

# CHAPTER 7

## EVALUATION USE WITHIN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC)

Lessons for the Evaluation Commissioner

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### CHAPTER TOPICS

- Evaluation use in large organizations
- Supportive or inhibiting factors
- Lessons for evaluation commissioners

**T**he European Commission (EC) is probably one of the world's most prolific commissioners and consumers of evaluations. Drawing largely on the findings of two empirical studies conducted in 2002 and 2005, this chapter examines how evaluations are used by the EC and highlights some lessons for evaluation commissioners. The chapter starts with an explanation of evaluation development within the EC before going on to consider the users and uses of evaluation. It concludes by drawing out the factors that foster (or hinder) the use of evaluation.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission (EC) is the European Union's (EU) executive body. It represents the interests of the EU as a whole (as opposed to the interests of individual member states). The EC's main functions are to set objectives and priorities for action, propose

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legislation to the European Parliament and Council, manage and implement EU policies and the budget, enforce European law (jointly with the Court of Justice), and represent the EU outside Europe (e.g., by negotiating trade agreements between the EU and other countries). About 23,000 staff work in the various EC departments (Directorates-General [DGs]) or services. Each DG is responsible for a particular policy area and is headed by a Director-General who reports directly to the EC president. It is a specific feature of the EC that it has a programming cycle of seven years—the current one covers the period of 2007 to 2013. Budgetary commitments for this period total nearly €1,000 billion, of which operational costs are a minor share: The vast majority of the budget is dedicated to expenditure programs in areas as diverse as regional development, overseas development cooperation, telecoms, energy and transport networks, support for small and medium-sized businesses, and research, development, and innovation activities. Given the broad scope of EU policies, the types and themes of evaluations vary widely.

EU programs and policies are evaluated at different times in their life cycle—generally during preparation (*ex ante*), during implementation (interim or intermediate), and when implementation is completed (*ex post*). The majority of evaluations are contracted out to external evaluators by evaluation functions situated *within* each DG or, less frequently, by services in charge of implementation. The EC's evaluation activities are centrally coordinated by the Secretariat-General.<sup>1</sup> For 2010 alone, some 150 evaluations and evaluation-related studies were commissioned by the different DGs—excluding those commissioned by other EU institutions, agencies, and bodies, and excluding so-called impact assessment (see below). In addition, the greater part of EU program management is devolved to member states—especially the regional programs (Structural Funds) with related evaluations being commissioned directly by EU national and regional administrations. These evaluations are generally conducted by external evaluators, according to conceptual frameworks designed by the EC.

The practice of evaluation within the European Commission (EC) dates back to the 1980s, with expertise being historically concentrated in the DGs responsible for major expenditure programs. Initially, this was within the areas of development cooperation and research where the responsible DGs developed their own specific evaluation approaches. A significant boost to evaluation capacity within the EC came in 1995 in the area of regional development with the MEANS Programme (European Commission [EC], 1999, MEANS Collection),<sup>2</sup> which was commissioned to address problems of widely varying practices, inconsistent results, and limited use of evaluations for EU-level policy making. The MEANS Programme was ambitious, drawing on the state of the

art in evaluation from across Europe and beyond to develop a methodological framework that takes into account the multilevel, multiple stakeholder, and partner context of regional development programs. In 1998, a substantial part of the MEANS framework was adapted for the evaluation of the financial instruments of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

As a result of the organic growth of evaluation within specific EU policy areas, by the end of the 1990s, there were essentially three families of practice within the EC.

- First, there were the project cycle management (PCM) and the logical framework approaches. These were used to evaluate the overseas development projects and later the programs for preparing the accession of new member states. The approach remains strong to this day in the area of EU external policy.
- The use of independent, expert panels was the dominant approach adopted for the evaluation and monitoring of research programs and policy. Experts in scientific and technological fields are called upon to provide peer reviews and expert opinions. This approach has also had an important influence on the development of evaluation practices in other policy areas, such as the information society, where science, technology, and innovation are central.
- For regional development and employment policies in particular, the MEANS Programme's methodological framework played a central role, providing a structured, eclectic approach for the evaluation of the geographically and sector-bound actions implemented through devolved expenditure programs.

Two major developments within the EC in the area of evaluation have since occurred. First, a shift to results-based management, launched in 2000, was accompanied by a broadening of the scope of evaluation beyond expenditure programs to all EC "activities." The second is the emergence of the Better Regulation Agenda, which has given rise to the rapid institutionalization of "impact assessment," a form of ex ante evaluation that is fully integrated into the preparation of major legislative proposals and nonlegislative initiatives.

## **EVALUATION USE IN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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To better understand how the considerable quantity of evaluation produced were being used and how use could be reinforced, the EC conducted two studies,

in 2002 and 2005, in which we were involved (Williams, de Laat, & Stern, 2002; de Laat, 2005).

The initial study, predominantly exploratory in nature, mainly comprised a survey of evaluation functions and a series of DG-focused case studies. It was designed to understand the way in which the different DGs organized their evaluation activities, the degree of evaluation institutionalization within them, and how these parameters affected evaluation use. This study also included a scan of the literature on evaluation use available at the time. This scan identified four main types of use.

- *Managing with the support of evaluation.* Evaluation recommendations are directly taken up by decision makers. Patton (1997) calls this the *instrumental* use of evaluation to directly modify programs.
- *Evaluation as a learning experience.* For participants in an evaluation (for example, as members of an evaluation steering group), the experience of participating can lead to an increased understanding of the activities that they manage and the issues involved. This is often referred to as process use, that is, “changes . . . that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process” (Patton, 1997, p. 90).
- *Evaluation as one input among others in policy debate.* Here, policy making is conceived of as an ongoing dialogue, the quality of which may be enhanced by using evaluation results to support more *informed dialogue* or argumentation (Van der Knaap, 1995).<sup>3</sup>
- *Enhancing incrementally the knowledge base of organizations through evaluation.* The “enlightenment view of evaluation” (Weiss, 1999) whereby the incremental knowledge generated through evaluations is fed into policy debates. *Cumulative learning* across many evaluations takes place rather than direct use from particular evaluations. In this type, evaluations rarely lead to direct changes in policy or to specific decisions. Evaluation inputs should not be expected to override political agendas and administrative necessities, which may well push decisions in quite different directions.

The second study, built on the knowledge gained of the EU context in the first study and the different types of evaluation use found in the literature, identified five types of use that were likely to be present within the EC:

- Providing inputs into *priority setting* and choosing between policy options
- Supporting the design of interventions

- Assisting in the efficient *allocation of resources*
- Improving the *implementation* of activities
- Increasing accountability and awareness of achievements

For each of these types of use, to ensure a systematic approach, a series of analytical criteria and corresponding indicators were developed at the start of the second study to help assess whether the type of use existed in any significant way (see Table 7.1).

The criteria listed in Table 7.1 were proposed in a survey questionnaire to 150 EC staff within evaluation functions. In light of the responses, they were subsequently refined and then used to provide a basis for the analysis that took place within 10 case studies (the contents of which are briefly described in the Appendix section of this chapter). The case studies did not focus on individual evaluations (e.g., one specific ex post program evaluation) as the basis for

**Table 7.1** Types of Use, Criteria, and Indicators

<i>Type of Use</i>	<i>Criteria</i> <i>Evaluation results are</i>	<i>Indicators (Examples)</i> <i>Evaluations are referred to, or explicitly used, in</i>
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used to elaborate and support proposals to European Council and European Parliament (e.g., reform communications, framework regulations, other regulations or directives)</li> <li>• used in an internal process (which can be an ex ante evaluation or impact assessment) that leads to new proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Commission (EC) Communications or their annexes, the adoption process in European Council or Parliament, the APS and CLWP, internal preparation process for new proposals, within (ex ante) “impact assessment”</li> </ul>
Design of interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used to describe the implementation of an intervention to European Council and Parliament</li> <li>• taken account of when designing interventions at the level of the EC</li> <li>• supportive of the annual planning cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EC Communications or their annexes</li> <li>• the adoption process in European Council or Parliament</li> <li>• the APS and CLWP</li> </ul>

(Continued)

**Table 7.1** (Continued)

<i>Type of Use</i>	<i>Criteria</i> <i>Evaluation results are</i>	<i>Indicators (Examples)</i> <i>Evaluations are referred to, or explicitly used, in</i>
Resource allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting establishment of EC annual budget (the “financial perspectives”)</li> <li>• instrumental in determining the appropriate level of funding within concrete EC proposals</li> <li>• instrumental in determining the appropriate level of funding in EC acts</li> <li>• underpinning financial management decisions</li> <li>• underpinning budget allocation choices within the budgetary and ABM and SPP processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (legislative) financial statements and explanatory memoranda</li> <li>• financing acts and decisions</li> <li>• the adoption process in European Council or Parliament</li> <li>• activity statements</li> <li>• APS</li> <li>• operational decisions with financial implications</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting management decisions on operations-level spending and activities</li> <li>• underpinning the EC’s own administration and internal procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individual Annual Management Plans</li> <li>• designing and modifying internal procedures</li> <li>• EC responses or “fiche contradictoire” to (external) evaluation</li> <li>• check and control by Evaluation Units for follow-up of recommendations</li> </ul>
Accountability and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used to account for achievements in the context of decision-making processes</li> <li>• referred to in dealings of the EC with the European Council and Parliament</li> <li>• referred to in dealings with external stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AAR and related processes</li> <li>• Communications, Commission working documents</li> <li>• discharge documents</li> <li>• ECA documents or activities</li> <li>• replies to Parliamentary questions</li> <li>• other European Council or Parliament documents</li> <li>• external documents and reports</li> <li>• relevant stakeholder groups</li> </ul>

*Note:* AAR = Annual Activity Report; ABM = Activity Based Management; APS = Annual Policy Strategy; CLWP = Commission Legislative and Work Programme; ECA = European Court of Auditors; SPP = Strategic Planning and Programming.

analysis but on “activity” as defined by the EC’s activity based budgeting (ABB) system. Within an ABB activity, several policy activities come together to contribute toward a policy objective or a set of policy objectives. Taking such an approach allowed an assessment of the interplay of *different* evaluations and other activities vis-à-vis a set of related policy objectives. It also allowed a varied set of policy interventions and policy domains to be investigated.

Table 7.2 indicates how often the different types of uses were encountered across the case studies (different cases could have more than one type of evaluation use). This shows that evaluation was most often used to assist implementation (of a program or policy), whereas priority setting in policy making was the least frequently observed type of use.

**Table 7.2** Frequency of Types of Use

<i>Type of Use</i>	<i>Frequency (Case Studies)</i>
Implementation	8
Design of interventions	7
Resource allocation	4
Awareness and accountability	4
Priority setting	2

The following sections present the highlights of the two studies and the relevant implications for evaluation commissioners. Although the most recent study was concluded in 2005, the lessons and insights that can be drawn from them, in view of our experience, are still highly relevant today.

## TYPES OF EVALUATION USE

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The following paragraphs discuss the types of evaluation use observed in the EC, following the order presented in Table 7.2, and present some tentative conclusions and pointers toward the different factors that are important in promoting different types of use.

### ***Evaluation Use to Improve Implementation***

The studies suggest that improving the implementation of various activities is the main contribution of evaluation in the EC, that is, instrumental use.

Only in two case studies (both relating to regulatory policy) was this type of use not observed. Instrumental use of intermediate evaluations of expenditure programs, for example, in the area of regional development, was particularly prevalent, as well as a key form of use with regard to the implementation of agreements with non-EU members in the areas of fisheries, the organization of agencies in the domain of education and culture, and humanitarian aid projects.

An interesting “use-rich” example was provided by DG Education and Culture’s Leonardo da Vinci Programme, which focuses on vocational training exchanges within the EU. Here, project selection methods were adapted as a direct result of evaluation findings (and their endorsement by the program’s management committee). Action plans developed by both the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF), the two EU vocational training agencies working respectively inside and outside the EU, resulted directly from evaluation recommendations.

The cases examined suggest that promoting the use of evaluation to improve implementation requires particular attention to be paid to

- the quality of evaluations, with regard to the production of practical and realistic recommendations; and
- the regular monitoring of progress in implementing the recommendations.

### ***Evaluation Use in the Design of Interventions***

Most of the case studies examined evaluations of existing programs at mid-term with a view to their possible continuation or the development of a new generation of interventions. These evaluations therefore often focused on design (this section) and implementation (above) issues.

In no case was the design of an expenditure program, a regulatory initiative, or other type of intervention radically altered due to evaluation findings that, most of the time, led to slight changes or reformulations. Two reasons could account for this. First, none of the evaluations in the case studies were specifically commissioned with the aim of supporting the design of an *entirely new* intervention but mainly focused on implementation issues, usually in the context of the continuation or renewal of the same intervention. Second, a radical change to the design of an existing intervention would generally require a change to its legal base, which may well inhibit evaluators from—or their being asked to refrain from—making any radical proposals for change.



In the early 2000s, the institutionalization of (*prospective*) *impact assessment* as a tool to support the design of interventions was at a relatively early stage and was not covered in either of the two studies. This aspect of evaluation received a major boost as of 2002 when the EC launched its impact assessment (IA) system, creating a unified framework to replace a range of sectoral impact assessment instruments developed in some DGs, mainly with responsibility for regulatory initiatives. The European Court of Auditors (ECA), on the basis of a review of IA reports between 2003 and 2008, concluded that “impact assessment has become an integral element of the Commission’s policy development and has been used by the Commission to design its initiatives better” (European Court of Auditors [ECA], 2010, p. 6). However, both the Court and the EC’s Impact Assessment Board observe<sup>4</sup> that there has been relatively limited use of *prior* evaluation findings in impact assessments. The Impact Assessment Board in its 2011 report noted that “there is still a need to better plan evaluations, so that they are available in time to be used as input for the IA process” (EC, 2012, p. 26).<sup>5</sup>

In the light of the cases studied, it can be concluded that effective planning is essential to ensure that evaluation results are available in a timely fashion in order to feed them into the design of an intervention. Moreover, the planning of an evaluation needs to take into account whether provisions exist in the legal base of an intervention for making significant changes or whether the legal base itself would have to be changed.

### **Evaluation Use in Resource Allocation**

Overall, any evidence of using evaluation to support resource allocation was difficult to find—contrasting with a recent World Bank report (2009) that claims (impact) evaluation is a useful tool in budget planning and financial management. The studies indicated that the influence of evaluations in relation to budget issues is marginal, especially for EU internal policies and programs. In the case of budget allocations within *external* policies that focus on countries outside the EU, the role of evaluation appeared to be more important. In such cases, evaluation was generally used to support requests for budget increases but not for making the case for reduced spending. This represents something of an issue for evaluation and even more so in times of severe budget constraints.

By contrast, decisions on reallocations within DGs or programs very often appeared to be supported by the use of evaluation results, and past evaluations feeding into *ex ante* evaluation can be used to help to better determine budget needs for a specific program when it starts to take shape.

Effective planning, which takes into account an organization's budgetary processes (in the case of the EC, very much shaped by the seven-year cycle, with possible adjustments halfway through), is important if evaluations are to inform decisions about resource allocation and budgeting. Moreover, obtaining senior management support for an evaluation is likely to be useful to promote a more symmetrical use of evaluation results in this context.

### ***Evaluation Use in Awareness Raising and Accountability***

The use of evaluations for accountability purposes is readily identifiable from the documents reviewed during the studies, especially in EC “communications,” and, to a certain extent, in other types such as budgetary discharge documents, replies to parliamentary questions, and so forth. Moreover, as an often overlooked side effect, the actual publication of evaluation results, which is the general rule for the EC, often helps raise awareness of the evaluated intervention. In several cases, an active communication strategy was developed to reach out and involve stakeholders—for instance, by organizing conferences or public hearings—whereas in other cases, reports were simply made available on the Internet.

Inter-DG communication practices organized around evaluations (e.g., by DGs participating in each others' steering groups) also help raise awareness. This was often the case (and an obligation) in evaluations of regulatory initiatives, agreements, and agencies, when multiple DGs often have shared responsibility. This practice is rarer in the evaluation of expenditure programs, unless two or more DGs are jointly accountable for implementation.

The case studies suggest that using evaluations to raise awareness and for accountability purposes requires particular attention at the planning stage to ensure that evaluation results can be appropriately disseminated.

### ***Evaluation Use in Priority Setting and Choosing Between Policy Options***

The studies provided evidence to show that evaluation results were systematically used in the policy-making processes in general, but they did not seem to significantly influence the setting of strategic or policy priorities, and while evaluations may have helped to shape priorities, any causal links were difficult to trace. The studies therefore suggest that evaluation does not appear to be an influential priority-setting tool. It could be argued that this is not so surprising

since priorities tend to emerge, rise up, and slide down the policy-making agenda as the policy environment evolves in the light of new challenges and related needs. Indeed, the EC did not set out to use evaluation as a tool for helping to set priorities, since its focus has been mainly on retrospectively examining program performance, that is, on their capacity to respond to predetermined policy priorities and related objectives.

Impact assessment provides a means through which evaluation can better support priority setting and the choice of policy options. Two major components of IA are (a) analyzing the *raison d'être* of proposed interventions and comparing different scenarios, and (b) assessing trade-offs between policy options. Furthermore, the scope of IA includes “upstream” initiatives such as white papers and communications that help define future EU policies. IA thus provides both a support in its own right for strategic development, policy making, and priority setting and a natural channel by which the results of previous evaluations can be used to this end (see above).

Another way of supporting greater use of evaluation in decision-making was the evaluation highlights document prepared by DG Budget and presented to the European Union’s Financial Perspectives ad hoc Working Group and to the European Parliament’s Policy Challenges Committee on policy challenges and budgetary means of the enlarged Union 2007 to 2013 (see Box 7.1).

### BOX 7.1 USING EVALUATION FOR DECISION-MAKING

The [...] evaluation highlights have the objective of furnishing institutions, stakeholders, and the general public with relevant evaluation results, as delivered by independent external consultants during the year 2005. The results have been analyzed in a crosscutting manner for each of the relevant headings in the new financial framework (2007–2013), on the basis of criteria such as the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, or community added value of the interventions. For each heading, crosscutting findings, appearing in several of the evaluations completed this year, have been identified, which could be of interest for *future decision making* [emphasis added] on EU policies.

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*Source:* European Commission, Directorate-General for the Budget. (2005). *Evaluation in the European Commission. Reporting on results. Annual evaluation review 2005*. Brussels, Belgium: Author. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat\\_general/evaluation/docs/eval\\_review\\_2005\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/evaluation/docs/eval_review_2005_en.pdf)

These findings mean that evaluation *on its own* may not be the most appropriate instrument to inform policy making, priority setting, and strategy formulation and that untenable promises should not be made in this respect. For some areas, there may be more of a tradition of previous evaluations being used for policy making than for the others. If the policy area is characterized by a low level of this type of evaluation use, there may have to be some preparatory work to secure advance support for using an evaluation. When an evaluation is expected to draw on previous evaluations to help shape policy and priority setting, the processing of information can draw on and feed into other procedures and processes so as to take into account the policy-making environment, including the political dynamics in play. Therefore, if an evaluation is conducted to directly inform policy making, it needs to be linked to the broader policy-making, priority setting, or strategy formulation processes. Some form of meta-evaluation, or evaluation synthesis, may be useful here to bring together the lessons of several individual evaluations and to enhance understanding of the broader policy context.

## **FACTORS SUPPORTING OR INHIBITING EVALUATION USE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION COMMISSIONERS**

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So far, our analysis has mainly looked at *how* and to what *extent* evaluation has been used in the EC. Now, we will look more closely at the *factors* that appear to play a role in fostering or inhibiting the different types of evaluation use in order to draw out insights that may be useful for evaluation commissioners. The different factors are discussed below in order of their relative importance, as shown by the two studies.

### ***Evaluation Planning and Timing; Purpose of the Evaluation***

Without exception, the timeliness of evaluations and evaluation planning in relation to the program or policy cycle turned out to be the most crucial factor for all types of evaluation use. This finding is echoed by the Impact Assessment (IA) Board report for 2011, which points out that timeliness of evaluations is a key issue for IA, hence, for the preparation and definition of policies and regulation more broadly.

In the cases studied, both the reason (for instance a legal obligation) and the purpose of the evaluation (i.e., who should use the results and when, in

order to do what) appeared intimately linked—not to say an equivalent factor—to the timeliness of the evaluation. This is because an evaluation can make a significant contribution to a (set of) decision(s) at a certain period in time only, for example, when the intervention is actually being designed (not once it is up and running). Consequently, the commissioner should ensure that the time frame set for an evaluation allows the findings to be delivered at the optimal moment.

It has been a feature of EC expenditure programs that the time frame for their evaluation is specifically incorporated into their legal base; this means that an evaluation has to be carried out at a given point in a program's life, irrespective of what it could be expected to have achieved by then and regardless of whether an evaluation would have anything meaningful to report on, for example, in terms of a program's effects. Some flexibility should therefore be allowed in order to optimize an evaluation's usefulness, though in the firm knowledge of the trade-offs involved, in particular that an evaluation that is well synchronized with the preparation of a new programming cycle might be able to provide only an analysis of implementation. The studies also identified cases where decisions on follow-up programs had to be taken before the evaluations had been completed, due to legal timing requirements or evaluations taking longer than planned.

Over time, some of the EC's services have introduced greater flexibility into the legal provisions of programs with respect to the timing of intermediate evaluations. For instance, the intermediate evaluation of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme on vocational training was advanced by 6 months in order to be useful to the preparation of the new generation of programs from 2007 to 2013.

Recommended practices for commissioners to make evaluations timelier are therefore to

- understand the policy cycle of which the evaluation is part and determine the most useful moment for the delivery of evaluation results accordingly;
- plan evaluations to respond to decision making needs and constraints (e.g., the type of legislative procedure);
- advance the timing of the evaluation, if this will facilitate its use, should there be sufficient flexibility within the relevant legal statutes and/or it is possible to make compromises in terms of data collection and analysis; and
- establish framework contracts with external evaluators to help reduce the length of procurement procedures and, consequently, the overall duration of evaluations.

However, planning should go beyond the issue of timing to identify the type(s) of use an evaluation is expected to serve and provide a framework to ensure an appropriate evaluation design and process. For example,

- with respect to informing decisions on resource allocation and budgeting, the evaluation commissioner should ensure that evaluations are appropriately designed, especially with regard to the analyses of efficiency and, in turn, to inform on cost issues; and
- if accountability is the explicit purpose of the evaluation (e.g., if this is legally required), a steering group may be useful in this context to develop messages on accountability issues as well as raising awareness among stakeholders, while a communication strategy should be drawn up to identify channels, formal and informal, for communicating evaluation results to both internal and external audiences, giving special attention to a wide range of interested stakeholder groups.

Last but not least, the importance of the role of the evaluation function should be underlined. This entity is often the only one that has a clear overview of the entire set of evaluations and evaluation processes within an organization and how these relate to the overall decision-making processes. For this reason, it should help other parts of the organization to understand the importance of ensuring good evaluation planning.

### ***Support of Senior Management***

Support from senior management in the use of evaluation findings appeared to be an important factor, though this support is often implicit in nature and little evidence could actually be found regarding senior management's overt support for evaluation or its use. This was especially true in the case of *intermediate* "routinized" and legally obligatory evaluations of expenditure programs for which there was only "silent support" most of the time. Seemingly, it is clear for senior management that these evaluations simply need to be done. As a consequence, the main use of evaluations is very much *instrumental* and at an operational level (see above).

It appears to be difficult for evaluation results to be "filtered up" to the higher levels of senior management, at least in their original form, even if this does not exclude their use "in disguise" (e.g., in policy papers or concept notes which draw on evaluation results). There was, however, some evidence to show

that evaluation results were taken up and used by senior management to support budget *increases* and possible resource reallocations. But, as explained above, evaluation use was not primarily seen as being important for making budgetary or financial decisions other than at operational level, that is, within DGs or programs, though this situation is likely to change in the future, particularly as impact assessments are expected to increasingly draw on previous evaluations.<sup>6</sup>

Consequences for the evaluation commissioner are as follows. To secure commitment for evaluation from senior management and thereby optimize its use, the commissioner needs to ensure buy-in and ownership. In part, this may be secured through institutionalizing evaluation within an organization. In such cases, it is important to assign a specific role for senior managers within the institutionalized procedures for defining the production, circulation, and dissemination of evaluation reports as well as the uptake of results—for instance, through the need for a management response to the evaluation to be provided, or, through an obligation to report on the implementation of recommendations, to an appropriately high-level audience, for example, an organization's executive board. Such commitment is easier when an evaluation *culture* already exists within an organization and when there is general acknowledgment of the benefits and value of evaluation by different stakeholders. Such an evaluation culture cannot be created through a single evaluation but is the outcome of a much longer process; moreover, such a culture needs to be continuously nurtured and confirmed (see the “shared model of change” in Wimbush's Chapter 5 as well as Läubli's Chapters 4 and 10 and Neubecker, Ripley, and Russon's Chapter 9 in this book).

In addition, when the commissioner can actively involve senior management in the evaluation process, this can help improve the strategic use of evaluation. Such involvement appears particularly important at the *planning stage* (e.g., sharing and discussing evaluation terms of reference such as in a workshop, so as to nurture demand for evaluation results). Involving senior management in discussing the draft evaluation results can be equally useful. Securing the participation of senior management at these two stages is particularly important for increasing the strategic use of evaluations, including decisions that involve significant resource reallocations, which could involve closing programs when evaluation results show that they do not respond adequately to the needs of beneficiaries (i.e., limited relevance), are not fully achieving their objectives (i.e., limited effectiveness), or they are not achieving their objectives at a reasonable cost (i.e., limited efficiency).

### **Evaluation Quality**

The quality of an evaluation appeared to also be an important factor for the use of findings, and in this context, the evaluation commissioner has an important role to play. However, even when an evaluation is methodologically and empirically sound, this alone will not necessarily ensure that recommendations will be followed up since political factors can be much more influential. Indeed, major political decisions are taken on the basis of poor-quality evaluations—and are often made in their complete absence. The studies support the idea that, within a system where evaluation *is* taken seriously and is effectively *planned to be used* (i.e., its instrumental use, which was increasingly the case at the EC at the time of the studies), it is a condition sine qua non that evaluations use reliable data gathering and analysis procedures to produce credible evaluation results.

Specifically, when using evaluation results to improve implementation, the notion of quality should take into account the need for recommendations to be practical and realistic enough to be taken forward by services responsible for the evaluated program. Theoretical, or abstract, recommendations are generally not useful in any situation. “Strategic” recommendations—which external evaluators, confronted for the first time with a program, are too often inclined to make—should be made only if they are likely to be taken up beyond those responsible for implementation, that is, at a more political level.

Of course, the quality of the evaluation is directly, though not exclusively, related to the expertise of the evaluators, so selecting the right evaluators is an important task for the evaluation commissioner. An important lesson to highlight here is that evaluations require a combination of skills, which the commissioner should identify in the call for tender in order to prevent—as we saw in several cases—the need for undue support from the evaluation function and other concerned services, either because the evaluators are subject experts who are not well acquainted with evaluation or because they are evaluators with insufficient understanding of the subject matter. Ideally, a combination of expertise should be available in the evaluation team. In the case studies, we noted that the teams usually included both evaluation and subject-matter expertise, such as experts in the fields of energy, rural development, fisheries, or food security. However, in one area, we found that demand for evaluation significantly exceeded supply and evaluators were overstretched as a result—which ultimately had an impact on the quality of reports.



**BOX 7.2****TWO EXAMPLES: FOOD SAFETY AND HUMANITARIAN AID**

For one of the cases, in food safety, interviewees linked the quality of the study to the evaluator's competences or knowledge of the subject matter. In another case, the evaluation was performed by a "pure" evaluator. The quality of the report produced by those with both subject and evaluation expertise was found to be significantly better (and its usability therefore higher) for these highly technical subjects.

A second example where the quality of evaluators, of the evaluation, and of evaluation use was directly linked was in the case of humanitarian aid. Here it was found important to select evaluators with a good understanding of humanitarian aid so that, from the onset, they were able to gain the confidence of the geographical desks and the field-based technical assistants.

Yet engaging evaluators with the relevant expertise is not sufficient—it is the task of the evaluation commissioner to manage relations with the evaluation team in such a way as to ensure the production of a high quality product.

Several actions that the evaluation commissioner can undertake are instrumental in this process:

- Produce sound and clear terms of reference, which include the purpose of the evaluation and its focus in terms of the questions to be answered.
- Assist in selecting the evaluator or evaluation team with the appropriate mix of expertise.
- When particular evaluation approaches are required, including the development and use of more complex methods, this should be clearly specified.
- Provide a clear set of quality standards with which the work should comply, for example, by proposing a template for the report structure, when possible, with an example of what is considered a high quality report.
- Establish a steering group, involving different stakeholders to oversee the evaluation process.

- Set up an external peer review of the evaluation report or meta-evaluation (especially whenever the evaluation commissioner does not have the competence him- or herself to perform this) and possibly also of the terms of reference and intermediate or draft reports.
- Ensure that it is possible to refuse a report which does not comply with quality standards—it should be noted that this is likely to effect the time frame of an evaluation, so it is best to supervise and work closely with the evaluator from the earliest moments of the exercise in order to ensure that any quality issues are dealt with as they arise.

Finally, the scope, quality, and use of evaluations appear to be closely related. Four cases studied suggest that evaluations are more useful when they have a narrow focus, allowing them to examine questions in-depth and provide more precise results. By contrast, wide-ranging evaluations run the risk of being superficial and giving rise to generic recommendations. The depth and precision of an evaluation influences the practicability and feasibility of recommendations in terms of their implementation.

### ***Monitoring the Follow-Up of Evaluation Recommendations***

Although this finding cannot be generalized (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009), at the EC it is common practice in most of the DGs to monitor the follow-up of evaluation recommendations (i.e., their implementation). Although no harmonized format seems to exist within the EC to do this, the main steps are generally as follows. At the end of an evaluation, all recommendations are listed and questions are asked of the relevant services, relating to (a) whether a recommendation will and can be followed up, (b) how it will be followed up, and (c) by when. Next, at regular intervals, the realization of this plan is checked by the evaluation function. This is an issue evaluation commissioners should address to enhance the use of evaluation results, particularly in the context of using evaluations to improve implementation. Although this may be viewed by some as giving evaluation functions too much of a policing role, from our experience, it appears to constitute a very important tool to reinforce the use of evaluation results since it allows those responsible for responding to the evaluation to be held to account for progress made. Furthermore, in the interest of accountability and transparency, and to provide an incentive for follow-up to take place, the results of this process can be made public.

### ***Involvement of Stakeholders***

The involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process, particularly potential users, appeared to be a crucial factor for the uptake of evaluation findings, as more recently confirmed by other studies (Johnson et al., 2009; Vanlandingham, 2011). In the two studies, the most important user group was the commissioning DG itself. In other cases, however, potential users may well be more widely distributed within an organization and even beyond, in particular among beneficiaries and funders. A distinction can therefore be made between two major groups of stakeholders: first, those responsible for the direct uptake of evaluation results and, second, those who are not involved in implementation but have a strong interest in one form or another in the intervention.

The studies suggest a “good practice,” namely, that those responsible for the implementation of evaluation results are actively involved in the evaluation process; that is, they are consulted on defining the terms of reference, taking part in the steering group, and commenting on draft and final reports. This can strengthen the feasibility and practicality of recommendations and thus increase the likelihood of their use by lead users.

#### **BOX 7.3 STEERING GROUPS**

The EC’s Annual Evaluation Review 2003 (EC, 2004, p. 15) showed that steering groups for the management of the evaluations had become standard practice. In 2003, around 82% of all completed evaluation projects were conducted under the guidance of a steering group. The number of evaluations without steering groups was continuously declining. In about half of the internal steering groups, European Commission officials from the different DGs are represented. In the other half, they come from the same DG. In nearly half of the cases, steering groups also incorporated external stakeholders, that is, non-EC.

In some cases, a broader range of stakeholders, for example, civil society, was involved in an evaluation process, not as members of a steering group but through expert hearings or public consultations, some of which were facilitated electronically. An example of the latter case was organized by DG Information Society, which organized a broad consultation of the draft,

intermediate report of its *Five Year Assessment* of the Information Society Technologies (IST) research program. This process involved the IST policy community, representatives of member states, and beneficiaries of the evaluated program, many of whom used the opportunity to comment on the draft recommendations. This procedure helped to finalize the final report and to disseminate the preliminary results of the evaluation to the relevant stakeholder communities.

More generally, the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders in the evaluation process may also help increase the legitimacy of evaluation findings, thus, easing the path for the implementation of recommendations and other types of evaluation use.

### **Human Resources**

Even though, in the course of the studies, interviewees and respondents did not mention “time investment” as being a particular problem, evaluations are “time consuming” and human resource intensive. On the basis of the study, and in the light of our own experience, we can recommend that, when planning an evaluation, evaluation commissioners should bear in mind that the following activities are highly resource intensive:

- Determining the need, scope, purpose, and questions for the evaluation—drawing up the terms of reference and organizing and participating in steering group meetings; this work is done by the “secretariat” (or manager) of an evaluation, that is, the official who manages the evaluation process from beginning to end and is in closest contact with the evaluator (in the case of an external evaluation); estimated time needed for this function ranges from 20% of the manager’s time to peak periods of nearly full time, especially in the beginning of the evaluation project (terms of reference, kick-off meeting, inception report, inception meeting, etc.) and during the drafting phases of the final report
- Taking part in the steering group; members devote time before, during, and after the meetings for reading and preparing comments on documents
- Administrating the formal and contractual procedures of the evaluation project, again especially important in the case of procuring the services of external contractors or when internal evaluations have external components (e.g., external facilitation of workshop)
- Conducting an internal evaluation, including designing, planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data and writing up and presenting the report

Closely linked to human resources, financial resources more broadly are important. In the case studies, no real problems appeared to have been encountered with regard to funding. In other organizations, this can, however, be a real problem, and the evaluation commissioner should be aware of the cost of the various steps of an evaluation, especially when extensive data collection and more complex analytical methods are requested from evaluators.

### ***Dissemination of Evaluation Results***

The studies showed that in most cases, active dissemination of evaluation results is not viewed as a priority—“Interested people will read the report anyway so posting it on the internet is sufficient,” as one interviewee phrased it. However, targeted dissemination may contribute to the improved awareness, and eventually improved use, of evaluation results. Similarly, it helps increase the acceptability of the evaluation findings by a wider audience than those directly involved with the implementation of an intervention. Broad dissemination to a wide range of stakeholders is particularly important when using evaluations for awareness raising and accountability purposes.

An evaluation commissioner may therefore want to distinguish between the following groups and use different ways of communicating with them:

- Those responsible for the implementation of the intervention, who are usually directly involved in the evaluation process
- Senior management
- Other services within and outside the organization which are involved in implementing the evaluated intervention
- Those responsible for analyzing and summarizing evaluation activity across the organization
- Wider stakeholder groups, including funders and beneficiaries

It should be borne in mind that for the EC, the groups targeted for dissemination are more readily identifiable for expenditure programs as these have clearly defined beneficiaries. This is not usually the case for regulatory and other policy initiatives. To improve the dissemination of evaluation results, the studies found that it is important not to focus on one single evaluation but to synthesize and disseminate the findings from several evaluations around the same program, policy, or theme.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the results of two studies on evaluation use at the European Commission and translated those findings into hands-on recommendations for evaluation commissioners.

Table 7.3 matches the EC's main uses of evaluation with those discussed in the literature, as described above. The table clearly suggests two clusters, one around instrumental use and learning, a second related to the policy debate and enhancing the knowledge base underpinning decisions and public interventions.

Evaluations appeared to be mainly used to improve the implementation and design of interventions and for awareness raising and accountability. Although evaluations appeared to be frequently used for reallocation of resources within a program, this is not the case for budget allocation at policy level or for priority setting—the more recently developed Impact Assessment (IA) instrument seems to be more used for this and, for the time being, does not seem to take into account evaluation results sufficiently. Factors that foster or hinder evaluation use are related to evaluation planning and timing, and, timeliness: to the buy-in of senior management, to the quality of the evaluation and the involvement of potential users and stakeholders in the evaluation process; and these are all important features the evaluation commissioner should consider when setting up and managing an evaluation. Last but not least, the systematic and transparent monitoring of the implementation of recommendations provides a means of reinforcing accountability for evaluation use.

**Table 7.3** Mapping of Purpose of Evaluation at EC Versus Evaluation Use as per the Literature

<i>Literature EC</i>	<i>Managing and Instrumental</i>	<i>Learning</i>	<i>Input Into Policy Debate</i>	<i>Enhance Knowledge Base</i>
Implementation	X	X		
Design of interventions	X	X		X
Resource allocation	X			
Accountability and awareness			X	X
Priority setting	X		X	X

The findings presented in the present chapter now allow us to draw up a profile of the “use-oriented” evaluation commissioner.

- The use-oriented evaluation commissioner will ensure that evaluation results are available “on time” to permit their input into the decision-making process. This means designing an evaluation sufficiently in advance and anticipating the full period needed for its completion. It also means that the evaluation commissioner should analyze to what extent an intervention can actually be changed.
- The use-oriented evaluation commissioner will set up a steering group that oversees the work of the evaluators and provides feedback. She or he makes sure that there is buy-in from senior management into the evaluation (which can either be a systematic feature or specific to each evaluation). Such commitment will be more readily obtained if an evaluation culture has already taken root within an organization.
- The use-oriented evaluation commissioner will ensure that quality assurance is a continuous process, starting when the terms of reference are being designed, and that evaluation recommendations are formulated in such a way as to be used by the relevant services for improving program implementation. She or he will have put into place a system for tracking progress in implementing recommendations over time.
- A dissemination strategy for evaluation results can also contribute to increased use. Again, it is the task of the evaluation commissioner to devise the strategy and ensure that it is implemented. Messages should be tailored to stakeholder profiles, differentiating between communicating inside and outside the organization.
- The studies suggest that the influence of evaluation on budgetary decisions, except when reallocations within a program are envisaged, is weak. Wherever evaluations are commissioned to help with decisions about resource allocation and budgeting, they should be appropriately designed, especially with regard to the analyses of efficiency in order to be able to inform convincingly on cost issues. The evaluation commissioner should therefore be well acquainted with the organization or evaluated program’s budgetary processes.
- Last but not least, it was found that in some cases that evaluation may not be the most appropriate or, at least, will not be the single, main approach used within policy-making processes. If an evaluation is explicitly conducted with the purpose of use for policy making in mind, the evaluation commissioner should be closely connected to or at least

well acquainted with, the broader policy-making, priority setting, or strategy formulation process and its design, as well as with other methodologies and tools used in that process (e.g., impact assessment, foresight exercises), in order to make sure that the evaluation she or he commissions and the information it yields can be made useful within this broader process.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Amid the various uses for evaluation suggested in the literature is “knowledge generation.” How would you measure the incremental knowledge generated through an evaluation?
2. What are the pros and cons about using recommendations as criteria for judging use?
3. A number of criteria and indicators were used to analyze the EC’s analysis of evaluation use. Some examples of the indicators used for each of the criterion are provided in this chapter. Can you identify any additional ones, especially qualitative indicators?
4. In developing and implementing a communication strategy for disseminating evaluation findings, who should be involved and how? What are the budget implications?

## NOTES

1. This coordination function was situated within the Directorate-General for Budget until being transferred to the Secretariat-General in 2009.
2. MEANS stands for Méthodes d’Evaluation des Actions de Nature Structurale.
3. A more recent contribution in this area is on exploiting policy windows to enhance use (Wimbush, 2010).
4. See the IA Board’s report for 2011 (Commission Staff Working Document [SEC(2011)]101 final; see EC, 2012) and the ECA’s Special Report No. 3 of 2010 (ECA, 2010).
5. The recent Smarter Regulation initiative of the EC includes the systematizing and reinforcing of the evaluation of legislation, following implementation, and aims to increase the use of evaluations as inputs into IA.
6. Political guidelines for the next European Commission (2009).

## APPENDIX

This appendix provides an overview of the cases studied. Most of these reports can be accessed through the European Commission’s websites.



<i>DG (European Commission Policy Activity Analyzed in the Study)</i>	<i>Evaluation-Intervention Couples Identified</i>	<i>Main Use of the Evaluation Results</i>	<i>Intervention Types</i>	<i>Evaluation Types</i>	<i>Is Evaluation a Legal Obligation?</i>	<i>Centralized, Decentralized, or Devolved</i>	<i>Evaluation: Internal, External?</i>
DG Enterprise (Encouraging entrepreneurship)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intermediate (2002–03) and final (2004–05) evaluation of MAP</li> <li>Intermediate (2002) and final (2004) evaluation of IDA program</li> <li>Evaluation of MGS pilot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation improvement</li> <li>The MGS pilot action is stopped after the evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programs</li> <li>Pilot action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Midterm and final evaluations</li> </ul>	Yes	Decentralized	MAP midterm internal, others external
DG Employment (Work organizations and working conditions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of the practical implementation of national legislation transposing health and safety directives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To account for achievements in the light of the European Union member states implementing the relevant directives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transposition of directives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing; ex post</li> </ul>	There is legal requirement to monitor rather than evaluate	Decentralized	External
DG Agriculture (Rural development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leader—Several evaluations</li> <li>Objective 5a and 5b and accompanying measures</li> <li>Different regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expenditure programs policies</li> <li>Regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ex post</li> <li>Midterm</li> <li>Impact assessment</li> </ul>	Yes	Decentralized, devolved	External

(Continued)

(Continued)

<i>DG (European Commission Policy Activity Analyzed in the Study)</i>	<i>Evaluation-Intervention Couples Identified</i>	<i>Main Use of the Evaluation Results</i>	<i>Intervention Types</i>	<i>Evaluation Types</i>	<i>Is Evaluation a Legal Obligation?</i>	<i>Centralized, Decentralized, or Devolved</i>	<i>Evaluation: Internal, External?</i>
DG Transport and Energy (Conventional and renewable energies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midterm, evaluation of</li> <li>• Energy framework program which consists of SAVE, ALTENER, SYNERGY, CARNOT, SURE and ETAP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of current program, internal coherence, future of the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expenditure programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ex post, midterm, ex ante</li> </ul>	Yes	Decentralized	External
DG Fisheries (International fisheries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of fishery agreements between Europe and non-EU members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewal of fishery agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreements with developing countries</li> </ul>	“Final”	Yes	Decentralized	External
DG Regional Policy (Regional development fund)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midterm evaluation of structural funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation</li> <li>• Decisions on performance reserve</li> <li>• Capitalization within the DG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural funds (programs)</li> </ul>	Midterm	Yes	Devolved	External
DG Education and Culture (Vocational training-Leonardo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midterm evaluation of Leonardo II Programme</li> <li>• Periodical evaluations of Cedefop and European Training Foundation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued implementation of a program</li> <li>• Input to ex ante evaluation and preparation of a new program</li> <li>• Establishment of agency action plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expenditure program</li> <li>• Agencies</li> </ul>	Midterm ongoing, periodical evaluation of agencies	Yes, in all cases	Decentralized	External (but the ex ante evaluation making use of the Leonardo evaluation was done internally)

<i>DG (European Commission Policy Activity Analyzed in the Study)</i>	<i>Evaluation-Intervention Couples Identified</i>	<i>Main Use of the Evaluation Results</i>	<i>Intervention Types</i>	<i>Evaluation Types</i>	<i>Is Evaluation a Legal Obligation?</i>	<i>Centralized, Decentralized, or Devolved</i>	<i>Evaluation: Internal, External?</i>
DG Health and Consumer Protection (Food safety)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of the food labeling legislation</li> <li>Evaluation of Regulation 258/97 concerning novel foods and novel foods ingredients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislation</li> <li>Regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislation and Regulation</li> </ul>	Ongoing	Yes	Decentralized	External
DG Justice (Citizenship and fundamental rights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Midterm and final evaluations of Daphne Programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of ongoing program</li> <li>Preparation of new program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program</li> </ul>	Midterm and final	Yes	Decentralized	External
DG ECHO (Humanitarian Aid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of humanitarian aid interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program and external funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program and external funding</li> </ul>	Periodical evaluation	Yes	Decentralized	External

*Note:* Cedefop = European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; DG = Directorate-General; ECHO = DG for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection; IDA = European Program for Electronic Interchange of Data between Administrations; MAP = Multi-annual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship; MGS = Mutual Guarantee Schemes. Please note that the following are NOT abbreviations but just catchy titles for a series of subprograms within a broader Energy framework program that ran from the mid-1990s until the mid 2000s: SAVE (promotion of energy efficiency), ALTENER (renewable resources), SYNERGY (co-operative program), CARNOT (environmentally sound use of solid fuels), SURE (nuclear), and ETAP (multiannual program of studies, analyses, forecasts and other related work in the energy sector) were subprograms of the Energy Framework Program of the European Union.

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