SUMMARY

Literature Review: Professionalization of Evaluators

Prepared for the CES Evaluation
Professionalization Project

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Executive Summary

This literature review is intended to summarize (a) existing research on evaluator competencies, (b) academic views of professionalization in evaluation and comparable disciplines, and (c) existing processes of professional certification/credentialing in comparable disciplines. Regarding the latter, the issues addressed in this review are intended to augment the information gathered in the interview component of this project.

This review will consider professional standards, competencies, and practice, and will situate credentialing in the context of the range of professional designations. The review focuses chiefly on Canadian examples, but also considers American examples where appropriate.

What are the definitions of the key terms? The terms *licensure*, *credential*, *certification*, and *accreditation* are not always used consistently in the literature on professionalization. To avoid confusion we will rely on Altschuld's definitions which distinguish between certification (as an individual-level assessment and, typically, testing of competencies) and credentialing (as a set of courses or other experiences that a person must go through, which may or may not involve examination).

Altschuld describes *credentialing* as a set of courses or other experiences a person must go through to receive a credential. The credentialing process may be done by a professional society, or by educators/trainers.

He describes *certification* as a process by which a person masters certain skills and competencies in a field as assessed by an external body (usually a professional society in the area of consideration). If one is certified, then an additional step is to become licensed to practice.

Licenses are awarded by provinces or states and are intended to restrict professional practice to those who have duly met the licensing requirements. Persons who practice without a license can be sanctioned by the professional body and/or the jurisdiction in which the person should have obtained a license to practice.

Accreditation is a mechanism whereby the educational program of an institution or agency is examined by an external panel representing the profession, against established criteria for programs. If the program passes the review, it is granted a document indicating that it has been accredited. Usually, accreditation is for a fixed period of time and must be renewed.

What do we know about evaluator competencies? There have been two recent projects conducted under the auspices of professional evaluation associations to develop inventories and descriptions of competencies for evaluators. Both have been done in North America – one in Canada under the auspices of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) and one in the United States connected with the American Evaluation Association (AEA). The Canadian project was conducted by Zorzi, McGuire and Perrin (2002) and yielded a report for the CES as well as an article that summarized key findings from the report (Zorzi, Perrin, McGuire, Long, & Lee, 2002). More recently, McGuire and Zorzi (2005) published a paper based on their earlier work as part of a *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* thematic section on evaluator competencies.

The two evaluation association-based projects are similar in that they both develop lists of competencies for evaluators in a wide range of settings and evaluation undertakings. But the approaches are different in important ways. The ECPE list of competencies is intended to be generic. It is clear that the focus is on program evaluation and no efforts are made to distinguish among types of evaluations or domains of practice that might be undertaken by practicing evaluators. Because they are generic, the competencies tend to be general – there would need to be ways of translating and perhaps even expanding particular competencies or clusters to make it possible to map out curricula for workshops, courses or programs.

Is there a consensus on core evaluator competencies? Cousins and Aubry (2006) and Gussman (2005) suggest that the ECPE framework represents an emerging consensus view of evaluator competencies, and hence, is a basis for evaluator training and apprenticeships and practice.

In contrast, Smith (2003) identifies several issues that have and will continue to divide the profession, among them being the qualitative-quantitative debate, and the advocacy versus independence debate. With respect to the former, she suggests that although there have been laudatory efforts to advocate for mixed methods in evaluations (Patton, 1997), there continues to be a deep underlying division within the profession around the epistemologies that differentiate constructivists, who advocate qualitative methods (Lincoln, 1994) from those who advocate for one or another versions of positivism (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

The issue of evaluators as program advocates versus evaluators as independent assessors of programs is one that has become more important over time. Empowerment evaluation, for example, developed and promoted by David Fetterman (2001) connects evaluation with efforts to improve social justice. This style of evaluation is intended to assist programs and organizations on their terms, and not impose external (evaluator) judgment on programs.

This advocacy view contrasts with Scriven's (1997) views on the importance of evaluator objectivity. If one compares evaluation with (now) competing professions like internal

audit, that stress independence if not objectivity as core values in their practice (Mutchler, Chang, & Prawitt, 2001), the evaluation profession is divided on this issue.

How will recent changes in the field of evaluation affect evaluator competencies? Smith (2003) points out that the nature of evaluation work has changed significantly in the past 15 years. Beginning with the passage of the Government Performance Review Act (GPRA) in the United States in 1993, jurisdictions at all levels of the public sector in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand have embraced performance measurement as a principal way of addressing growing demands for public accountability.

Mayne and Rist (forthcoming) suggest that set-piece evaluation engagements are giving way to streams of evaluative information that play a key part in knowledge management strategies in organizations. This shift means that performance measurement and performance management systems will continue to be a central part of evaluation – likely growing in importance over time

Performance measurement and its connections with performance management need to become explicit parts of evaluation and we need to ensure that the competencies that are arrayed for evaluators include those that take into account the knowledge and skills that are required to design, implement, maintain, revise and even integrate performance measurement systems into different scales of public sector and non-profit organizations. McDavid and Hawthorn (2006) suggest that core performance measurement knowledge and skills can be seen as an outgrowth of program evaluation knowledge and skills – program evaluators are well-positioned to make performance measurement a part of their practice if they are prepared to understand and work with the organizational cultural and political processes that are entailed in successfully developing and implementing performance measurement systems. As well, program evaluators, because they understand assessing program effectiveness, are in a position to position performance measurement systems so that the roles and expectations for them are realistic.

Are some competencies more essential than others? In the Canadian context, Aucoin (2005), in his discussion of the roles that program evaluation plays in Federal government decision-making, makes a strong case for program evaluation being a key contributor to assessing the effectiveness of programs. He argues that in a system that emphasizes results-based management, there is no substitute for program evaluation, given its core focus on program effectiveness. Although program evaluation clearly is capable of doing more than assessing program effectiveness, as has been pointed out by the Zorzi, McGuire and Perrin (2002) in their study for the CES, that role is in the core of what distinguishes program evaluation from other, competing, professions, including internal audit. Being able to design and execute competent effectiveness evaluations continues to be a key part of what evaluators do.

What are the key steps in credentialing, certifying and licensing evaluators? A review of the literature that discusses the processes and issues involved in professionalizing disciplines is necessarily selective. The volume of material available on credentialing, certification, licensing and accreditation is very large and the practicalities of conducting such a review makes it necessary to focus the review of books, articles, reports and websites on topics and issues of particular interest for this project.

Given that the terms of reference for the project, as specified by the Canadian Evaluation Society, place particular emphasis on credentialing as an option for professionalizing evaluators, this literature review has systematically canvassed sources that help us to understand the processes and issues entailed in credentialing professionals. But because credentialing is, in fact, an option that has been selected by comparatively few other professions and because credentialing is usually seen as one step in a multi-step process, this literature review also considers certification and licensure of professionals, albeit in less depth than credentialing.

Based on the literature review, it is possible to list requirements for a *credentialing* process. Because credentialing is seen as the first step in professionalizing a discipline, *certification* generally entails the requirements for credentialing plus others that are appropriate for certification. *Licensing,* like certification, also builds on the requirements for both credentialing and certification, adding additional steps that are primarily focused on the legal status of a profession and its practitioners.

What are the key steps in credentialing? Based on the literature review, the following are generally seen as steps to successfully designing and implementing a credentialing system for a profession.

- ❖ Obtain agreement by the governing body for the professional association/society that credentialing is an appropriate way to begin professionalizing the discipline.

- ❖ Consult with the membership of the professional association to ascertain/confirm the need/demand for a credential.

- ❖ Consult with/enlist the support of the organizations/institutions that would be providing formal education or training as part of obtaining a credential.[1]

- ❖ Assign staff resources in the professional association to the credentialing process.

- ❖ Develop volunteer committees to assist with the process. Their tasks will depend on the range of ways by which practitioners can become credentialed. If experience, for example, is included as an option for credentialing, assessing

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[1] Although accrediting institutions that provide education or training is an option, that process would entail establishing the content and delivery modalities of curricula that would need to be offered. Establishing whether core competencies are being taught can be a part of the accreditation process but is not essential.

experience will necessitate committees of practitioners who review portfolios or other evidence of practice.

❖ With the aid of academics and practitioners, identify credentialing requirements and options. These may include formal education, training, professional development, experience and various combinations of these options. One important distinction is between education and training for which persons have been granted formal post-secondary credit, and other training or professional development for which no credit has been granted.

❖ Although it is not essential that core competencies be defined to credential practitioners, it is essential that a code of ethics be developed for practitioners as well as standards for practice.

❖ A self-evaluation/self-reporting process that is intended to detail relevant experience, may also be required. Criteria for relevant experience will need to be developed. If portfolios are deemed to be necessary for the credential, they are prepared by practitioners will need to be assessed by committees or persons designated for this task. Criteria for the assessment process will need to be developed and validated.

❖ There may be a formal examination process as part of a credentialing process, but this is more typical of a certification process. Developing, validating and periodically revising such an examination is a significant undertaking. The examination may be a part of assessing the experience of practitioners who apply for the credential outside the ambit of formal education or training channels.

❖ If a grandparenting system is developed to credential existing practitioners, criteria will have to be developed to decide who gets grandparented, how long such a privilege is extended to the practice community, and what evidence is required to be granted a credential in this way.

❖ Requirements for continuing professional development can be established. The professional association needs to decide whether the credential is granted for a fixed period of time, subject to maintenance and/or renewal.

❖ There has to be a capacity in the professional association to monitor the credentialing process, and to modify it as needed.

❖ There has to be a capacity to handle complaints and appeals from persons who have been unsuccessful in the credentialing process.

❖ Once a plan for the design and implementation of the credentialing system has been established, a business plan must be developed. The business plan will need to estimate the costs of credentialing, and the revenues that will be needed to offset those costs. Allocating the costs among stakeholders (principally, those persons seeking the credential, costs to governments, costs to the society/professional association, costs to organizations providing education/training, costs to organizations assessing experience) will be a part of

the business plan. The business plan will need to be approved by the governing body of the professional association.

❖ A newly-developed credentialing system will need to be marketed to current and future members of the professional association.

What are the key steps for certification? In a word, the requirements for credentialing are also applicable to certifying professional practitioners.

❖ In addition, it is essential that there be agreement on the core competencies for the profession, since there will need to be a process for assessing the competence of each practitioner who applies for certification. The competencies will need to be translated into curricula for the organizations that purvey knowledge, skills and dispositions that are deemed to be appropriate for practitioners.

❖ An examination/assessment process is typical of professions that certify their practitioners. The examinations need to be developed, validated in terms of competencies measured, and revised periodically. Exams are usually administered on a cyclical basis, and may include both a written and an oral compone nt. Professions vary in the requirements for a passing score. Typically, candidates have a limited number of "tries" (one to three) to pass the exams.

❖ Professions that have a certification requirement for practice typically have a body of theoretical knowledge that defines the profession, sponsor organizations that do research, and often have professional publications (journals and books).

❖ Like credentialing, certification does not usually give practitioners an exclusive right to a given field. In other words, even if the name of a certificate is protected by a provincial or state statute, persons who do not have that certificate can still practice in that field.

What are the key steps for licensing? In addition to the requirement for credentialing and certification, there are additional considerations for professions that are licensed to practice. Typically, the rationale for licensing practitioners has to do with public safety (medicine or law as examples).

❖ Licensed professionals are persons who must acquire a license from a regulatory body (typically the profession itself) and/or a government jurisdiction in order to practice in that jurisdiction. What makes licensing unique among professionalization options is that a licensed profession is one where legislation has been passed in a jurisdiction that pertains to the practice of that profession. Almost always, licenses grant the practitioners the exclusive right to practice that profession in the jurisdiction(s) in which they hold valid licenses.

❖ Accompanying the legal aspects of licensing are possible liability issues. Thus, a profession that had succeeded in securing for its practitioners the exclusive right to practice in a field, will incur greater liabilities, typically from applicants who have failed to secure a license to practice.

Competent practice is regulated by the profession, usually organizations that train or educate practitioners are themselves accredited by the profession (medical schools are subject to periodic accreditation reviews, for example).