Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators

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Vignettes

What competencies do evaluators need?

In other words, what are the knowledge, skills and dispositions that the program evaluator needs to complete the evaluation successfully ?

Introducing. . .

The Essential Competencies

for Program Evaluators

Evaluator Relationships

- A relationship exists between the evaluator and the client, the program staff, and other evaluation stakeholders
- The evaluation decision making and implementation relationship may shift during the study

Evaluator Relationships

Primary responsibility for making and implementing evaluation decisions may lie with:

(1) the evaluator

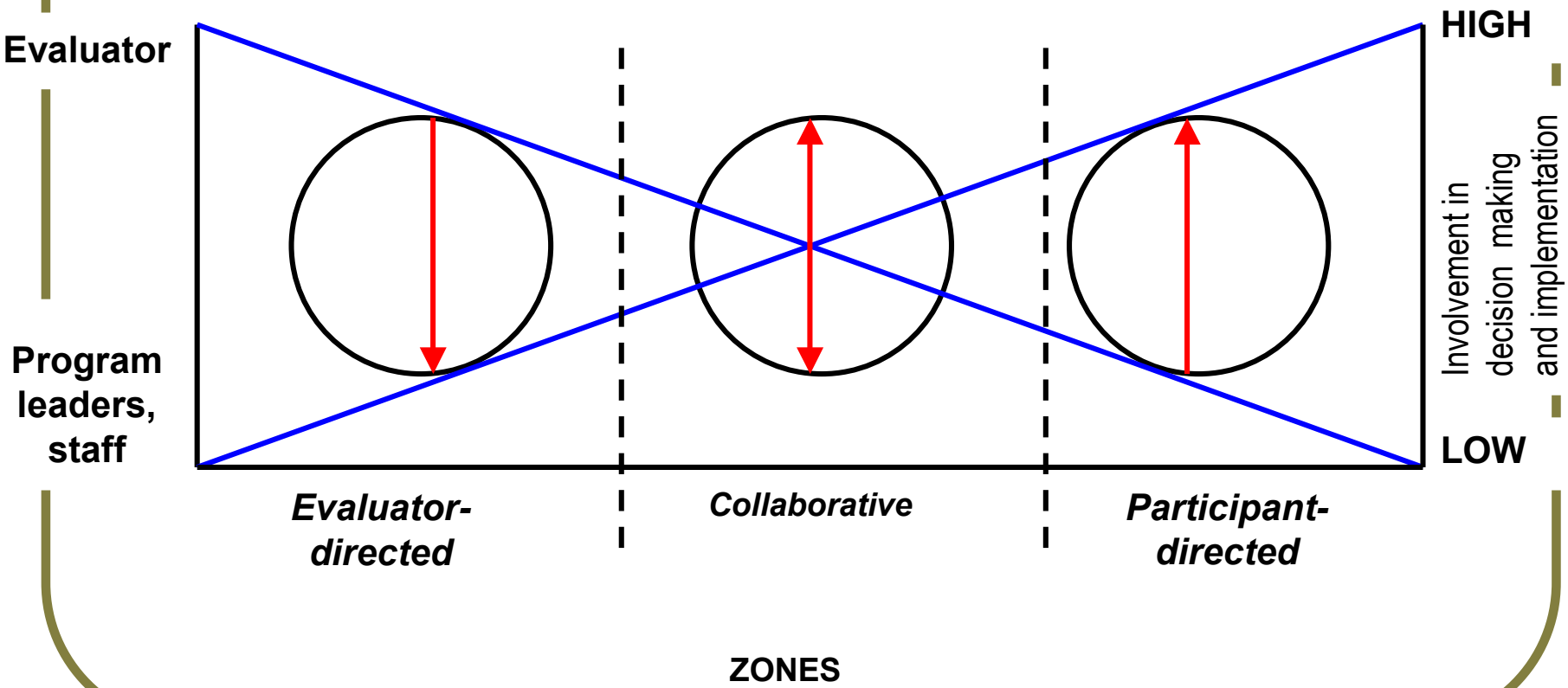
(2) someone else in the setting

(3) both jointly

The Basic Question

"Who directs the evaluation?"

Interactive Evaluation Quotient



Situational Analysis

- Every evaluation setting is unique
- The answer to virtually every evaluation question is, “It depends. . .”
- On what does IT depend?

How were the ECPE developed?

- **Began:** With an idea in a graduate course
- **Then:** "What does the literature tell us?"
- **Then:** A pilot study using the initial set of competencies, *AJE* publication (2001)
- **Then:** A revision process including a crosswalk
- **Then**: ECPE published in *AJE* (2005)
- **Then:** Articles in *CEJ* (2005) and *AJE* (2006)
- **Next:** A national validation study

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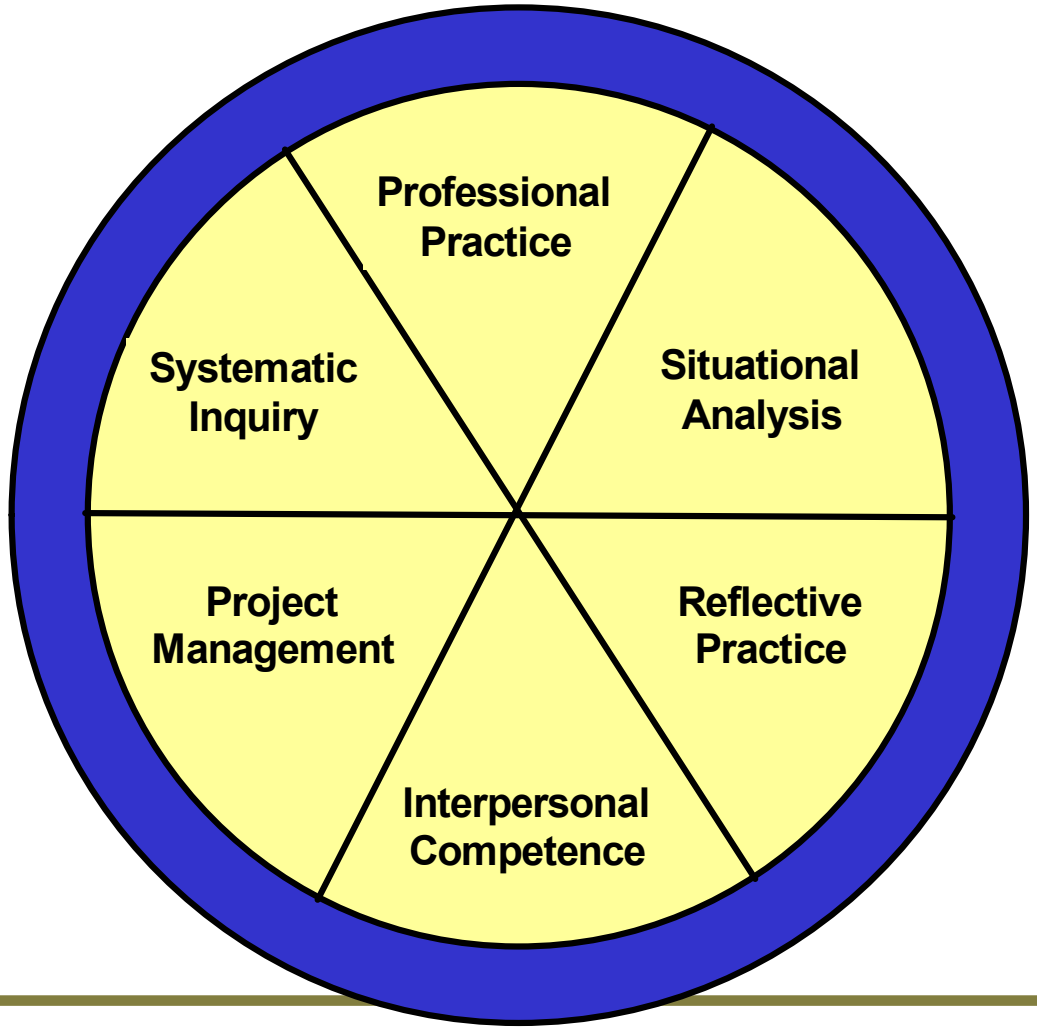


1) Professional Practice

- **Fundamental norms and values of evaluation practice**

  - Applies evaluation standards
  - Works ethically
  - Respects all stakeholders
  - Considers the general and public welfare
  - Contributes to knowledge base

2) Systematic Inquiry

- **Technical aspects of evaluation practice**
  - Understands knowledge base
  - Knows quantitative and qualitative methods
  - Knows mixed methods
  - Conducts literature reviews
  - Specifies program theory
  - Frames evaluation questions
  - Designs the evaluation

PLUS. . .

2) Systematic Inquiry (cont.)

- Collects and interprets data
- Makes judgments and recommendations
- Provides rationales for decisions
- Reports procedures and results
- Notes evaluation strengths and limitations
- Conducts meta-evaluations

3) Situational Analysis

- **Unique interests, issues, and contextual circumstances of evaluation**
  - Describes program
  - Determines program evaluability
  - Identifies stakeholders' interests
  - Serves intended users' informational needs
  - Addresses conflicts
  - Attends to evaluation use ***PLUS. . .***

3) Situational Analysis (cont.)

- Examines organizational and political context
- Attends to organizational change
- Respects site and client uniquenesses
- Remains open to input
- Modifies evaluation as needed

4) Project Management

- **"Nut and bolts" of evaluation work**
  - Responds to RFPs
  - Negotiates with clients
  - Writes formal agreements
  - Communicates with client
  - Budgets evaluation
  - Justifies cost

PLUS. . .

4) Project Management (cont.)

- Identifies needed resources
- Uses technology as appropriate
- Supervises and trains others
- Conducts evaluation in nondisruptive manner
- Presents work in timely manner

5) Reflective Practice

- **One's own evaluation expertise and need for growth**

  - Knows self
  - Reflects on practice
  - Pursues professional development: *evaluation* and *content areas*
  - Builds professional relationships

6) Interpersonal Competence

- **"People skills" necessary for evaluation practice**

  - Uses written and verbal/listening communication skills
  - Uses negotiation skills
  - Uses conflict resolution skills
  - Facilitates constructive interpersonal interaction
  - Demonstrates cross-cultural competence

Competencies and Evaluator Role

Given the three zones of the framework, how does your competency category apply?

- What are the priorities?
- Is it different for the evaluator and the client?

Competencies Belief Statements

- For each statement, circle

  SD for **Strongly Disagree**

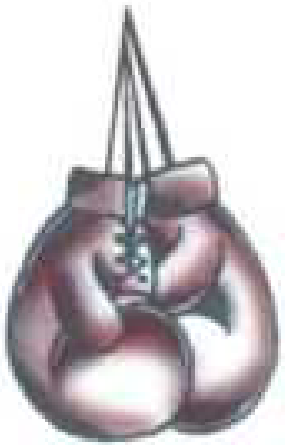
  D for **Disagree**

  A for **Agree**

  SA for **Strongly Agree**
- There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions

Belief # 1

The field will never completely agree on a set of competencies for program evaluators.

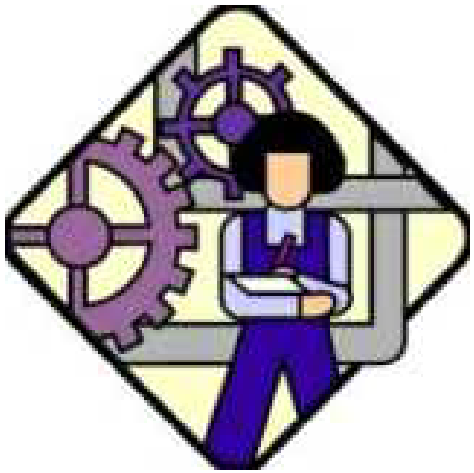


Belief # 2

No one person can have the competencies needed to conduct every possible evaluation.

Belief # 3

Technical knowledge and skills are the most important category of evaluator competencies.



And Now?

- Has seeing these competencies made you feel *better* or *worse* about your evaluation practice?
- Any additions or deletions?

Competencies Case Application

- Read the case study and answer the questions
- If there is time, compare your answers with someone near-by

Case Study Questions

1. What are the key issues the evaluation team confronted in the study?
2. To what extent did they resolve them successfully?
3. To what extent did the team effectively apply the ECPE?
4. In what ways might the ECPE have facilitated the team's work?

Understanding the Case Program

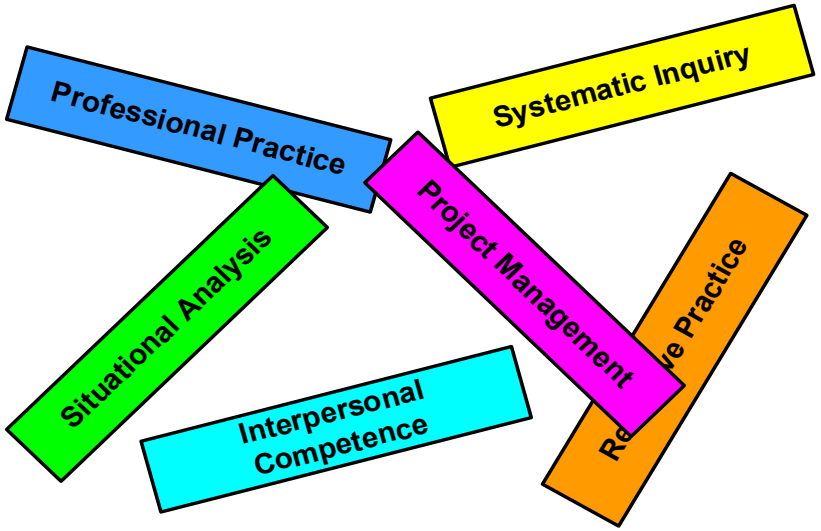
- Rationale
- Purpose and goals
- Participants
- Staff
- Administrative organization
- Activities

Work Context and Program Evaluator Competencies

- Professional Practice
- Systematic Inquiry
- Situational Analysis
- Project Management
- Reflective Practice
- Interpersonal Competence

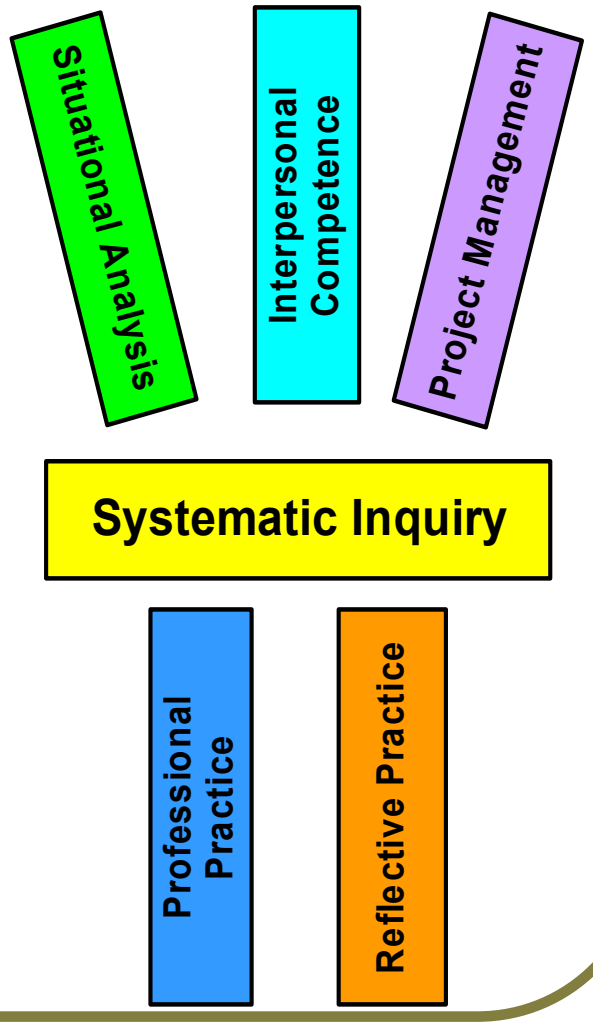
Imagine a Concept Map--

- In your work context, what are the relationships between and among the competencies?



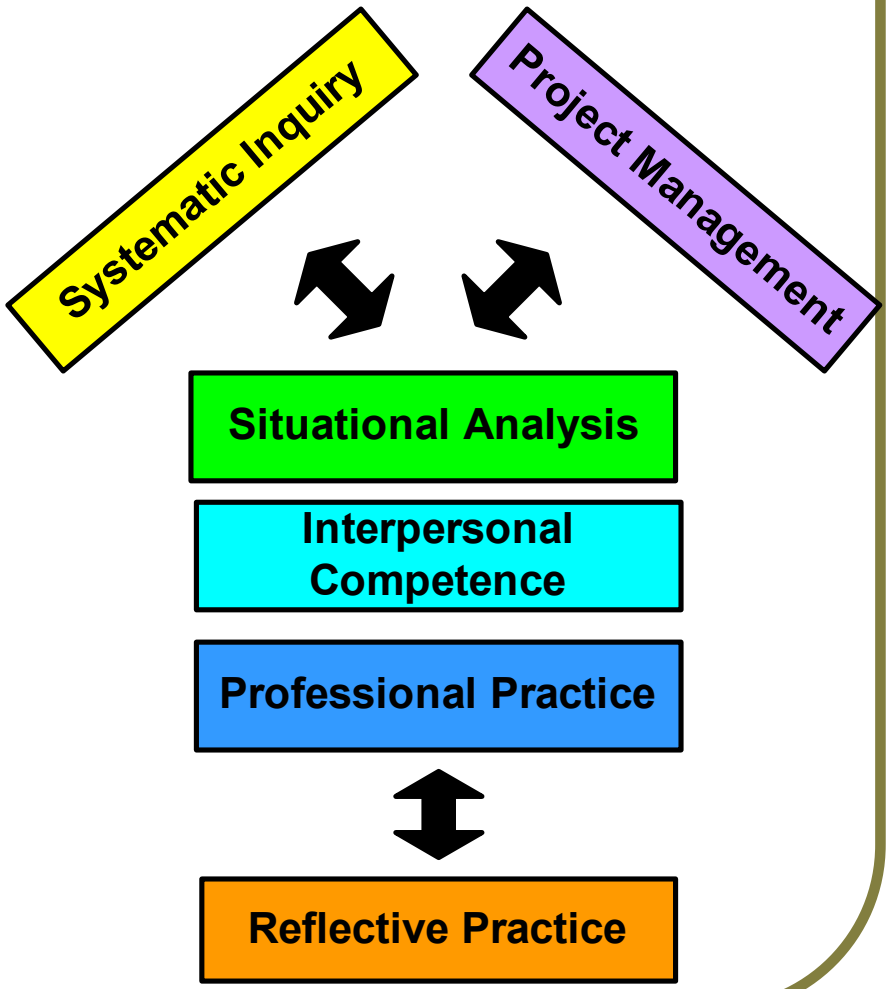
Context Specific Concept Map: Example 1

- Social Services
- External Evaluator



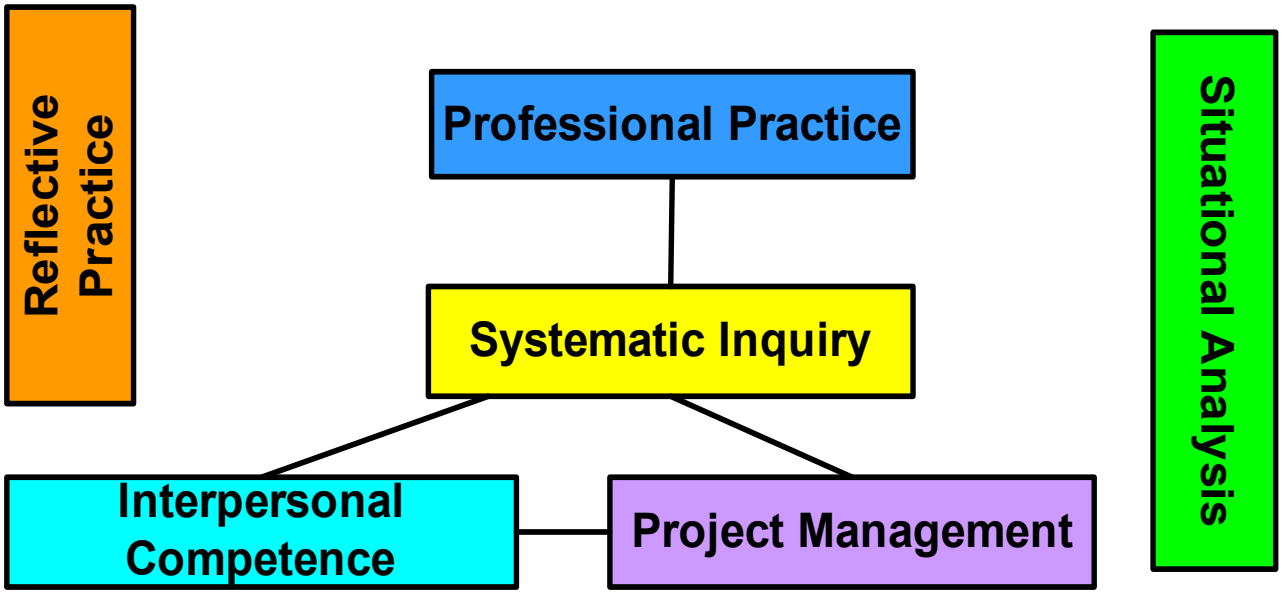
Context Specific Concept Map: Example 2

- Education
- Internal Evaluator



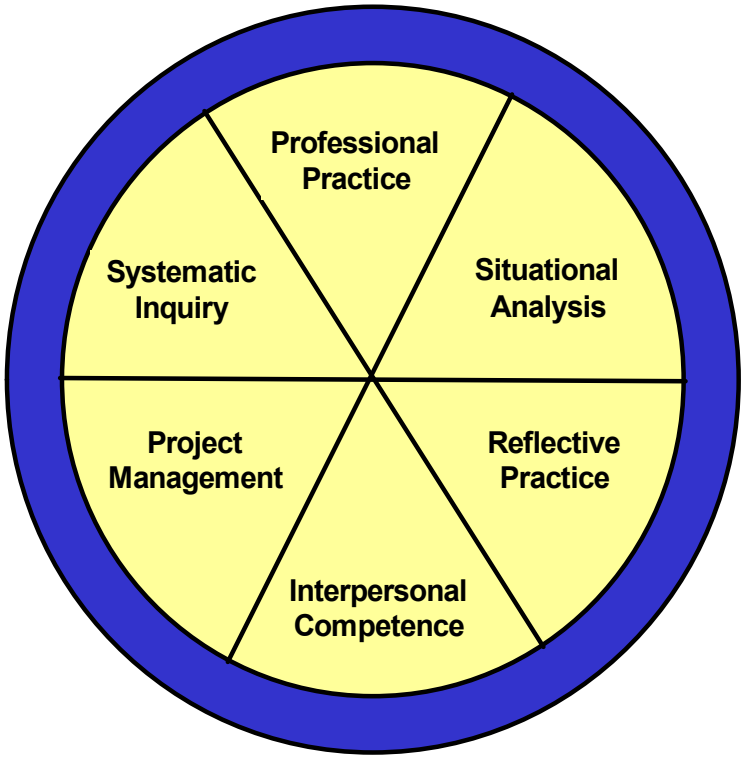
Context Specific Concept Map: Example 3

- Business
- Internal Evaluator



ECPE Self-Assessment

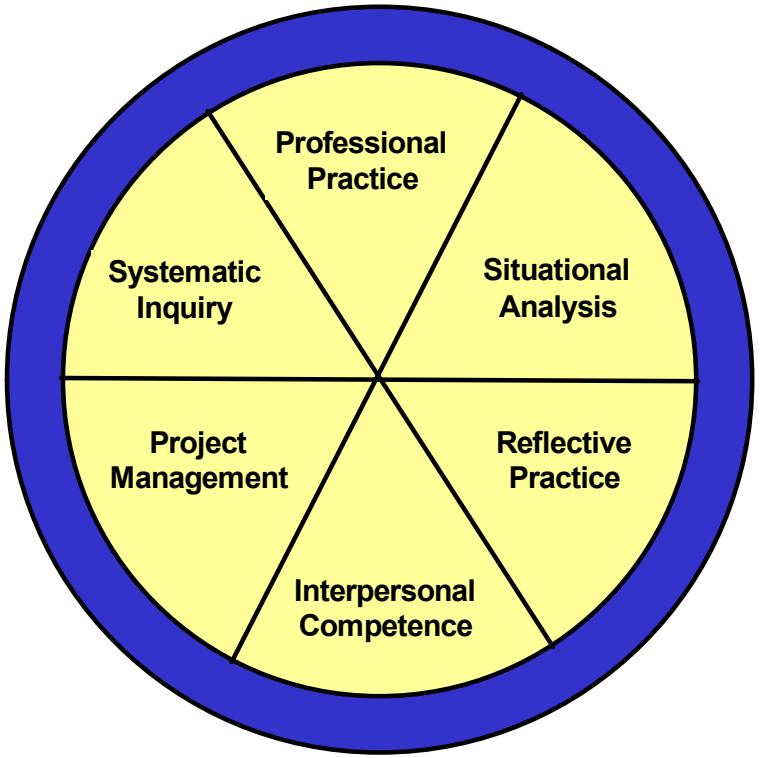
Reflecting on your own practice, how do you rate your knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively carry out program evaluations?



ECPE Rating Scale

Entry / Novice	**Proficient/ Skilled**	**Mastery/ Expert**

ECPE Self-Assessment



- Learned?
- Affirmed?
- Challenged?

Forms of Professional Development

- Individual study and reflection
- Professional learning communities
- Professional development courses
- Conferences
- University courses
- Networking

Now what?

Complete your professional development plan.

Summary

- Essential competencies for program evaluators DO exist.
- They help us analyze our current practice and guide future practice.
- Professional evaluators are obligated to reflect continually on personal improvement.

References

Stevahn, L., King, J. A., Ghere, G., & Minnema, J. (2005). Establishing essential competencies for program evaluators. *American Journal of Evaluation, 26, 43-59.*

Ghere, G., King, J.A., Stevahn, L., & Minnema, J. (2006). A professional development unit for reflecting on program evaluator competencies. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27,* 108-123.