

**Towards achieving consensus on essential competencies for evaluation  
practice in South Africa**

**Final Draft Report**

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## **Acronyms**

1. AEA - American Evaluation Association
2. ANZEA - Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA)
3. AES - Australasia Evaluation Society
4. CES – Canadian Evaluation Society
5. CLEAR AA – Centres of Learning on Evaluation and Research Anglophone Africa
6. CREST – Centre for Research Evaluation Science and Technology
7. DeGeval – German Evaluation Society
8. DPME – Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation
9. EES – European Evaluation Society
10. IDEAS – International Development Evaluation Association
11. MES – Malaysian Evaluation Society
12. JES - Japan Evaluation Society
13. SAMEA – South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association
14. SEVAL - Swiss Evaluation Society
15. UKES – United Kingdom Evaluation Society
16. UNEG – United Nations Evaluation Group
17. VOPE – Volunteer Organisation for Professional Evaluation

## 1. Abstract

This report presents the findings from a study on evaluator competencies in South Africa that was conducted between November 2016 and March 2017. The study had two aims. The first aim was to understand which evaluator competencies are seen as important by evaluators practicing in South Africa and by extension, competencies in which they need training. The second aim was to gather lessons that South Africa could adopt from other Volunteer Organisations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs). In order to achieve this, the researcher compiled a draft list of evaluator competencies based on a crosswalk of existing competency frameworks. A questionnaire was developed and surveyed among alumni and students from the Centre for Research Evaluation Science and Technology (CREST Stellenbosch University). The findings from the study suggest that evaluators find these three domains as the most important domains: a) conducting an evaluation study, b) understanding the evaluation context and c) managing client and stakeholder relations. Furthermore, they see the majority of competencies as essential rather than important. The findings also suggest that there is a high need for training in technical research skills (e.g. qualitative and quantitative data analysis software) as well as non-technical skills such as understanding budgets and team coordination. Furthermore, the study gathered some lessons that could benefit South Africa from other VOPEs around the process of establishing competencies, constructing the competencies and implementing the competency framework.

## 2. Introduction

This study sought to answer two research questions: a) what can South Africa learn from other VOPEs who have already developed evaluator competencies and b) Which evaluator competencies are seen as important by evaluators in South Africa? In answering the second question, the study also identified competencies in which evaluators need training. Evaluator competencies are defined as:

Standards define for the practitioner the acceptable characteristics of evaluation *products and services*. Competencies are the **skills, knowledge and abilities** required in a *person practicing evaluation*. Ethics provide an umbrella, under which the competencies are applied and products produced (The Three Pillars: Standards, Ethics and Competencies, (2008:1)

To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher carried out three key processes and each process had an output: a) carrying out a literature review and cross-walking existing competency frameworks to compile a draft list of evaluator competencies (referred to as the draft competencies list hereafter) and gather lessons for South Africa, b) constructing a testing tool (questionnaire) for rating and ranking these competencies and c) conducting a survey with a pilot sample on the draft

list of competencies. The outputs from these processes could be useful in taking the process of establishing evaluator competencies forward.

### 3. Problem Statement

South Africa needs to shorten the gap between demand for quality evaluations and available limited capacity. This can be approached in different ways, but clarity is still needed on what competencies (skills, knowledge and abilities) evaluators must possess or work towards acquiring (Podems 2015). Currently there is a set of evaluator competencies in South Africa framed by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), to guide programme managers, M&E advisors and evaluators who work in the public sector. These competencies have not yet been validated by other sectors. It is not clear which of these competencies are seen as important by evaluators, commissioners of evaluations and institutions that train evaluators. The competencies in which evaluators need training across the sectors have not been identified. Although there are numerous sets of competencies for evaluators internationally, it has not yet been established which of these can be transported to the South African context.

By building on the work on competencies conducted by the DPME, the study also seeks to provide a draft competencies list that could be the basis to build and widely consult upon as the country takes the process of establishing evaluator competencies forward. Furthermore, it seeks to provide a tool/questionnaire that can be adapted in the future in the process of establishing evaluator competencies to see what competencies are seen as important by evaluators, managers of evaluations and commissioners of evaluations and to check competencies in which evaluators need training across the sectors. Having an established list of competencies could provide a guide for providers of training programmes, aspiring evaluators and practicing evaluators in their own professional development. It is hoped that all these will contribute towards strengthening evaluation and evaluator.

This study will add to the body of knowledge on evaluator competencies in South Africa. There is limited research on evaluation and research on competencies in the country. While there is a 'young but vibrant culture of evaluation research in South Africa' as observed by Abrahams (2015:1), the literature review conducted for this study showed that little had been published about evaluation research in South Africa. It is therefore not surprising that Galport and Azzam (2016) found that the majority of competency literature focuses on the United States, mostly on university-based training programmes on evaluation (Beywl & Harich, 2007; Dewey, Montrosse, Schroter, Sullins, & Mattox, 2008; LaVelle & Donaldson, 2010; Stevahn et al., 2005b).

## 6. Methodology

A mixed method research approach was used. This allowed the researcher to combine qualitative and quantitative research methods within one study (Bryman and Bell 2011). The researcher carried out a literature review of articles and papers on evaluator competencies and professionalization. Secondly she conducted a crosswalk of existing evaluator competency frameworks from 8 VOPEs around the world: the American Evaluation Association (AEA), the Australasia Evaluation Society (AES), the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), the European Evaluation Society (EES), the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL), United Kingdom Evaluation Society (UKES). The researcher also cross-walked the Evaluation Competency Framework for Government (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation), Malaysia Evaluation Society (MES) MES framework for evaluation policy and standards and the Japan Evaluation Society (JES) Hiroshima pilot test for school evaluators. Thirdly, the researcher conducted a survey with CREST alumni and students in the Post Graduate Monitoring and Evaluation Studies programme. It has to be pointed out here that the VOPEs that whose frameworks were cross-walked are mostly from the global north. The researcher could not find existing frameworks from VOPEs in Africa.

### 6.1 Survey sample

The researcher used purposive sampling based on her judgement and nature of the study (Barbie and Mouton 2012). As discussed by Barbie and Mouton (2012), with purposive /judgement sampling it is important to consider that the sample may not represent a real population and is therefore ideal for a pre-test. The researcher had knowledge of the elements of the population and specifically selected a sample of 300 possible respondents who have experienced and understand practicing evaluation in South Africa. As a pilot study, the researcher hoped to get 60 responses out of the 300.

### 6.2 Data analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using ATLAS.ti. This enabled the researcher to organize and categorize a sizeable amount of data and store text (Smit 2005, Barbie and Mouton 2012). ATLAS.ti places emphasis on interpretation (Schiellerup: 2007). Therefore, the researcher was able to build categories of families as well as networks based on the data. Coding was done inductively and deductively. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS. From Survey Monkey, data was cleaned in a Microsoft Excel sheet then transferred into SPSS for further cleaning and coding before analysis could begin.

## 7. Literature Review

This literature review is divided into two parts. The first part will look at key discussions around competencies such as rationale for establishing competencies, some possible challenges and issues

as well as cultural competency. The second part will look at the lessons that South Africa can learn from other VOPEs hence answering one of the questions of this study.

### 7.1 Part One: Key issues surrounding the competencies debate

#### **Rationale for establishing competencies: strengthening evaluation and evaluators**

It has been argued that there is a limited pool of qualified evaluators in Africa and South Africa (OED 2001; Podems 2015; DPME 2013). While evaluation skills and experience do exist in Africa, they are described as 'scarce' (OED Precip 2001). South Africa is faced with poor quality evaluations and a lack of quality evaluators (Podems 2015). Studies conducted by the DPME in 2012 and 2013 also showed the limited expertise in evaluation in the public sector. Their 2013 study found that 78% of provincial departments felt confident in monitoring and reporting, whereas only 42% were confident in managing evaluations (Podems, Goldman and Jacob 2014). But it is not all gloom and doom as Abraham (2015) states that evaluations conducted in South Africa have increased 'number, scope and quality'.

Both supply and demand are required to build national capacity for M&E. Evaluator competencies fall within the 'supply' space together with technologies and institutional frameworks (OED 2001). VOPEs around world have committed to improve or support improvement the capacities of their evaluators while building the practice through various means such credentialing and Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review (CES 2010, EES 2012). Discussions around professionalization are informed by evaluator competencies together with standards and guidelines (Abrahams 2015). On the same vein the lack of agreement on competencies is seen as one of the hindrances towards the establishment of credentialing, certification, or accreditation systems (Tarsilla 2014). South Africa is not ready for professionalization and the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) is focussing on strengthening evaluation and evaluators (Podems 2015).

Even with the strategy that focuses on strengthening evaluators, there is still a need to be clear on what competencies will be strengthened. There are a number of pathways in the road map proposed by Podems (2015) whether South Africa pursues professionalization or the strengthening of evaluation and evaluators. What is clear from the Theory of Change for the road map is that the things needed to 'increase a credible pool' of evaluators require clarity of the competencies that emerging evaluators must acquire; that practicing evaluators must improve; should guide training programmes (Podems 2015).

Regardless of the Road chosen to strengthen evaluators, a common understanding and agreement on what knowledge, skills and attitudes comprises an evaluator, needs to be established. (Podems 2015: 29)



Podems' arguments above place the 'credible pool' of evaluators at the centre of improving the quality of evaluations. Beyond increasing this pool, commissioners of evaluations have to be able to identify such credible evaluators. It is hoped that agreed upon competencies will guide commissioners of evaluations on identifying qualified evaluators (Stevahn et al 2005; Wilcoks 2012). Providers of training programmes need to know how to train practising and new evaluators who become the credible evaluators. Without agreed upon competencies, training providers may not have guidance for curriculum development (Stevahn, King, Ghere and Minnema 2005). Galport and Azzam (2016: 1) see competencies as having the potential to help with the alignment of training programs to field-specific needs. This misalignment was found by Dewey et al (2008) who found a mismatch between what is taught and what employers. In addition, new evaluators will be guided by the competencies on what they should study while practicing evaluators will be able to map out their professional development path (Stevahn et al 2005; King and Podems 2015; Wilcocks 2012, Tarsilla 2014). Two other reasons for establishing and seeking consensus on evaluator competencies are; a) contributing to research on evaluation and b) improving reflective practice as evaluators think about what it means to be an evaluator are (Stevahn, King, Ghere and Minnema 2005: 103)

### **Where are we globally?**

Common consideration for competencies may be close at hand. King and Stevahn (2015) note that the 'tipping point' may possibly close due to the extent and intensity in discussions around competencies globally. They go on to identify the different VOPEs around the world who have established competency frameworks (CES 2010, ANZEA 2011) and the DMPE (2012) in South Africa. To this list, one adds SEVAL, AES (2012), UKES (2013), EES (2011), DeGEVAL, IDEAS (2014) as well as the UNEG (2016). The core purposes for the establishment of competencies vary from guiding training programmes (DeGEVAL) to credentialing (CES 2010) and professionalization (EES 2012).

### **That said: why do we need to validate them in South Africa?**

Yes, there is an existing competency framework framed by the DPME in the country. This may be seen as duplication. However duplication unintentionally will result in comparison and 'a form of validation across different taxonomies' as argued by King and Stevahn (2015). This is in addition to other reasons stated prior such as looking beyond the public sector. Evaluator competencies will need to be validated with evaluators in various sectors, geographical locations and in various stages of their careers for them to be relevant (Bailey 2014). As such a list that evaluators have not engaged with in its development (e.g. bringing the CES framework to South Africa) or that which they have not validated may be irrelevant to them. As argued by Chouinard and Cousins (2009) evaluation methods and methodology selection are influenced by cultural differences. The authors applied the

Essential Competencies for Programme Evaluation taxonomy to Taiwan. Expert panellists who understood the cultural context of Taiwan retained 9 items as they were and modified 45 items albeit with minor changes. They added 10 items and deleted or merged 8 items.

### **What are some of the key issues / challenges expected**

“To have competencies or not to have competencies?” That is the question used to open a discussion by King and Podems (2015: vii). Given that it has been decades before there has been a need to formalise evaluator competencies, the first hurdle could be that evaluators may not see the need for competencies. Related to this question, Wehipeihana et al (2014) highlight that the question asked was ‘what is the problem’ that competencies seek to fix. The first hurdle is possibly people not seeing the need for evaluator competencies.

The second possible issue is the lack of conceptual clarity and agreement on what evaluation is. Smith (1999) argues that without a ‘unified definition we logically cannot define requisite competencies, much less have a discussion about credentialing (in Lavelle 2014: 15). Respondents in the ANZEA process raised the same concern and questions were raised about how evaluation is conceptualised and defined (Wehipeihana et al 2014). However, Lavelle (2014) argues that ‘diverse definitions of and approaches to evaluation spring from a common well’.

Related to the issue of conceptualization, evaluation practitioners work in diverse settings. To supplement content-specific areas of practice, they lean on trans-disciplinary skills. Because of this Lavelle (2014) observes that those opposed to establishment of competencies may argue that a single set of competencies is not able to reflect the ‘diverse knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be effective in various contexts’.

The fourth issue is the view that a competency list may simplify or ‘technocratize what evaluators are and what they do’ Wehipeihana (2014:60). Linked to this is the argument that because evaluation goes beyond methodological specialisation, the evaluator is more than a methodological expert (Schwandt 2008). Schwandt is of the view that an evaluator deals with social-moral questions decisions. These cannot be made with mathematical proof. As note by Lavelle (2014) the dilemma here for the evaluation profession like other professions is how the profession would be expect to instil in professional, values, attitudes and perspectives.

The fifth issue is the lack of empirical evidence linking sound evaluation to evaluator competencies taxonomies (Wilcocks and King 2014). On the same lien thought, ‘a good evaluator does not necessarily equate to “good evaluation” Wehipeihana et al (2014: 15). There is evidence that some

‘poor’ evaluations are a result of unclear Terms of References, poorly managed processes and resource constraints (Podems 2015).

The sixth issue is the concern that establishing competencies may lead to exclusion and promotion of elitisms as a boundary is put around those who can and cannot practise (Wehipeihana 2014). In addition, the list could be inflexible and result in commissioners of evaluations holding ‘evaluators to account in unhelpful ways’ in what King and Podems (2015) call a ‘stranglehold’.

### **Cultural competency**

Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. (AEA 2011) The diversity of cultures within the United States guarantees that virtually all evaluators will work outside familiar cultural contexts at some time in their careers – (AEA 2011).

The statement above rings true when looking at the cultural diversity of communities in South Africa. The importance of cultural competency is reflected by the fact that 6 out of 7 VOPEs include cultural competency in their competency frameworks. The exception is CES (2010). The American Evaluation Association also has gone as far as issuing a cultural competency statement (AEA 2011). Stevahn and King did not have cultural competency as part of their first taxonomy. In their discussion of the adaptive process more than a decade later, they state that considerations would have to be made on how competencies address subject area or cultural context (King and Stevahn 2015). They further state that the next question would be if they should do so. On the other hand, for ANZEA (2011), cultural competency is at the core of the evaluator competency framework. Their position is clearly captured below:

Centralizing cultural competence in evaluation in Aotearoa NZ means (a) knowing ourselves as cultural beings (individually and collectively)—our roots, histories, biases, prejudices, power, and assumptions; (b) personal responsibility and commitment to personal development and education about different cultures; and (c) a willingness and ability to draw on the values of different cultures to appropriately and effectively meet key stakeholder needs (Wehipeihana 2014:57).

What remains then is the decision on how cultural competency is incorporated into the competency framework. For instance, ANZEA interwove it into the whole competency framework so that it would not be treated as a ‘peripheral aspect’ (Wehipeihana 2014:56). In the AEA draft competency list, cultural competency is included in competencies under three domains: context domain, interpersonal domain and professional domain. On the other hand, in the UKES Capabilities Framework (2012), cultural competency is explicitly stated under the domain ‘Professional Practice’ among competencies under ‘Demonstrates Interpersonal Skills’.

## 7.2 Part Two: Lessons that South Africa could adopt

This section of the literature review focuses on lessons that South Africa could learn from other VOPEs who have already established or are in the process of establishing evaluator competencies. These lessons include: a) the process of establishing competencies, b) constructing the competencies and c) implementation of the competency framework.

### **Lesson 1: Clarity on purpose for the establishment of competencies**

This lesson builds onto the preceding discussion on the rationale for establishing evaluator competencies in South Africa. For competencies to be tailored for use, the purpose for their establishment has to be clear (Wehipeihana 2014). Evaluator competencies have been established by different VOPEs to serve various purposes. A look at existing frameworks finds that VOPEs state the purpose(s) of the competency framework. It would appear that there is a link between the purpose of the framework, its structure and what happens after it is established. Four examples will be used here: ANZEA, SEVAL, AES and CES. At the end of the discussion a summary of purposes given by various VOPEs is presented in table 1. The importance of having clarity on the purpose or intended use of the competency framework is captured by Wehipeihana et al (2014:54) in their discussion of the process of establishing the competency framework for ANZEA:

We began by defining what the primary intended use was for the competencies. ANZEA members had sent a clear message that one of the most important potential benefits for them of belonging to a national association was access to good professional development. The next logical question, of course, was “in what?” Thus, an important initial use for the competencies was to help ANZEA gauge what was most needed and desired by ANZEA members, so that the right mix of professional development could be offered. (Wehipeihana et al 2014:54)

On the other hand, the purpose of the SEVAL framework is described as:

To clarify the key competencies needed to quality manage evaluation studies and promote more effective return on evaluation investment (SEVAL 2014: 5)

As a result, the list focuses on managers of evaluations and the knowledge, skills and dispositions they are expected to have to manage evaluations. On the other hand, the CES framework was part of the credentialing programme of the CES. There are some parallels there with UKES and EES who mention that the capabilities frameworks are to support professionalization efforts. The CES framework was also to act as a guide for courses and curriculum development and professional development and self-assessment by evaluators. In addition, the framework could also be used to support the development of employment criteria (CES 2010).

The purpose of the AES framework is stated as:

The purpose of the Evaluators’ Professional Learning Competency Framework (the framework) is to guide and support members and other interested parties to enhance their evaluation knowledge and expertise (Australasia Australasian Evaluators Professional Learning Competency Framework 2013: 3)

It was expected to contribute to the VOPE’s goal of improving the quality of evaluation practice. The VOPE was expected to help their members to plan their learning by a guide developed by the AES. Furthermore, the framework would be the basis for ‘on-going professional learning activities, programmes and conferences’ (AEAS 2103). The current strategy by SAMEA is to strengthen evaluation and evaluators – a build up on the existing efforts (workshops, conferences, seminars, training programmes within and outside of universities). It therefore says that beyond establishing the list, there is need to consider what it will be used for. To inform training programmes and curriculum, it has to be clear, perhaps making it possible for those concerned to distinguish what can or cannot be taught within the discipline. Secondly, as a tool for self –assessment for professional development, there will likely be a need for a guide or a self-assessment rubric to help evaluators to plan their learning.

Table 1 below shows that most VOPEs explicitly state that they established competencies to guide training programmes for evaluators. Four VOPEs state that competencies will assist in enhancing or improving evaluation quality and or capacity. Only CES state credentialing as a purpose while only UKES and EES mention competencies as a way of professionalization efforts.

**Table 1: Purposes for establishing competencies**

<b>Purpose for establishing competencies</b>	<b>ANZEA</b>	<b>CES</b>	<b>DeGEVAL</b>	<b>SEVAL</b>	<b>UKES</b>	<b>EES</b>
Purpose credentialing	0	1	0	0	0	0
Purpose employment criteria	1	1	0	1	0	0
Purpose enhancing evaluation quality	1	0	0	1	1	1
Purpose ethical practice	1	0	0	0	0	0
Purpose guide contracting	0	1	1	0	0	0
Purpose professional accountability	0	0	0	0	1	1
Purpose professional development	3	0	0	0	0	0
Purpose professionalization	0	0	0	0	1	1
Purpose pub education	1	0	0	0	0	0
Purpose salary scales	0	0	0	1	0	0
Purpose self assessment	1	1	0	1	0	0
Purpose training programmes	1	1	1	1	0	0
Total Quotations	8	5	2	5	3	3

## **Lesson 2: Competencies for whom?**

Competency frameworks indicate their target group. For instance, SEVAL is clear that the competencies in the framework of 2014 are meant for managers of evaluations. Even the title immediately shows whom the competencies are meant for.

Evaluation Managers Competencies Framework: Tasks, Challenges and Competencies (SEVAL 2014)

The IDEAS framework states that the competencies are for commissioners of evaluations, managers of evaluations and evaluators. The DPME competency framework is clear on their target being the 'programme manager', the 'M&E advisor' and the 'Evaluator' conducting evaluation related work in government:

This draft Evaluation Competency Framework (ECF) describes the competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) for the managers and users of evaluations conducted through the national evaluation system, through setting benchmarks of quality evaluation practice (DMPE 2012: 1)

On the other hand, ANZEA states the competencies are for use by evaluators, commissioners of evaluations, those offering training programmes and employers. However, there are competencies for evaluators with different levels of experience and expertise:

The evaluator competencies apply to, and are intended to be inclusive of the range of skills and knowledge evaluators bring, i.e. evaluators that come from practitioner-based backgrounds (e.g. teachers, iwi, social, community development and health workers), those with 'life' knowledge and experience (family members, people working to make positive changes) and those with academic knowledge and experience (e.g. research trained), or with a mix of all or some of these. (ANZEA 2011:6).

## **Lesson 3: Relevance to local context - various pathways of entry into profession**

As noted by Engle and Altschuld (2014:13) 'no two pathways to the evaluation profession are the same. It is important to consider that evaluators practicing in different sectors in South Africa have entered the profession through different pathways and this is a lesson that can be learnt from ANZEA. Three pathways were considered (Wehipeihana et al 2014) as follows:

1. Practitioner based backgrounds e.g. educators and health practitioners
2. Those with 'life' knowledge and experience e.g. people working in their communities to improve their families' and communities' lives
3. Academic knowledge and experience e.g. in people with research, evaluation, specific content areas knowledge and expertise.

Perhaps such considerations should not only be in the drafting of the competencies and contents of the competencies. They should also be made during consultation and feedback processes.

#### **Lesson 4: Decide on outcome / input based approach**

A decision has to be made on whether to use the 'input based' or 'outcome based' approach. These could also be used together (EvalPartners 2011). The outcome based approach presents competencies in terms of demonstrable quality of the evaluator's work. Here the focus is on results. Japan used this approach with their credentialing project and CES use the approach for the professional designation programme. For the latter, evaluators had to demonstrate competencies in 5 areas (EvalPartners 2011).

The input based approach having a learning orientation focuses on professional development and capabilities. EES and UKES have used this approach with focus on knowledge, practice and dispositions. They are used to implement the Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review pilot project (EES 2012). There are similarities between the two approaches; a) they look at capabilities in terms of disciplinary content and delivery, b) social interaction / management skills, d) theory and practice, knowledge, e) experience, e) attitudes and f) they ensure that evaluators keep developing their skills from entry level requirements to specialized skills (EvalPartners 2011).

#### **Lesson 5: Relevance to local context – consider peculiarities of South African context**

The competency framework has to consider the South African context. A lesson can be learnt from ANZEA. They took into account the pathways discussed above and the reality that there were limited opportunities for professional development and tertiary training for instance for evaluators in New Zealand (ANZEA 2011). In addition, they considered the cultural diversity of evaluators and users of evaluations reflected in the 'centrality and integration of culture and cultural values and the treaty of Waitangi' (Wehipeihana et al 2014).

Unlike other VOPEs that have established competency frameworks, SAMEA is in a peculiar position that can be deduced from its name. It is the only VOPE that has 'Monitoring' in its name. The dialogue around 'monitoring' and whether one needs a separate set of competencies to perform monitoring duties will have to be revisited. In addition to this, the competency list for South Africa could also consider those national and community ethos such as 'Ubuntu' and Batho Pele'. It would be prudent to look at the profile of South African evaluators and apply some of the questions that ANZEA had to ask. These include but are not limited to:

1. What are the existing opportunities for tertiary training / qualification?

2. What are the current opportunities for professional development?
3. To what extent does the country offer opportunities to practice?
4. How big is our evaluation community compared to others?

### **Lesson 6: Take into account different levels of expertise**

There is a need to consider slotting the competencies into different competency levels from entry level to expert levels. The majority of existing competency frameworks (e.g. UKES, EES, SEVAL and AES) do not differentiate between required levels of expertise or mastery for evaluators at different levels of their career. Two exceptions are the UNEG Evaluation Competencies for the UN System for Evaluators, Managers and Commissioners of Evaluation (2016) and to some extent the DPME competency framework. UNEG distinguishes between, a) senior officer, b) intermediate officer, c) officer and junior officer (UNEG 2016). The DPME framework distinguishes between what is expected of a) the programme manager, b) the M&E advisor and c) the evaluator (DPME 2012). However it has to be remembered in the case of the DPME framework that there could be different levels of expertise among the evaluators (internal and external).

While existing frameworks do not currently have this differentiation, IDEAS (2011) acknowledges the importance of the differentiation:

The set of IDEAS competencies for evaluators and managers of evaluation have not been slotted into different competence levels. It is also possible that each competency could be written so as to have variations for entry, intermediate, and advanced levels. As part of next steps, this issue will be revisited. (IDEAS 2011:9)

### **Lesson 6: Make it clear that an individual evaluator is not expected to have all competencies**

It has to be made clear to evaluators and others who will use the draft competency list that an evaluator is not expected to have all the competencies listed. AES encourages the competencies in their framework be viewed as a 'menu rather than a checklist' (AES 2013:8) because evaluators have different strengths, knowledge, skills and experience'. The competencies are therefore an instrument for 'understanding and managing strengths and gaps in a constructive way' (AES 2013:8).

Two VOPES – ANZEA and UKES echo what is said above by stating the following in their competency frameworks:

It is NOT expected that an individual evaluator or an evaluation team would possess ALL of the proposed competencies. Rather, evaluators will develop and build on their areas of strength, and



address any gaps through professional development and/or collaborating with others. (ANZEA 2011: 6)

It also takes into account the fact that the responsibility for ensuring quality evaluation does not rest solely with an individual evaluator. Teams are often involved in the conduct of evaluation in which evaluators have different strengths and different levels of experience (UKES 2012:3)

### **Lesson 7: The competency framework must be clear and easy to use**

The competency framework must be clear, easy to understand and easy to use. The AES makes this point:

A competency framework is of little value unless it is understood and used (AES 2013: 4)

This has implications on how the competencies are phrased, the descriptors, the descriptions of the domains and how the framework is presented. Firstly, language used should be clear and simple to understand. Secondly, descriptors for the competencies should be specific and a deliberate effort must be made to use a single descriptor for each competency unless concepts cannot be separated (Stevahn et al 2005).

Thirdly, there is a need to unpack the competencies. This process is necessary to develop a common understanding of terms used and maintain consistency in the meanings (Stevahn et al 2015). As such, a lesson could be learnt from the approach taken by CES where they have elaborations that describe what each competency includes and what it means (CES 2010). The snapshot in figure 1 below shows an example of the competency domain and its description and the competencies and their elaborations (CES 2010: 5). The fourth consideration is how the competencies are presented. It is suggested that the chosen layout may influence how the competency list is seen as useful. On this point, Galport and Azzam (2016) found that participants in their study thought that a graphic or flow chart presentation explaining necessary competencies at various points in the evaluation would be useful.

<b>1.0 Reflective Practice:</b> Competencies focus on the fundamental norms and values underlying evaluation practice and awareness of one's evaluation expertise and needs for growth.	
1.1 Applies professional evaluation standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Apply the Canadian/US Joint Committee Program Evaluation Standards <a href="http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/">http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/</a></li> <li>2) Apply the five dimensions of the Standards; feasibility, propriety, utility, accuracy and meta evaluation</li> <li>3) Recognize the Standards are illustrative and to be used with discernment as required in diverse contexts and propriety obligations.</li> </ol>
1.2 Acts ethically and strives for integrity and honesty	Understand and adhere to Canadian Evaluation Society <u>Guidelines for Ethical Conduct</u> <a href="http://www.evaluationcanada.ca/site.cgi?s=5&amp;ss=4&amp; lang=EN">http://www.evaluationcanada.ca/site.cgi?s=5&amp;ss=4&amp; lang=EN</a>

Figure 1: Elaborations in CES competency framework.

### Lesson 8: Consider the implementation of competency framework

An implementation plan has to be put in place. For instance, AES had already decided that they would have a guide to help the evaluators to plan for their learning (AES 2013). ANZEA had workshops with multiple purposes. These included showing evaluators how they could use the competencies for self-assessment and also to get feedback on the rubrics for them to ‘fine tune’ them (ANZEA 2011). Based on DPME competency framework, 2 courses were developed, one of which –Managing evaluations - was tested with government departments (Podems, Goldman and Jacobs 2014). However it is not clear from literature whether they were at that stage used for self-assessment or as a tool for summative assessment after the training.

Stevahn et al (2015) encourage the development of rubrics for self-assessment. Figure 2 below is a snapshot of a rubric developed by ANZEA adapted from Wehipeihana et al (2014:64).

<sup>1</sup> Snapshot from CES Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice 2012 p5

Evaluator Competency Self-Assessment Rubric	
Level of knowledge and experience	
1 Very good / Tino pai	1. Highly experienced with very good knowledge/skills in relation to all the main dimensions of the competency. 2. Few gaps or weaknesses and these (a) have no significant impacts and/or (b) are managed effectively. <i>"I manage pretty well in most/all situations."</i>
2 Pretty good / Ka pai	3. Generally strong experience and level of knowledge/skills in relation to the main dimensions of the competency. 4. A few gaps or weaknesses but these (a) have generally minor impacts and/or (b) are mostly managed effectively. <i>"I'm generally OK but have some moments."</i>
3 Needs work / Whakarāra	5. Has relevant experience and level of knowledge/skills in relation to several of the main dimensions of the competency. 6. There are gaps or weaknesses and these (a) have variable impacts and (b) may or may not be managed effectively. <i>"I survive but definitely need to be better."</i>

2

Figure 2: Example of rubric developed for ANZEA

Another example of a rubric that could also be adapted is the 3-point rating scale advanced by the competency assessment document from the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation (IDPE) at Western Michigan University. This assessment was used to determine students' readiness to advance into PhD candidacy. Students were assessed on research methodology and design, content knowledge and other competencies e.g. interpersonal skills. They needed a rating of 3 on research methodology and competencies and specialized knowledge of one or more evaluands. Zero meant that the student was not yet familiar with concept or skill. One meant that the student had not yet developed a firm understanding but they could recognize and recall the key principles. Three meant that the student could demonstrate their understanding of the concept by their ability to explain the concept clearly. Four meant that the student could demonstrate application in practice and or was able to fairly critique its application (Bailey 2009).

**Lesson 9: Remember this a process that takes time**

Establishing evaluator competencies is a process that may take a long time (Stevahn et al 2005). It took ANZEA 3 years from the time they started with a Technical Working Group in 2009 to the time the competencies were release in September 2011 (ANZEA 2011). A look at the CES process finds that it took CES close to a decade from the first consultations by Zorzi, Mguire and Perin in 2002 to

<sup>2</sup> Snapshot from Wehipeihana et al (2014:64)

the time the competencies for evaluation practice in Canada could be released. In Europe, It took UKES 3 years to gain consensus on the Capabilities framework and there were 4 revisions of the framework (UKES 2012). The process of establishing competencies in South Africa (potentially a long-term endeavour) will there therefore present some challenges. It will be worthwhile to heed advice:

The development of evaluator competencies is challenging. The US, Canadian, European and Australasian evaluation associations have had a go, with the Canadian Evaluation Society being the only association currently to have a set of agreed competencies (ANZEA 2011:5)

### **Lesson 10: Extensive consultation with evaluators and stakeholders**

We believe that the ultimate aim of any useful comprehensive taxonomy of programme evaluator competencies should be its broad validation and widespread endorsement by professionals in the field (Stevahn et al 2005: 55)

Regardless of how the process began, VOPEs consulted (e.g. AES, ANZEA, UKES) or are currently consulting evaluators (e.g. AEA) on the competencies. ANZEA for instance consulted their members and non-members practicing in New Zealand. They even sought feedback from evaluators practicing in Australia at the 2010 conference (ANZEA 2011). CES did not only rely on expert consultations. They also got feedback from CES members. EES on the other hand sought to have a process that encourages ‘principled deliberations’ coupled with a realistic design and review of the framework (Bailey 2009). Consultation in South Africa would have to consider the following:

1. Evaluators and stakeholders in various sectors
2. Evaluators and stakeholders in various geographical locations
3. Evaluators at different levels of expertise and experience
4. Practitioners who conduct evaluation related but identify evaluation as a secondary professional identity after another discipline

### **Lesson 11: Competency frameworks cannot be cast in stone**

One important thing to remember after the establishment of the competency framework is that the competencies cannot be a fixed and static list that does not respond to the changes in the context. As such, EES has opted for a validation process that allows for a realistic design as well as regular updating of the their capabilities framework (Bailey 2009). This means therefore that validation or consultation is continuous even after establishing the competencies. ANZEA committed to review their competencies every two years (ANZEA 2011).

## Lesson 12: Central role of SAMEA

Only VOPEs have the legitimacy to promote evaluation professionalism within their distinctive contexts as well as facilitating evaluation practice across borders. (EvalPartners 2015)

The statement above puts SAMEA right at the centre of the establishment of evaluator competencies and supporting the implementation of the competency framework to promote professionalism with a focus on strengthening evaluators and evaluation. This is aligned to SAMEA's mission:

SAMEA strives to cultivate a vibrant community that will support, guide and strengthen the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as an important discipline, profession and instrument for empowerment and accountability in South Africa. (SAMEA <http://www.samea.org.za/samea-2.phtml> )

Respondents in the survey with CREST alumni and students also recognized the role that could be played by SAMEA as the professional body. One respondent suggested:

Professional bodies in South Africa and Africa should play a major role to protect the Monitoring and Evaluation professionals, even recruiting companies they do not have full knowledge of the profession which results in professionals in M & E faced with practicing challenges such as lack of recognition of the profession because everyone claim to be M & E expert. (Respondent's comment)

To establish evaluator competencies, SAMEA could create committee or working group that could drive the process. In 2009 ANZEA established a Technical Working Group comprising 6 people to drive the process of establishing competencies (ANZEA 2011). A Professional Learning Committee drove the process of establishing competencies for AES (AES 2013). The resource implications of this process cannot be wished away even with the dampening reality observed by Abrahams (2007) that SAMEA 'often lacks funds, time and facilities' to turn ideas into practice (in Basson ud: 2).

### 8. Compiling the draft list of evaluator competencies for this study

To compile the draft competency list, the researcher followed a six-steps process. At the end of this process, a draft list of 44 competencies was produced. The 44 competencies fall within these 5 competency domains:

1. Conducting an evaluation study
2. Understanding the evaluation context
3. Managing client and stakeholder relationships
4. Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies
5. Managing an evaluation study

**Step 1:** a crosswalk of existing evaluator competency frameworks from VOPEs around the world as well as the DPME Evaluation Competency Framework. The output was the first list comprising 98 competencies.

**Step 2:** revisited the 98 competencies to eliminate repetitions, reduce ambiguities and make the competencies on the list as simple as possible to understand. The output of this step was a draft list of 60 evaluator competencies

**Step 3:** piloted the 60 competencies in a draft questionnaire<sup>3</sup>. From the pre-test it was clear that: a) the list was too long for the questionnaire b) the rating scale presented some conceptual issues for respondents, and c) some of the competencies still had some constructs that made rating difficult.

**Step 4:** after consultations with senior researchers and evaluators at the researcher consulted senior evaluators and researchers within CREST, the researcher revisited the competency list based on a framework that considers the context of conducting an evaluation study in South Africa. Borrowing from the discussions on evaluation context by Rog (2012) the framework in figure 3 below was developed.

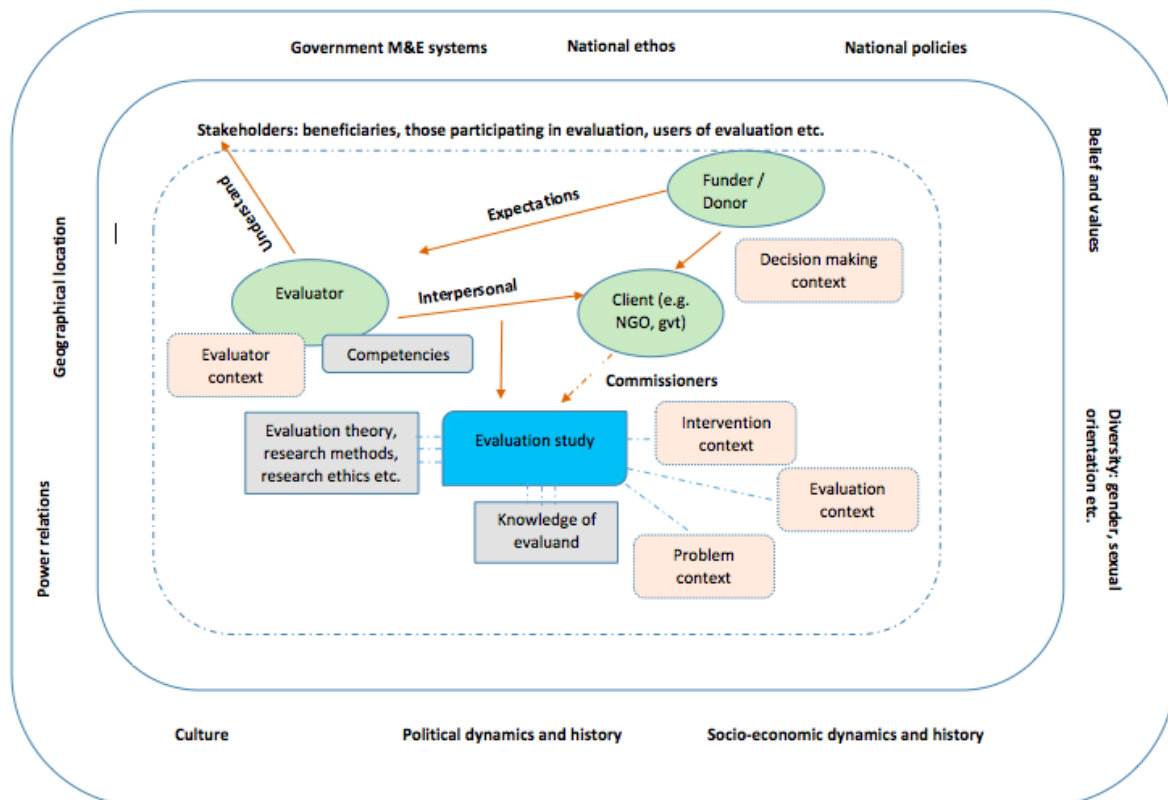


Figure 3: Evaluation context framework

<sup>3</sup> This questionnaire was constructed with reference to a questionnaire that had been used as a tool to validate the Essential Competencies for Evaluation Practice in the USA by Wilcocks (2012)

The evaluator has a context (skills, attitudes, experiences, knowledge, perspectives) that interacts with the evaluand (Rog 2012). The evaluand is steeped in a context – organisational, evaluation, community and national. An evaluator conducting an evaluation study is highly likely to interact with the client and possibly the donor and other stakeholders. This interaction will occur at various stages and this together with the demands of conducting and managing that study will require certain competencies of the evaluator which will also include those competencies that distinguish evaluation from other professions. There are also elements within the context from organisational to national level that are peculiar to South Africa e.g. the concept and practice of Ubuntu as well as Batho Pele principles.

**Step 5:** based on the framework above, the researcher adopted step-wise ranking with 3 levels. At level 1, respondents were asked to rank the competency domains and discuss the descriptive given for each domain. Level 2 involved the respondents ranking and rating competencies within the competency domains. Level 3 (which is not part of this study) would involve further expansion on the competencies on key things like further elaborations on the competencies, possible levels e.g. requirements for those at different expertise levels.

**Step 6:** the competencies were grouped within their domains so that respondents would be able to rank them according to their perceived importance.

## 9. Findings - Survey Results

This section of the report will discuss the findings from the survey that was conducted among CREST alumni and students. The section will start by looking at the characteristics of the sample then move to discuss the findings.

### 9.1 A profile of respondents

A look at the sample reveals the following:

- There were slightly more males (18) than females (16) who participated in the study and 8 respondents did not indicate their gender
- The majority of respondents (20) identify themselves as 'evaluators' and fewer as managers or commissioners of evaluations
- The majority of respondents describe themselves as 'skilled' compared to those who identify themselves as novices or experts
- Most of the respondents are employed by or contracted to do evaluation related work by government - local, provincial and national (n=16) and local CBOs and NGOs (n=16) followed by international NGOs (n=13).

- Most respondents frequently conduct evaluation related work in the public health sector (n=10) followed by the economic development sector (n=7).
- In terms of academic qualifications, most of the respondents have a Master's degree (n=23).
- Most respondents have 5 years or below of experience in evaluation related work

## 9.2 Respondents' ranking of the five competency domains

Respondents ranked the 5 competency domains from 1 to 5 where, 1 is 'Very important' and 5 'Least important'. The lower the mean score is then the higher the perceived importance. The top three domains in terms of importance are: 1) 'Conducting an evaluation study', 2) 'Understanding the evaluation context' and 3) 'Managing client and stakeholder relationships'. The mean rankings in figure 4 below show that while the domain 'Conducting an evaluation study' is regarded as the most important domain, it is closely followed by the domain 'Understanding an evaluation context' with a very slight difference.

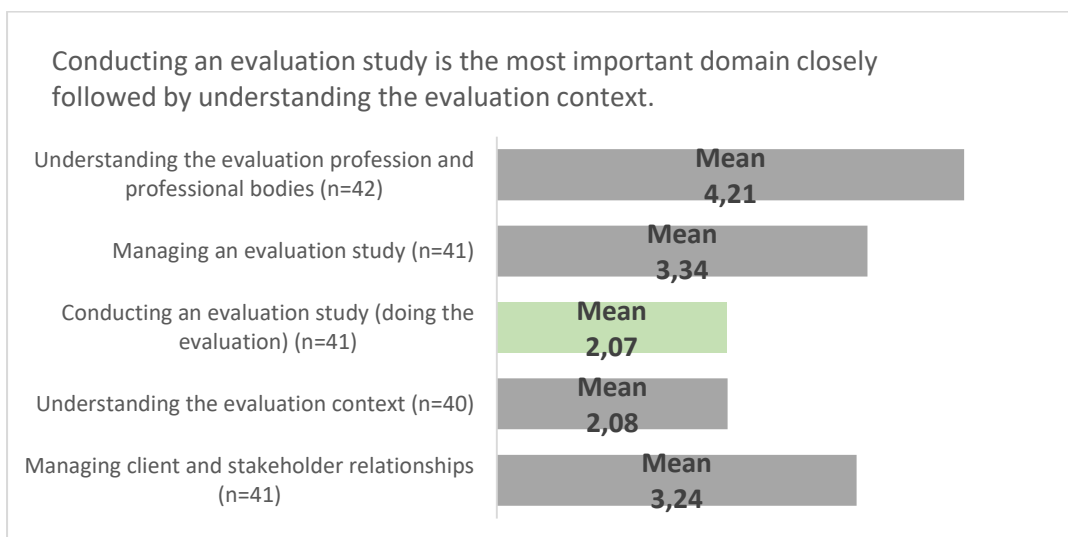


Figure 4: Ranking of the five domains

## 9.3 Ranking of competencies within domains

Each of these domains comprises 4 competencies – with 'Understanding evaluation context' divided into competencies for 'national' and 'organisation' contexts. Respondents were asked to rank competencies in order of importance: 1 is for most important, 2 for second most important, 3 for third most important and 4 for least important. Again, the lower the mean score means the higher the perceived importance.

### 9.3.1 Ranking of competencies in the domain 'Understanding the evaluation context: national'



Figure 5 below shows that ‘Understanding national M&E policies and frameworks (e.g. GWME framework)’ is seen as the most important competence in this domain followed by a having a good understanding of the relevant sector policies and strategies. An understanding of the procurement and contracting processes for evaluation studies is seen as the least important among the four competencies.

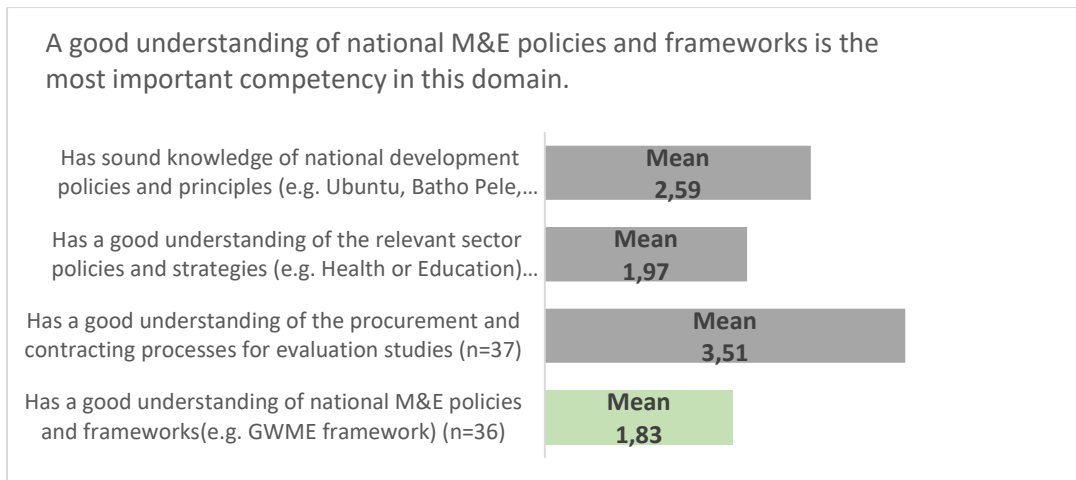


Figure 5: Ranking of all competencies in 'Understanding evaluation context: national' domain

### 9.3.2 Ranking of competencies in 'Understanding of evaluation context: organisation' domain

While a good understanding of the M&E system within an organisation is seen as the most important competence in this domain, respondents see a good understanding of various organisations work as the least important competence.

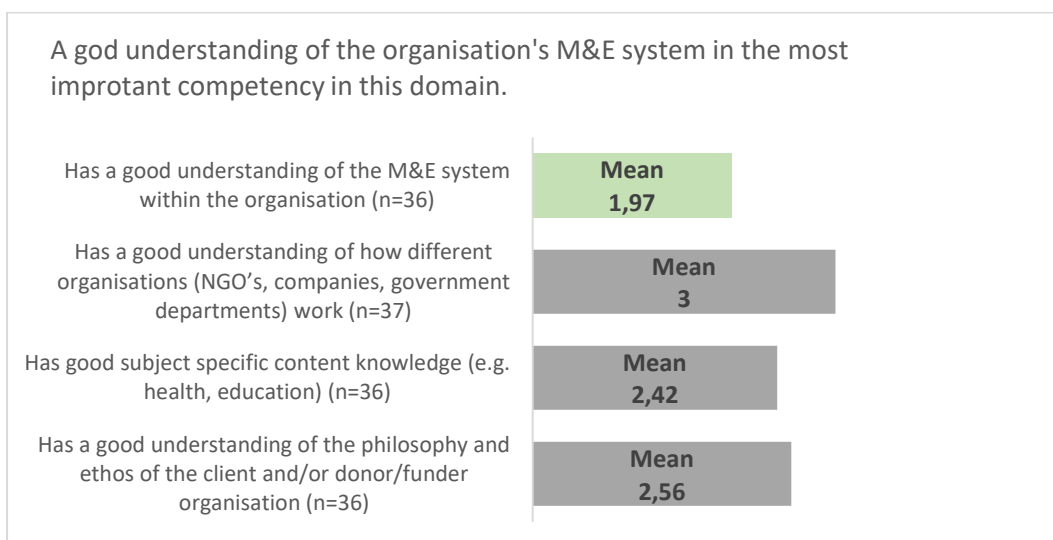


Figure 6: Ranking of all competencies in 'Understanding of evaluation context: organisation' domain

### 9.3.4 Ranking of competencies within the domain ‘Understanding evaluation profession and professional bodies’

Sound knowledge of and application of standards, ethical codes and guiding principles is the most important competence in this domain as shown by figure 7 below. The competence building the capacity of others as appropriate and the competence ‘Contributes towards the strengthening of the evaluation field through knowledge sharing’ are second and third respectively and there is a slight difference between the two in terms of mean ranking score.

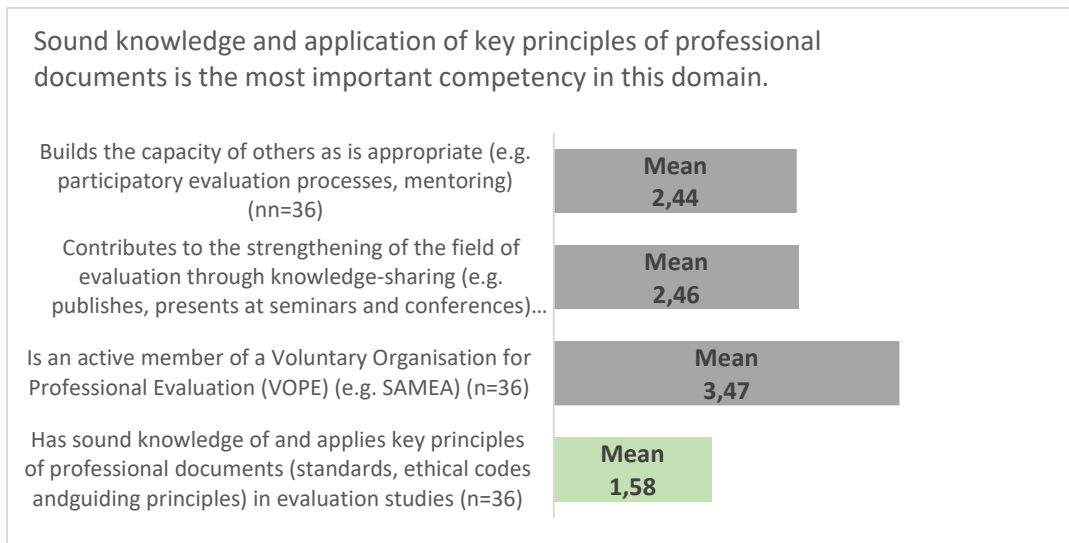


Figure 7: Ranking of all competencies within 'Understanding evaluation profession and professional bodies' domain.

### 9.3.5 Ranking of competencies within the domain ‘Managing client and stakeholder relationships’

The competence, ‘Communicates effectively with stakeholders (e.g. communication protocols, presentations)’ is the most important in this domain. As shown by figure 8 below, this competence is followed by the competence ‘Is able to recognise key contextual issues and take these into account (e.g. gender, sexual orientation and beliefs).

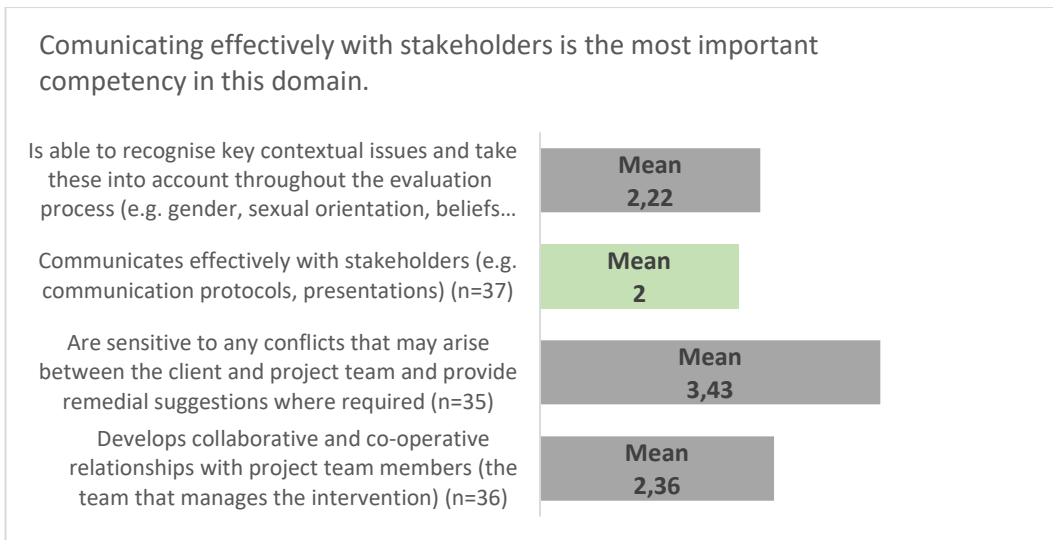


Figure 8: Ranking of all competencies within 'Managing client and stakeholder relationships' domain.

#### 10. Rating competencies within the 'Conducting an evaluation study' domain

Respondents were asked to: a) rate the competencies as 'Not relevant', 'Important' and 'Essential' and b) indicate whether or not they need training in each of the 22 competencies. For the purpose of presenting findings in this section, the 22 competencies have been grouped into 3. As shown by figures 9, 10 and 11, all the competencies in this domain are 'essential' or 'important'. The majority are 'essential' (n=18 regarded as essential by most respondents). The 4 competencies regarded by most respondents as 'important' are equally split between competencies that can be acquired through training (quantitative and qualitative data analysis software) and those that are likely to be acquired through experience. The former are around quantitative and qualitative data analysis software and the former are around sensitivity to evaluation use and on-going reflection. It is interesting that while competency in quantitative and qualitative data analysis software is seen largely as 'important'; proficiency in quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques is largely seen as 'essential'.

Except for sensitivity to evaluation use, more respondents view the competencies as essential compared those those who view the same competencies as important.

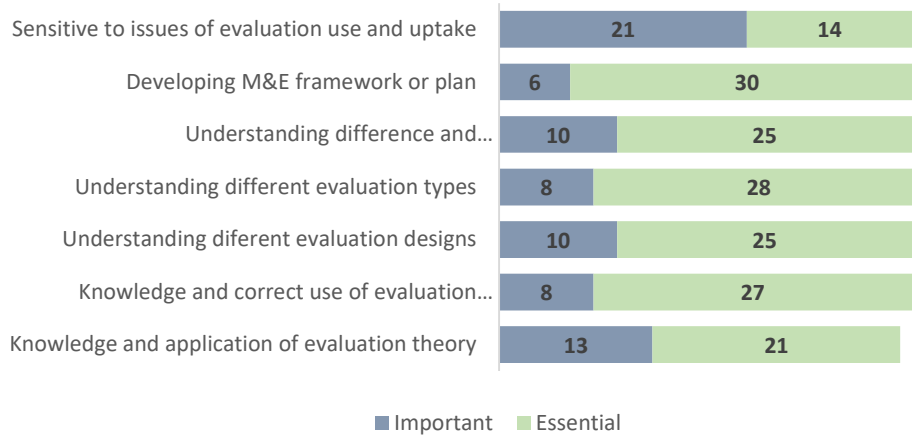


Figure 9: Ratings of competencies in Conducting evaluation study' domain

The majority of respondents regard the competencies as essential compared to those that regard them as important.

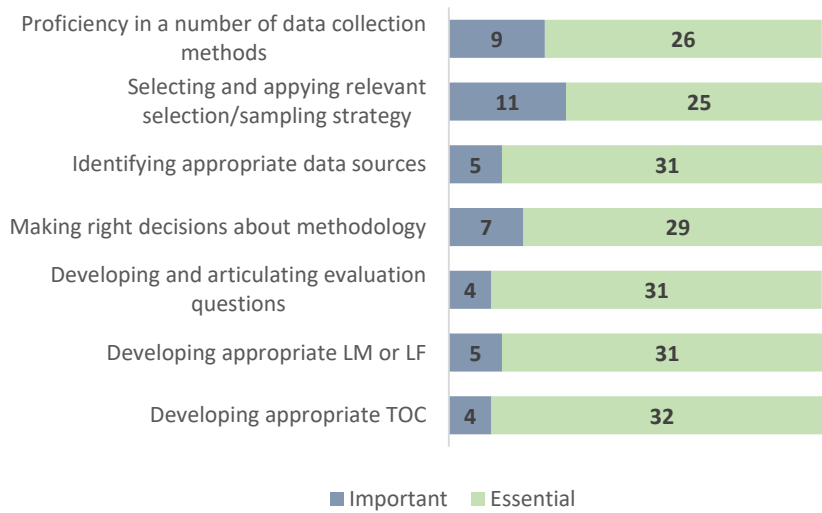
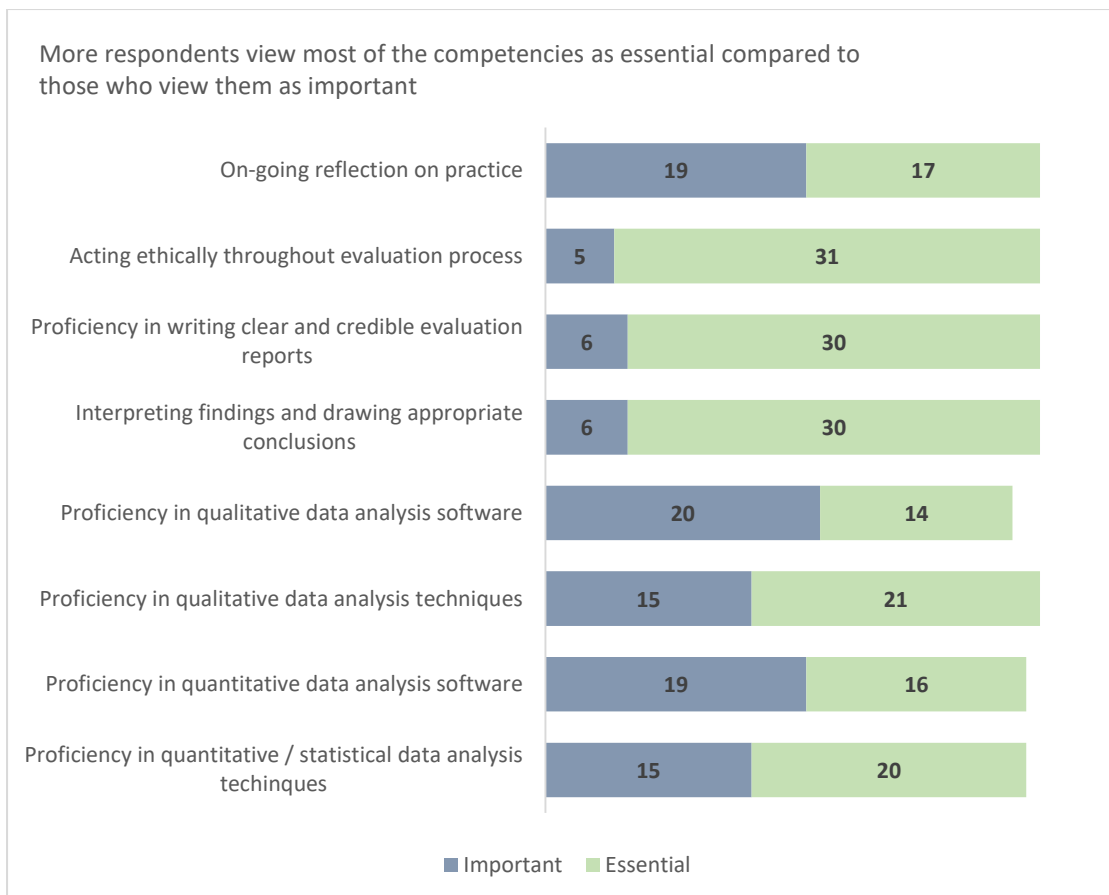


Figure 10: Ratings of competencies in Conducting evaluation study' domain



**Figure 11: Ratings of competencies in 'Conducting evaluation study' domain**

A pattern is seen across the three figures above. Where a competency is seen as 'essential' by most respondents, there is a big difference in number between those that give a rating of 'essential' and those that give a rating of 'important'. Where a competency is seen as 'important' by most respondents, then there is a smaller difference in number between those that give a rating of 'important' and those that give a rating of 'essential'. For example, 31 respondents regard the competency 'Is able to develop and articulate evaluation questions' as 'essential' compared to 4 respondents who regard the same competency as 'important'. Meanwhile, 19 respondents regard 'proficiency in quantitative data analysis software' as important and 16 respondents regard the same competency as 'important'.

### 10.1 Training needed for competencies in the domain 'Conducting an evaluation study'

Respondents indicated whether or not they needed training in the competencies within this domain. Figure 12 below presents 10 of the 22 competencies that had the highest number of respondents indicating that they need training in those specific competencies. As shown by figure 14, the competencies in which most evaluators require training are competencies that can be acquired through training (formal e.g. contact sessions with a service provider, on the job etc.). Even though

experience could also help, for instance with competencies around developing an appropriate Theory of Change – all the competencies in this domain require some form of technical training.

The highest need for training is in qualitative and quantitative data analysis software. This is interesting given that the majority of respondents see these competencies as ‘important’ and not ‘essential’. Naturally, there is also a high need for training in qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. It can be seen below that the training needs apply to competencies that evaluators need at various stages of conducting an evaluation study i.e. from developing evaluation questions to writing the evaluation report.

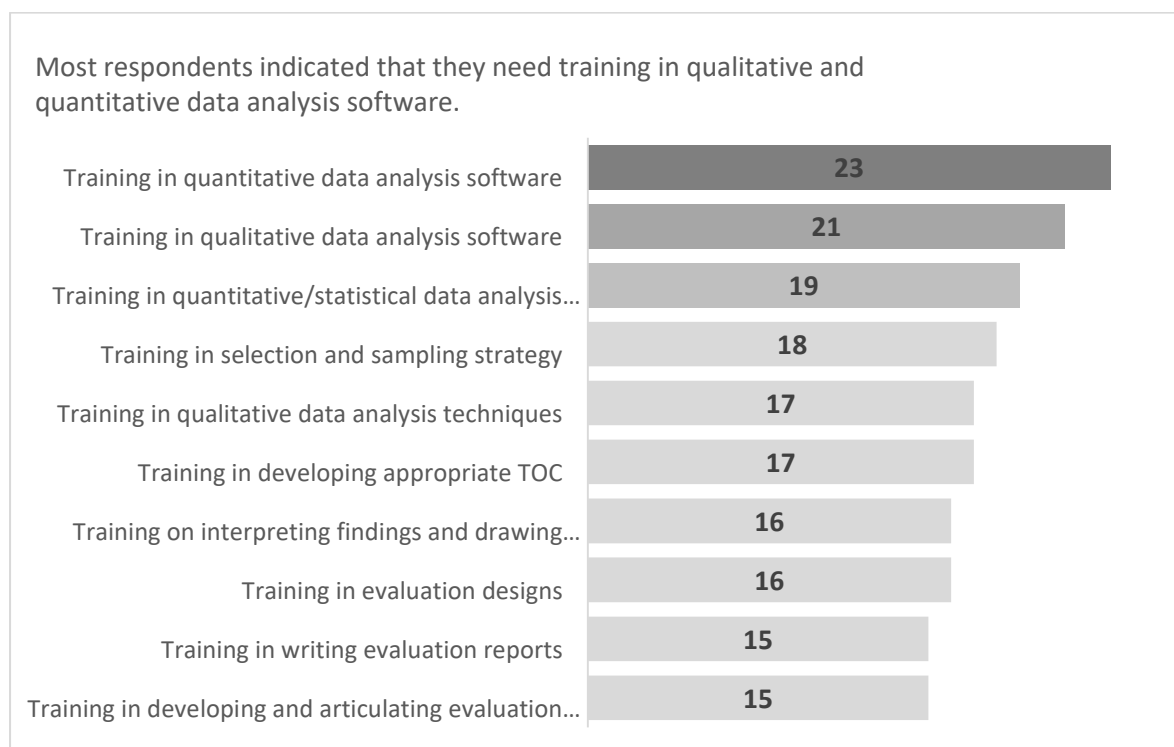


Figure 12: Training needs for competencies under 'Conducting an evaluation study' domain.

### 10.2 Training needs by years of experience

Figure 13 below shows that there is not a notable difference in training needs based on years of experience. More than half of the respondents across the 3 categories of years of experience need training in quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques and software. This indicates that the gap in these competencies does not only apply to emerging evaluators.

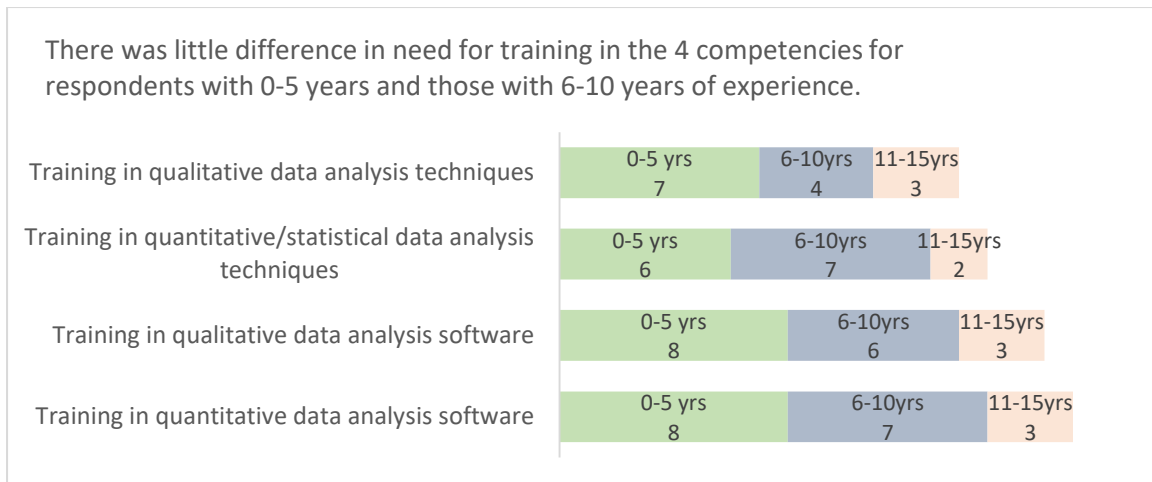


Figure 13: Training needs by years of experience

### 10.3 Relationship between essential / importance and training needs

It was interesting to note that proficiency in qualitative and quantitative data analysis software are seen as important by most more respondents compared to those that see the competencies as 'essential'. Yet, the majority of respondents indicated that they need training in these two competencies.

### 11. Rating of competencies in the domain 'Managing evaluations'

As reflected by figure 14 below, the majority of respondents see all the competencies in this domain as 'essential' except for one. The competency 'Is able to develop an appropriate evaluation budget' is the exception. Most respondents view it as 'important' rather than 'essential'. Similarly, where a competency is seen as 'essential' by most respondents, there is a big difference in number between those that give a rating of 'essential' and those that give a rating of 'important'. Where a competency is seen as 'important' by most respondents, then there is a smaller difference in number between those that give a rating of 'important' and those that give a rating of 'essential'.

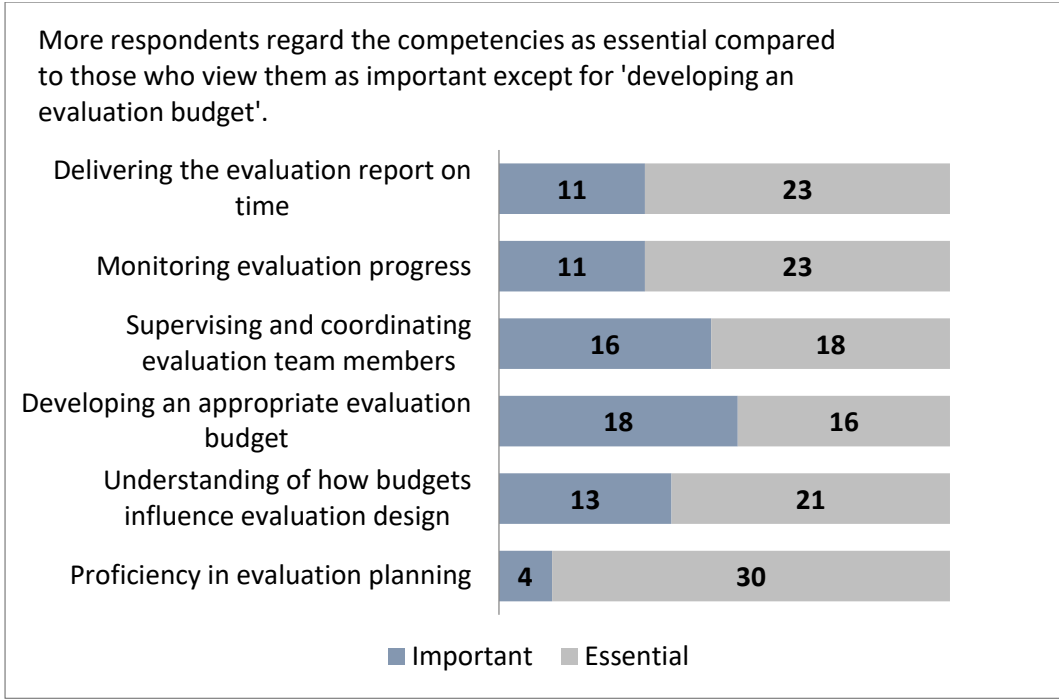


Figure 14: Ratings of competencies within 'Managing evaluation study' domain

11.1 Training needed in competencies 'Managing an evaluation study'

Figure 15 below reflects that there is a high need for training in budgeting. Most evaluators need training in the development of an appropriate evaluation budget (n=23) as well as training on understanding how the budget influences 'evaluation design' (n=19). These two competencies are not too far removed from evaluation planning and the third highest number of respondents indicated that they need training in that competence.

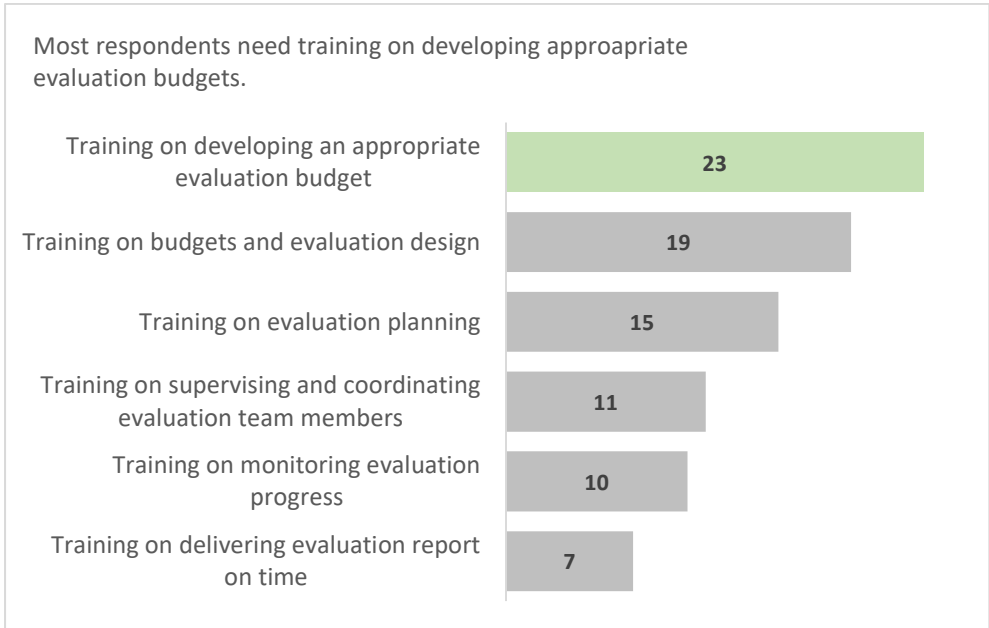


Figure 15: Training needs on competencies within 'Managing an evaluation study' domain



## 12. Discussion

Findings suggest that the three most important domains are: 1) 'Conducting an evaluation study', 2) 'Understanding the evaluation context' and 3) 'Managing client and stakeholder relationships'. These domains have competencies that apply to technical research skills and knowledge needed to conduct an evaluation study, competencies related to understanding the organisational and national contexts as well as competencies around communicating with and building a relationship with stakeholders.

The findings also suggest that the domain 'conducting an evaluation' is the most important domain out of the five. However it has to be noted that 'understanding the evaluation context' closely follows it. It should not be surprising that 18 out of the 22 competencies in that domain are viewed as 'essential' more than they are viewed as 'important'. As indicated in the findings section, where a competency is seen as 'essential' by most respondents, there is a big difference in number between those that give a rating of 'essential' and those that give a rating of 'important'. The reverse is true where a competence is seen as 'important' more than it is seen as 'essential'. Competencies in this domain cover the technical research expertise (e.g. evaluation design, methodology and data collection and analysis), understanding and application of evaluation theory as well as reflective practice. A study conducted by Galport and Azzam (2016) in the United States found that 'Professional Practice' and 'Systematic Inquiry' domains are seen as the most important domains. Conducting an evaluation study and 'systematic enquiry' have similarities – both look at knowledge base of evaluation as well as the research skills necessary for conducting an evaluation study. Strong research skills 'in some type of research' was noted as an important skills set by respondents in another study conducted by Podems (2015) in South Africa.

**What implications does this have for South Africa's strategy for strengthening evaluation and evaluators?** The fact that the majority of respondents need training in competencies (especially in qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques and software) in this domain is eye opening. It has to be remembered that the respondents are CREST alumni and post-graduate students who are conducting evaluation related work. They have had some training in qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Concerns with quality of evaluations that have been raised in the country could be linked to a limited availability of evaluators with the capacity to 'conduct an evaluation study' utilising the competencies in this domain. As research has shown that poor quality evaluations resulted from lack of knowledge of evaluation methodology and research methodologies (Podems 2015).

Furthermore, other competencies they need training apply to evaluation roles and activities throughout the lifespan of an evaluation such as articulating evaluation questions, evaluation design, quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques and writing evaluation reports.

The questions that need to be asked therefore are: a) are the competencies teachable, b) can they be acquired (as observed by King and Stevahn 2015), c) what are the capacity building models South Africa should be exploring', d) how do capacity building efforts reach individuals who do not identify as evaluators but practice evaluations?

One will see that the competencies that the majority of respondents need training in are such competencies that can be acquired through training and built upon through on-going professional development. The findings have shown that there was no difference in training needs between respondents in 3 categories of work experience. This may be pointing towards the need for innovative training programmes that are accessible on and off the evaluators' jobs to evaluators with different levels of experience and expertise. It could partially answer the question posed by King and Stevahn (2015) and note that 'yes', some could be taught and some are acquired. For this to happen, there is a need for innovative training programmes and professional development efforts that will require not only the individual's efforts but also SAMEA and other stakeholders such as private service providers and academic institutions to play their part.

The domain 'Managing an evaluation study' is seen as the fourth most important domain but it will be discussed here as it is the only other domain for which respondents indicated whether they need training. This domain contains competencies that are not evaluation-specific (core to evaluation) such as budgeting and supervision and coordination. Except for one - all 6 competencies are seen as 'essential' instead of 'important'. There is a need for training in competencies around budgeting and evaluation planning and coordinating and supervising evaluation teams. In terms of strengthening evaluators and evaluation, training programmes and professional development have to pay attention to competencies that may not be evaluation specific but are key to the evaluation process.

Respondents did not indicate whether or not they need training for competencies within these three domains: a) 'Understanding evaluation context', b) Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies and c) Managing relationship with client and stakeholders. The competencies that are regarded as the most important within these domains are all competencies that can be acquired through some form of training then refined over time through experience. For instance for the domain "Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies' the competence that is seen as the most important is 'Has sound knowledge of and applies key principles of professional documents (standards, ethical codes and guiding principles) in evaluation studies'.

It has to be acknowledged that for some of the competencies, training programmes could perhaps provide the basics. A good example is 'understanding the M&E' system of an organisation'. A training programme would probably teach what an M&E system looks like or how it should be established. At the same time, some of these competencies are steeped within a context that also changes for instance the government wide policies on M&E. As such professional development and training programmes and organisations would have to see how their capacity building strategies respond to the changes in the policy context. It also points to an need for mentoring as some skills can be developed over time, learning from a more experienced evaluator, for instance sensitivity to conflicts and resolving such conflicts.

It appears that the competencies that are seen as least important across the 3 domains are those competencies whose absence may not exactly stop an evaluation that is in process – even though they may delay the process. For instance, 'Is an active member of a VOPE', 'Contributes to strengthening the evaluation field', 'Builds the capacity of others as is appropriate' and 'Understanding procurement and contracting processes for evaluation studies'. Interestingly in the USA, a similar pattern was found where the competencies, 'Responds to requests for proposals', 'Contributes to the knowledge base of evaluation' and 'Trains others involved in conducting evaluation' were ranked as least important by the majority of respondents (Galport and Azzam 2016).

**Competencies for monitoring:** In taking the process of establishing evaluator competencies, a decision would have to be made whether there is a need for a different set of competencies for monitoring. In this research, monitoring was put under 'understanding of different evaluation types' under the domain 'conducting an evaluation study'. This competence is regarded as 'essential' more than it is seen as 'important'. Strategies for strengthening evaluators will have to take this into account. The focus on monitoring within public institutions is noted by Abrahams (2015:18) who states that M&E units have been established in all government units but 'mostly focusing on monitoring'. The comment below by one of the respondents who is not in the public sector serves as a reminder of how much work in monitoring work is conducted within the organisations by internal evaluators for instance.

Most of the time organisations are overwhelmed with day-to-day **monitoring** and as a result those hired for the work don't have time to conduct evaluations. I feel like I lack experience in evaluation because organisations use consultants to do evaluations and it cripples us to have hands on evaluation work. (Survey respondent)

### **Being an active member of a VOPE**

The competence 'Is an active member of a VOPE' is seen as the least important competence in the domain 'Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies'. Therefore, it is interesting that comments by respondents seemed to link competencies with professionalization. And at the centre of professionalization is the VOPE, in this case SAMEA. As shown by figure 16 below, 6 respondents had something to say about professionalization in their overall comments.

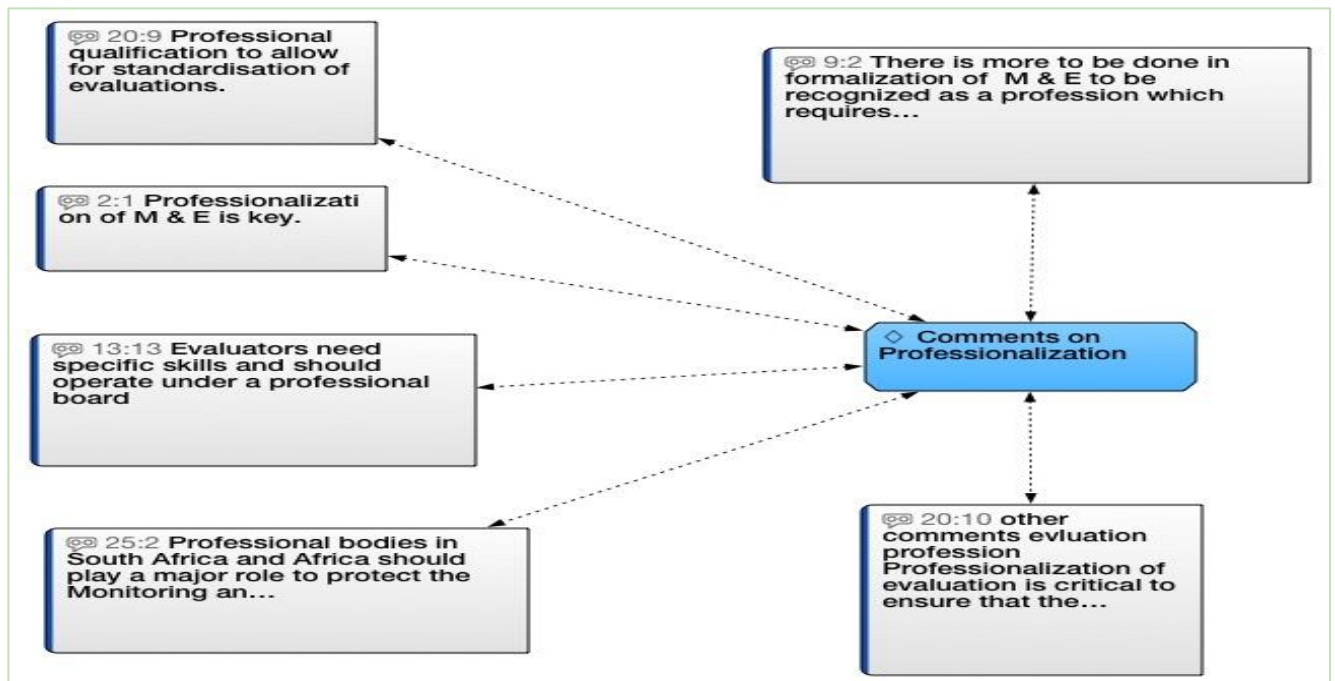


Figure 16: Respondents' comments on professionalization

### Lessons to be learnt from other VOPEs – implications for South Africa

The lessons that South Africa can learn from other VOPEs have implications that include resources and capacity. The process to establish evaluator competencies is a long process that will require financial and human resources. Broadening the consultation to include evaluators in various sectors, geographical locations and levels of experience will require time and resources. While SAMEA as the professional body may successfully set up a task force or committee to be responsible for this process, financial and human resources will be needed. The committee or task force should comprise members who understand the field. They may have to represent evaluators from different sectors as well as commissioners and managers of evaluations. A possible challenge would be finding such a calibre of people that can stay committed to the process until the end. Beyond establishing the competencies, SAMEA could decide to review the competencies after a certain period. This will also require some financial and human resources. Partnerships and collaborations with other

stakeholders invested in the evaluation field (e.g. foundations, organisations and some government agencies such as DPME) could be considered.

### 13. Study limitations

Survey participants were all CREST alumni and students. Although they have varying levels of experience and practice in different sectors, they all have some formal training in M&E. This may present a high likelihood of having the perspective of those with a similar pathway into the profession. In addition, their ratings of and indication of training needs may be similar – e.g. assuming that all have been trained in evaluation theory then fewer would indicate that they need training competencies around evaluation theory. The second limitation is the sample size. The study had aimed for 60 participants but at the time of analysis, 43 respondents had completed the survey. While their comments and suggestions are insightful, it would have been beneficial to get the perspectives of more evaluators. The third limitation pertains to the questionnaire. By its nature, the questionnaire is long. Biographical questions are situated towards the end of the questionnaire. Some respondents did not answer some of the biographical questions and this made analysis using cross-tabulations by gender for instance inappropriate. The fourth limitation of the study emanates from the questionnaire not requiring respondents to indicate their geographical location. As a result, it is impossible to determine whether their responses were influenced by their geographical location.

### 14. Taking the process forward

As a pilot study, this research developed a draft competencies list. It also produced a testing tool and provided a basis for further work in the establishment of evaluator competencies. These can become a basis for future research. Taking the process forward post this pilot study, some key considerations will have to be taken into account:

1. Seek broader consultation and feedback from evaluators, and stakeholders in various sectors (e.g. academia, public sector, private sector, civil society) and geographical locations within South Africa. This could be through virtual platforms, conferences, workshops, interviews and focus group discussions and utilisation of existing SAMEA engagement platforms e.g. eval-cafes.
2. SAMEA should be at the centre of the process. A task-team or sub-committee could be set up and they will be responsible for driving the process.
3. While learning from other VOPEs, be mindful of relevance of competencies to South African context and its dynamics.
4. Consider ways to adapt the testing tool so that it is appropriate and useful as new themes or issues arise from consultation and feedback from evaluators. In addition, adapt the testing

tool so that training needs for competencies in these domains can be established: a) Understanding an evaluation context, b) Managing client and stakeholder relationships and c) Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies.

5. Consider cross-walking the competencies list against existing standards or guidelines for practice (e.g. AfrEA).

## 15. Conclusion

The research produced a draft list of 44 evaluator competencies under 5 competency domains: 1) Conducting and evaluation study, 2) Understanding an evaluation context, 3) Managing client and stakeholder relationships, 4) Understanding the evaluation profession and professional bodies and 5) Managing an evaluation study. These were rated or ranked using the questionnaire that was an output of the second process. The study found that respondents see the majority of competencies as essential. The highest need for training is for competencies related to technical research skills (Quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques and software) as well budgeting (developing an appropriate budget and understanding how the budget affects evaluation design). The study also identified a number of lessons that South Africa can learn from other VOPEs. These pertain to the process of establishing competencies, constructing the competencies and implementation.

## 16. Ethical clearance

The study received ethical clearance from the Stellenbosch University Humanities Research Ethics Committee.

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