

Evaluating Programs and Emerging Trends

PSY3660 Unit 8

Introduction

This unit will focus on whether a program will be successful or not. It will also focus on examining the why or why not of its success. There are different reasons or models that emphasize a successful program and this unit will examine the different models as well as the emerging trends for the future of the community psychologist in today's ever changing time period.

Program Evaluation

When we think about evaluation it occurs in everyday life in many activities. It is something that tells us about our experience with an activity. For instance, when we go to a restaurant we decide from the service we received, the food we ate and the atmosphere whether or not there was quality in the service and the food and enjoyed the atmosphere. From those criteria we decide if we will return for another visit. When we join a gym we evaluate if the gym offers varied class time as well as diverse classes and equipment for us to go back to the gym. If the gym is dirty and not well-kept then we decide not to keep our membership with this particular gym. We evaluate many things on a daily basis without even realizing an evaluation has taken place.

When thinking about evaluation it is about providing a final decision on a program's effectiveness. We ask "did the program work, why or why not?" To ask such a question there needs to be a monitoring of the program and to determine why or why not the program was effective. When thinking about the logic of program evaluation it is about identifying if there was failure of theory with the program or identifying if there was an implementation failure. As community psychologist much time, money and energy was spent on the development of the program. Therefore, we need to know why the program was not effective, after all aside from these factors of time, money and energy there was a specific reason for this program to be developed. It was designed to improve the well-being of the community members in some way so we want to find out why it was not successful and why we did not achieve what we set out to do.

A program will fail due to theory failure or implementation failure. Theory failure is the rationale behind why the specific intervention was considered within a specific context and population. What was it about the theory of this programming that was not effective? The reasoning behind this program is what is evaluated to determine if it was the theory itself that was wrong. It examines if the underlying assumptions of the theory are not appropriate for this context with the program. It examines what was wrong with this specific form of intervention and then begins to take it apart piece by piece to determine the reasons for failure of the program.

Implementation failure is exactly that; how the program was executed. The execution of the program is what is evaluated. It is the procedural components of the program that are investigated to determine why they were not effective. An examination of the step by step process of the execution of the many components of the program are investigated. Detail by detail of the procedural components are examined. It is not about pointing fingers rather it is about accountability and changing what isn't working so as to overhaul the program so it can be effective.

Program Evaluation Models

There are various ways to think about evaluation of a program. There is the Logic Model of Planning Programs which examines step by step the conditions, activities, outcomes, impacts needs assessment, program planning, and implementation. Establishing a step by step process of evaluation starts at the beginning with examining the intended goal of the program and what exactly the program was originally striving for. It seeks to identify what the target goals were, who the target populations were, what were the

intended desired outcomes. As it does this, then it can move onto monitoring each and every program activity. Taking the activities apart from the organizational process to the outcome process. Evaluating the outcomes and the overall impact that the program had on the community. Examining if the outcome was what was expected. To do this as well as the other evaluations it is accomplished through observations, questionnaires, self-reports, ratings interviews and gathering any further notes on the outcomes of each of the activities and then the ultimate impact of the program. Is the program long standing or will it be short lived? Did it reduce, eliminate or create awareness of the intended objective? There are so many questions to ask and to examine to truly determine if the program was successful. It is time consuming, almost as time consuming as creating the program for the implementation in the first place, however; it is very much needed so as to determine if the intended goal is being accomplished.

Emerging Trends

When thinking about what personal qualities makes an effective community psychologist is interesting. As a diverse society we have the benefit of so many different types of people with so many great personal resources of character that want to commit to assisting their communities. A community psychologist must possess tolerance for diversity, a risk taker, passionate, motivated, and dedicated. The community psychologist doesn't work alone, they work in collaboration with other community leaders and members who all have a stake in improving their community. The community psychologist works along-side others to establish partnerships. It is not a single person job, rather it is a group effort. Due to our increased access to globalization the efforts can be from near or far, in terms of resources and partnerhsips.

Community psychology has become an interdisciplinary field which bridges the gap between empirical research and development of various programs as well as policy change. The community psychologist goes from local to international. The local community psychologist monitors the overall well-being of the community, facilitates research and planning, consults, trains and evaluates community members, resources and programs. Community psychology has increased around the globe. It has unique histories in many countries and offers various journals, conferences, international collaborations and criticisms all to create an improved quality of life for community members across the globe.

A broadening impact for social justice, collaboration, participatory research and action have emerged with greater dedication and motivation towards creating communities which are culturally collaborative. Creating community awareness of one another as individuals as well as the interests of the many diverse community members establishes options for change. It is about creating effective programs which will create effective interventions which will improve quality of life for community members. Community psychology is even more so in demand due to the great diversity we have in our societies today. A balance of patience and zeal must be taken into consideration. A passion for wanting to assist local community members to change, to accept change and to improve upon a context within their community. Using empirical research allows communities to see grounded examples of tangible changes in other communities so they can feel empowered that they too can work together and establish a change within their communities.

There is an increased need for community psychologist across the globe. It is an increasing area of employment. For those of you who are interested in community activism and change and with the combination of a psychology degree, this is an area of future employment. Looking at graduate school programs in community psychology will put all the pieces of the puzzle that we have talked about throughout the semester into perspective. Do not underestimate yourselves when it comes to expanding your future careers with areas that may not necessarily have been what you originally thought about. Gain new insights into new career fields so as increase your own potential and future outlooks.

Conclusion

This unit focused examining what makes a program successful. It looked at the theories as well as the logic behind the theories for establishing a successful community program. When examining a program to determine its success rate there are various components that when applied accurately will create a successful program. This unit emphasized the need for program evaluation and program accountability with a community. To establish a successful program takes many varied people from the community, it cannot be a person job. Many community members must become actively involved in all phases of the programming.

(CSLO 4, CSLO 5)

References

Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., Elias, M., & Dalton, H. (2012) *Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.