

European Self-Evaluation Tool for eLearning: An on-going focus on
Quality and Customer's Needs

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European Self-Evaluation Tool for eLearning: An on-going focus on Quality and Customer's Needs

The SEVAQ project Consortium
Anne-Marie Husson (le Preau/CCIP),
Brian Merison (BLA), Jeanne Schreurs (University Hasselt),
Edwige Morin (Vidéoscope), Helga Van Heysbroeck (EFODL)

Questioning customers and using their evaluation to improve quality is one of the nine pillars of the EFQM model of excellence. Processing the answers obtained by the results of customers' self-evaluation questionnaires enables the provider to enhance the quality of the products on offer. In other words, making good use of good evaluation questionnaires leads to better quality.

In order to promote Quality in e-learning provision and offer the e-learning designers adequate means to reach it, the SEVAQ project consortium has adopted a threefold goal:

- produce a multifunctional, multilingual European tool to help the various stakeholders interested in evaluation of e-learning provision to design sound and comprehensive evaluation questionnaires to be applied to their learners
- support the processes of the application of the self-evaluation questionnaire to the target group of learners
- help in the translation of the results gained from the questionnaires into improved processes and/or resources, so that the overall quality of the e-learning provision is continuously improved.

The stakeholders of the evaluation questionnaire

Many recipients have a potential interest in the results of the learning provision evaluation (the learning provider of course, but also the learners themselves or the funding body or even the line manager). In any case, it is important that the design of the questionnaire will really meet their needs. This is the reason why we have carefully considered the categories of stakeholders who could have interest in the evaluation.

Eight have been defined in the context of VET:

- the learners themselves
- the line managers
- an internal Learning or Human Resource Department
- the Company Management and/or Executive
- the external Training Providers
- the external facilitators and Trade Bodies
- the Policy makers and regulators
- the wider public.

While this list is not exclusive, (for it has been considered in the specific field of VET and should probably be amended for initial learning or the Higher Education context), it demonstrates that there will be significant differences in perspective and interest in the process of the evaluation showing the need for flexibility in any framework for evaluation.

Our theoretical models

Evaluation is a complex process which needs a thorough framework to guarantee sound results. It must for example specify the real "object" of the evaluation, define the objectives of it, the target group to be questioned, the stakeholders interested in the final results and the methodology to be used in designing the questionnaire, applying it and analysing the results.

Two methodological models have been selected that provide a theoretically sound framework for the evaluation:

- a Quality model : the EFQM Excellence Model
- an evaluation model for learning : the 4 Kirkpatrick levels

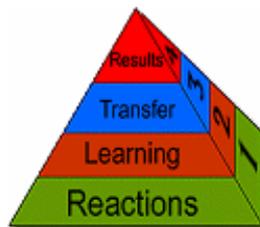
The EFQM Excellence Model

The EFQM Excellence Model introduced in 1992 has long been known as a rigorous and practical tool for the assessment of quality and good practice. It is based on the premise that : *“Excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through Leadership driving Policy & Strategy that is delivered through People, Partnerships, Resources and Processes.”*

Based on the premise that a learning provider organisation needs to establish a suitable organisational framework for the delivery of a learning programme, the SEVAQ proposal had envisaged the EFQM Model as a valid conceptual framework for the evaluation of learning provisions. As our purpose is to evaluate learning provisions as a step towards improving the **quality** of learning, this means, considering the EFQM model, to evaluate both the Enabling elements of the model (*Leadership, People, Policy & Strategy, Partnerships & Resources and Processes*) as well as the Results ones (*Customer results, People results, Key Performance results and Society results*).

The 4 Kirkpatrick’s levels

In our conceptual framework, it is important not to forget the specific purpose of the project which is to develop a tool that includes its own criteria and methodology for evaluation. One of the most well known and widely used models of evaluation is that developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in 1994. This proposes four levels of evaluation with each successive level built on information provided by the lower level.



Level 1: Reactions – measures how participants in a learning programme react to it; their perceptions. This level of evaluation is often referred to as a ‘SmileSheet’ and is completed by the learner.

Level 2: Evaluation of learning – attempts to measure what has been learned, most likely in terms of skill, knowledge or attitude through some form of measurement.

Level 3: Transfer of learning – attempts to measure how the learner has applied what has been learned through changes of behaviour in the everyday environment of the learner.

Level 4: Results – success in terms that a business or organisation can understand such as increased productivity, increased sales, lower costs etc

The conceptual framework of our tool

The SEVAQ project had proposed at first to base its evaluation framework on the EFQM model alone. However, it was soon apparent that an acknowledgement of the Kirkpatrick evaluation was also necessary as it would help to determine:

- At what stage should SEVAQ attempt evaluation?
- Who should carry out the evaluation?

The merging of the two models

The SEVAQ methodology had been predetermined as producing a questionnaire, available as both an online set of questions backed up if necessary with a paper based version. To some extent this pre-supposes that the questionnaire will be completed by the learner with the implication that the responses will be mostly at Kirkpatrick level 1. However reference to the EFQM model suggested that the issues covered could be much more extensive than those traditionally associated with level 1 evaluation. In addition we surmised that careful choice of questions could produce some measure of what has been learned and so produce a partial evaluation at level 2.

Consideration of both EFQM and Kirkpatrick together with stakeholder interest had therefore produced a model that we termed a '*stakeholder evaluation model*' that now underpins the SEVAQ methodology.

Once it is determined that the learner will be the one to evaluate and complete the questionnaire, even when other stakeholders have an interest, this places boundaries around certain criteria of the EFQM model so that we concentrate on those that can be assessed by the learner. This also has the advantage of concentrating the range of questions on these key criteria. For example can the learner assess leadership or the policy and strategy of the learning provider? Almost certainly not. So we can identify the key criteria according to those that can be evaluated by the learner.

A three levels structure

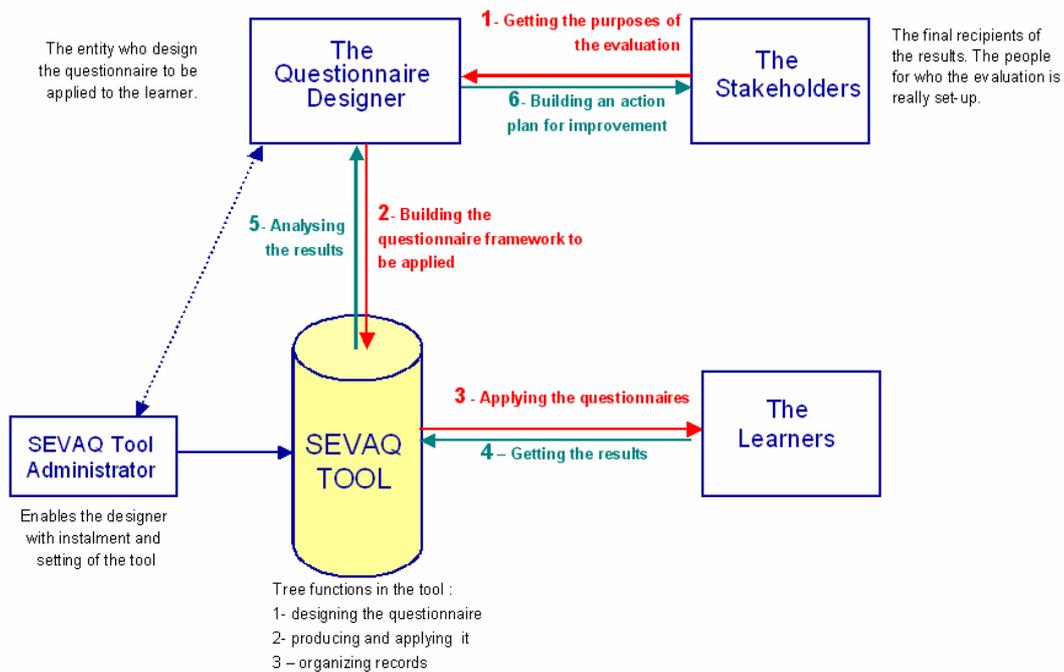
The evaluation tool has been modelled according to a three level structure:

- The Main criteria :
 - The Resources for learning
 - The Learning Processes
 - The learning Results.
 - Subdivisions of the main criteria
 - Sub-criteria, each of which contributes to the description of the criteria itself
- Most of the questions belong to the sub-criteria level.

With the framework complete and questions identified the stage is set for the implementation of the online tool.

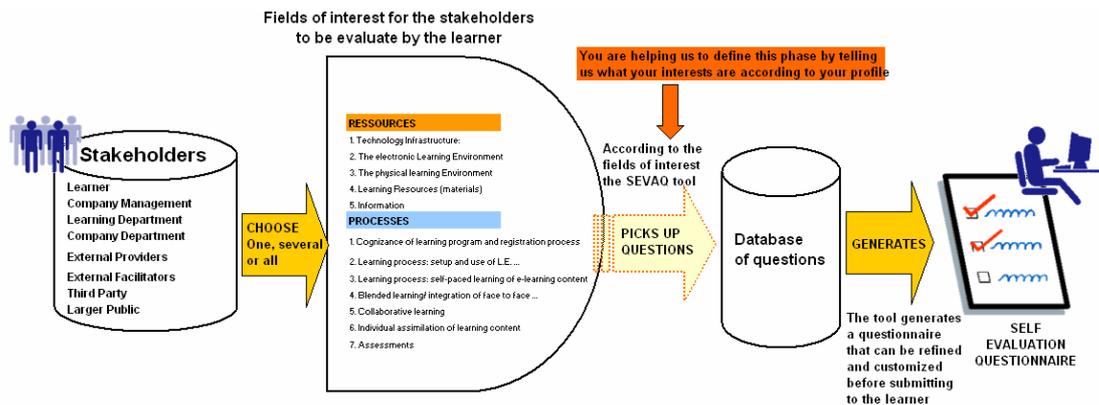
Description of the SEVAQ tool

The designer of the questionnaire has a defining role acting as an interface between the learners and the stakeholders of the evaluation. In order to design the questionnaire, first it is necessary to question the stakeholders on their interests and translate them into the areas to be covered by the questionnaire that will be applied to the learner. When interpreting the results it will also be necessary to make useful and meaningful recommendations to those stakeholders.



A data based solution

Given the wide range of international partners in the SEVAQ project consortium and the target reference groups established by each partner, we had a large pool of expertise from which to draw potential questions grouped around each main criteria and sub-criteria. The intention has been to establish large numbers of questions so as to meet the potential needs of the different stakeholder groups while being aware that only questions that could be answered by the learner are valid. We also realised that given the range of stakeholders and the variety of applications, it is impossible to identify sufficient questions to suit all possible situations and stakeholders' interests. The solution has been to suggest an option for additional questions to be added by the user when the tool is being used to design evaluation questionnaires. This way we can offer maximum flexibility for the widest possible range of applications.



Three profiles of users :

- the *administrator* : installs the software on a local server, defines the profile and rights of the future users, creates the different sessions of evaluation and maintains the updating of the system to take account of the customised versions produced.
- The *designer* builds the questionnaire, deciding at each level of Main criteria, Criteria and Sub-criteria which topic to keep and reformulating the questions, if necessary. Following application of the questionnaire the same person may analyse the results and make recommendations to the stakeholders.
- *Learners* enter their profiles and respond to the questionnaire. If specified, learners can gain access to the results of the evaluation.