

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Intranet

Thinking About Program Impact (Including End Result Change As Program Effect)

When we talk about the effect a program may be having on its participants, we are talking about its impact. Mayeske (1994) defines program impact as benefits (effects) resulting from programmatic effort.

Extension is an agency that offers educational programs. Accordingly, we ask, what changes occur in persons (and/or in situations they are connected to) as a result of their participation in an extension program?

Primary Changes

When we think of program impact occurring, we are primarily concerned with documenting changes in:

(1) participants' awareness of something (**reaction/awareness change**) [for example, participants realize that healthy eating is important];

(2) participants' knowledge of something (**knowledge/skill change**) [for example, participants learn the benefits of healthy eating];

(3) participants' behavior (**practice/behavior change**) [for example, participants eat healthier];

(4) Finally, changes may occur in participants' situations as a result of a program (**end result change** - related to prevention, reduction, and/or solution of a problem) [for example, participants become healthier people, have improved self-concept, are less depressive, and/or enjoy life more].

Importantly, the above changes in participants (and/or situations) should be thought of as sequential and causally occurring. Which means that each change is necessary for the next change to occur. For example,

If program participants feel healthy eating is important, **then** they will learn more about it, **then** they will eat healthier, and so on....

Also, while it is not necessary for a program to show measurable change for each sequentially occurring event, it is important to realize that each occurring event is antecedent to the next and that there is a hierarchical order of events.

Necessary Conditions

Preceding the four "primary" changes associated with program participants are necessary conditions. These constitute the basis, or foundation, of a program. They include program input, activity, and people involvement (participation).

While necessary conditions can also be considered changes which are taking place, specifically, they are program changes (rather than changes in program participants). However, they must occur before changes associated with participants (primary changes) take place. Therefore, they are called necessary conditions.

As before with participant changes, necessary conditions should also be thought of as occurring sequentially and causally. For example,

If money is allocated and personnel hired, **then** a curriculum is developed, **then** people will sign up for the workshop.

Necessary conditions include:

- (1) **input** into a program (e.g., new resources, personnel, or building space),
- (2) **activities** of a program (e.g., newsletters, workshops, development of curricula), and
- (3) **people involvement** within a program (e.g., 120 people attended two seminars).

Necessary Conditions and Primary Changes

Putting Necessary Conditions and Primary Changes together in rank order (from least to most impacting), we create what we call a hierarchy of change. The seven levels of change include:

Necessary Conditions	(1) input into a program (e.g., new resources, personnel, or building space), (2) activities of a program (e.g., newsletters, workshops, development of curricula), (3) people involvement within a program (e.g., 120 people attended a two seminar)
Primary Changes	(4) reactions , changes in peoples' awareness and response to educational programming and information related to the problem; (5) knowledge or skill (K/S) , changes in peoples' knowledge, understanding, or abilities related to the problem; (6) practice change , changes in peoples' behavior related to the problem; and (7) end results , broader change in peoples' situation related to prevention, reduction, or solution of the problem itself (Bennett, 1979).

End Result Change As Program Effect Thinking back to the "causal" idea of changes in program participants. Remember that each level of change is a consequence of a change antecedent to it.



While participants constitute reaction, knowledge/skill, and practice/behavior change, when we think of end result change it is important to understand that it is a change in a person's situation (i.e., a broader change in peoples' situation related to prevention, reduction, or solution of the problem itself). End result change can occur in either: (1) program participants; and/or (2) larger entities with which program participants are affiliated.

End Result Change In Program Participants

For example, a program participant's situation may change in terms of them:

- (1) becoming healthier;
- (2) having improved self-concept;
- (3) becoming less depressive; and/or
- (4) enjoying life more.

End Result Change In Larger Entities (with which program participants are affiliated)

For example, a program participant's situation may change in terms of their:

- (1) family becoming healthier (family is eating healthy and exercising regularly);
- (2) community practicing health conscious fund raising events ("Run for Fun" and "Eat Healthy In The Park Picnic");
- (3) business changing its working environment ("Healthy Choice" vending machines are installed);
- (4) environment improving (there are fewer beer and cola drink bottles to pickup); and/or
- (5) community's finances improving (an annual statewide Healthy Choices Convention is held in the community).

References

Bennett, C. (1979). **Analyzing Impacts of Extension Programs**. Washington, DC.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Science, & education administration (ES C-575).

Mayeske, G. W. (1994). **Life Cycle Program Management & Evaluation: An Heuristic Approach, Part II**. Prepared for Use by the Cooperative Extension System.

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