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THE EVALUATION OF THE SUPER PSIHOLOG PROJECT

Introduction and Background Information

The evaluation of the SUPER PSIHOLOG project provides an external view of its implementation, with the aim of monitoring the project and reviewing its achievements, and evaluating the extent to which the goals set by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism were achieved. It differs from other evaluations carried out within the project in its focus, since it does not focus on the educational results of the activities implemented in the project. Instead, its purpose is to ensure better transparency and accountability of the project holders towards the finance providers, professional public, and general public.

The project's finance provider, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, applies the assessment methodology set out in the document titled Evaluation Guideline: EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 (Evaluation Guideline: EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014, 2011). This methodology is intended for evaluating entire programmes, and thus it has been adjusted to suit the evaluation requirements of the SUPER PSIHOLOG project.

The evaluation of SUPER PSIHOLOG concentrates on the following basic criteria:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability of project outcomes

The evaluation is comprehensive, as it includes all the criteria determined in the Evaluation Guideline: EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (2011). The planning of evaluation is based on the Project Execution Plan (Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, 2014).

The external evaluation deals with the following target groups:

- Supervisees
- Supervisors
- Supervisors of supervisors
- Norwegian supervisors
- Project leader, project coordinator, and other project operators

Due to its pilot nature, the project developed several questionnaires, and the project operators evaluated the results of these in accord with their research aims. As an external evaluator, I used the results of other surveys in addition to analyses of my own questionnaires, with the aim of evaluating the project outcomes with a particular focus on the criteria of the effectiveness and impact of the project. This chapter presents an interim evaluation, while the final evaluation was performed in the closing part of the project when recommendations for further work were developed.

Outcomes and Results

The Project Followed the Set Goals

Among the key challenges and needs of the Republic of Slovenia in the field of public health, as defined by the programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 for Slovenia (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia, 2013), is a key statement in relation to the SUPER PSIHOLOG project: “[...] that the field of public health and primary prevention does not receive enough financial support, therefore the implementation of new concepts and mechanisms is slow” (p. 4).

The SUPER PSIHOLOG project was part of a sub-field aimed at improving services in the field of mental health, with the goal of establishing new models and concepts of mental health promotion, including psychosocial help for children and adolescents, prevention and treatment of peer violence, and the development and implementation of integrated programmes for suicide prevention. The aim was also to increase the knowledge and skills of various profiles of professional workers in the field of mental health (the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2013, p. 9).

The priority target groups were professional workers who are in contact with vulnerable individuals and perform in the fields of public health services, primary health care, education, social welfare and related areas of practice, and in the non-governmental sector (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic

of Slovenia, 2013, p. 9). The services envisaged in the Call for Proposals were, among others, (i) the development and establishment of new models and concepts for the promotion of mental health and prevention of suicide, and (ii) programmes for practitioner training in the field of mental health, and prevention of suicide and violence.

The active participants confirmed that the implementation of the SUPER PSIHOLOG project followed the set goals and thus contributed to the fulfilment of the priorities of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. They evaluated the training and supervised practice, and agreed that the project was very well planned and the contents were profession-relevant.

The participants felt that the content sequence in the three modules of the training programme was appropriate. In their opinion, each part of the content built on the previous one and integrated theory and practice. The supervisees confirmed that the topics dealt with during the supervision process were useful. The supervisors acquired knowledge which was, in their opinion, necessary for systematic and detailed work, while the supervisors of supervisors stated that they received good support from their Norwegian colleagues.

The timeliness of the project's activities was seen as compatible with the Project Execution Plan (Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, 2014). The project started more than six months later than originally planned due to a delay at the Norwegian Financial Mechanism programme holder in the assessment of applications. After the project was confirmed, the project team put together very quickly, engaged supervisors and supervisors of supervisors, and took all the initial steps in order to enable further implementation. In practice, the planned sequence of activities proved to be appropriate. The time allowed for the project's implementation was prolonged by six months with the approval of the Norway Grants programme operator. The partners were thus given opportunity for better implementation, evaluation and arrangement of all the project's results.

The Project was Financially Well Planned

The evaluation also examined whether the cost of the project was justified by the results. The project documentation showed that most of the expenses were incurred by partners which are public institutions, and the documented expenses for the various forms of project work were appropriate and not too high. The non-governmental partners also included their costs into the proper frameworks. Due to additional limitations by the programme operator with regard to cost eligibility, some activities were transferred to external parties who provided services at more reasonable prices.

For activities which cost more than had been estimated, e.g. the costs associated with the Norwegian supervisors, the partners obtained internal resources and did not exceed the planned financial framework. In order not to exceed the planned

costs, the project operators determined the maximum amount per event, per participant or per promotion instrument. According to the opinion of the project leader, overall the project was financially well planned.

The Main Goals of the Project Were Achieved

The general aim of the project within the programme area “Public health initiatives,” i.e. improvement of services offered in the field of mental health, was a starting point for the effectiveness and efficiency evaluation. On the basis of the Project Execution Plan (Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, 2014) the expected main impact of the project was the increased competency of mental health practitioners in the primary health care, as well as that of some other practitioners. The project operators pledged to train 155 employees, i.e. 50 novice psychologists, 25 students, 25 supervisors, five supervisors and 50 other psychologists. The project reached and partially exceeded these goals.

The effectiveness of the training was evaluated based on the participant surveys. The purpose of Module 1 was to train supervisors to guide the supervised practice according to the competence-based approach. The participants acquired the structure and theoretical guidelines for systematic implementation of the supervised practice, and were most satisfied with interactive work in groups or dyads with their supervisees. Module 2, whose curriculum was the development of supervision competences, was led by two Norwegian experts who presented many new perspectives and approaches, and much new knowledge. Their performance impressed the participants, who claimed that it prepared them well for the implementation of the supervised practice. Module 3, whose aim was to empower the novice professionals to work in the field of mental health, was evaluated as effective and the participants noted that they would like to receive more training of this kind in the future.

At the conference “What Kind of Mentorship Do We Need? Experiences and Transfer of Good Practices in Mentoring Psychologists” which was held on 18 November 2016 in Ljubljana, 75% of the survey respondents stated that the approach which had been applied by the SUPER PSYHOLOG project to develop the supervision of early career psychologists was effective. The majority (64%) evaluated the project outcomes as useful for their further professional performance.

Information on the progress of the target groups was first gathered on the basis of a group self-evaluation of progress, and then with the help of evaluations conducted by other stakeholders or target groups. This form of cross-evaluation made the results more reliable. The supervisees evaluated their progress as effective, and felt the same for the work of their supervisors. The supervisors also responded positively regarding the progress of their supervisees, the development of their own competences, and successful collaboration in supervisory groups.

The supervisors of supervisors advanced in their professional development, as was reported by the Norwegian supervisors Mona Duckert and Bjarte Kyte in an interview conducted on 6 February 2016. They emphasized that the group of supervisors of supervisors had learned a lot during the implementation of the project, and thus were well trained for further professional work. They emphasized that the key qualities of the supervisors of supervisors were openness, motivation, and decisiveness. The Norwegian supervisors adjusted the programme as needed to better meet the cultural context it was carried out within, and accepted several solutions which were put forward by Slovenian colleagues to achieve this.

The subjective understanding of the project's effectiveness was evaluated with a survey conducted at the closing meeting of the SUPER PSIHOLOG project, on 9 April 2016 in Koper, Slovenia. The project was evaluated as effective or very effective by all participants, although it should be noted that the closing meeting was only attended by satisfied participants. Nevertheless, the opinions expressed at this meeting provided both positive evaluations of the project and offered valuable insights into its aims and how the participants understood these.

Participants emphasized the following factors with regard to the project's effectiveness and efficacy: the creation of a positive climate that was animated, creative and lively, with a compatible team of project operators; good organization and support for active participants, with high attendance at training sessions and the closing meeting; the transfer of knowledge, practice and opinions between different generations and fields of practice, and thus greater professional development; the creation of new personal contacts and a network of psychologists in Slovenia, with greater motivation for supervision, an increased awareness of the importance of supervision, a higher quality of performance, the establishment of mechanisms for the systematic development of supervised practice and its promotion, better knowledge of the *EuroPsy* competence model, and so on.

The activities related to providing information and publicity about the project were performed according to the plan. An interim evaluation of the extent and effectiveness of such efforts was carried out at the conference "What Kind of Mentorship Do We Need? Experiences and Transfer of Good Practices in Mentoring Psychologists." The results of this survey showed that nearly all the participants were familiar with the project's web platform, and that they followed the Facebook profile of the Slovenian Psychologists' Association, where news regarding the SUPER PSIHOLOG project was announced. Most of the participants learned about the conference through the invitation sent by the Slovenian Psychologists' Association, and other electronic announcements. Most conference participants stated that they had obtained enough information regarding the project, and expressed satisfaction with the conference.

The Model of the Supervised Practice Has Long-Term Potential

Within the framework of the project, the pilot implementation of the supervised practice model, as developed in compliance with the standards of *EuroPsy*, was performed and thoroughly documented. The pilot implementation confirmed that the supervised practice could offer appropriate support for psychologists early in their careers, and this enhance the quality of the psychological services they provide.

At the closing meeting, which was held on 9 April 2016, the active participants stated numerous benefits that they had obtained by taking part in the project, in addition to the explicitly educational ones. On a personal level, they experienced better self-knowledge and awareness of their own competences, along with greater self-confidence and curiosity, as well as new personal contacts, enthusiasm for transferring knowledge and caring for the development of others, and better skills with regard to active listening and organizing their work, in addition to other positive outcomes.

On a professional level the project helped the participants to better understand the importance of continued learning, the evaluation of one's own competences, knowledge of best practices, better reflection and self-care, and increased their desire to become supervisors in the future. With regard to their specific work positions and the benefits participation in the project had delivered, they emphasized the possibility of transferring theoretical knowledge into practice, the increased quality of their client-related work, exposure to new ideas, awareness of the importance of intervision and supervision, greater efficiency, better collaboration with co-workers, identification of the factors that make up a good work environment, and the need for relaxation and a better life-work balance.

According to the results of the survey carried out in the closing meeting, the SUPER PSIHOLOG project was effective in its preparation of starting points for the model to be transferred into practice, and the development and application of uniform guidelines for the supervision of early career psychologists. The respondents felt that the project would further contribute to the strengthening and development of psychological services in Slovenia, the better formation of psychologists' professional identities and attitudes towards the profession, improved professional relationships, more effective professional networking, higher ethics, self-regulation of the profession, and better informing of the general public and potential users about psychological services, and thus better recognition of the profession.