FUNDAMENTALS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Topic Objective:

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term program evaluation
- Describe the process of program evaluation
- Discuss the importance of program evaluation in the field of education

Definition/Overview:

Program Evaluation: Program evaluation is a formalized approach to studying the goals, processes, and impacts of projects, policies and programs. Program evaluation is used in the public and private sector and is taught in numerous universities. Evaluation became particularly relevant in the U.S. in the 1960s during the period of the Great Society social programs associated with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Extraordinary sums were invested in social programs, but the impacts of these investments were largely unknown.

Key Points:

1. Dimensions of Program Evaluation

Program evaluators may assess programs on several dimensions to determine whether the program works. Rossi et al. (2004) divide these dimensions into 5 main categories: needs assessment, program theory, process analysis, impact analysis, and cost-benefit & cost-effectiveness analysis. A needs assessment examines the nature of the problem that the program is meant to address. This includes evaluating who is affected by the problem, how wide-spread the problem is, and what effects stem from the problem. For example, for a housing program aimed at mitigating homelessness, a program evaluator may want to find out how many people are homeless in a given geographic area and what their demographics are.

The program theory is the formal description of the program's concept and design. This is also called a logic model or impact pathways. The program theory breaks down the
components of the program and shows anticipated short- and long-term effects. An analysis of the program theory examines how the program is organized and how that organization will lead to desired outcomes. It will also reveal unintended or unforeseen consequences of a program, both positive and negative. The program theory drives the hypotheses to test for impact evaluation. Developing a logic model can also build common understanding amongst program staff and stakeholders. Process analysis looks beyond the theory of what the program is supposed to do and instead evaluates how the program is being implemented. The evaluation determines whether target populations are being reached, people are receiving the intended services, staff are adequately qualified, etc. The impact evaluation determines the causal effects of the program. More information about impact evaluation is found under the heading 'Determining Causation'. Finally, cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis assesses the efficiency of a program. Evaluators outline the benefits and cost of the program for comparison. An efficient program has a lower cost-benefit ratio.

2. Determining Causation

Perhaps the most difficult part of evaluation is determining whether the program itself is causing observed impacts. Events or processes outside of the program may be the real cause of the observed outcome (or the real prevention of the anticipated outcome).

Causation is difficult to determine. One main reason for this is self selection bias. People select themselves to participate in a program. For example, in a job training program, some people decide to participate and others do not. Those who do participate may differ from those who do not in important ways. They may be more determined to find a job or have better support resources. These characteristics may actually be causing the observed outcome of increased employment, not the job training program. If programs could use random assignment, then they could determine causation.

A program could randomly assign people to participate or to not participate in the program, eliminating self-selection bias. Thus, the group of people who participate would be the same as the group who did not participate. However, since most programs cannot use random assignment, causation cannot be determined. Impact analysis can still provide useful information. For example, the outcomes of the program can be described. Thus the evaluation can describe that people who participated in the program were more likely to experience a given outcome than people who did not participate. If the program is fairly
large, and there is enough data, statistical analysis can be used to make a reasonable case for the program by showing, for example, that other causes are unlikely.

3. Types of Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is often divided into types of evaluation:

- Formative Evaluation
- Process Evaluation
- Outcome Evaluation

3.1. Formative Evaluation

Formative Evaluation occurs early in the program. The results are used to decide how the program is delivered, or what form the program will take. For example, an exercise program for elderly adults would seek to learn what activities are motivating and interesting to this group. These activities would then be included in the program.

3.2. Process Evaluation

Process Evaluation is concerned with how the program is delivered. It deals with things such as when the program activities occur, where they occur, and who delivers them. In other words, it asks the question: Is the program being delivered as intended? An effective program may not yield desired results if it is not delivered properly.

3.3. Outcome Evaluation

Outcome Evaluation addresses the question of what are the results. It is common to speak of short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. For example, in an exercise program, a short-term outcome could be change knowledge about the health effects of exercise, or it could be a change in exercise behavior. A long-term outcome could be less likelihood of dying from heart disease.

4. CDC framework
In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a six-step framework for conducting evaluation of public health programs. The publication of the framework is a result of the increased emphasis on program evaluation of government programs in the US. The six steps are:

- Engage stakeholders
- Describe the program.
- Focus the evaluation.
- Gather credible evidence.
- Justify conclusions.
- Ensure use and share lessons learned.

**Topic : Planning An Evaluation**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the concept of Steps of Planning and Evaluation
- Describe the process of program evaluation
- Discuss need and uses of evaluation

**Definition/Overview:**

**Steps of Planning and Evaluation:** The first step in planning an evaluation is to identify the stakeholders of the evaluation. Evaluators must be very careful to be sure that they understand the purpose of an evaluation because many stakeholders talk about evaluation in terms that sound like summative evaluation when they really want to improve the program.

Program evaluation, like other types of applied social science research, differs from basic research in that there are definite time limits for completing applied research projects

**Key Points:**

1. Program Evaluation
A skill that is more important in program evaluation compared to basic social science research is estimating accurately how much time each phase of the project will require. "Evaluability assessment" refers to the likelihood that valid evaluation can be completed. A major failing of many evaluations is that the evaluator never learned why the program activities were expected to lead to the desired outcomes. Understanding the conceptual foundation of a program provides an evaluator with hints about how the program services are expected to lead to the outcomes that the staff and director hope to achieve. An evaluation of high quality usually is based on data from a more representative sample of program participants than one of lower quality. The data collection process is likely to be corrupted even by well-meaning program staff members if they are permitted to control data collection. A written proposal outlining the steps to be followed in carrying out a planned program evaluation should always be prepared. Resistance to an evaluation is likely to be greatest when the evaluation is a summative evaluation.

**Topic : Selecting Criteria And Setting Standards**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term selection criteria.
- Describe the development of program goals.

**Definition/Overview:**

**Selection Criteria:** The selection of indexes of program effectiveness is usually difficult because different stakeholders have different views about what the most important criteria of program success are. When there is disagreement about the choice of the criteria of program effectiveness, the best procedure for program evaluators would be to arrange discussions among stakeholders to find common concerns and to gain agreement to measure a variety of criteria.

**Key Points:**

1. Development of Program Goals
The development of program goals is important for carrying out program evaluations because goals help evaluators to determine what variables to measure. The criteria used in a program evaluation may include an assessment of how completely the program has been implemented because practical difficulties can lead well-intentioned people to depart from the program plan. In outcome evaluations, the achievement of intermediate goals is often examined because this aids evaluators in learning whether program activities do indeed contribute to the achievement of the outcomes desired. Evaluators using published program goals to select criteria can increase the practical value of their evaluations by including observations of criteria which must apply to all programs, such as avoiding discriminatory behavior and treating clients with respect. Social values are central in the choice and implementation of programs; however, empirical data cannot dictate which are to be adopted.

An examination of the needs of program clients would be important in an evaluation of outcome because a mismatch between the needs of clients and the services provided could be responsible for disappointing outcomes. Evaluators who learn that a treatment group has a higher average level on measures of desired outcomes than a comparison group at a p .05 level have not completed their work since field settings require an understanding of the extent of improvement. In setting a specific mean level expected for a criterion of success among a treatment group in an outcome evaluation, the evaluation team works with the staff, but recognizes that program staff members often overestimate the degree clients will change even in an excellent program. Evaluators discuss the conceptual, or theoretical, basis for the program because program theory helps evaluators to learn that might be important to observe and measure.

In Section 2 of this course you will cover these topics:
- Developing Measures
- Ethics In Program Evaluation
- The Assessment Of Need

**Topic : Developing Measures**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:
Define the term developing measures.

Describe the importance of developing measures.

**Definition/Overview:**

**Developing Measures:** Desirable aspects of using archival data for program evaluation include the non-reactivity of the data selected from program records. A major disadvantage of using program records in program evaluation is records were not designed for evaluation purposes. Among the advantages of using program participants as a source of evaluation data is the information is relatively inexpensive.

**Key Points:**

1. **Developing Measures**

   When obtaining information from program participants one should ask only about issues familiar to the participants. Program participants are likely to be defensive about answering an evaluator's questions whenever they feel that they have something to lose by providing their comments. One of the major problems with using program participants as sources of evaluation data is their tendency to make indiscriminately favorable evaluations of services. Asking individuals familiar with the kinds of services provided to make direct observations of the program could produce much unbiased data if the experts are involved in neither the program not its competitors. Failing to detect a true program outcome because a variable is affected by so many influences is a particular problem with community-level indexes such as crime rate or GNP. The choice of the criteria of effectiveness is very sensitive in program evaluation because most evaluations show that human services are highly effective. Selecting one particular variable to be the criteria of program effectiveness will probably corrupt it.

**Topic: Ethics In Program Evaluation**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term ethics in program evaluation
Describe the ethical issues in program evaluation

**Definition/Overview:**

**Ethics in Program Evaluation:** If an evaluator believes that a potential client has requested an evaluation that will not meet the agency's real needs, the evaluator should attempt to redefine the form of evaluation to be done. Ethical issues in program evaluation seem more compelling than in basic research because program evaluations are seldom replicated and the findings may be applied even if in error.

**Key Points:**

1. **Ethical Issues**

   Program evaluators stop thinking about ethical issues at their peril because ethical standards can be violated at any stage or even after the report is finished. "Informed consent" refers to obtaining the agreement from people to supply data for an evaluation after they have been adequately informed about what is expected of them. Evaluators are especially concerned about the possibility of invalid conclusions because evaluations are more likely to have an impact on people's lives than basic research reports do. If after beginning an evaluation the evaluator comes to feel that the evaluation plan cannot be carried out in a way that will yield a valid evaluation, the best alternative is to seek to renegotiate the evaluation plan so that it describes a plan that can be carried out well. In conducting an evaluation of an innovative program, the most important responsibility of the evaluator is to be sure that the evaluation does not harm the participants.

   Evaluators prefer to have informed consent from all participants in an evaluation. When a full description of the program groups for example, innovative program and control groups threatens to undermine the internal validity of the evaluation, a good way to decide if full disclosure is necessary is to consider what the potential cost to the participants of each group could be if they did not have such information. Prior agreement from people who are to be sources of data in programs evaluations can be called "informed consent" only when agreement has been given only after sufficient information has been provided to permit understanding the requirements of the evaluation. Problems
that surface when an evaluator becomes an advocate for the program being evaluated include the loss of objectivity needed to conduct an evaluation. The term stakeholder refers to anyone affected by the program being evaluated.

**Topic : The Assessment Of Need**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term assessment of need
- Describe the conceptual model of a program
- Discuss the population needs.

**Definition/Overview:**

**Assessment of Need:** Before a program is implemented, the evaluator should ask about the conceptual foundations of the plans.

**Conceptual Model of a Program:** The conceptual model of a program refers to the processes hypothesized to lead to the outcomes desired. Evaluators need to know the specific definitions of good program outcomes because using vague definitions make it impossible to know if program goals were achieved. Knowing the characteristics of the target population will make it easier to design a useful service program.

**Key Points:**

1. **Population Needs**

   The needs that professionals ascribe to a population might not be what the population needs. If a target population does not acknowledge the needs that program planners ascribe to them, people are unlikely to cooperate with the treatment. The staff members of human service programs often overestimate the extent of the need for their services. A program might be ineffective because the target population does not feel a need for the service provided. Program goals should stress various types of goals from the development of resources through final outcomes. An impact model permits one to relate
program activities to final outcomes. Programs that are too weak to affect the problem they are planned to treat should be revised in the planning stage.

In Section 3 of this course you will cover these topics:
- Monitoring The Operation Of Programs
- Qualitative Evaluation Methods
- Single-Group, Non-Experimental Outcome

**Topic : Monitoring The Operation Of Programs**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term program monitoring
- Describe the process of program monitoring
- Discuss the need of program monitoring.

**Definition/Overview:**

**Program Monitoring:** Program monitoring includes an examination of the program's activities. Program implementation refers to the degree plans are put into effect. The study of the people actually served by a program often reveals that the staff members hold some inaccurate views about the population served. Program monitoring can involve relatively simple observations or a complicated system.

**Key Points:**

1. **Program Monitoring**

Program monitoring is carried out in order to describe the essential elements of the program as implemented. When reporting information to stakeholders, it is crucial to remember that people often incorporate new information without recognizing that some of their beliefs had been incorrect. Social service agency records can be used in program evaluation; however, many agencies do not keep well-organized records. When using agency records, the privacy of the program participants must be protected. The information used to describe the program participants will be determined by the type of
program being described. Management information systems are implemented to track the delivery of services to various groups of clients/students/patients. Management information systems will provide summarized feedback to service providers that are unavailable from other sources.

**Topic : Qualitative Evaluation Methods**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term qualitative evaluation
- Differentiate between qualitative and quantitative evaluation

**Definition/Overview:**

**Qualitative Evaluation:** Qualitative evaluation procedures are particularly appropriate when stakeholders cannot wait until the program is completed to evaluate the program. Qualitative evaluation methods are especially sensitive to the unique features of the organizational setting of the program to be evaluated. When a program has vague or diffuse goals, evaluators may decide to do a qualitative evaluation. If the entity being evaluated is a single unit with complex, multifaceted goals, it is hard to imagine how to do an experiment. When a carefully done evaluation takes a long time to complete, some stakeholders may no longer be interested in the issue.

**Key Points:**

1. **Qualitative versus Quantitative**

   A crucial difference between qualitative and quantitative evaluations is the central importance of the data gatherer in qualitative evaluations. Qualitative evaluators believe that the evaluator should react to initial findings redirecting the focus of the evaluation as necessary. The text likens the understanding derived from qualitative evaluations to the kind of qualitative understanding developed in mystery stories and court decisions. When qualitative data gatherers are present in a program setting but do not have a role in the interaction, they are called non-participant observers. The settings in which non-
participant observers are most likely to fit into easily are those that are relatively public. The settings in which participant observers are most likely to be required to make direct observations are those that are relatively private.

**Topic : Single-Group, Non-Experimental Outcome**

**Topic Objective:**
At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the quantitative and qualitative evaluation process
- Describe the evaluation design.

**Definition/Overview:**

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**Key Points:**

1. **Evaluation**

   Evaluation designs should be selected so that the stakeholders' questions can be answered. The use of small samples can lead unsophisticated evaluators to conclude falsely that a program had no impact. The question of how much improvement in a treatment group is enough cannot be settled empirically. Correlating the amount of service received with the condition of the participants after going through the program can sometimes reveal that a
service is useless. The difference between the post-program score and the pre-program score divided by the standard deviation of the outcome variable being measured is an index of effect size. The threat to internal validity called "maturation" refers to predictable changes in people that can be expected solely due to the passage of time. The threat to internal validity called "history" refers to events happening in the community that will change the behavior of the program participants.

In Section 4 of this course you will cover these topics:

' Quasi-Experimental Approaches
' Using Experiments To Evaluate Programs
' Analyses Of Costs And Outcomes

**Topic: Quasi-Experimental Approaches**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term Quasi Experiment
- Describe the term design
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Quasi Experimental design

**Definition/Overview:**

**Quasi-Experiment:** A quasi-experiment is a scientific research method primarily used in the social sciences. "Quasi" means likeness or resembling, so therefore quasi-experiments share characteristics of true experiments which seek interventions or treatments. The key difference in this empirical approach is the lack of random assignment. Another unique element often involved in this experimentation method is use of time series analysis: interrupted and non-interrupted.

**Key Points:**

1. **Design**

   The first part of creating a quasi-experimental design is to identify the variables. The quasi-independent variable will be the x-variable. This is the variable that is manipulated
in order to affect the outcome. "X" is generally a grouping variable with different levels. Grouping means two or more groups such as a treatment group and a placebo group. The predicted outcome is the dependent variable which is the y-variable. In a time series analysis, the dependant variable is observed over time for any changes that may take place. Once the variables have been identified and defined, a procedure should then be implemented and group differences should be examined.

2. Advantages

Since quasi-experimental designs are used when randomization is impossible and/or impractical, they are typically easier to set up than true experimental designs; it takes much less effort to study and compare subjects or groups of subjects that are already naturally organized than to have to conduct random assignment of subjects. Additionally, utilizing quasi-experimental designs minimizes threats to external validity. Since quasi-experiments are natural experiments, findings in one may be applied to other subjects and settings, allowing for some generalizations to be made about population. Also, this experimentation method is efficient in longitudinal research that involves longer time periods which can be followed up in different environments.

3. Disadvantages

The control allowed through the manipulation of the x-variable can lead to unnatural circumstances. Also, the lack of random assignment in the quasi-experimental design method may allow studies to be more feasible, but this also poses many challenges for the investigator. This deficient in randomization makes it harder to rule out confounds and introduces new threats to internal validity. Because randomization is absent, some knowledge about the data can be approximated, but cause-effect conclusions are difficult to determine. Moreover, even if these threats to internal validity are assessed, causation still cannot be fully established because the experimenter does not have total control over variables.

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**Topic : Using Experiments To Evaluate Programs**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the use of pretests.
- Describe the Quasi-Experimental

**Definition/Overview:**
The Use of Pretests: The use of pretests in an experimental evaluation may introduce the internal validity threat of testing. Service providers sometimes object to random assignment to groups because they try to match particular social services to particular individuals, however, there is considerable variation in the services provided to people with similar needs even in the absence of an evaluation. The use of pretests with an experimental evaluation permits one to control for random individual pretest differences thereby lowering Type II error. A good approach to interpretation when a program fails to achieve its objectives is to treat well-conceived programs as experiments and search for what can be learned to improve the next version of the program. When determining the costs of a valid, experimental evaluation of a new medical treatment, treatment innovators often overlook the costs of making a Type II error.

An evaluation that cannot be interpreted is a waste of resources.

Key Points:

1. Quasi-Experimental Design

Although some quasi-experimental designs are fairly effective in separating the effect of the program from viable alternative interpretations, staff will greatly object to quasi-experimental methods. Whenever preexisting, intact groups are used for an evaluation, the groups will differ on many variables. When an evaluator recognizes a potential threat to internal validity of an evaluation it many be impossible to control for it short of randomization. A randomized experiment relieves the evaluator of worrying about most of the threats to internal validity. Pretests are recommended even when the evaluation design consists of randomly formed groups because pretests will permit some interpretations even if randomization fails in practice.

Topic: Analyses Of Costs And Outcomes

Topic Objective:

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term program evaluation
- Describe the outcomes of a program
Definition/Overview:

**Program Evaluation:** An advantage that accountants have over program evaluators is that their crucial unit of analysis, a dollar, is widely accepted. Variable costs are to fixed costs as electric bills are to monthly rent charges. Sunk costs are those that have already been expended. Costs that have already been expended and cannot be recovered are called sunk costs. Indirect costs are those that cannot be associated with specific individual clients. Inaccurate estimates of program costs make it very hard to plan rationally. The outcomes of a cost-effective program are achieved at a lower cost per unit of outcome than other programs seeking to affect the same variables.

**Key Points:**

1. **Outcomes of a Program**

   When outcomes of a program can be expressed in dollars, then a cost-benefit study can be done. An evaluator doing a cost-benefit study may ignore certain benefits when it has been shown that other benefits exceed program costs. Cost-effectiveness analyses are performed when one cannot express outcomes in dollars, but can measure the outcomes of alternative programs that are designed to deal with the same problems. Cost-effectiveness analyses cannot be used in decisions when outcomes of possible programs are expressed in different units, i.e. lives saved, jobs created, commuting time saved.

In Section 5 of this course you will cover these topics:

- Evaluation Reports: Interpreting And Communicating Findings
- How To Encourage Utilization

**Topic : Evaluation Reports: Interpreting And Communicating Findings**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term evaluation report
- Describe the uses of evaluation report

**Definition/Overview:**
**Evaluation Report:** The introduction to an evaluation report usually contains a description of the setting of the program. The introduction should deal with the reasons for conducting an evaluation because the kind of implications drawn will follow from the reasons for conducting an evaluation. It is important to be sure that readers of an evaluation report recognize what is not dealt with in an evaluation because many readers hold limited definitions of what a program evaluation is.

**Key Points:**

1. **Evaluation Report**

   Including a description of the program participants observed during program evaluations helps readers to judge the external validity of the evaluation. Methods of selecting a sample are described in reports because internal validity may be threatened by some methods of finding a sample. An evaluation report could be more difficult to write than an article on basic research because the readership of an evaluation report may be more heterogeneous. In presenting evaluation results the meaning of group differences can only be interpreted in the light of the importance of the variable observed. Small improvements in important variables -- death rate, for example -- are worth finding and stressing in reports. Small improvements in outcome variables can be crucial if the variables are important or affect many people. The "adequacy" of a program refers to whether the program is sufficiently ambitious to serve the actual needs of the target population. A written evaluation report includes a summary that provides readers with an overview of the evaluation and recommendations.

**Topic : How To Encourage Utilization**

**Topic Objective:**

At the end of this topic student would be able to:

- Define the term encouragement factor
- Describe the role of evaluation report as an encouragement factor

**Definition/Overview:**
**Encouragement Factor:** If program staff members are terrified of failure, they will resist adopting ideas for change contained in an evaluation report. When evaluators sense a fear of evaluation, they would be wise to encourage the management to state clearly that program improvement and innovation are wanted, even if some innovations may turn out to be ineffective. If unsuccessful program innovations are not identified, others are more likely to implement ineffective programs. Evaluators are more likely to see evaluations used if staff is expecting help in improving the program.

**Key Points:**

1. **Evaluation Report**

   The conclusions of evaluation reports should seldom give blanket approval or disapproval of a program. Sometimes an innovative program will fail to do better than currently used approaches, but the new approach still has certain positive features (e.g., lower cost) that suggest it be adopted anyway. When an evaluator fails to document successful achievement of outcome goals, but the innovation seems to make sense anyway, evaluators can speak of the innovation having "common sense plausibility" and urge that further evaluations be conducted. If only the more costly elements of a program are eliminated because of negative findings, the evaluation served a useful purpose, especially if additional study is to be done. Evaluators need not be overly discouraged if the implications of an evaluation are not taken into consideration immediately because evaluation data are only one form of data that managers must use. The finding of "no differences" between a comparison group and a treatment group could be due to poor evaluation methodology or inadequate analyses. Implementing the results of evaluation studies is encouraged when the evaluation feeds back into program planning.