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Adding value through monitoring of evaluation capability

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Introduction

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has a strong history of evaluation capability building (ECB), and its evaluation culture and capacity are well regarded amongst Victoria's public sector and the wider evaluation community (McDonald et al 2003, McKenzie and Jordan 2005).

Over the last two decades, the DPI has applied evaluation capability building as a central part of their overall evaluation strategy, through formal training, mentoring arrangements, communities of practice and other support mechanisms.

This roundtable will focus on one specific element of DPI's ECB approach, the monitoring of evaluation competencies and its value to a broader ECB strategy. Participants are invited to;
- explore and critique the evaluation competencies selected
- view preliminary analysis of results
- discuss use of competency data as part of an ECB strategy

Competency Items Used to Monitor Evaluation Capability in DPI

With changing demand for services, projects and incident response, DPI has recognised a need to better understand the current capability of its workforce for more effective workforce planning, and to provide a mechanism for staff to be aware of what skills are required to inform career planning, and professional development.

In 2007 DPI initiated a competency mapping process across the organisation which mapped job profiles to competencies, and surveyed staff to assess individual competencies which can be defined as the knowledge and skills to proficiently undertake a task to a defined quality standard. Using a web-based survey, staff self rated their level of competency as 0 'Not Possessed', 1 'Contribute', 2 'Experienced', 3 'Lead', or 'Expert', to be later validated by supervisors.

For Farm Services Victoria (FSV), a Division of DPI with almost 800 staff, a list of some 550 competencies were selected and used. Each discipline team had an opportunity to contribute a set of competency items to the survey, and fourteen items were constructed to assess and monitor evaluation skills;

1. Project evaluation
2. Theory of action and program logic design
3. Evaluation planning using a range of evaluation approaches
4. Development of surveys
5. Qualitative research and analytical techniques
6. Quantitative research and analytical techniques
7. Evaluation theory and methods
8. Economic evaluation theory and methods
9. Working understanding of the research, development and practice change continuum
10. Evaluation as part of project development and management
11. Organisational reporting frameworks for performance
12. Establish performance indicators and required data sets
13. Theory of different types of evaluation eg. impact evaluation
14. Use of evaluation outcomes in Approach Deploy Results Improve (ADRI) cycle

In the survey, the first two items were grouped with Practice Change/Extension Design competencies reflecting that they were regarded as an integral part of program design, and the other 12 items formed a set under the heading of Advanced Evaluation. Together they cover several different categories of competencies;
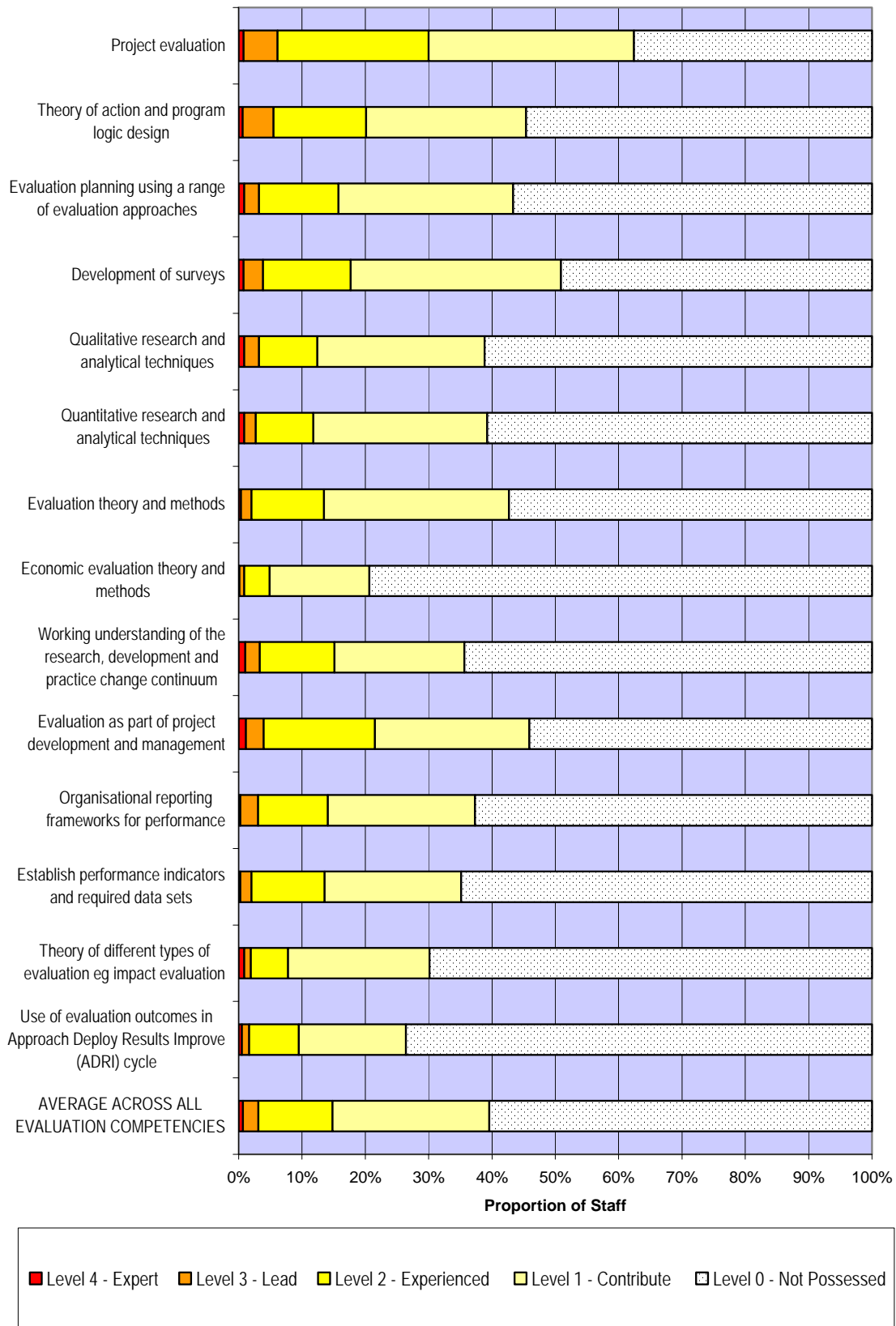
- *knowledge competencies* (Evaluation theory and methods, economic evaluation theory and methods, theory of different types of evaluation)
- *competencies related to the project design context* (Theory of action and program logic design, working understanding of the research, development and practice change continuum)
- *functional competencies* (Evaluation planning using a range of evaluation approaches, development of surveys, qualitative research and analytical techniques, quantitative research and analytical techniques)
- *competencies related to reporting, utilisation and improvement* (Evaluation as part of project development and management, organisational reporting frameworks for performance, establish performance indicators and required data sets, use of evaluation outcomes in Approach Deploy Results Improve (ADRI) cycle)

> Question: how useful are these competencies to assess the skills of an evaluation practitioner? What other competencies should be included or deleted?

Preliminary Analysis of Results

Preliminary analysis of results are presented in Figure 1 showing the proportion of FSV staff at each level of evaluation competency.

Figure 1: Proportion of Farm Services Victoria Staff in DPI at Each Level of Evaluation Competency (preliminary results from 780 respondents)

Considerable diversity exists across the 14 competency items with only 4% (31 staff members) rated as experienced with 'Economic evaluation theory and methods', compared to 15% (114 staff) experienced with 'Theory of action and program logic design', 18% (137 staff) experienced with understanding the use of 'Evaluation as part of project development and management', and 24% (186 staff) rating themselves as experienced with 'Project evaluation'.

The proportion of staff who rated themselves as able to lead ranged from 1% to 5% (6 to 42 staff), and around 1% (1 to 9 staff members) rated themselves as expert against the various competency items. Between 17% and 32% (132 to 253 staff members) rated themselves as being able to contribute across the 14 items.

> Question: what balance of experts, leaders or mentors, and experienced practitioners, and staff who are gaining experience through contributing might be required in an organisation or team?

Use Of Competency Data As Part Of An ECB Strategy

Across FSV, all program teams, regions, and individual staff can compare staff competency against the skill set for evaluation, as well as other job roles in the Division. FSV managers will be able to assess the staff numbers in the various program teams, and the geographic distribution of staff with evaluation skills across the Division.

Skill gaps identified at individual level help inform professional development needs, and numbers of staff with certain levels of skills inform workforce planning decisions across the organisation. Such analysis not only looks at numbers of 'experienced' staff, but numbers of staff with 'lead' and 'expert' skills to provide leadership and specialist support. Statistics on competencies, and the names of staff with these competencies will also inform ECB professional development needs.

> Question: how can competency data best be used to add value to an ECB strategy?

Summary

A web based competency mapping process across an organisation such as DPI offers a tool to support workforce planning by managers, and to inform career planning, and professional development for individuals, and provides a mechanism to identify professional development needs and monitor changes in evaluation capability. The process appears to add value to ECB activities, therefore improving evaluation outcomes for the organisation.

References

McDonald, B., Rogers, P. and Kefford, B. (2003), Teaching people to fish? Building the evaluation capability of public sector organisations. *Evaluation, 9,* 9-29.

McKenzie, R. and Jordan, H. (2005). *Evaluation support project: evaluation needs assessment and capability assessment in Agriculture Development Division.* Department of Primary Industries, Victoria, unpublished.