EVALUATOR PERSPECTIVE REGARDING
CLIENT PRACTICES DURING PROJECT
EVALUATIONS

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Abstract
Clients and evaluators play a vital role in ensuring the success of an end of project evaluation. The role played by evaluators has been the subject of numerous articles while that of the client has received less attention. The paper sets to contribute to the latter and argues that client practices do affect the way evaluation work proceeds. Using a group of evaluators, the paper discusses their experience of client practices and how this affected the process, for locally sponsored evaluations. The experiences indicated that indeed clients can enhance or hamper the process. In general, when the latter happens, it is because the client did not plan the evaluation; did not support and facilitate the process; or the disposition was not appropriate. Improving in these areas may enhance the process and improve the quality and usability of results.

Keywords: Evaluations, practices, project, clients, evaluators

Introduction
Projects are implemented by organisations to provide beneficial change (McElroy, 1996; Pellegrinelli and Bowman, 1994) for solving a problem, complying with changes in regulations or seizing a business opportunity. It is of utmost important to assess the extent to which a project achieves its goal and objectives on completion. End of project evaluation (here after referred to as evaluation) is a tool used for this purpose. Evaluation is a process by which data is systematically collected, analysed and interpreted to provide evidence to determine the performance a project, for example, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (Republic of South Africa, 2011; Imas and Rist, 2009). Apart from assessing performance, other reasons for evaluations include the need for transparency in accounting for resources invested in a project; assessing the relevancy and sustainability of a project’s outcomes; improving decision making in project delivery by learning what works and what does not work (Gorgens and Kusek, 2009).
Regardless of the size and complexity of a project, these are compelling reasons for organisations to conduct evaluations. Decisions as to whether to use an internal or external evaluator, the duration and budget are determined by the nature and extent of the evaluation. Furthermore, importance must be given to the principles of independence and objectivity in the evaluation process for credible and usable results (Mayne, 2011).

Since evaluations are projects in their own rights they require meticulous planning, effort, time and resources (PMI, 2013). If conducted by an external evaluator, the gist of this paper, a procurement process is also needed, increasing the planning effort. Most importantly, evaluations require facilitation and support by clients, for example, providing information, resources, oversight and logistics (Imas and Rist, 2009). The effort required may be one of the reasons why some organisations are often unwilling to undertake end of project evaluations (Taut and Brauns, 2003). Other reasons include seeing no sense in ‘digging up the past’ when the project is over (May and Thorngate, 2003; Muraskin, 1993). On the other hand, for organisations that conduct evaluations, sometimes there are indications of clients not being ready for the process (Ssegawa, 2013). This often results in challenges that compromise the quality of the evaluation.

Successful evaluations depend on three major interacting and interdependent components namely the evaluator, client, and the environment in which the process is conducted (Forss, 1994). Both the client and the evaluator play an important role in taming the environment through planning, making appropriate decisions, taking appropriate actions and exhibiting the right attitude (Jespersen, 2009). Evaluators play a leading role in the project evaluation process. Professional evaluation standards prescribe evaluators to be skilled, impartial, neutral and objective for evaluations to be credible and usable (Yarborough et al., 2011). Numerous articles (e.g. Steele, 1975; Schein, 1988; Morabito, 2002; and Scriven, 2007) have highlighted the role, skills, behaviour and expected conduct of an evaluator. However, fewer studies (e.g. Clark 1995) have focused on the role and practices of the clients in the evaluation. The purpose of the paper therefore, is to discuss client practices during evaluations based on the lenses of evaluators in Botswana. Specifically the paper answers the question: What are the evaluators’ perspectives regarding challenges posed by client’s practices during evaluations? Practices mean the decisions, actions, attitudes and behaviours exhibited by clients with a direct or indirect bearing on evaluation work. On the other hand, perspective means the experiences of evaluators regarding client practices especially how they affect the evaluation work. The intention of the discussion is neither to insinuate that evaluators are seamless during evaluations nor to buttress clients but rather to identify practices which may endanger the success of the evaluation.
2 Client And The Evaluation Process

2.1 Evaluation Culture

Organisations with an evaluative culture institutionalise evaluations. An evaluative culture supports positive attitudes and practices that support the willingness to learn (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2001). These include inquiry, self-reflection and examination based on evidence-based learning (Mayne, 2011). Such a culture encourages reflection on the past to foster change without blame for failure (Owen, 2003). Absence of a ‘blame culture’ is the hallmark of an innovative organisation. Blanchard and Blanchard (2012) noted that the difference between identifying the cause of a negative outcome and looking for someone to blame is that the former is productive if used to avoid a similar situation in the future. Whether the evaluative culture is a creation of a policy, an embodiment of the strategic direction, or a formal governance tool, its acceptability and sustainability are susceptible to the leadership disposition in the organisation. Leadership plays a strong role in institutionalising evaluations by addressing why and how they are carried out; how they are planned and supported; how evaluators are selected, supported and facilitated; and how results are utilised for organisational learning.

2.2 The Phases of the Evaluation Process

Kubr (1992) noted that a consultancy including evaluation, has five phases namely entry, diagnosis, fact finding, action planning, implementation and termination phase. In Botswana however, after the signing of the evaluation contract, the process normally proceeds in four phases namely the period leading to the kick-off meeting, inception, draft and final report as illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Typical evaluation contractual phases](Source: adapted from Ssegawa (2013))

However, an additional phase need to be included, the pre-contract phase (see Phase 0 in Figure 1), where the client makes critical decisions which guide the downstream evaluation phases. The pre-contract phase
identifies, among others, the evaluation need, scope, duration and budget. However, the would-be evaluator has no contact with the client and cannot participate or influence decisions taken during the phase.

The kick-off meeting phase is where the evaluator is introduced to the client’s team and evaluation issues clarified (Scriven, 2007). The inception phase is where the evaluator develops and unveils the evaluation plan, especially the methodology. In the draft report phase the evaluator collects, analyses, interprets, recommends and presents interim findings to an oversight committee. The last phase is where the evaluator incorporates the comments of stakeholders to produce a final report (Ssegawa, 2013).

2.3 The Nature of the Client

A client is a team of persons who have an interest in the project and hence has the highest stake in the evaluation because of the desire to know about the project outcome. The team is normally made of several interacting parties (e.g. Schein, 1977), for example, it may consist of management, evaluation oversight committee (EoC), the evaluation coordinator and project implementation team as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Client team and their role during evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Client Team (Layer)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management - normally consists of the chief executive officer (CEO) and departmental heads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation Oversight Committee (EoC) normally consists of Chairperson (e.g. one of the departmental heads); evaluation coordinator; stakeholder representative(s); project leader as ex-officio; and evaluator as ex-officio</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation coordinator normally consists of one person or a team of two to three people who were not part of the implementation team. The person or team must be identified prior to selecting the evaluator in order to prepare the ToR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the overall coordinator and who:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiates and develops the ToR and procurement plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acts as the contact person for the oversight team, project team, stakeholders and evaluator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides documents and artefacts related to the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides the necessary administrative (e.g. office, communication, etc.) and logistical resources (e.g. transport) to the evaluators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Addresses day-to-day issues of the evaluation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduces evaluator to stakeholders/ would-be participants in the evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepares all meetings associated with evaluation including stakeholder meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Submits deliverables to the evaluation committee and organises presentations to review deliverables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitates prompt payment for the evaluator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Implementation staff</th>
<th>Prior Phase 0, Phase 0-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Provides project insight and information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project leader as ex-officio of the EOC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Schein 1977; Imas and Rist, 2009; Scriven, 2007; and Ssegawa, 2013)

The roles played by client team during evaluation are briefly indicated in Table 1. A few aspects may be noted in the client configuration. First, the EoC normally consists of internal and external stakeholders to the project and hence with varying interest for the evaluation. Second, to preserve independence and impartiality of the evaluation, the team that implements a project should not be part of the evaluation team. Second, if it is a project sponsored by a development agency, the arrangement may have additional layers; for example, a focal person representing the agency may be involved in the process as part of the EoC or as an extra entity above EoC. The study specifically looked at projects and associated evaluations sponsored by local organisations from internal sources.

### 2.3 Planning the Evaluation Phases

As Ika, Diallo and Thuillier (2010) noted that ‘failing to plan is planning to fail’, the client has to have a culture and the necessary skills to plan the evaluation in Phase 0 (Figure 1). This should be in context of what Patton (2008) noted that the selection of content, model, methods and the underlying theory of change should be commensurate with the context of utilising the evaluation. Evaluation planning requires developing a request for proposal (RfP) consisting of an evaluation guideline and conditions of procurement (Imas and Rist, 2009) shown in Table 2. To ensure a high quality outcome and utility, stakeholder engagement is very critical during
evaluation planning and implementation (PMI, 2013). The evaluation coordinator normally takes the lead in developing the evaluation plan while the EoC performs the review of the RfP and the selection of the evaluator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation guideline</th>
<th>Conditions of Procurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe context of the project (e.g. policy or strategic plan, etc.)</td>
<td>i) Determine and state the:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• compliance requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>) Prepare background of the organisation and project</td>
<td>• competence required (qualification and experience) of the evaluator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Determine required information</td>
<td>• schedule of required deliverables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Define evaluation audience</td>
<td>• oversight framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Define purpose/ration for evaluation</td>
<td>• validity period of the fees quoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Define scope and focus (including evaluation questions)</td>
<td>• place where the full RfP may be obtained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii) Define statement of work</td>
<td>• query procedure for any unclear RfP issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Solicit data collection method to be used</td>
<td>• bid evaluation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Develop a list of project stakeholders and sites</td>
<td>• procurement deadlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x) Determine appropriate duration and starting date</td>
<td>• mode of submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xi) Determine logistical issues</td>
<td>• contact details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Kubr, 2002; and Imas and Rist, 2009)

2.4 Role of the Client during the Evaluation Phases

When the evaluation contract is signed, best practice demands that a kick-off meeting be held between the evaluator and the client. The meeting provides an opportunity for parties to introduce themselves including developing a framework to guide the evaluation, for example, defining roles, developing a common purpose and assuring support to the evaluator. To serve this purpose, kick-off meeting must have a well-thought agenda.

The activities of the four phases in Figure1 test the client’s ability to plan; propensity to facilitate and support; and the overall disposition towards the evaluation. The latter relates to the client team’s attitude, actions, perception and behaviour in creating a professional and enabling environment that enhances the evaluation process. Kellogg (1984) asserted that the evaluation coordinator-evaluator interface is of utmost importance in the success of the evaluation process. Cooperation, good rapport, prompt response to queries, accepting feedback non-defensively, respect, sticking to stipulated roles and willing to learn are some of the key attributes that makes the interface useful (Carucci and Tetenbaum, 2000; Appelbaum and Steed, 2005).

3 Methodology

The focus group was chosen as the most appropriate method for the study. The approach involves a researcher selecting and assembling a group
of individuals to discuss and comment on a common research topic based on their personal experiences (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Focus group discussions provide faster, richer and a wider dimension to the research topic. The key aspect about the focus group drawing out participants’ attitudes, beliefs, feelings, reactions, interpretations and experiences about the topic (MacIntosh, 1981). This contrasts with, for example, the interview, observation or questionnaire survey methods. Morgan (1998) noted that it takes a long time to collect data and a narrow view of the topic is obtained if the observation method is used. It also takes a longer time to collect data and at a high cost if interviews are used. Though the questionnaire survey provides a faster, less costly and a wider perspective of views, the depth achieved cannot be compared with the focus group method (MacIntosh, 1981).

3.1 The Study Stages

The research process was divided into five parts, a pre-workshop engagement and four workshops based on the phases of the evaluation process. The division was guided by a recommendation by Bryman and Bell (2003) that group discussions should last between 60 and 120 minutes. Given the guide the entire study could not be conducted in one sitting to avoid over saturation of ideas, fatigue and hence loss of focus. The workshops were held as part of the pre-conference activities planned for the second annual conference of a local monitoring and evaluation association. They were conducted in a quiet and neutral hotel meeting room. The four workshops were held on two consecutive days and lasted 70, 85, 70 and 65 minutes, respectively.

3.2 Selection of Participants

Scholars (e.g. MacIntosh, 1993; Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2005) have suggested that the optimal number of participants in a focus group should be between six and twelve people. Less than six participants are considered too few to provide a wide perspective of the research topic and over twelve are too many to manage during the discussions. There are 45 registered members of the local monitoring and valuation association of which 15 reside in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. Fifteen letters explaining the purpose, phases and request to participate in the study were sent out to members (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). Seven practising evaluators agreed to participate in the study and provided their profiles shown in Table 3 (for anonymity participants are referred to by letters A to G).
Table 3: Profile of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Expertise area of evaluation</th>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Experience in consulting (Years)</th>
<th>No of consultancies conducted (No.)</th>
<th>No of evaluations conducted (No.)</th>
<th>No. of locally sponsored evaluations (No.)</th>
<th>No. as lead evaluator (No.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Health¹</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS²</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹including HIV/AIDS; ²HIV/AIDS only

There were three female participants out of seven evaluators and their expertise spanned a number of economic sectors. Conspicuously the infrastructure sector was not among them perhaps due to the approach used in the evaluation process, often referred to as project audits (Meredith and Mantel, 2012). The average age was 44 years, with an average consulting experience of 10 years. Apart from evaluations participants had worked on various consultancies (127 in total) including project planning, M&E system implementation and feasibility studies. The total number of evaluations conducted by participants was 41 and ranged between two and ten, some of which were sponsored by international bodies. Each participant had led at least two locally sponsored evaluations. The wide spectrum of evaluation experiences of participants was considered comprehensive to provide a deeper insight into the research topic.

The same group was used in the four workshops. Bryman and Bell (2003) noted that different groups can be used in longitudinal research to study changes of a phenomenon. Secondly, they can also be used if there is an attempt to generalise findings, as more groups increase the study ‘sample’. It was felt that the results will be discussed in the context of a cross-sectional study and based on experience of a specific group of people.

3.3 The Engagement Process and Analysis of Data

The workshops were managed by two facilitators with one person guiding the discussions while the other recording the proceedings. The sessions were also tape recorded. At the beginning of the first workshop, the moderator reiterated the purpose of the research. Subsequently, each
workshop discussion was based on the following guiding questions: *During the kick-off (inception, draft or final) phase what client practice posed a challenge to your evaluation work? Please clarify how and why you think it happened?*

The written transcripts were validated using the tape recordings and thereafter, a content analysis was conducted to identify practices which were commonly identified. Subsequently a synthesis was also done to identify whether it was a planning, support, facilitation or a disposition issue which could have caused the practice. While participants cited many experiences, it is only those which were narrated by at least four or more participants that are discussed here (Krippendorff, 2004).

**4 Findings And Discussion**

**4.1 Period up to and including the Kick-off Meeting**

**4.1.1 Timing of the start of the evaluation**

The timing of the evaluation was discussed as an evaluation challenge. Three experiences illustrated the effect of timing on the evaluation. In one instance a client stipulated the start of the evaluation as the second week of December so that work proceeds up to mid-February, the following year. The reason being that the evaluation report was to be an input to the strategy review process planned for March. The period in question is well known for low productivity in southern Africa due to the excitement caused by the so called ‘festive season’. Apart from the excitement most people take leave and therefore, the combination hampers data collection, communication and decision making. One of the participants noted however that “after my explanation that the timing is not conducive, the client changed from December to the second week of January to avoid the festive season”.

The second timing experience related to evaluating a project after it had closed. Participants’ experiences indicated scenarios where some of the key implementers had left the site while others had even left employment. In some cases the leaving was not smooth and left bitter experiences for some of the project implementers. Beneficiaries were also in some cases difficult to trace. A combination of these factors made data collection and verification difficult. In another similar case, the situation was exacerbated by a poor record keeping regime which had occurred during project implementation.

Another experience related to the evaluation coinciding with the financial audit of the organisation. Participants who had such an experience reported how in some instances they ‘chased the same data with the auditor team to the fatigue of employees’. The employees affected paid more attention to the financial audit perceiving it as an urgent and an important exercise than the evaluation.
The experiences above underpin the importance of a well-thought plan that considers the most appropriate timing of the evaluation by taking cognisance of the vagaries of the organisation’s environment. Secondly, participants who had an evaluation timing experience were also quick to point out that client flexibility is critical in overcoming such a challenge. Rigidity to comply with contractual provisions may not yield a quality and usable evaluation. Therefore the client needs to be pragmatic and frugal.

4.1.2 Kick-off meeting

Absence of a kick-off meeting in the evaluation process has been emphasised as a misnomer. Participants narrated experiences where no meeting was held. One participant noted “once the contract was signed, I was expected to hit the ground running. Issues which could have been discussed at such meeting were dealt with in an ad-hoc manner. Unfortunately, at the review of the inception report we were still focusing the evaluation”.

Participants who had a kick-off meeting for their evaluations noted a big difference in the smoothness of the evaluations. As one participant observed “On hindsight had the evaluation scope and evaluation questions not been discussed early enough with the client, disputes on the evaluation duration would have arisen along the evaluation journey”. Participants agreed that since a kick-off meeting is so important to clarify issues, the evaluator should insist on the client scheduling it. Moreover, since evaluation is an iterative process, it was felt that the right place for starting to clarify issues was in the kick-off meeting.

4.1.3 Access to project and related information

Access to information in terms of extent, promptness and quality drew numerous experiences. A participant recalled “In one of the evaluations, information provision was haphazard that I kept on receiving documents until the final report. The evaluation coordinator kept on ‘saying there is a document I want to give you but I keep on forgetting to look for it in my computer’”. While another participant was provided with adequate project documents there was another challenge. “I had to spend a half-day trying to arrange the reports in a chronological order to make sense of the context and performance of the project”. In another case a participant noted that “I resembled a forensic expert by uncovering the existence of project information”.

The discussion also noted that, where the information was provided the experience contrasted as one participant noted that “in one of my assignments a kick-off meeting had an agenda item ‘provision of project information’. When the meeting got to the item, the chairperson pointed to a trolley with several project related documents, neatly arranged and quipped
‘there are the project documents, use it and safely return it after use”. Another experience was more elegant “the documents were uploaded to an electronic ‘drop box’. The electronic mode gave the advantages of compactness, quick access, portability and manipulability. This greatly facilitated writing my reports”.

Since information is the fuel that drives the evaluation, its quality, adequacy, promptness and mode of provision makes a huge difference in the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluator. Participants noted that where project information had the desired attributes, evaluation reports were easy to write.

4.2 Period up to and Including Inception Report Presentation

4.2.1 Prioritising evaluation questions

Participants noted that in their experience there was a lack of appreciation of the interrelatedness of the components in the evaluation matrix. In turn this affected the understanding of the feasibility of answering the evaluation questions in terms of methods, data, schedule and budget. The challenge starts with the failure to prioritise the list of evaluation questions as one experience noted “Client wanted the entire evaluation criteria covered from relevance to impact – a total of twelve questions. However, when the list was explained in terms of the effort required to collect data, the effect on the schedule and the logistical budget, the client team trimmed what they wanted to know”.

Participants noted that evaluators must take a lead in ensuring that the list of evaluation questions is prioritised and agreed on as early as possible to scope the evaluation. There is no dispute that client suggestions enrich the evaluation design, if provided without prejudice. The recommended approach is to review evaluation questions with the EOC and obtain a full buy-in to avoid scope creeps (extra questions being slotted in later).

4.2.2 Sample of stakeholders to include in the evaluation

Another potential challenge observed relating to methodology was the provision and the selection of the evaluation participants/sites. In some cases, participants noted that the list was wrong, contained wrong entries, was not exhaustive, was provided late or did not exist at the time of the evaluation. Each scenario affected the efficiency of the evaluation design in particular the sampling design and data collection schedule. One participant noted “At the review of the inception report I was given additional stakeholders to include in the study. This had a serious implication on the evaluation schedule. Even after the inception report meeting, the list kept on growing and affected the data collection schedule”.
Another challenge was agreement on the sample of stakeholders to include in the evaluation study. A participant narrated her experience “My experience was more dramatic, I was told who to include and who to leave out in the study. Those to be left out were identified as uncooperative during implementation. However, after explaining the need not to bias the evaluation, the client accepted my sample, which included stakeholders they had wanted to be omitted. What was interesting in the end was client appreciated their input because they learnt what they did not do well which is what they were trying to avoid.”

Participants agreed that the best time to provide the list of participants/sites is during the kick-off meeting to allow the sampling to be included in the inception report. In addition, the evaluator should be given a leeway to select the sample to avoid bias.

4.3 Period up to and Including Draft Report Presentation

4.3.1 Existence of an appropriate M&E data

Participants noted that there were challenges with project M&E systems. Most were not well-designed and data was not well collected or kept. They noted, for example, baselines were either missing or inaccurate. One participant noted “to overcome the problem we had to use the first quarterly report as the baseline”. If the baseline is the basis on which project change is measured, its absence or quality is a threat to the evaluation results. The baseline measurement is one of practices of project implementation p which affects the evaluation quality.

4.3.2 Presentation of findings

Participants noted that, if there was agreement on the methodology during the inception report and the evaluator lives up to his professional standard, the most challenging aspect about this stage is presenting results which indicate poor performance or which do not resonate with the interests of various stakeholders. Most affected are the implementers. If the evaluations are not proceeding in favour of good project performance they may expect that the evaluator provide either a mild or soft tone in the report. Worse still they may request the evaluator to soften the negative tone of the report. A participant noted that “I was pressurized to either to delete instances where I had indicated that the project did not get 50% of the planned output and instead state that the causes of poor performance were beyond the control of the implementers. However, the facts indicated a myriad of poor management practices”.

An article by Donaldson, Golder and Scrivien (2002) provides a comprehensive overview of the stakeholder anxiety relating to evaluations in terms of causes, effects and mitigation measures. It suffices to say that the
evaluator has to navigate ‘the client anxiety land mine’ with care while remaining professional.

4.4 Period up to and Including Final Report Presentation

Participants noted that once there is agreement between the evaluator and the client team during the draft phase, there are minimal challenges in the final phase. However, in situations where the performance of the project was described as below the expected norm, there is a challenge for the evaluator as to how to proceed with the final report. This brings about professional ethics at the forefront of the evaluation process. When an evaluation report brings a discredit to project implementers, the evaluator risks his or her career for possible collaborations with the same organization. The evaluator must make a good judgment. One participant noted that “Maintaining a good relationship with the client at the expense of a doctored document may prove a short lived venture”

4.5 Issues Cutting across all Phases

4.5.1 Evaluation coordinator

Participants narrated various experiences relating to their interaction with the evaluation coordinator. One noted “As the evaluation progressed I was surprised to learn that the same person who was the project coordinator was the evaluation coordinator. As it turned out I was also advised not to interview certain persons on the grounds that there was not much to gain from such engagement”. The participant later noted that the evaluation coordinator had several issues with some of the project stakeholders and was trying to avoid them. Another experience related to the evaluation coordinator taking leave “The absence accounted for 20% of 35 days of the evaluation period. The replacement hardly knew the role he was supposed to play. While very cooperative, he simply could not cope with the requirements of the role. We both got frustrated”. The third experience narrated by another participant was more dramatic “the person maintained an arms-length relationship. He often looked stressed whether from other work related duties or social challenges. I encountered turbulence every mile of the evaluation flight”

Amidst challenges with evaluation coordinators, there were also pleasant interactions for example, one of the participants noted that I encountered “a very professional, cooperative and committed person who was always willing to help without being patronising”. Evaluation coordinators are key to the evaluations should be persons with a high level of commitment throughout the process.
4.5.2 Appropriateness of EOC membership

Participants noted that EOC membership is appropriately chosen in number, representation and commitment. Too many people in the EOC may be difficult to manage, while too may be unrepresentative. Secondly, appropriate persons must be selected to represent the various interests for the project and this must be done at the before the kick-off meeting to avoid new people bringing ideas which change the direction of the work at an advanced stage. Participants also noted that membership should also be committed to attending all meetings to ensure their input is considered at the right time as one experience illustrated “At the kick-off meeting, there was agreement on the list of questions to guide the evaluation. However, at the inception report meeting, a new member argued vehemently that two evaluation questions need to be included. The arguments put forward for including the question were perfect but the timing was disruptive”.

4.5.3 Promptness and quality of feedback on submissions

Client feedback drew a variety of experiences from participants but mainly centred on two issues, promptness and the quality of feedback. One participant noted that “After submitting, there was no acknowledgement of receipt of my report. When I inquired, I was told it was received and is still being reviewed. The contract had stipulated that the report shall be reviewed within three weeks after submission. It was not until after a month and half that a meeting was arranged to discuss the report. However, the discussion was useful and showed they had thoroughly read my report.” Another experience was cited “I submitted the report and there was a three months silence after which the evaluation coordinator brought a copy of the report. They requested that I attend to some typographic errors indicated on the report and I should submit my invoice. This left me wondering whether my work was too good or bad that it required no comment”.

The two experiences illustrate the effect of feedback on the evaluator’s psychology, professional well-being and development. It is important for clients to afford evaluators prompt and quality feedback as one participant experienced “in one case the client promptly acknowledged receipt of the report and indicated when I should present the report. During the presentation, it was clear the stakeholders had read and internalised the report; there were constructive comments from all corners. I felt my work had been appreciated”. PMI (2013) noted that upon receipt of a communication, there must be an immediate acknowledgement even if there is no response to the gist of the matter. However, actual feedback must follow promptly and directed at the issue of communication. Feedback must be given promptly and moreover, there must be an attempt to critically review the submission. There is no point simply accepting the submission
without reviewing it because this is not only a waste of money but demotivates the evaluator.

4.5.4 Nature of payment regimes for professional fees

Experiences with payments in terms of promptness and structure brought varied and interesting experiences. Participants described the various payment structures they have encountered and their effect on the evaluator, for example, one participant said “in one evaluation the policy was to pay 100% after the final evaluation report is submitted”. Other fee structures were also noted, for example, 50% on submission of draft and final reports, respectively or payment of various percentages for the inception, draft and final reports (e.g. 30%, 40% and 30%, respectively). There was agreement that stage payments reflect a win-win situation. The client does not face a high completion risk but at same time the evaluator is motivated by being paid for the deliverables completed.

The criterion for releasing payments was also discussed, that is, should payment be released on submission, after approval of the deliverable or a mixture of the two? Participants encountered experiences with all options. They were also quick to note that payment on approval of a deliverable does not favour the evaluator if the client takes a long time to review and approve reports. Participants noted that the last option balances both concerns, that is, the inception and draft report should be paid simply on submission since the evaluator is still within the contract period. However, the final report should be paid after its approval. One participant noted “for an efficient client who provides quick response, there is no need to get worried of any option but this is not often the case”.

Participants further noted that sometimes when the evaluator submits an invoice it is another matter to actually get paid. Various experiences were narrated regarding the issue, for example, in one instance “I submitted my invoice but the chairperson of the oversight committee forgot to write a covering letter to authorise payment until I queried payment after two weeks”. Another participant said “I was advised to submit, the invoice directly, but finance could not pay because, there was no copy of the contract! What was of concern was finance personnel did not bother to ask for the contract from me or the oversight committee – they simple sat and waited”. Participants noted that in many cases the evaluating and financial personnel work in silos, with the latter not paying a proactive role. They also noted that, the financial arm may be simply inefficient as evidenced by a participant’s experience “they lost my invoice and only asked me to submit another one after I queried the delay in payment”. Another was more revealing “… they paid me after three months because they had diverted the money to pay for another transaction”. Participants also expressed the
sensitivity associated with querying payments, as one participant noted “it appears clients do not appreciate evaluators querying payments as this shows greediness”. Further probe into this issue revealed that there is a cultural sensitivity attached to querying payment.

There was a general consensus that payment is an issue in terms of the delay for approval and the actual payment. Payment is the life blood of any exchange as it does not only keep evaluators afloat but motivates them to complete the assignment.

4.5.5 Nature of payment regimes for expenses

One participant with an appreciable period of consulting experience noted “sometime back one rate was used for both fees and expenses but now they are two separate issues. This is good because at time of bidding, many logistical issues are not known”. Further discussion centred on how the expenses are actually paid. The discussion yielded three options. The first option is where an evaluator submits a budget, and is given money to the value of the budget which has to be accounted for at the end of each phase. The second option is where the evaluator spends from his sources and makes a claim at the end of each phase. The third is a mix of the first two. The client pays for most of the expenses, for example, transport, venue for meetings and accommodation but allows the evaluator to spend and claim for unforeseen expenses. Participants did not favour option one and two as one participant recalled her experience “Each night I would divide time between ‘balancing books’ and evaluation work. In addition, whenever I could not find a receipt I forfeited the claim” Another experience was narrated “I submitted my claim and the accounting personnel argued that some items were inadmissible they would pay approximately 70% of the claim”. If evaluators have to work efficiently in a short period, they should be facilitated to focus on the evaluation. The burden of accounting work should be minimised by the client taking over the payment of foreseeable items. Admissible expense should also be stipulated and like professional fees, reimbursement should be paid promptly.

4.6 Discussion

The findings obtained should be viewed within the context of the limitation of the focus group strategy and the scope of study. The findings document a reflection of experiences of seven evaluators had with locally sponsored evaluation in Botswana. The intention is not to generalise the findings to all evaluations, locally or internationally sponsored, and for all countries. It is meant to provide an indication of some of lessons that both evaluators and clients can draw as to what affects evaluations. Like all qualitative studies, it is impossible to exhaust all ‘trigger events’ that may
occur during an evaluation. Further studies could involve a larger pool of evaluators and experiences based on both locally and internationally sponsored evaluations.

From the discussions there was no illusion that the success of an evaluation is a single faceted venture but an interaction of three major factors namely evaluator, client and the environment. Moreover, the evaluators acknowledged that they are not angels in the evaluations process. Some of the challenges may emanate from their indulgences. The vagaries of the environment also add to the bouquet of challenges of the evaluation. Both the evaluator and client need to work together to tame the environment. As already indicated, there is no shortage of articles on the role of the evaluator. The paper focused on the practices of the client that affect the evaluation.

First it was noted that the practices that pose challenges are not confined to evaluation period only but some are a knock-effect from the project implementation period. Examples of such practices were given as lack of an appropriate M&E design and maintenance to provide accurate baseline and M&E data. Unfortunately, evaluators have no influence in the practices during this period.

Second, the discussion noted that the practices in pre-evaluation stage are crucial in determining the success of an evaluation. Inappropriate decisions and omissions compromise the accuracy and credibility of the evaluation. Key issues identified centred on the appropriateness of the thought process that goes into the RfP. The client as represented by evaluation coordinator and the oversight committee were also identified as playing a crucial role in developing, reviewing and making decisions relating to the RfP and the selection of the evaluator. Participants noted that in some cases clients are more reactive that proactive and this is attributed to poor pre-evaluation planning. Temporary endeavours (e.g. projects and evaluations) require thorough planning to reduce wastage of time, effort, resources, frustration and sometimes conflict.

The kick-off meeting was identified as forum for making amends for anything that could have been incorrectly decided on in the pre-evaluation phase. If the meeting is not arranged, it is a missed opportunity for fine tuning the evaluation purpose and for defining the roles of each party. Lack of understanding the role a client is supposed to play may lead the evaluator isolated and dysfunctional. Since the evaluator is always new to the organisation’s environment and yet has a tight schedule to complete the evaluation, it is incumbent on the client to facilitate and support him or her. Providing office space, communication facilities, arranging meetings and providing logistical support is part of this effort.

Human relationship also plays a crucial role in the success of the evaluation especially the disposition of EOC, evaluation coordinator, finance
personnel and evaluation participants. A professional and harmonious setting is required to foster a successful evaluation outcome.

**Conclusion**

The paper has provided an evaluator’s perspective relating to client’s practices during end of project evaluations. First it was noted that some of practices which affect the evaluations are ‘imported from the project planning and implementation era’. Second, it was noted that client’s inadequacy in planning the evaluation may pose a serious risk to the evaluation process. Third, it was also noted that client facilitation and support were key in smoothening the evaluation. Lastly, the disposition of the client (especially the evaluation coordinator and any person incidental to the evaluation process) is very crucial in maintaining a professional and conducive environment for the evaluation.

**References:**


Steele, F. (1975), Consulting for Organisational Change, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA.
