The Effects of the Institutional Context of the
Agency Responsible for Allocating Evaluations on the Utilization of Evaluation Results

Short description of the study
I would like to present a study in progress. The focus is on the question as to where the responsibility for evaluation should be located so that the utilization of evaluation results may be maximized. I will approach this question by testing the following two competing hypotheses, knowing full well that the answer will be much more differentiated and complex!
Hypothesis A: The distance between the evaluator and the unit to be evaluated must be large in order to obtain results that are politically accepted (this line of argument follows Campbell and others).
Hypothesis B: The distance between the evaluator and the unit to be evaluated must be small in order to obtain results that are accepted (this line of argument follows Patton and others).

The basis for the study is a list which I have compiled of 340 evaluations that were carried out in the Swiss Federal Administration between 1999 and 2002. The target variables which interest me are the different ways and intensities of utilizing evaluations. The main influencing variables are six different factors that define the institutional context in which an evaluation is undertaken (cf. below). In addition, the study will include some further factors of influence that are known from the literature, relating to the environment and the process of an evaluation. Figure 1 illustrates the effect model that I have assembled.

Definition of the distance between the evaluator and the unit to be evaluated
The central influencing variable in my model is the institutional context where an evaluation is carried out. This context governs the distance between the evaluators and the evaluees in an evaluation project.

It is expedient to define the most important terms:
- *evaluators* is the term used to denote individuals who carry out an evaluation. A distinction can be drawn here between internal and external evaluators. Internal evaluators consist of those individuals who are directly involved in the implementation of a program, an action or a project. External evaluators are not involved in the implementation of an action and in this respect, they may be regarded as independent. However, the practice of allocating evaluation assignments shows that external evaluators also have differing relationships with the evaluees. This circumstance will have to be taken into account when determining distance.
- *evaluees* are those individuals, groups or organizations whose activities form the subject of the evaluation and who are therefore assessed by the evaluators. According to Weiss (Weiss, 1998b: 27), the evaluees can be differentiated into individuals responsible for programs ("program directors, who administered the program at national or local levels") and those who execute the programs ("program practitioners, the staff in direct contact with clients").

- In the literature, the "*client*" is cited as the third important player within the evaluators – evaluees relationship. Weiss (Weiss, 1998b: 27) mentions sponsors ("program sponsors, the people who paid the program's bills"). It emerges in practice that the clients for evaluations are identical with the program directors in many cases. In other cases, it is actually the evaluating units who give themselves the evaluation assignment (for example, in the case of supervisory/monitoring bodies for government and parliament).
- Finally, there are increasing numbers of *units responsible for evaluation* in public administrative bodies, as the institution's point of contact for evaluations. Depending on the particular institution, the tasks and competencies of these units will vary. In individual agencies, they are the clients for evaluations and they also take charge of administration and quality assurance for them. In other agencies, the units responsible for evaluation – with differing levels of independence from the evaluees – are only responsible for handling the studies and/or for the quality assurance. The extent of independence for the body that is responsible for evaluations has a decisive influence on the distance between evaluees and evaluators.

The relationship between evaluators, evaluees and clients is the institutional context where an evaluation is carried out. This context reflects an institution's evaluation practice (e.g. a Federal agency or monitoring organ) and – regardless of a specific evaluation project – is identical for all evaluations in the same department.

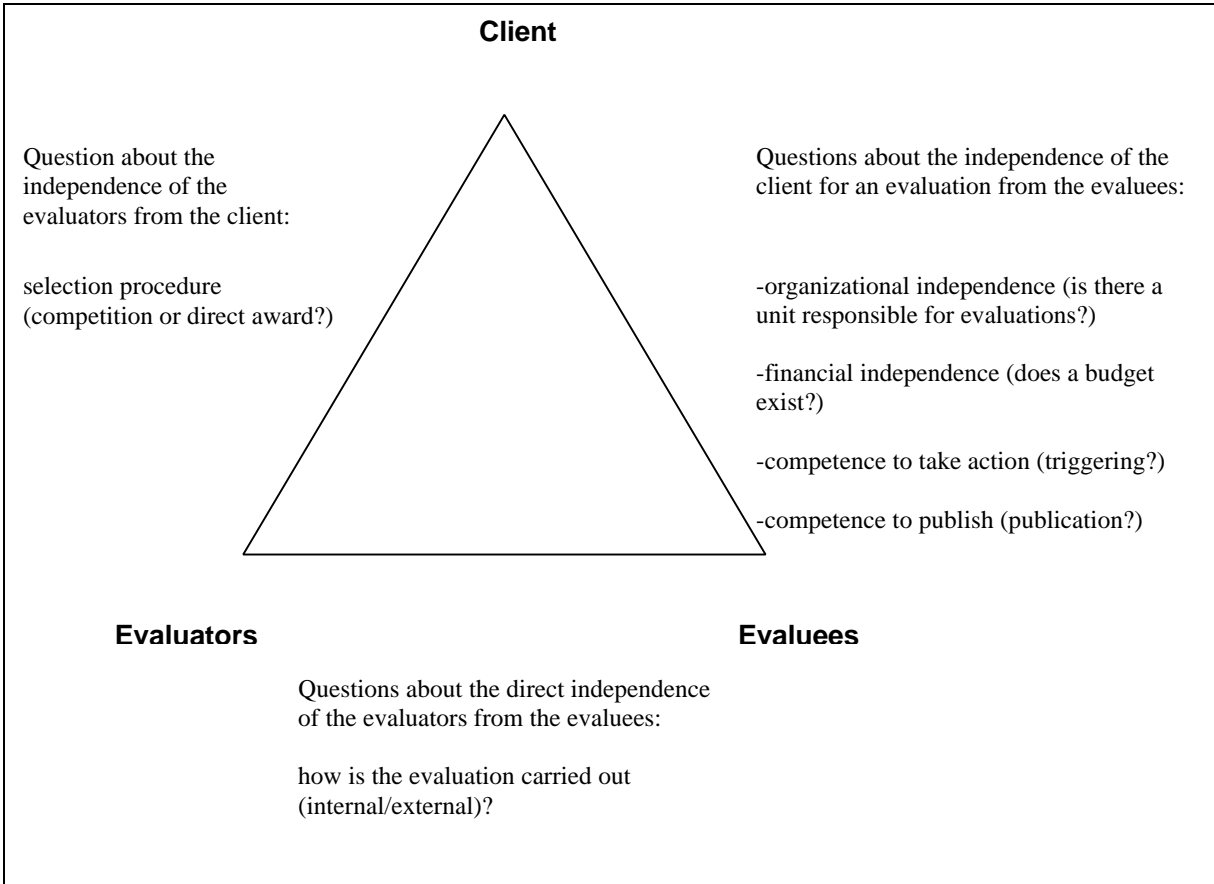**How to measure the distance between the evaluator and the unit to be evaluated?**
The institutional context determines the distance between evaluators and evaluees. Six influencing factors can be differentiated here:
- *the unit responsible for the evaluation*: is there a unit with responsibility for evaluations in the institution in question, which acts as the interface between the evaluees and the evaluators? Behind this question lies the assumption that the distance between evaluators and evaluees is greater if a unit located outside of line responsibility is in charge of administering the project than if the program director handles the evaluation himself.
- *evaluation budget*: is there a special, separate budget for the evaluation? It is assumed that the distance between evaluators and evaluees is greater if the evaluations do not have to be financed from funds for the evaluated action.
- *how an evaluation is triggered*: who triggers evaluations: is this done by the individuals responsible for the programs or actions, that is to say the evaluees? Or is it done by a unit responsible for evaluation? If a unit that is responsible for evaluation can trigger the evaluations, a greater distance between evaluators and evaluees is assumed.
- *allocation practice*: are evaluation assignments allocated using a competitive procedure (invitation to tender) or are the projects awarded directly to evaluators who appear to be suitable? It is assumed that the distance between evaluators and evaluees is greater if there is a competitive procedure.
- *publication practice*: can the evaluees influence the publication of the final report? I assume that the distance between evaluators and evaluees is greater if the reports are published systematically.
- *external evaluation*: are the evaluations usually undertaken by specialists outside the administration? The applicable assumption is that the distance between evaluators and evaluees is greater in the case of external evaluations.

By determining how pronounced these influencing factors are, it is possible to measure the institutional distance between evaluators and evaluees in a specified context, and to distinguish

between contexts with differing distances. Figure 2 below illustrates where the influencing factors mentioned above should be located in the triangle comprising the evaluators, evaluees and clients.

Figure 2:   Factors of influence on the institutional distance of an evaluation

Client

Question about the
independence of the
evaluators from the client:

selection procedure
(competition or direct award?)

Questions about the independence of the
client for an evaluation from the evaluees:

-organizational independence (is there a
unit responsible for evaluations?)

-financial independence (does a budget
exist?)

-competence to take action (triggering?)

-competence to publish (publication?)

Evaluators   **Evaluees**

Questions about the direct independence
of the evaluators from the evaluees:

how is the evaluation carried out
(internal/external)?

Status of work and further procedure

The research concept has been refined and finalized over the last months. In addition, the universe of evaluations and the institutional context of the evaluation activities has been surveyed in those 32 Federal bodies which carry out evaluations. In the next phase of the project, ten case studies will be compiled on the utilization of evaluations and the relevant-relevant factors for them. These case studies are to be assessed using the "Quantitative Comparative Analysis" methodology. With a small number of cases and a large number of variables, the QCA method makes it possible to derive factor combination patterns that link the cases.[1] In the present research context, the result that may be expected is that the factor combinations leading to a high or low utilization intensity for evaluations will become identifiable for each type of utilization. This is to be followed by a broad survey of all 340 evaluations produced in the years between 1999 and 2002. These data are to be analyzed using uni-, bi- and multi-variate methods.

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[1] It can be downloaded from the following homepage free of charge: http://www. compasss.org/Softwares.htm. The software is based on the QCA program developed by Kriss Drass and Charles Ragin which has been widely distributed since 1986.

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Influencing variables　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Target variable**

Features of the institutional context where an evaluation is undertaken
- existence of a unit responsible for evaluation
- existence of a budget for evaluations
- practice for triggering evaluations
- allocation practice
- publication practice concerning evaluation results
- regular use of external evaluators

Environmental features of an evaluation
Dimensions according to Cousins, 1986:
- information requirements
- nature and importance of the decision
- political climate
- other sources of information
- characteristics of the decision-makers
- commitment and receptiveness of the decision-makers
- characteristics of the institutions affected

Process features of an evaluation
Dimensions according to SEVAL standards (Widmer, 2000b):
- utility
- feasibility
- propriety
- accuracy

Utilization of an evaluation with the following dimensions:
- nature of utilization (dimensions according to Clarke, 1999):
- instrumental utilization
- conceptual utilization
- symbolic utilization
- process-related utilization

intensity of utilization (dimensions according to Landr 1998)
- low
- medium
- high