THEORY-BASED EVALUATION OF CAPACITY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

Paper for Strand 5 - The use of evaluation in public policy (14:00 - 15:30)

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Abstract
The article aims at presenting the main results of theory-based evaluation in the area of administrative capacity building and making a simple contribution claim for one specific intervention of management systems. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence from one Lithuanian capacity evaluation was used to infer that the better design of quality management interventions and more favorable implementation conditions explain partly better results of these projects compared to other projects supporting management systems. Since contextual and process conditions were found to be as important as interventions themselves for achieving the intended outcomes, the article recommends the adoption of both external and internal conditionalities for the effective implementation of future interventions.

Keywords
Theory-based evaluation, contribution analysis, public management, European Social Fund, administrative capacity building, Lithuania

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Introduction

Theory-based evaluation has recently gained increased academic interest in evaluation literature.\(^1\) The basic logic of this evaluation approach is very simple: since programs are theories, their causal chain from inputs to outcomes could be tested by evaluators (Pawson, 2003).

Although there are many definitions of theory-based evaluation, this article perceives this approach in terms of its five core principles defined by Coryn et al (2012, 205) (see Table 1 below). These principles should not be viewed as absolute criteria – a different set of principles could be employed in different theory-based evaluations. More importantly, it is the fifth principle (explaining causal links postulated in a program theory) that separates theory-based evaluation from other types of evaluation.

Table 1. The core principles of theory-driven evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Theory-driven evaluations/evaluators should formulate a plausible program theory (from existing theory, implicit theory, observation of the program or a combination of the above).</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Theory-driven evaluations/evaluators should formulate and prioritize evaluation questions around a program theory.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Program theory should be used to guide planning, design, and execution of the evaluation under consideration of relevant contingencies (e.g. time, budget, and use).</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Theory-driven evaluations/evaluators should measure process, outcome or contextual constructs postulated in program theory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Theory-driven evaluations/evaluators should identify breakdowns, side effects, determine program effectiveness (or efficacy), and explain cause-and-effect associations between theoretical constructs.</td>
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Also, evaluation practitioners are increasingly engaged in verifying and reformulating program theories in their evaluations. Theory-based evaluation was identified as one of the main evaluation approaches for assessing the effective delivery of the European Cohesion policy. When other types of impact evaluation (e.g. macro-economic modeling or counterfactual analysis which mainly produce quantified impact estimates) are not feasible for certain types of interventions given their socio-economic context or actual implementation phase, theory-based evaluation can explain why, how, for whom, and under what conditions a certain causal package produces (or does not produce) impacts by providing an evidence-based narrative (The European Commission, 2011a). Therefore, it is likely that the use of theory-based evaluation will become more widespread in the future evaluation of this EU policy.

Despite large and growing literature on theory-based evaluation and the increasing practical application of this evaluation approach, there is a lack of case examples and evidence about the potential benefits of theory-based approach in the evaluation of EU-financed regional development interventions. This is especially true in the new intervention area of administrative capacity building where the European Social Fund (ESF) support was provided for the first time in the 2007-2013 programming period. One previous evaluation of administrative capacity building considered such governance issues as the structure of governance and the decentralization process (in terms of the balance of power between central, territorial and local levels of government or self-governance and any ongoing changes) and, more importantly, the state of public management reforms in the

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\(^1\) For instance, this is witnessed by the publication of a special issue on contribution analysis in the volume No. 18(3) of Evaluation in 2012.
selected EU Member States (ECORYS, 2011). However, there have been no critical explanations of the ESF support to administrative capacity building based on comprehensive program theories.

The purpose of this article is to assess the application of theory-based evaluation in the area of administrative capacity building co-financed by the ESF. A good ground for testing the main principles and characteristics of theory-based evaluation in this policy area is Lithuania, where the largest share of ESF assistance (18%) among all EU-10 countries was allocated for this intervention area in the 2007-2013 programming period. The article is based on evidence and results of the evaluation of Priority 4 “Strengthening administrative capacities and increasing efficiency of public administration” of the ESF-supported Human Resources Development Operational Program (HRDOP) (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2011).

Furthermore, following this evaluation and after considering other important contextual/process conditions this article aims at making a simple contribution claim in the specific area of management systems supported under Priority 4. One intervention area was selected because of the limited scope of this article and the conclusion of other authors that only one contribution claim is manageable in a single evaluation project due to various constraints (Delahais et al, 2012). Taking into account a significant volume of ESF assistance allocated to the development of management systems in Lithuania, it is important to assess the contribution of this assistance to increasing administrative capacities.

Finally, the article explores the possibilities for setting external or internal conditionalities during the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy in the 2014-2020 period according to evaluation evidence. Should theory-based evaluations and contribution analysis identify any important contextual or process conditions influencing the intended outcomes, a number of external or internal conditionalities could be set for improving the future implementation of specific interventions. In order to increase the focus on results in the new programming period, the European Commission proposed to set two types of external conditionalities in the Partnership Contracts with the EU member states: ex ante conditions that should be met before EU funds are disbursed and ex post conditions that will make the release of additional EU funds contingent on performance.²

ESF assistance to administrative capacity building in Lithuania and its evaluation approach

Under the ESF regulation, in the 2007-2013 programming period ESF support is provided for strengthening institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level and, where relevant, of the social partners and non-governmental organizations. This assistance seeks to promote reforms, better regulation, and good governance especially in the economic, employment, education, social, environmental, and judicial fields (The European Parliament and the Council, 2006). While the ESF will continue to invest in institutional capacities and the efficiency of public administrations and public services (with a view to reforms, better regulation, and good governance) in the 2014-2020 programming period, it is likely to emphasize capacity building for stakeholders delivering employment, education, and social policies, as well as sectoral and territorial pacts in order to promote reforms at national, regional, and local level (The European Commission, 2011b).

² It is planned to set preconditions for each of the eleven thematic objectives (including administrative capacity building) containing political, regulatory, and institutional requirements. The latter includes the transposition of EU legal acts into national legislation, co-financing of EU strategic projects or administrative and institutional capacity building.
The aim of this capacity building evaluation, which was commissioned by the Lithuanian Ministry of Finance and carried out by the Public Policy and Management Institute (Vilnius, Lithuania) in 2011, was to improve the implementation of HRDOP Priority 4. The scope of this evaluation covered the whole Priority 4 “Strengthening administrative capacities and increasing efficiency of public administration” of this operational program. At the time of evaluation, it was implemented through 14 measures intended to achieve the following three objectives:

1. To improve the management of human resources and administrative capacities in the civil service;
2. To improve performance management, better implement EU policies, improve the structure of public administration;
3. To improve the regulation of economic activities, the provision of services to residents and businesses.

The Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for public management policy in Lithuania, acted as the intermediate body for Priority, while its projects were administered by the ESF Implementation Agency (ESFA).

The financial allocation from the ESF and national budget for this priority amounted to about Eur 177 mln, with financial support different measures varying between about Eur 1-54 mln. It was the measure “Improvement of the system of public administration subjects” (supporting the development of financial and non-financial management systems, among other interventions) that had the biggest budget amounting to Eur 54 mln. Also, there was a large variation in terms of the number of projects financed under different measures (from 1 to 170 projects) and their financial value. The three main types of projects were supported under Priority 4: (1) training of the civil servants; (2) development of various management systems (financial and non-financial performance systems, quality management systems, document management systems, and human resource management systems); and (3) the preparation of various documents (spatial planning, strategic regional and municipal planning documents). This article focuses on the second set of projects.

The interim evaluation of Priority 4 followed the core principles of theory-driven evaluation outlined in the previous section. First, it was based on a program theory (see below), which guided evaluation planning, design, and implementation. Second, the evaluation qualitatively and/or quantitatively measured the main variables postulated in this theory and sought explaining causal links between them.

While other evaluations focused on specific capabilities that individuals or organizations need for effective functioning (Huyse et al, 2012), a more contextual and theory-driven approach was selected under this evaluation. It drew upon the general models of public management (traditional public administration, the New Public Management (NPM) and governance) and was informed by more specific propositions from academic literature of policy implementation, project management, and organizational change.

The general models of public management were used for generating insights about alternative instruments of administrative capacity building. Under the traditional administration model, administrative capacities are built following a legalistic approach, emphasizing administrative structures and inputs. Under the NPM model, a managerial approach is followed, with emphasis on results. Also, while capacity building is largely an internal process under the former model, the latter model entails sub-contracting and the procurement of goods and services from the private market. The governance model mixes different characteristics of other general models, focusing on
organizational processes and evidence-based management. Table 2 below provides a summary of these three models in terms of their capacity building instruments.

### Table 2. Instruments of capacity building under the traditional model, New Public Management and governance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Traditional model</th>
<th>New Public Management</th>
<th>Governance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on structures (legal framework or institutional set-up) and inputs (especially human and financial resources);</td>
<td>• Emphasis on management systems (performance or quality management) and results;</td>
<td>• Emphasis on processes (both performance and cooperation);</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Legalistic approach: administrative capacity building based on the application of legal rules;</td>
<td>• Managerial approach: capacity building through managerial instruments;</td>
<td>• Mixed approach: involvement of civil servants, researchers and experts, social partners, other stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internal approach: civil servants are responsible for capacity building (by drafting procedures, participating in training events, etc.).</td>
<td>• External approach: private sector representatives are actively involved in capacity building through the provision of services and advice.</td>
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Source: Public Policy and Management Institute (2011) based on desk research.

While the ESF regulation favored the governance model to the design and implementation of capacity building interventions (emphasizing not only such evidence-based decision-making instruments as monitoring and evaluation, research, statistical information and expert consultations, but also the involvement of social partners and non-governmental organizations, as well as coordination and dialogue public and private partners), Lithuania selected largely the NPM-based approach for the implementation of ESF-supported capacity building interventions implemented through the procurement of various products and services from the market (see the following section below for the results of this approach).

More specifically, the evaluation tested several propositions from public policy, public administration, organizational and project management studies. Based on public management literature, it explored political support behind capacity building interventions, assuming that government-promoted reforms have higher changes for success compared to other sources of changes. Drawing on policy implementation literature, the evaluation also addressed the capacity and willingness of responsible institutions (the intermediate body and the implementing agency) and the project beneficiaries to implement capacity building measures or projects. It was assumed that the smaller the implementation capacity and willingness, the larger the chance for an implementation gap to occur. More specifically, following organizational and project management literature, the evaluation analyzed the extent to which the project beneficiaries had sufficient organizational maturity to manage the ESF-supported projects in terms of their structural capacities or project management instruments (see Box 1 for the explanation of these factors).

**Box 1. Organizational maturity in the management of organizational changes and projects**

One large Lithuanian study found that Lithuanian public sector organizations that have higher structural

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3 For instance, in the civil service area academic research showed significant variation in the civil service reforms across the Central and Eastern European countries, depending on the political priorities of changing governments (Meyer-Sahling, 2011).

4 Leeuw (2012) argued that in prospectively testing program theories one can consider implementation failures that could identified during desk research.
capacities (approximated by the number of employees and size of budget) are more prone to innovation (the application of such innovative performance techniques as IT, quality management or redesign of internal processes) (Nakrošis and Martinaitis, 2011).

Furthermore, project management literature emphasized the importance of project management maturity for successful project implementation in the private and public sectors. First, it depends on the allocation of responsibility for project management processes (a project manager; a project owner; a project management service; a project portfolio management group, etc.). Second, it depends on the definition and application of project management procedures in an organization (Lietuvos projektų vadybos asociacija, 2011).

Third, the evaluation followed the systemic approach (ECORYS, 2011), covering all important issues of administrative capacity: structures (relating to overall institutional set-up, competences and functions of individual institutions, inter-institutional coordination and partnership, including the involvement of social partners and NGOs), human and financial resources (relating to the number of staff, their competence and motivation and financial appropriations for individual institutions), as well as management systems and tools (including management systems and tools in the area of human resource, financial and non-financial performance and quality management, related methodological documents and IT solutions) that could be financed from the ESF support.

A program theory was developed by integrating different types of important variables into a single framework. In this article, the program theory is perceived as the whole causal package, identifying interventions, other supporting or confounding factors and the relationships among them (Mayne, 2012, 276). Following the original intervention logic of Priority 4, the program theory linked (1) the main aim of administrative capacity building - more efficient allocation of financial resources and better results of government policy – to (2) the main sets of measures and interventions outlined in the ESF-funded operational program and its complement. They included improving human resource management, administrative structure, financial and non-financial performance management, as well as support to the design and implementation of a few policy reforms (especially in the policy areas of health, education, and social protection), improve business regulation and implement other EU policies. In order to assess the achievement of Priority 4 results, the evaluator also made the program theory operational. For instance, specific changes in the beneficiary organizations (e.g. in staff competences, performance or quality management frameworks or actual processes and results) were observed based on qualitative information from the case studies and interviews, as well as quantitative data from the survey of project managers.

Moreover, desk research enabled identifying the following contextual and process conditions (pre-conditions) affecting the achievement of capacity building aims and objectives: (1) program of public management reforms linked to the implementation of Priority 4; (2) organizational maturity of the ministries, agencies and other public sector beneficiaries to plan and implement ESF-supported measures and projects; (3) capacity of external providers from the market to deliver certain services or goods; and (4) effective administration of the ESF assistance for capacity building (performance of the responsible institutions).

Finally, public management literature recognises that performance management activities are subject to contextual contingencies arising from a public administration framework or political environment (e.g. Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008). Therefore, the program theory identified other important explanatory factors (such as the impact of the economic and financial crisis that coincided with the implementation of Priority 4 or other public policies on Priority 4) and a few unintended

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5 Overall level of project management maturity in the Lithuanian organizations was estimated to be below average (2.3 from 5 points based on survey data), implying the application of basic project management tools (such as the appointment of a project owner and manager) during project management.
outcomes (such as falling motivation of civil servants due to a combination of salary cuts, staff layoffs and increased workloads during the program implementation). Figure 1 below summarizes the program theory that was employed in the assessment of administrative capacity building in Lithuania.

Figure 1. Program theory for assessing the interventions of administrative capacity building

The evaluation applied a mixed quantitative-qualitative methodological approach to data gathering and analysis with the following methods:

- **An analysis of primary and secondary sources** (documents, legal acts, reports, previous evaluations and research, monitoring data, etc.);
- **Interviews**: 21 interviews with 29 civil servants and other employees were conducted during the evaluation;
- **An on-line survey of project managers** according to the questionnaire was carried out (with replies from 334 out of 496 invited respondents);
- **Statistical analysis of the survey data** (descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlations investigating the relationship between certain variables);
- **Case studies**: an in-depth evaluation of 13 projects from each measure (except one) of Priority 4;
- **Prospective analysis** in the form of analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as analysis of alternatives;
- Finally, the evaluation involved main stakeholders into the process of drafting evaluation recommendations.

**Findings of the interim evaluation: gaps in the intervention logic and implementation problems**

The limited impact of government priorities on the implementation of Priority 4
The implementation of Priority 4 faced a number of important contextual changes, ranging from the financial and economic crisis to new government-wide priorities set by the 2008-2012 Lithuanian Government. Considerable cuts in the number of staff and their salaries during the process of fiscal consolidation reduced both capacity and motivation in the civil service to implement important policy and institutional changes (Nakrošis et al, 2012). More significantly, despite the formulation of many public policy priorities (including such public management priorities as the civil service reform), assistance from Priority 4 was granted only to a few areas of government priority, including performance-based management (under the project “Improvement of performance-based management” managed by the Prime Minister’s Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance) and improving public services/one-stop-shop (under the projects supported under the measure “Initiatives for the quality of public services”). No ESF support was provided to the on-going structural reforms in such areas of government priority as social protection, health, and energy.

Therefore, the assumption of an important link between political reforms implemented by the Lithuanian Government and the implementation of Priority 4 was largely unfulfilled, with the exception of the few areas where this link contributed to achieving better implementation progress (see below). The limited input of Priority 4 into the implementation of government priorities was associated with the procedures of non-competitive selection for state projects (the fact that most projects were initiated on the “bottom-up” basis) and the lack of thematic coordination at the government level and across different Lithuanian ministries (the Ministry of the Interior as the intermediate body vis-à-vis other ministries responsible for particular structural reforms).

Gaps in the intervention logic, especially in providing support to the development of management systems

Despite the identification of appropriate Priority 4 aims and objectives in the programming documents, some specific measures of this priority suffered from the lack of appropriate intervention logic. This problem was particularly pronounced for the measures supporting the development of various management systems (“Improvement of the system of public administration institutions“, “Promotion of public policy reforms” and, to a lesser extent, “Initiatives for the quality of public services”). The ESF assistance to these systems was provided on the basis of a quantitative, IT-based and supply-driven approach, producing the proliferation of IT-based management systems developed primarily through the procurement of external services (and often without sufficient ownership of the project beneficiaries). Other measures of Priority 4 also suffered from certain gaps in their intervention logic.6

Insufficient project management capacities and implementation problems

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6 For instance, systemic problems of managing civil servants’ training (such as underdeveloped management of personnel and competences in the civil service, insufficient coordination of the civil servants’ training, inadequate definition of training needs) negatively affected to the design and quality of training projects supported under Priority 4. These projects were rarely defined on the basis of annual training plans for the civil servants, while the selected projects were often small, implemented in a decentralized way and insufficiently contributing to personal competences. Furthermore, Priority 4 supported some measures (such as “Territorial planning” and “Improvement of regional development, regional development plans and plans for municipal strategic development”) that did not directly contribute to the overall aim of Priority 4 to strengthen administrative capacities and increase the efficiency of public administration.
The efficiency of project implementation depends largely on existing project management capacities of the beneficiary institutions. The evaluation results showed that such capacities were underdeveloped at the time of project execution. For instance, only about 26% of the survey respondents indicated that internal projects administration rules were approved in their institutions, while only 24% of the respondents suggested that a risk management plan was approved. Therefore, the majority of the beneficiaries lacked effective instruments to manage external conditions (assumptions and risks) that occurred during the project implementation (see below).

Insufficient project management capacities produced some implementation problems, especially in the areas of public procurement and human resources. A statistically significant relation (Kendall’s tau-b = -0.442, sig. 0.000) was found between the small budget of a beneficiary, its project value and public procurement problems. This indicated that the more and larger projects were implemented by smaller organizations, the more frequently they experienced public procurement problems during their execution.

Projects supporting various management systems faced particularly large problems of public procurement (according to 53% of project managers responsible for these projects compared to 32% of all survey respondents) and human resources (47% of responsible managers compared to 36% of all respondents). Also, all five irregularities identified by ESFA during the implementation of Priority 4 were associated with the violations of national public procurement legislation.

Mixed satisfaction with the quality of services provided by external providers

The implementation model of Priority 4 relied largely on the procurement of services from the market. About 90% of the survey respondents indicated that they procured services from external providers for the execution of project activities. Therefore, the achievement of project results depended significantly on the quality of services procured from the market.

According to the survey results, the quality of external services was mixed, depending on particular Priority 4 measures or types of service providers. The best external services were provided in implementing projects supported under the measure “Promotion of public policy reforms”, while the quality of external services was assessed least positively for the execution of projects supported under the measures “Strengthening the civil service system”, “Territorial planning”, and “Initiatives for the quality of public services”. The quality of services provided by business consulting/audit firms (often implementing projects developing various management systems) and engineering/design companies was rated below the average. Although the larger, system-level projects well met organizational needs of the beneficiaries, their implementation more frequently suffered from the insufficient quality of external services. The larger the project budget, the less positive the assessment of quality was observed during the implementation of Priority 4, with a weak, but statistically significant relation between these variables (Cramer’s V = 0.238, sig. 0.002).

Organizational changes during the implementation of Priority 4

Since Priority 4 was at the implementation stage during its interim evaluation, it was difficult to measure specific outcomes of the supported measures and projects. However, the evaluation assessed actual changes at the level of individuals and organizations, explaining their link to the supported interventions of capacity building and important contextual/process conditions influencing the expected outcomes. Analysis of the survey data indicated that some changes occurred in the area of competences of civil servants and other employees (according to 33% of all respondents). About 20% of the survey respondents argued that some changes have occurred in the
areas of human resources, finance, asset, performance, and quality management processes, as well as in the area of institutional strategies and performance planning, while only 14-16% of all respondents identified any changes in the area of institutional set-up, legal acts, cooperation with other state institutions and stakeholders or leadership and management.

The evaluation found little organizational change under the projects of management systems due to some delays in their execution and other execution problems discussed above. Interestingly, the projects of quality management were found to be the more advanced (and more cost-effective) among this set of projects: although their budget was below the average of projects supporting management systems, their execution brought more organizational changes (32% of projects managers responsible for projects under this measure agreed that changes already occurred compared to 0-24% of managers developing other management systems, depending on particular measures). The larger the project budget, the smaller organizational changes were observed, with a weak, but statistically significant relation between these variables (Cramer’s V = 0.201, sig. 0.005).

More advanced status of the quality management projects was associated with their clearer design and higher organizational maturity of the project beneficiaries (influenced by the fact that larger central-level institutions participated in the execution of quality management projects), as well as more favorable policy and organizational environment (including the government priority of one-stop-shops, the quality management policy implemented by the Ministry of the Interior and advice on quality management provided by ESFA) (see the discussion below).

**Discussion of the evaluation findings in the area of management systems: what contribution claim could be made?**

This section discusses the evaluation results, seeking to develop a simple contribution claim. For the purpose of contribution analysis the program theory, which was presented in the previous section, was elaborated into a simple mathematical model.

Causal packages analyzed in theory-based evaluations and/or contribution analysis should include both interventions (as sufficient factors to obtain the expected outcomes) and contextual/process conditions (as necessary factors to produce them) (Mayne, 2012, Delahais et al, 2012). The evaluation of Priority 4 found that the dismal implementation of capacity building interventions was related to a combination of the following factors: (1) gaps in the logic of some capacity building interventions; (2) such process factors as the insufficient supply of capacity building services and the limited organizational maturity of beneficiary organizations; and (3) some contextual conditions influencing overall outcomes in a positive (e.g. the policy of quality management implemented by the Lithuanian Ministry of the Interior) or negative (e.g. lack of staff motivation in the civil service) way. If the likelihood of achieving program outcomes (O) depends on the design of interventions (I) and the number of conditions (the conditions influencing the expected outcomes through the interventions (C_I) and other conditions affecting the outcomes on an independent basis (C_o)), the following simple equation could be used for making a quantitative contribution claim:

\[ O = I (C^I) + C^o \]

In line with academic research on contribution analysis (Mayne, 2012, Delahais et al, 2012), this model assumes that the interventions are sufficient for achieving the expected outcomes, whereas the conditions are either necessary (in the case of C_I) or sufficient (in the case of C_o) for this purpose.
Overall, this model seems to explain observed broad differences between the implementation of the measure “Initiatives for the quality of public services” (the frequency of 32% of organizational changes under this measure) compared to other Priority 4 projects supporting management systems (the frequency of 0-24%, depending on a measure) according to the quantitative measures obtained from the survey of project managers or, where no other evidence was available, expert opinion (e.g. for the value of contextual factors). In the first case, the design of interventions was clearer (let’s assume that its value is 50%), whereas their implementation depended on two main conditions, whose assumed likelihood was 50%. The quality management projects also faced more favorable policy and institutional environment (the assumed value of 20%). In the second case, the design of intervention logic was somewhat worse (the assumed value of 40%), their implementation also depended on two conditions, but their likelihood was lower (40%). Also, other projects developing management systems faced less favorable environment (the assumed value of 10%). Based on the equation above, the computed likely effectiveness of the quality management projects is therefore 0.325 (0.5 multiplied by 0.5^2 and 0.2 added), whereas it is only 0.164 (0.4 multiplied by 0.4^2 and 0.1 added) for other projects developing other management systems. This model also indicates that following the above assumptions and quantitative measures the likely contribution of quality management systems to the programs outcomes is about 6% higher compared to other projects (0.064 subtracted from 0.125, without considering the influence of C_o).

Alternatively, the contribution claim could be developed on the basis of qualitative evidence from the case studies completed during the evaluation of Priority 4. Table 3 below provides a comparison between two different projects supported under Priority 4. The project „The introduction of quality management system meeting the ISO 9001 standard“ executed by a government agency represents the first case, while the second case describes one (financial and non-financial) performance management project carried out by a district municipality. Based on the implementation progress of these projects, this table confirms the importance of intervention design and conditions important for the success of capacity building interventions. The first project was found to be more successful in terms of its process and outputs/results because of its smaller nature and better design (the intervention), longer experience of the beneficiary, and a more qualified service provider (the conditions or process factors). Other conditions or contextual factors were judged to be similar for both projects as the national quality management policy equally targeted both central and local level institutions in Lithuania and the financial crisis had a similar effect on all public administration institutions. Therefore, from the quantitative and qualitative evidence and after considering other important factors it is possible to infer that the better design of quality management interventions and smoother process of their execution explains partly the difference between the interim outputs/outcomes of these projects compared to other sets of look-alike projects supported under Priority 4.

Table 3. Comparison of successful and unsuccessful projects in the area of quality management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project intervention</th>
<th>Performance management project</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project beneficiary</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government agency</td>
<td>District municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About EUR 122.000 (below the average)</td>
<td>About EUR 434.000 (above the average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance management system</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality management system of small-average complexity</td>
<td>Complex management system entailing financial management and accounting, performance management, and document management components</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Conditions for the expected outcome*
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Previous experience of the beneficiary</th>
<th>Government agency had several years of experience in quality management</th>
<th>District authority had no previous experience in project management before the start of projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project management instruments</td>
<td>Project team, working groups, internal project management</td>
<td>Project manager, the procurement of project management services (whose assessment is poor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td>Specialized quality management company, good quality of services</td>
<td>Business consulting and IT companies, average quality of services</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project progress and interim outputs/outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of the beneficiary in project activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems and risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outputs and changes during the project implementation</td>
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**Conclusions**

Although no impact assessment of capacity building interventions supported by Priority 4 of HRDOP was possible in the middle of the program implementation, the evaluation managed to verify the original program theory, identify a number of contextual and process factors critical for successful implementation and explain their possible influence on the expected outcomes. In this article it was demonstrated that a contribution claim could be inferred from both quantitative and qualitative evidence in one specific intervention area. Although the evaluation involved two discussions of its results, conclusions and recommendations, it is possible to further develop this contribution claim by seeking out additional (including non-linear or more recent) evidence and discussing the contribution story with other stakeholders (in line with the framework for contribution analysis outlined by Mayne (2012) or Delahais et al (2012).

The simple model of estimating program effectiveness allowed making a simple contribution claim (explaining the differences in program progress across different sets of projects). Interestingly, small changes in the design of interventions and the number and likelihood of conditions affect significantly overall outcome probability. Therefore, it could be used in future theory-based evaluations and contribution analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively. For instance, ex-ante evaluations of 2014-2020 operational programs supported by the EU structural funds could benefit from the assessment of effectiveness and impact probability stemming from the verification of intervention logics and their reformulation. However, it is important to note that this model is limited to linear relationships inside the causal package – one can go beyond this simple way of understanding by assessing more complex interconnections and involving program stakeholders in the evaluation process (Patton, 2012).

What other lessons could be offered for the programming and implementation of capacity building interventions in the 2014-2020 programming period from the evaluation of administrative capacity building interventions in Lithuania? First, a combination of limited capacity of private sector organizations and insufficient organizational maturity in the beneficiary organizations clearly constrained the effective implementation of capacity building interventions (especially IT-based management systems) in Lithuania. Since these process and contextual conditions were found to be
as important (if not more important) as interventions themselves for achieving the intended outcomes, specific attention should be paid to their management.

Second, the outcomes of theory-based evaluations (with or without contribution analysis) entailing the verification of a program theory and the identification of important contextual and process conditions affecting the achievement of program aims should inform the definition of country- and sector-specific conditionalities in the Partnership Contracts for the 2014-2020 programming period. For instance, taking into account the results of previous evaluations (ECORYS, 2011; Public Policy and Management Institute, 2011), it would be reasonable for the European Commission to demand that a public management reform program should be adopted by responsible national authorities, integrating the use of ESF support with the aims and objectives of main government priorities in the area of public management.7

Third, in addition to external conditionalities, important assumptions and risks could be managed by setting some internal conditionalities for the implementation of capacity building interventions. For instance, since existing capacity or the project beneficiaries and their project managers to design and manage ESF-funded projects affects greatly their chances of successfully implementing capacity building projects, it is necessary to improve project management systems, practices and skills in the beneficiary organizations (including risk management). Also, the successful development of management systems requires organizational leadership, intensive staff involvement and previous experience – these important conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled by external service providers alone. Therefore, management systems could be developed on an internal basis, starting from more simple models (such as the Common Assessment Framework) or instruments (such as the assessment of customer satisfaction) and proceeding to more sophisticated management systems when an organization gains sufficient organizational experience (or it matures for more advanced projects) (Nakrošis and Černiūtė, 2010). Moreover, it could be useful to assess the organizational maturity of state and municipal organizations prior to the selection of ESF projects and tailor specific types of interventions to individual organizations, depending on their structural capacity or previous experience with management systems.

Fourth, in terms of public management theories, since the NPM-based implementation approach to strengthening administrative capacities did not enable result-based orientation of the ESF assistance in Lithuania, one could advocate the adoption of governance-driven approach for the design and implementation of future interventions in this area. For instance, ESF assistance could be provided to such instruments as co-operation between various states institutions, NGOs, other stakeholders; gathering, analysis and dissemination of evidence or process improvements in individual organizations and their networks. Unlike IT-based management systems, these instruments do not require a lot of money, and their implementation is likely to less risky, thus increasing their likely effectiveness.

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References

7 In 2011-2012, the Lithuanian Government adopted a public management program and its action plan, setting a good framework for a more strategic implementation of the ESF assistance in the 2014-2020 period.


**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
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<td>ESFA</td>
<td>European Social Fund Agency</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>HRDOP</td>
<td>Human Resources Development Operational Program</td>
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<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Standards Organization</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technologies</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>NPM</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
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Biography

In 1998, Vitalis Nakrošis graduated from the London School of Economics and Political Science where he was awarded the MSc degree in Political Economy of Transition. In 2004, after defending his thesis he was awarded PhD in political sciences from the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University.

At present, Vitalis Nakrošis is employed as a professor in the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, where he researches and teaches public administration and policy. Also, he is a program manager at the Public Policy and Management Institute (Vilnius, Lithuania), where he carries out evaluations of EU and national programs and implements other projects commissioned by the EU institutions and national authorities.