

# ***Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE): An Ongoing Journey in the USA***



## ***ECPE***

(Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005)

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

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## Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

### *In the beginning . . .*

- Respected scholars suggested anecdotal lists of evaluator knowledge/skills/dispositions needed for professional practice (e.g., Kirkhart, 1981; Patton, 1990; Mertens, 1994; Scriven, 1996)
- Skepticism about whether agreement on a common set of competencies was possible given diverse contexts (e.g., Smith, 1999)

## Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

### ***Taxonomy development . . .***

- Four people at the University of Minnesota (one professor and three doctoral candidates) systematically reviewed the literature, reflected on personal evaluation practice/experience, sought consultative feedback from select scholars, and created/proposed a taxonomy

## Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

### ***Systematic validation research . . .***

- Multi-Attribute Consensus Reaching (MACR) process (quantitative and qualitative data) **(King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001)**
- Cross-Walk process with standard-setting documents (independent coder agreement) **(Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005)**

# Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

## ***Further validation research . . .***

- Messick's (1989, 1995a, 1995b) unitary validity framework grounded a web-based survey and series of interviews on the ECPE consisting of 61 competencies in 6 domains **(Wilcox, 2012; Wilcox & King, 2014)**
- Results
  - Survey: ( $n = 102$ ; 49% response rate)  
58 competencies = "*strongly necessary*"  
3 competencies = "*moderately necessary*"
  - Interview: ( $n \approx 9$ ; purposive across three contexts)  
*Professional Practice* and *Interpersonal Competence* considered critical

# Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

## *Most recently . . .*

- Cross-Comparison of evaluator competency taxonomies developed in North America to determine essential competencies for qualitative evaluators (**Stevahn & King, 2014**)
  - ***Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE)*** (Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema; 2005)
  - ***Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice*** (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2010)
  - ***Evaluator Competencies*** (Institutional Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction, 2006; Russ-Eft et al., 2008)
  - ***Professional Competencies of Qualitative Research Consultants*** (Qualitative Research Consultants Association, 2003)

# Brief History of Evaluator Competencies in the USA

## ***Common Core Competency Domains***

(Stevahn & King, 2014)

### **1. *Professional Focus***

... acts ethically/reflectively and enhances/advances professional practice

### **2. *Technical Focus***

... applies appropriate methodology

### **3. *Situational Focus***

... considers/analyzes context successfully

### **4. *Management Focus***

... conducts/manages projects skillfully

### **5. *Interpersonal Focus***

... interacts/communicates effectively and respectfully

# Persistent Issues, Personal Perspectives, and Future Possibilities

- AEA has not officially endorsed or adopted evaluator competencies—readiness and/or urgency has not characterized the field of evaluation in the USA
- AEA primarily continues to debate certification, credentialing, licensure, and accreditation—not validation or adoption of evaluator competencies (ECPE development and validation research was and continues to be independent of AEA, conducted by unfunded scholars/practitioners)
- Advancing professionalization in the USA most likely will require agreed-upon competencies—foundational to certification and licensure; useful for credentialing and accreditation





# Persistent Issues, Personal Perspectives, and Future Possibilities

- Ongoing ECPE research provides a growing base of empirical evidence—overall supports validation and indicates that distinct evaluator roles/contexts matter
- ECPE appears to be useful for pragmatic real-world practice—professional evaluation associations and university training programs have drawn upon and/or are applying the ECPE in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes despite validation limitations (regional vs. national sampling)



# Persistent Issues, Personal Perspectives, and Future Possibilities

- Identifying and agreeing upon a handful of core domains and competencies for adaptation in varying contexts may be most important for developing skilled evaluators—rather than searching for one detailed/definitive taxonomy that cannot possibly serve all contexts well



# Persistent Issues, Personal Perspectives, and Future Possibilities

- Numerous evaluator competency taxonomies developed around the world and validated in a variety of ways— most typically through repeated rounds of broad and comprehensive consultative processes with evaluators representative of each country's context/culture
- Future cross-comparisons across all taxonomies— may further confirm/disconfirm competencies essential for professional evaluator practice



# Persistent Issues, Personal Perspectives, and Future Possibilities

- Competency updates needed in light of evolving evaluation theory and practice—e.g., cultural competence imperative, expansion of evaluation associations internationally, increased attention to complexity and systems thinking, advanced access/use of technology and social media, role of facilitation in successful evaluation practice
- Evaluation research needed on competency applications—e.g., impact on program and/or course planning, assessment of individual performance, reflection/guidance for professional development, influence on evaluative thinking and/or decision making, etc.



## ***Looking Back and Moving Forward***

Evaluator competencies have progressed relatively rapidly worldwide over a fairly short period of time and have taken hold within the field of evaluation practice



Numerous future pathways present opportunities for continued learning about evaluator competencies and their potential for advancing effective evaluation practice