

competencies

Competencies for evaluation practitioners: Where to from here?

The issue of identifying and defining competencies for evaluation practitioners has been a topic of considerable debate for the AES over the last few years. The core issue in this debate appears to be whether to introduce accreditation and certification processes. The long-term strategy for AES on accreditation/certification is not clear, and debate will likely continue. In the meantime, a need has been identified for a set of competencies to aid in the training and professional development of members and in articulating what evaluation is about.

In December 1997, the AES Board approved a project to be conducted through the Professional Training and Development Committee. The aim was to develop a set of competencies to inform training and professional development. The working group who carried out the project consisted of:

- Brian English (Institute for the Service Professions, Edith Cowan University)
- Sue Funnell (Performance Improvement Pty Ltd)
- Rick Cummings (Teaching and Learning Centre, Murdoch University)
- Lisette Kaleveld (Institute for the Service Professions, Edith Cowan University).

The group developed a draft set of competencies, based on the following model of professional competence:

- **Knowledge/Cognitive Competence** – ‘the possession of appropriate work-related knowledge and the ability to put this to effective use’
- **Functional Competence** – ‘the ability to perform a range of work-based tasks effectively to produce specific outcomes’
- **Personal/Behavioural Competence** – ‘the ability to adopt appropriate, observable behaviours in work-related situations’
- **Values/Ethical Competence** – ‘the possession of appropriate personal values and the ability to make sound judgements based upon these in work-related situations’.

The full set of draft competencies is too long to include in an article. Instead, we will be mounting them on the AES website for members to review and provide feedback. You

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should be able to find a link from the home page (www.aes.asn.au) by the time this appears, or shortly afterwards.

Results of a recent survey of AES members

A web-based survey was conducted in October 2002 to investigate the extent to which these competencies featured in the work of AES members over the past two years.

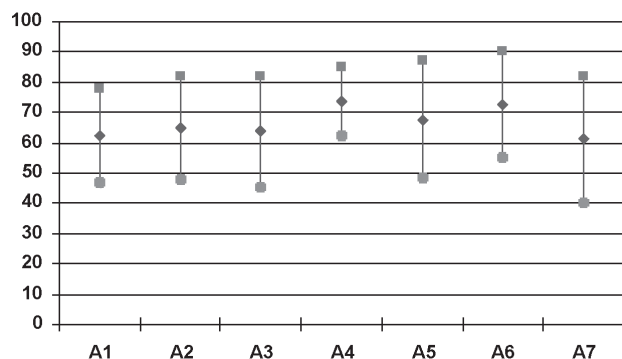
Forty-seven practitioner members (26 female, 21 male) completed the questionnaire. The survey participants identified themselves as having a broad range of professional interests. They included specialist evaluation practitioners (freelance, health program evaluation, education evaluation, audit and review), consultants (organisational, management, business and training, social research, evaluation consultancy), researchers (academic, social, participatory), and public servants. The mean number of evaluation projects conducted by this sample over the past two years was 9.15 (SD (standard deviation) 9.93); the mean number of years as AES members was 4.91 (SD 4.65), while the mean number of years working in the evaluation profession was 10.43 (SD 7.24).

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the proposed competencies to their evaluation work over the past two years in terms of the following:

- 0–20 Not at all important
- 21–40 Somewhat important
- 41–60 Moderately important
- 61–80 Very important
- 81–100 Extremely important

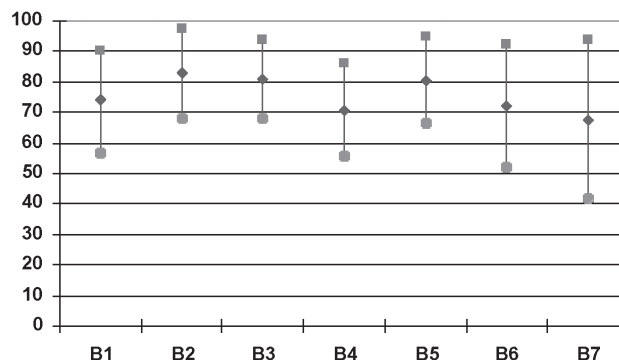
Figures 1–4 present the main findings for each area of competence.

FIGURE 1: IMPORTANCE RATINGS (MEAN AND SD) FOR KNOWLEDGE/COGNITIVE COMPETENCE



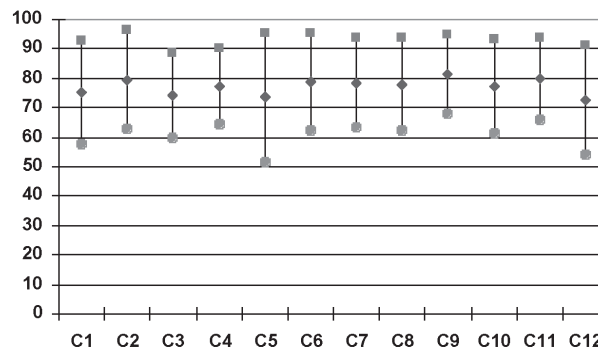
As shown in this Figure 1, practitioners rated the various components (sub-scales) pertaining to Knowledge/Cognitive Competence as ‘very important’ to their work over the past two years.

FIGURE 2: IMPORTANCE RATINGS (MEAN AND SD) FOR FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCE



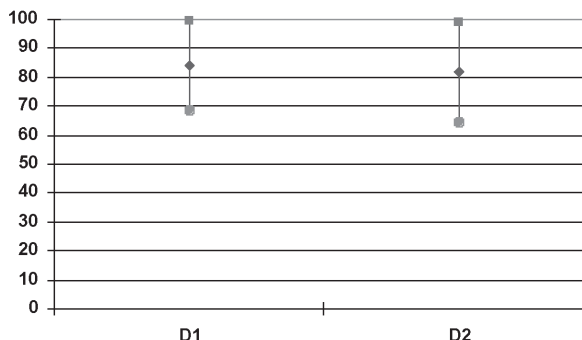
As shown in Figure 2, practitioners rated the various components (sub-scales) pertaining to Functional Competence as either ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’ to their work over the past two years.

FIGURE 3: IMPORTANCE RATINGS (MEAN AND SD) FOR PERSONAL/BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCE



As shown in Figure 3, practitioners rated the various components (sub-scales) pertaining to Personal/Behavioural Competence as either ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’ to their work over the past two years.

FIGURE 4: IMPORTANCE RATINGS (MEAN AND SD) FOR ETHICAL COMPETENCE



As shown in Figure 4, practitioners rated the various components (sub-scales) pertaining to Ethical Competence as 'extremely important' to their work over the past two years.

Where to from here?

The agreed purpose for developing a set of competencies in December 1997 was to identify the training and development needs of AES members. While some areas of competence have been rated as more important than others, the findings of the survey suggest that the proposed competencies are useful for identifying the training and development needs of practitioners.

A number of other issues arise, however, in relation to competencies and good evaluation practice.

First, evaluation work does not take place in a vacuum. There are three other key stakeholder groups:

- buyers of evaluation services
- educators/trainers of evaluation practitioners
- those at the end of the 'value chain' of evaluation activities, that is, the clients of the programs that evaluation practitioners are contracted to investigate.

Clearly, the competencies of evaluation practitioners are important to each of these groups. Buyers of evaluation services presumably need to know what to look for when they engage an evaluation practitioner, educators/trainers need to know what to focus on in their endeavours to improve evaluation practice, and program clients want to ensure evaluation practitioners act in ways that result in service improvement. Accepting this means accepting that each of these stakeholder groups needs to have a firm grip on what

competencies are important, and in the case of buyers and program clients, a say in who is engaged to conduct evaluations.

Where to from here? Further survey work may be useful. For example, how well matched are the competencies targeted by educators/trainers with the competencies experienced evaluation practitioners find they need on the job? Equally important, how

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well matched are the competencies targeted by educators/trainers with the competencies buyers of evaluation services look for when they contract an evaluation practitioner (or put together a team to conduct an evaluation)? Similarly, how well matched are the competencies highly valued by experienced practitioners and/or buyers of evaluation services with the competencies program clients regard as important? Or from a slightly different perspective, what would program clients look for in an evaluation practitioner or an evaluation team if they were more aware of what to look for and more empowered in the recruitment and selection process!

In light of these issues, it is clear that a sole focus on identifying and building the competencies of evaluation practitioners would be short-sighted. What is needed is a broader focus that builds the capacity of practitioners, educators/trainers, buyers of evaluation services, and program clients to recognise the core competencies that ensure good evaluation practice.

For more information about the proposed competencies please refer to the AES website.

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