

Challenges to Evaluators' Independence

A comparative perspective

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Independence in Evaluation Standards

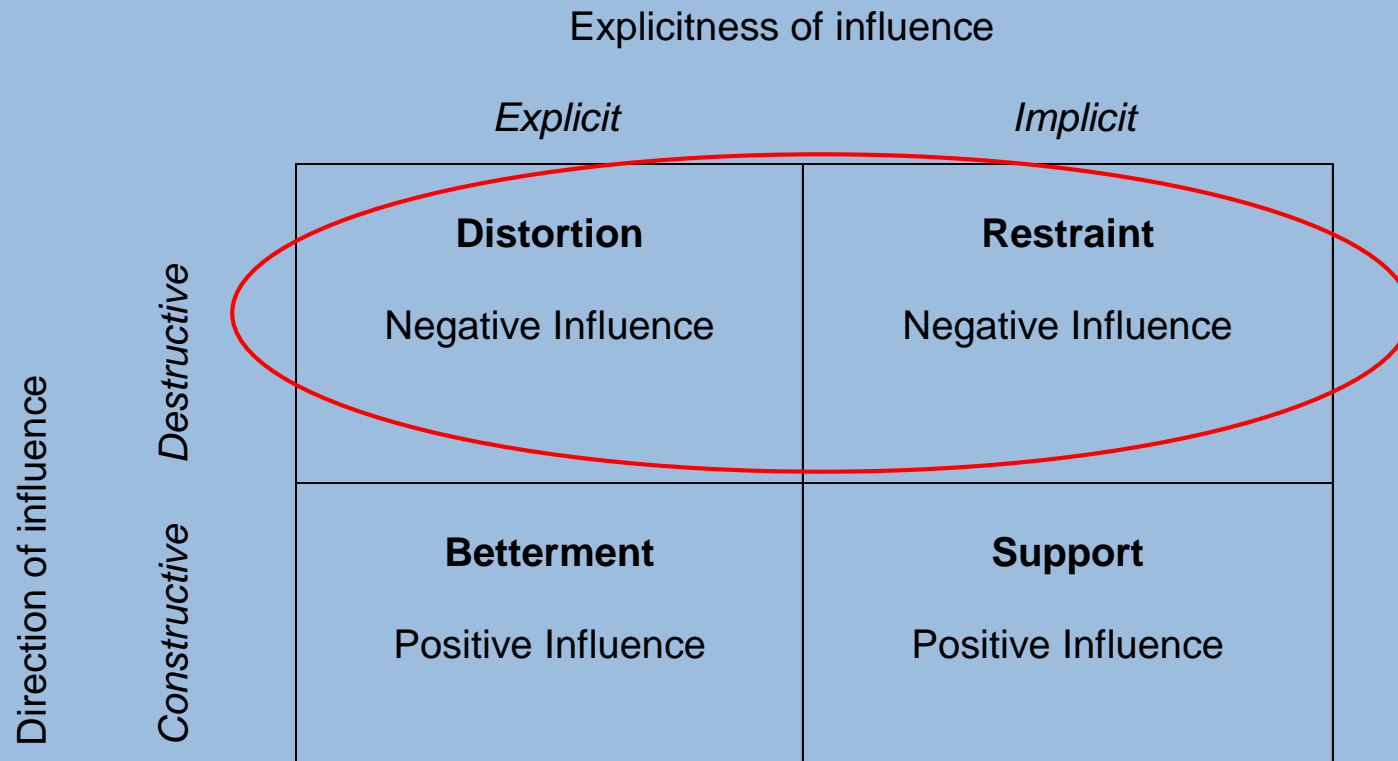
- > “The trustworthiness of evaluators decisively influences the feasibility and effectiveness of an evaluation. In order to be considered trustworthy by the various stakeholders, the following features are crucial: integrity, independence as well as social and communicative competences” (SEVAL)
- > “evaluators aspire to construct and provide the best possible information that might bear on the value of whatever is being evaluated” (American Evaluation Association)
- > “unbiased conduct and reporting” (*German Evaluation Society DeGEval*)

Some questions

- > Is it all normal that a commissioning agency asks me to change my results?
- > Am I the only one to experience pressure?
- > How do other evaluators cope with this situation?
- > How does Switzerland look in international comparison?

What are we talking about?

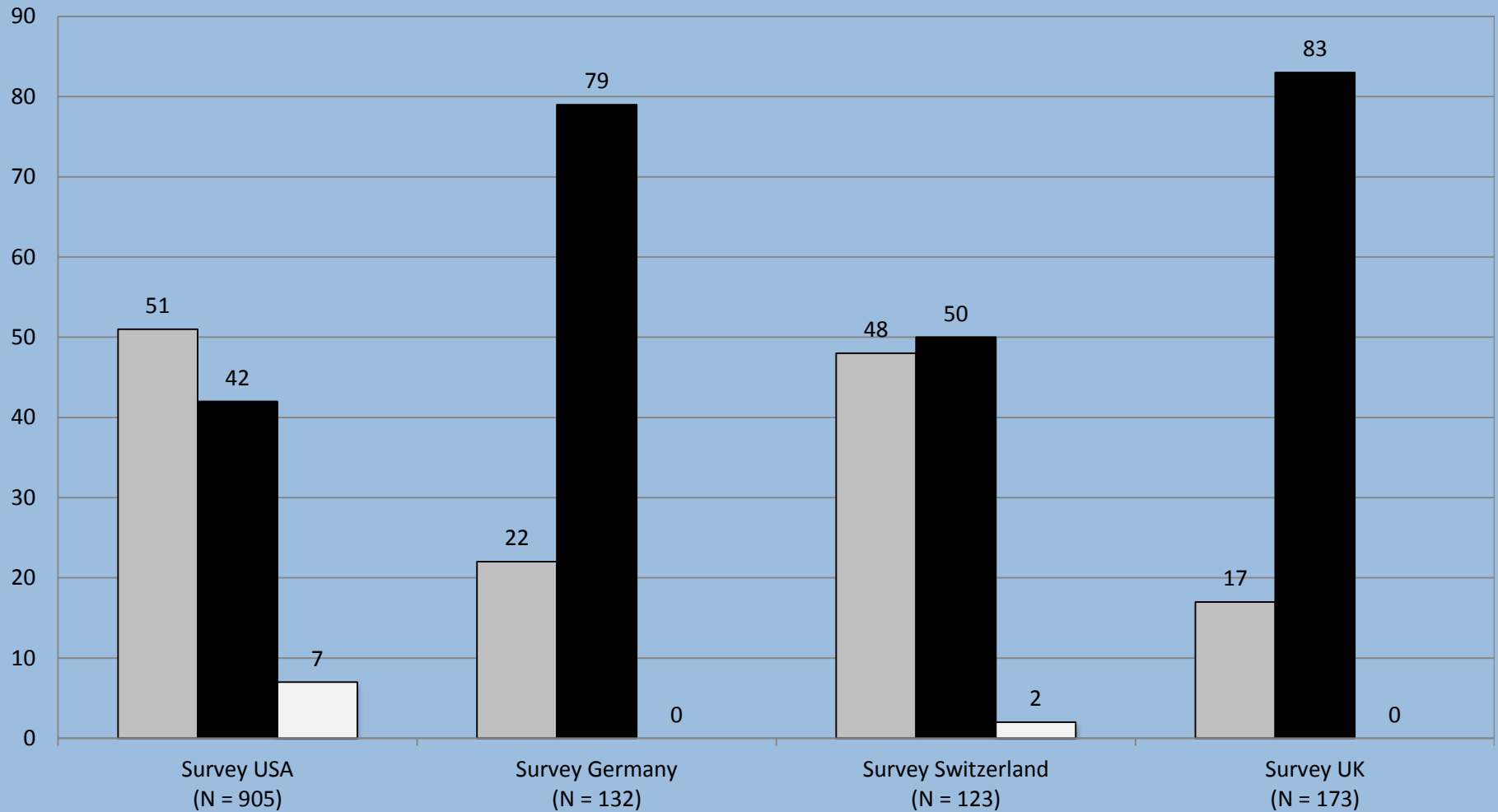
DRSB-heuristic model of influence



Comparing results from the USA, UK, Germany and Switzerland

- > USA by Morris & Clark (2013); UK by the LSE GV314 Group (2013); Germany by Stockmann et al. (2011); Switzerland by Pleger & Sager (2015)
- > Research design: studies were conducted by using an online questionnaire surveying members of their respective evaluation societies
- > Sample size: 940 (USA); 204 (UK), 132 (Germany), 157 (Switzerland)
- > Evaluators in the USA, Germany and Switzerland are relatively highly educated
- > Primary employment setting of the respondents when conducting evaluations are heterogeneous

Experience with pressure and influence



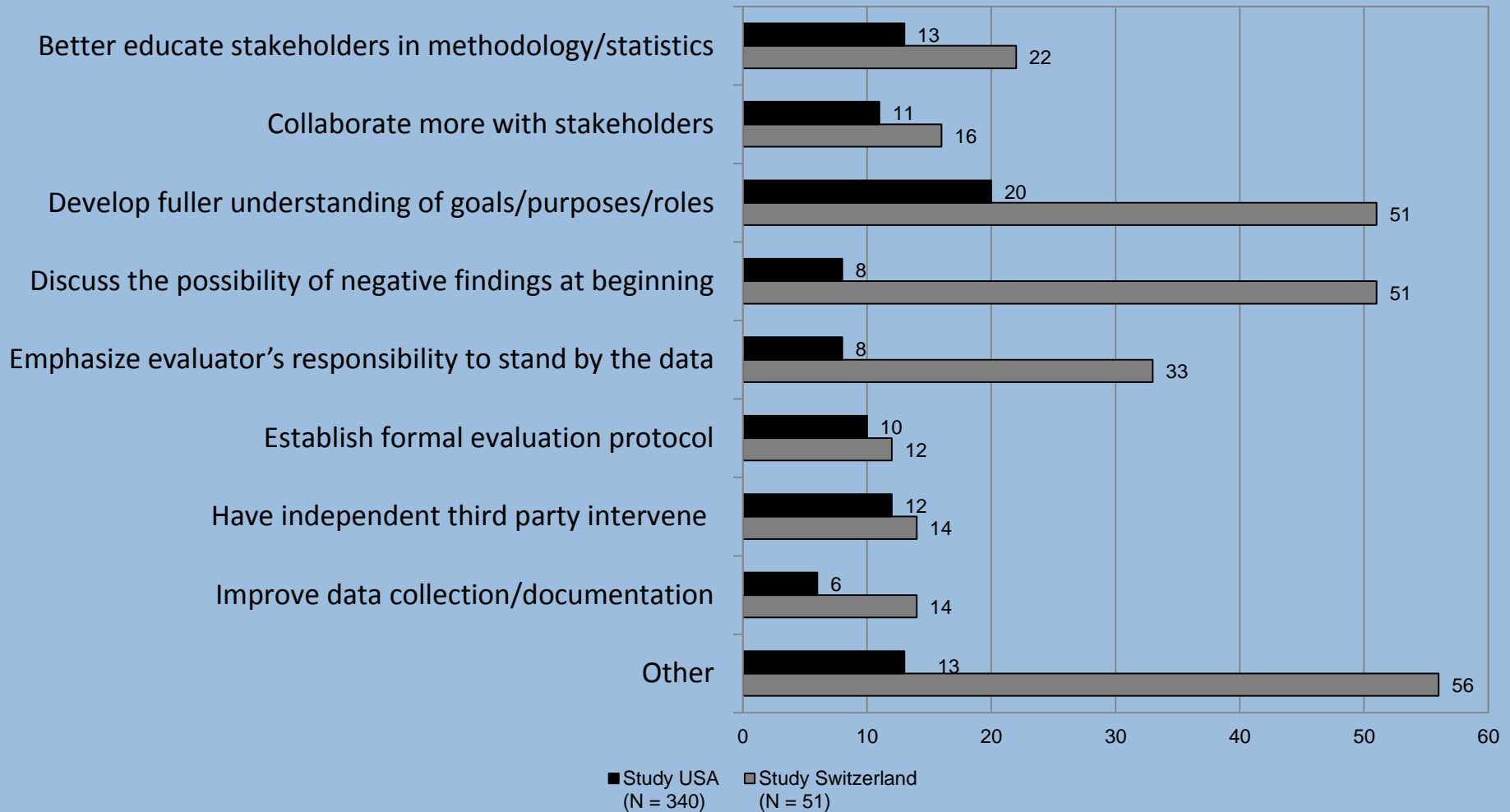
Changing Requirements of Stakeholder

- > Present findings more positively or negatively
- > Omit or downplay negative findings
- > Draw different conclusions
- > Use invalid/old/different data
- > Distortion of content
- > Results were determined in advance by the stakeholder

Dealing with misrepresentation pressure

- > 28% of AEA members and 12% of the SEVAL members claimed that no changes were made
- > 16% of AEA members and 9% of SEVAL members admitted that changes were made which constituted misrepresentation
- > 90% of DeGEval members and 90% of SEVAL members conceded that they had reformulated at least one sentence as a consequence of stakeholder pressure
- > 57% of the respondents from DeGEval and 48% of SEVAL members stated that they had presented findings more positively on at least one occasion

Potential preventive action



Findings

- > Pressure on evaluators to misrepresent findings is a common phenomenon in all four discussed countries
- > There is a large range of pressure
- > Individuals who commission evaluations are identified as the main influencing actor
- > While German commissioning agencies are more prone to put pressure on evaluators, German evaluators do not show stronger tendencies to surrender to pressure than the other countries' respondents

Conclusion: Evaluators between a rock and a hard place

- > Independence of evaluations is not a self-evident fact
- > Preventive measures are needed in order to reduce pressure by commissioners
- > Evaluators can be torn between commissioners' demands and compliance with professional standards, i.e. Evaluation Standards
- > Independence must take a prominent place and higher significance in Evaluation Standards
 - American and Swiss evaluators know evaluation standards quite well and try to comply them
 - To prevent negative influence, evaluation standards therefore might a good starting-point

Conclusion (cont.)

- > Influence is not always negative
 - Swiss results show that there is no consensus regarding the term 'influence'
 - The term 'independence' must be treated carefully: a clear definition is required
- > Evaluation standards for independence on the basis of a clear distinction of different types of influence allow increasing evaluation quality by fostering positive and preventing negative influence

Changing Requirements of Stakeholder

Content of Misrepresentation Request	Studies		
	Survey USA (N = 875)	Survey Germany (N = 121-123)	Survey Switzerland (N = 61-63)
	Open-ended question	Closed questions	
Present findings more positively	38% (n = 130).	78% (n = 123)	76% (n = 48)
Present findings more negatively	Unlevied.	30% (n = 123)	27% (n = 17)
Omit or downplay negative findings	25% (n = 857)	Unlevied.	Unlevied.
Change language—neither positive nor negative	13% (n = 43)	80% (n = 122)	87% (n = 54)
Use inappropriate/different methodology or statistical procedures	6% (n = 21)	72% (n = 121)	63% (n = 39)
Draw different conclusions	6% (n = 20)	53% (n = 123)	56% (n = 35)
Show inappropriate concern for implications of results	4% (n = 12)	Unlevied.	Unlevied.
Use invalid/old/different data	3% (n = 11)	57% (n = 121)	45% (n = 28)
Distortion of content	Unlevied	55% (n = 123)	55% (n = 34)
Results were determined in advance by the stakeholder	Unlevied	Unlevied	41% (n = 25)
Other	5% (n = 18)	Unlevied	30% (n = 16)