

# EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGY: TOWARDS A MATURE PROFESSION

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## WHAT IS EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING?

To define evaluation capacity building (ECB), we begin with a review of definitions provided in the literature. Bamberger (2000, p. 96) provides background for understanding evaluation and its contrast to evaluation capacity building in international development. He emphasizes that “evaluation activities may be limited to specific projects or programs, or they may seek to develop national evaluation capacity to replicate the methods”.

Schaumburg-Muller (1996, p. 5) gives a broad definition of the concept of ECB that includes “activities, which provide support for systems of evaluation, audit, feedback, and learning from policies, programs, or projects performed at various levels. Although the concept is defined broadly it excludes activities aimed solely at planning and appraisal activities. Also, the interest focuses on activities, which are not just of a temporary nature but have the aim of supporting a sustainable evaluation function”.

Another broad definition is given by Boyle, Lemaire and Rist (1999, p. 6): “Evaluation regime refers to the configuration of evaluation capacity, evaluation practice, organizational arrangements, and institutionalization. Evaluation capacity development refers to activities and initiatives taken to implement the regime”.

Mackay (1999, p. 2) defines ECB as “the development of national or sectoral evaluation systems”. Picciotto (1998, p. 39) expands the latter definition and comes up with “the ability of public institutions to manage information, assess program performance, and respond flexibly to new demands”.

Haarich and del Castillo Hermosa (2004, p. 5) define evaluation capacity as “the whole set of the evaluation system’s endogenous elements and subelements”. They point out that “the development and improvement of evaluation systems is therefore necessarily linked to the approach of evaluation capacity building”. The endogenous elements include the demand and the supply of evaluation processes and reports; resources (technical, human, material) and infrastructures that support the evaluation activities on the supply and the demand side and link those two elements.

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Compton, Baizerman and Stockdill (2002) suggest conceptual and working definitions of ECB that incorporate the idea of development of a sustainable evaluation effort and support good governance, rational decision-making and accountable performance. According to their conceptual definition, “ECB is a context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality program evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices within and/or between one or more organizations/programs/sites” (p. 8). The three also propose a practical, usable and flexible working definition of ECB: “The intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (p. 14).

Boyle, Lemaire and Rist (1999, p. 5) point out the close connection between evaluation capacity and evaluation practice. For them evaluation capacity is a necessary condition, a supply of ‘hardware’ for evaluation practice. “Evaluation capacity refers to the human capital (skills, knowledge, experience, etc.) and financial/material resources, and evaluation practice to the actual ‘doing’ of evaluation. Evaluation practice refers to the definition of the evaluation, the research design, and the execution of the evaluation activity, that is, implementation, results, and impacts on specific public policy. This practice is only possible if you have the supply of ‘hardware’ (in other words, evaluation capacity).”

Preskill and Boyle (2008, p. 444) propose a broad definition that refers to ECB at the individual, group and organizational levels: “ECB involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. For evaluation practice to be sustained, participants must be provided with leadership support, incentives, resources, and opportunities to transfer their learning about evaluation to their everyday work. Sustainable evaluation practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that help embed evaluation work into the way the organization accomplishes its mission and strategic goals.”

Professional organizations of evaluators make an important contribution to ECB. In fact, ECB is on the agenda of regional, national and international associations. Some authors identify it at the national level with the development of national and international evaluation organizations (Love 2002; Segone, Patel, Rouge and Russon 2003).

The president of the American Evaluation Association, Laura Leviton, in her 2001 presidential address, refers to ECB as building “collective evaluation capacity”. She points out that “a collective capacity is more than simply having an evaluation association. It permits evaluators to rely on each other to a greater extent than they do now. Evaluators need more effective ways to accomplish three aims:

1. To influence the program and policy world, which continues to misunderstand, misuse, and sometimes fear evaluation, with adverse consequences for evaluators;
2. To improve the relationships among evaluators themselves, a potential source of strength and influence that has generally lain fallow; and

3. To build on our individual strengths and compensate for weaknesses, by understanding where we can work independently and where we have a duty to collaborate on a product” (pp. 1-2).

Rist (2002) suggests an overarching concept of building an evaluation culture that incorporates many definitions of evaluation capacity development. Rist identifies criteria for a strong evaluation culture:

1. Evaluation takes place in many policy domains.
2. There is a supply of evaluators specializing in different disciplines who have mastered different evaluation methods and who conduct evaluations.
3. A national discourse concerning evaluation is taking place in which the more general discussions are adjusted to the specific national environment.
4. Members of the profession have their own societies or frequently attend meetings of international societies, and at least some discussion occurs concerning the norms or ethics of the profession.
5. Institutional arrangements exist for conducting evaluations in the government.
6. Institutional arrangements exist in parliament for conducting evaluations and disseminating results to decision-makers.
7. An element of pluralism exists, that is, within each policy domain there are different people or agencies commissioning and performing evaluations.
8. Evaluation activities are carried out within the ‘supreme audit institution’.
9. Evaluations are not just focused on the relation between inputs/outputs or technical production.

### ECB DEFINITIONS: KEY CONCEPTS

Although ECB definitions vary, they can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Thus, to describe the essence of ECB we summarized the key concepts presented in various definitions:

1. ECB is two-fold: it enhances both ‘ability to do’ (potential) and actual ‘doing’ (practice).
2. ECB is aimed at developing evaluation demand and supply.
3. ECB is aimed at increasing the use of evaluation and its results.
4. ECB requires development and implementation of evaluation systems.
5. ECB requires institutionalization of evaluation.
6. ECB could be and should be implemented at various levels: individual, group, organization, sector, nation.
7. ECB is linked to creation and development of professional evaluation organizations (associations).

**TABLE 1. CRITERIA OF MATURITY OF EVALUATION PROFESSION<sup>31</sup>**

1. Need for evaluation services and specialists (Mackay 2003; Worthen 1994)	This is the demand side of evaluation activities and a driving force for the development of the profession. Demand can emerge and grow due to internal and/or external pressures.
2. Stable career opportunities in evaluation (Flexner 2001; Worthen 1994)	Opportunity to choose evaluation as a career; long-term plans related to individual professional development and career growth in evaluation; evaluation positions in various organizations.
3. Body of knowledge and set of skills unique to evaluation (Flexner 2001; Worthen 1994)	Evaluation becomes a discipline with a unique body of knowledge that grows due to the contributions made by researchers. Development of evaluation theories. Development of applications of evaluation theories and specific sets of skills to practice evaluations.
4. Educational programmes and other professional development opportunities for evaluators (Kuzmin 2003; Preskill and Boyle 2008; Worthen 1994)	Educational programmes for evaluators are conducted by state and private universities. One can get a certificate or a degree in evaluation.
5. Institutionalization of evaluation (Boyle et al. 1999; Mackay 1999; Rist 2002; Worthen 1995)	Evaluation becomes part of a structured and well-established system.
6. Professional associations for evaluators (Flexner 2001; Kuzmin 2009; Worthen 1994)	Associations develop evaluation guiding principles, standards and ethical codes; influence educational programmes; provide certification of evaluators; and can exclude unqualified persons or persons who violate professional standards and/or ethical norms.

### ECB’S CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE EVALUATION PROFESSION

All the concepts mentioned above are indeed important for ECB, but how can we know if the list is comprehensive? To make sure that we have an exhaustive list of ECB characteristics, we need to have an overarching framework for them. Such an inclusive framework could be developed only at the meta-level. We suggest that the meta-level for evaluation capacity development is development of evaluation into a mature profession (Kuzmin 2004).

We propose the criteria of maturity of evaluation profession detailed in Table 1.

### TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE ECB STRATEGY

If we accept the ECB mission as developing evaluation into a mature profession, ECB goals should be related to the criteria of a mature profession. Hence a comprehensive ECB strategy should include:

- Nurturing the need for evaluation services and specialists;
- Establishing stable career opportunities;
- Creating and maintaining a body of knowledge and a set of skills unique to evaluation;

31. We refer to selected publications that mentioned those criteria in various contexts.

- Developing educational programmes and other professional development opportunities for evaluators;
- Institutionalizing evaluation;
- Building professional evaluation associations.

Compared to existing ECB paradigms, the proposed strategy explicitly suggests at least two additional directions: development of the evaluation body of knowledge and establishment of educational programmes. To be successfully implemented such a strategy requires contributions from government, business and civil society organizations. Only their mutual and systematic efforts can develop evaluation into a mature profession.

Interestingly, ECB experience in the newly independent states demonstrates interdependence of such efforts. For example, the Georgian Evaluation Association (an NGO) helps develop government evaluation awareness and competence, which creates conditions for government to institutionalize evaluation and enhances the need for evaluation specialists and services. In Kyrgyzstan the government involves NGOs in evaluation activities, which increases the number of people working in the field and leads towards establishing a national evaluation network. The International Programme Evaluation Network, with a mission of developing evaluation into a mature profession, established working relationships with several universities and initiated a number of evaluation courses in the Russian Federation. Universities in turn disseminate evaluation information and raise awareness of it among government, businesses and NGOs.

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