of which is the Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (Ghere et al., 2006; King et al., 2001; Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a). This taxonomy was developed on the basis of evaluation experts' and practitioners' feedback on an earlier, theoretically-derived taxonomy of evaluator competencies (King et al., 2001), followed by several further systematic feedback rounds consisting of conference discussions and student and expert feedback (King & Stevahn, 2015; Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a).

The Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators consists of 61 competencies organized into six primary categories, namely (1) *professional practice*, (2) *systematic inquiry*, (3) *situational analysis*, (4) *project management*, (5) *reflective practice*, and (6) *interpersonal competence* (Ghere et al., 2006). Examples of evaluator competencies – knowledge, skills, and dispositions – include: Evaluators apply professional evaluation standards and convey personal evaluation approaches and skills to potential clients (professional practice), they are familiar with multiple methods and can develop evaluation designs (systematic inquiry), they are able to determine program evaluability and respect the uniqueness of the evaluation site and client (situational analysis), they negotiate with clients before the evaluation begins and justify costs with respect to evaluation needs (project management), they reflect on their personal evaluation practice and pursue professional development in relevant content areas (reflective practice), and they use negotiation skills and facilitate constructive interpersonal interactions (interpersonal competencies).

Employment of the Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators might lead to improvements in evaluators' education and training, more reflective evaluation practice, more evaluation research, and the continuous advancement of evaluation practice (Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a). Furthermore, they might also contribute to the credentialing and accreditation of evaluators as professionals (Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005a). The Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators has also been proven to be generalizable to other cultural contexts, such as Taiwan, with minor additions (Lee, Altschuld, & Lee, 2012).

There are lively and still ongoing discussions about the appropriateness of a single taxonomy for the diverse contexts in which evaluation is conducted (Ghere et al., 2006). Nevertheless, there is also wide consensus among professional evaluators that the people assigned to evaluation tasks – regardless of context – should be well versed in all these competencies (Rodgers, Hillaker, Haas, & Peters, 2012). For example, the Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators have been employed in contexts such as university programs, where their utility was examined (Stevahn, King, Ghere & Minnema, 2005b); in cooperative extension services to assess the specifics of evaluator competencies (Rodgers et al., 2012); and to investigate professional program evaluators' training needs in terms of evaluator competencies (Galport & Azzam, 2016). However, the Essential Competencies have

not yet been investigated in the context of diversity training. The need for evaluation in diversity training contexts is an important issue, particularly in light of recent calls for more evidence-based practice (Stephan & Stephan, 2013), making the question of evaluator competencies in this context just as important. The training evaluation literature is constantly growing, but program evaluation and training evaluation literature have developed in parallel, with only a small degree of intersection (Michalski & Cousins, 2001). It is therefore of interest what competencies are viewed as relevant within diversity training evaluation, and whether the Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators can be applied to this evaluation field and thereby contribute to improving evaluations of diversity training activities.

3. Diversity training and its current evaluation practice

Diversity training aims at decreasing prejudice and discrimination against people who are perceived as different from one's own group (Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007). This could be people or groups of different ethnicities, religions and worldviews, or sexual orientations. Diversity training activities focus on influencing attendees' emotions, cognitions, and behaviors towards diversity issues via didactical or experiential training methods (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983). The intended results are improved respect, appreciation, and trust, as well as decreases in prejudice, fear, and uncertainty. Diversity training also seeks to induce changes in perceptions of group membership and newly acquired knowledge about culturally specific behaviors, as well as social, communicative and conflict resolution competencies (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016; Bolten, 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2004). In general, positive intergroup behavior is to be promoted and negative intergroup behavior reduced (Pendry et al., 2007), with the specific expected outcomes varying as a function of the type of diversity training provided (Bolten, 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2004).

Diversity training activities are carried out in a variety of different settings, such as health, governmental, educational, non-profit, and for-profit organizations. They are predominantly conducted by independent trainers who work under tight restrictions in terms of time and resources. Moreover, whereas other forms of organizational training such as technical training seek to improve participants' knowledge and teach them new skills, diversity training puts more emphasis on soft skills such as perspective taking in order to change participants' attitudes towards others and their behavior in social situations (Kalinowski et al., 2013).

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) provide the dominant conceptual evaluation model for training evaluation in general (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012; Twitchell, Holton, & Trott, 2000). This model was also recently incorporated into an integrated framework for evaluating diversity training programs (Appannah et al., 2017). The four levels of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) model comprise (1) reaction, (2) learning, (3) behavior, and (4) results. At the first level, investigators are interested in whether attendees are satisfied with the training. The second level asks whether attendees have acquired new knowledge, skills, or attitudes via the training. The third level focuses on changes in attendees' behavior as a consequence of the training, while the fourth level foregrounds the organizational benefits arising from participation in the training. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) recommend that all four levels be evaluated and view all four levels as related, such that, for example, only a positive reaction (Level 1) can support learning (Level 2), which is a prerequisite for changes in behavior (Level 3). However, little empirical support for such relationships has been found so far (Bates, 2004; Holton, 1996). Furthermore, the majority of training evaluations focus on the level of reaction (Eseryel, 2002; Salas et al., 2012), thereby disregarding evaluation at the levels of learning and behavior (Twitchell et al., 2000).

There is a lack of knowledge of the effects of diversity training programs, with inconsistent evidence regarding their effectiveness

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6792260>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6792260>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)