



**Utilization, Influence and Long-Term Impact – What is the Effect of Evaluation in Different Systems? – Position Paper of the Gesellschaft für Evaluation DeGEval (Evaluation Society) Management Board**

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The growing importance of evaluation is repeatedly pointed out. Evaluation often seeks to examine impacts, but does it have enough impact of its own? Can evaluation results change society, or sections of society, in the intended way? The question as to the use of evaluation links to the first set of criteria in the recently revised *Standards for Evaluation* produced by DeGEval – Gesellschaft für Evaluation (see [www.degeval.de](http://www.degeval.de)). However, this standard of utility in evaluation only relates to the conceptual design of the evaluation project, the extent to which all stakeholders were involved and how clearly the purposes of the evaluation were stated. Whether these are then actually implemented relates to the question addressed here as to the use and long-term impact of evaluation.

The long-term effect of evaluation in different social systems is the subject of intense debate, which commenced at DeGEval's 19th annual conference in Salzburg, Austria between 21 and 23 September 2016. The discussion ranged from issues relating to the requirements and conditions for the profitable utilization of evaluation, i.e. the planned usage or application of evaluation by stakeholders, to the direct and indirect influences and effects of evaluation. The term 'long-term impact' implies that the utilization of evaluation and its results produces a lasting positive effect, with equal consideration being given to social, ecological and economic aspects. The annual conference shed light on the utilization, influence, effect and long-term impact of evaluation with overarching issues in the educational, political, cultural, health, economic and administrative systems and from different perspectives.

Significant differences were identified between sectors depending on the extent to which evaluation is embedded in practice. Let's take a closer look at certain sectors by way of example:

- In the education sector, which was the focus of the 2016 conference owing to the host, the *School of Education* at the University of Salzburg, evaluation and the implementation of evaluation results is firmly embedded in many areas. The first models introduced in schools were self-evaluation models. Participation was mostly voluntary, with the result that conducting evaluation largely built upon the participating teachers' engagement and desire for self-improvement and the expansion of their own skills and thus led to more lasting effects. In recent years, evaluation in schools has increasingly been based on the assessment of pupils' competencies, which has led to some very thought-provoking results (the reaction in Germany to the results of the first PISA assessment was referred to as the 'PISA shock') but has not always

contributed to changes in the school system. In higher education, evaluation is required by law in many countries. In Austria, for example, universities are required to subject their quality management systems to regular external assessment; this may result in obligations which must then be fulfilled.

- In industry, evaluative measures – even if they do not always constitute evaluation in the proper sense – are primarily found in quality management. They are normally strongly embedded in the institution. Owing to economic considerations, companies have an interest in translating results directly into optimization measures and thus ensuring effect and long-term impact.
- In the health sector, defined forms of evaluation are required by law for the approval of drugs and treatments (experimental quantitative studies in the form of randomized controlled trials). Effectiveness in practice is therefore defined. In other areas, such as the evaluation of health prevention measures, processes are less compulsory and methodologies are ‘softer’ (e.g. quasi-experimental). Here, the long-term usefulness of the measures often remains unclear.

What can we learn from this? We believe that utilization, influence and long-term impact can be increased above all through two approaches. Firstly, participatory elements in evaluation augment its long-term utility. Stakeholders feel that they are being taken seriously, develop an interest in the evaluation results, apply the evaluation methodology where they identify a need and are therefore able to collaborate directly in the implementation of the results. Secondly, the long-term usefulness of evaluation is facilitated when evaluation is firmly embedded in practice, for example through legal obligations. However, it is important to stipulate not only that evaluation be conducted, but also that the results be implemented.

These two approaches are certainly opposed, often incompatible, and therefore represent different routes which may be more or less promising in different fields of practice. Both, however, contribute to the stronger embedding of evaluation in society.