

## : THREE :

## IDENTIFYING EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

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In the first two chapters, we identified our evaluand, what “big picture” questions need to be answered about it, and who needs to know. Now it is time to roll up our sleeves and get into some of the nuts and bolts. One of the most important activities in putting together a solid evaluation is identifying the evaluative criteria or **dimensions of merit**. These are the attributes (e.g., features, impacts) of the evaluand that we will look at to see how good (or how valuable, how effective, etc.) it is.

The evaluative criteria are most relevant in five of the Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC) checkpoints: Consumers, where we identify who might be affected by the evaluand; Values, where we explain broadly how we define what is “good” (or what is “valuable”); Process Evaluation, where we evaluate the content and implementation of an evaluand; **Outcome Evaluation**; and Comparative Cost-Effectiveness. These checkpoints are reproduced in Exhibit 3.1.

Before we start exploring the strategies available for identifying evaluative criteria, it is worth spending a few minutes on the following question: Why not just use goals? After all, this is one of the most common strategies used by both managers and evaluators, that is, seeing whether the evaluand did what it was supposed to do.

**Exhibit 3.1** The KEC Checkpoints That Are Most Relevant to the Identification of Evaluative Criteria

<b>Foundations</b>	<p><b>3. Consumers</b> Who are the actual or potential recipients or impactees of the program (e.g., demographics)?</p>	<p><b>5. Values</b> On what basis will you determine whether the evaluand is of high quality, is valuable, and so forth? Where will you get the criteria, and how will you determine “how good is good”?</p>
	<b>Sub-Evaluations</b>	<p><b>6. Process Evaluation</b> How good, valuable, or efficient is the evaluand’s content (design) and implementation (delivery)?</p>
<p><b>8 &amp; 9. Comparative Cost-Effectiveness</b> How costly is this evaluand to consumers, funders, staff, and so forth, compared with alternative uses of the available resources that might feasibly have achieved outcomes of similar or greater value? Are the costs excessive, quite high, just acceptable, or very reasonable?</p>		

**WHY NOT JUST USE GOALS?**

One of the first places many people start when they are asked to evaluate something is to find out what it was supposed to do and then check to see whether it did that. It is quite legitimate for management to want some information about performance relative to preset targets, and an evaluator is certainly the kind of person who has the expertise to collect such information. But as evaluators, we also must consider whether this information alone will allow us to draw valid conclusions about how well the product, project, or program is doing.

Before we get into a discussion of this, a quick point of clarification is in order. Most evaluands have some overarching purpose that we might refer to as a “goal.” But that is not the kind of goal we discuss in this section. Rather, the term is used here to refer to the *specific objectives* that many evaluands have in place, complete with *preset targets* that might or might not be achieved.

Well-thought-out goals (in the sense of specific measurable targets to be achieved) can often take us part of the way toward working out how good (or how valuable, how effective, etc.) an evaluand is. Unfortunately, even the best ones have the potential to fall short in several important respects. Let’s use an example to see why. Suppose that we had a hypothetical evaluand (called Program X) with three specific measurable goals. Suppose that Program X achieves one goal exactly, makes a near miss on another, but far exceeds target performance on its third goal (Exhibit 3.2).

**Exhibit 3.2** Performance of Program X Against Its Three Specific Goals

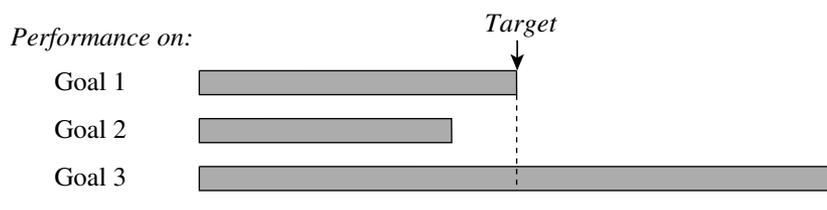


Table 3.1 lists some of the challenges encountered if one takes a strictly goal achievement-oriented approach to evaluating Program X.

The long and the short of it is that goals with specific targets can be handy guides when they exist but that even the best ones still need to be tweaked and/or supplemented with other criteria if they are to be used in an evaluation. What we really need is something more bulletproof that will allow us to take into account all of the issues listed previously and will even deal with the situation when there are no preset goals or targets or when we decide to do the evaluation in *goal-free* mode.

**Table 3.1** Problems With Using Preset Targets or Goals as the Only Criteria

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Example</i>
Overruns and shortfalls	Should we (a) call Program X a “failure” because it missed one of its targets, (b) say that it did very well because it exceeded one of its targets by much more than it missed on another, or (c) something in between?
Goal difficulty	What if the goal that Program X barely missed (Goal 2) was a particularly challenging one, whereas the goal it far exceeded (Goal 3) was easy?
Goal importance	What if the easy target was actually the more important one (i.e., it was more valuable to meet that goal than to meet the other one)? (How would we find out independently whether it was or was not? More on that in Chapter 7.)
<b>Side effects</b>	What if Program X also had an excellent side effect that was not included in the list of goals? Should we disregard that? If not, how would we know whether it compensated for the target it missed?
Synthesizing mixed results	What if we need to rank (or choose between) two programs, one of which is Program X and the other of which exactly met each of the three targets without exceeding any? On what basis could we say that one is better than the other?
Reasonableness of target levels	Suppose you find out that Program X came in “on budget” (i.e., met its cost goal), but then you find out that it cost five times as much as any comparable project that achieved roughly the same thing. (A similar problem occurs if Program X goes just over a very lean budget.)
Ignoring process: Do the ends justify the means?	What if Program X came in on budget by forcing the project staff to work overtime every weekend for 3 months so that in the end the top three team members quit their jobs and went to work for a competitor?

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Example</i>
Whose/Which goals to use?	<p>Suppose different people (program designers, management, and the staff who implemented the program) have very different versions of what the goals really are (i.e., what they are <i>really</i> trying to achieve). Whose/which goals should you evaluate against?</p> <p><i>Related issues:</i> How will you handle the politics of choosing one set of goals over another? What will you do if you chew through your entire evaluation budget just finding out what the goals are?</p>

NOTE: These points draw on Scriven's (1991) list of problems with goal achievement evaluation, with some adaptations and further explanations.

In **goal-free evaluation** (GFE), the evaluation team deliberately avoids learning what the goals are (or were) so as to avoid being overly focused on intended outcomes. The rationale behind this approach is that both intended and unintended effects are important to include in an evaluation. Therefore, it is important to find all effects, and it is of little consequence whether any identified effects happened to be intended or unintended.

Because the human mind inevitably pays more attention to what it knows it is looking for, concentrating on intended effects can lead the evaluation team to miss seeing some of the unintended effects. By leaving the search for effects (i.e., outcomes) open-ended and not focused primarily on goals (i.e., intended effects), GFE often picks up more side effects than does goal-based evaluation (GBE).

GFE is sometimes called **needs-based evaluation** because a **needs assessment** is one of the primary tools used to identify what effects (both positive and negative) should be investigated.

## IDENTIFYING CRITERIA: BASIC CONCEPTS AND TOOLS

Identifying the right criteria for an evaluation is similar to deciding what symptoms to look at when determining what (if anything) is wrong with a patient and how serious it is:

- We have a relatively limited time frame in which to make the diagnosis.
- If we miss something, we could easily make the wrong diagnosis.
- If we place importance on things that are not relevant to overall health, we could make an inaccurate diagnosis.
- Some *types* of symptoms represent more serious problems than do others.
- The *severity* of symptoms is important. Slight deviations from healthy levels are not as serious as those that are way off the mark.
- Sometimes it is *combinations* of symptoms that indicate a far more (or less) serious condition than each individual symptom would suggest.
- Sick patients are sometimes in denial about their symptoms or simply do not notice them, so there is a need to verify what they tell us (when possible) and to look for what they do not tell us.
- There could be several things wrong with the patient.
- In the end, we must put a lot of complex information together and come up with a final diagnosis (so that we know whether to admit the person to a hospital immediately or to send him or her home with some medication).

Unlike medicine, evaluation is not a discipline that has been developed by practicing professionals over thousands of years, so we are not yet at the stage where we have huge encyclopedias that will walk us through any evaluation step-by-step. Even if we did, such “book knowledge” would not be enough. Like medicine, evaluation is an art and a craft as well as a science. Becoming a good evaluator involves developing the pattern-spotting skills of a methodical and insightful detective, the critical thinking instincts of a top-notch political reporter, and the bedside manner and holistic perspective of an excellent doctor, among many other skills.

For the beginner, this lack of structured guidance can be a real headache. Although doing evaluation in the real world involves many complexities, there are (thankfully) a number of fairly straightforward nuts-and-bolts tools that evaluators can use to get started.

When it comes to building a criterion list, there are a few tools and procedures that are either essential or very useful:

- A needs assessment
- A simple **logic model** that links the evaluand to the **needs**

- An assessment of other relevant values
- Checklists for thinking of other relevant criteria under the headings of Process, Outcomes, and Cost
- A strategy for organizing your criterion checklist

In the rest of this chapter, we run through what these tools and procedures are and how to use them. By the end, you should be able to draw up a good initial criterion list for whatever it is you plan to evaluate. Of course, you will often find that you need to tweak the list once you get into the evaluation proper because, for example, there may be some effects or issues that you did not anticipate. But the main thing is to go into the evaluation with a well-thought-out plan so that you know what you need to know, where to get that information, and how you are going to put it together when you write up (or present) your report.

For those readers with a particular interest in **policy evaluation**, the identification of criteria follows many of the fundamental principles described here but can be more complex in several ways. For example, one often must weigh very difficult conflicting values such as whether being able to freely choose a school for one's child is intrinsically valuable even if that choice leads to poorer educational outcomes for the child (Miron & Nelson, 1992). Colleagues who work in the areas spanning evaluation and public policy have recommended two books that complement the methods described here and help to span the gap between traditional **policy analysis** and evaluation. These are listed as Additional Readings at the end of this chapter.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT FUNDAMENTALS

The very basic idea behind needs assessment is as follows. Having a positive impact on end users (also referred to as **consumers** or **impactees**) is (or should be) the fundamental purpose that justifies the creation or existence of all products, services, programs, and policies in the first place. The primary *consumer* is the person or entity who buys or uses a product or service, enrolls in or is the recipient of a program, is directly affected by a government policy, and so forth. (There may also be some others affected indirectly or unintentionally, hence the use of the more inclusive term *impactees*.)

If we can understand what the true needs of consumers or impactees are, this gives us a solid basis for finding out how well a program is doing by seeing how well it is helping to meet those needs. In other words, needs that we identify become the outcome criteria we use for the evaluation. Furthermore, the data collected during the needs assessment phase can often double as **baseline data** if we wish to track change in certain outcome variables.

Before launching into a needs assessment, then, a useful first step is to figure out who our consumers or impactees are. We had a shot at this in the exercise at the end of Chapter 1, but let's clarify a few key points and double-check to make sure that we have this right.

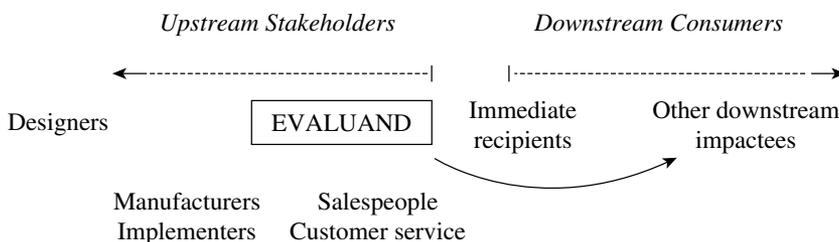
## IDENTIFYING CONSUMERS OR IMPACTEES

In general, consumers (or impactees) are those people for whom something changes (or should or might change) as a result of a particular product, service, program, or policy.

Occasionally, products, services, programs, or policies are designed to prevent change rather than to effect change (e.g., cosmetics that slow or prevent the signs of aging). In such cases, the impacts, effects, or outcomes are the lack of change that otherwise would have occurred and the impactees are the users or receivers of the products, services, or programs.

Recall the KEC, where Checkpoint 3 states that an important part of evaluation is to correctly identify the consumers. When we talk about consumers or impactees, we are referring to those people for whom something changes (or should or might change), or for whom something is prevented from changing, as a result of our product, program, or policy. At this point, we do not include the **upstream stakeholders** (i.e., the people who worked on the design, implementation, and/or management) under the heading of consumers or impactees; rather, we include just the people "downstream," that is, **downstream consumers** (Exhibit 3.3).

Consumers can be divided into two groups: (a) immediate users or recipients and (b) other downstream impactees (Exhibit 3.3). **Immediate recipients** are the people who actually bought a product, signed up for a program, or received services directly from the evaluand, whereas downstream impactees are those who were not **direct recipients** but who were affected nevertheless. Downstream

**Exhibit 3.3** Upstream Stakeholders Versus Downstream Consumers

impactees need not be individuals; instead, they could be the unit or organization where direct recipients work, the local community, or society in general.

Table 3.2 gives some examples of the different types of consumers for programs, policies, and products. When listing consumers, you should always include not only those who actually received the product, service, or program but also those who potentially could have or should have done so. This is because the extent to which a program or service actually reached those who most needed it is part of what makes a good program or service. If we consider just the impact on those who happened to be reached, we might be missing a big chunk of the story. In product evaluation terms, it may be helpful to think of the categories of immediate consumers as the “potential target markets.”

*Quick Exercise: Identifying Consumers*

1. At the top of a new page, write a one-sentence description of your evaluand (you can draw this from the exercise at the end of Chapter 1, tweaking as necessary in light of what you have learned since).
2. Create a table like Table 3.2 (except that you will only need one row), and identify the actual and potential immediate recipients or users of your chosen evaluand. Next, list the potential downstream impactees. (Do this on half a page or less, single-spaced.)
3. Discuss what you have written with a colleague, and critique each other’s work. (Common mistakes include mentioning upstream stakeholders such as program staff and salespeople [we will consider them elsewhere] and “throwing in the kitchen sink” [limit your list to two or three main groups in each category unless there are really compelling reasons to include more].)

**Table 3.2** Examples of Consumers Identified for Different Evaluands

<i>Evaluand</i>	<i>Immediate Recipients (actual or potential)</i>	<i>Downstream Impactees (actual or potential)</i>
After-school chess program	Children who attended the program; other children in the area who do not currently attend other after-school activities	Siblings and families of children who attended the program; the local community
Executive coaching intervention	Executives who received coaching; other executives or managers within the company who did not receive coaching	Executives' direct reports; the senior management team; the chief executive officer; shareholders; the organization as a whole
Policy to decrease legal drinking age from 21 to 18 years	People 18 to 20 years of age	Parents and siblings of 18- to 20-year-olds; the police; bar and restaurant managers; the general public (especially those who patronize bars)
New 1-kg (2-pound) lightweight portable printer	Professionals and academicians who are frequent travelers or who have a "just-in-time" approach to doing presentations; people in small apartments or dormitories	Colleagues; clients; the organizations where primary consumers (immediate recipients) work
Farm irrigation project	Farmers who received irrigation; farm workers; farmers and other landowners in the area who did not receive irrigation	Adjacent landowners; produce vendors; the surrounding community (e.g., people who consume farm produce, local businesses)

### *Pop Quiz: Timing of the Needs Assessment*

It is likely that you will run into a few people who will tell you that the only time a needs assessment is appropriate is at the design stage of the program, project, product, or policy. Once the evaluand has been launched, it is way too late for a needs assessment. You need to have a good answer for this one. What should it be? (Jot it down on half a page or less.)

### **Needs Versus Wants**

There are two critically important things you must know to design a good needs assessment. One is the fundamental difference between **wants** and needs. The other is what the distinctions are among the different kinds of needs, not all of which we are concerned with in a needs assessment.

Importantly, a true need might *not* be something that someone desires or is conscious of needing. It might even be something that is definitely not wanted. A seriously dehydrated person wandering in the desert might strongly desire a beer on arrival at an oasis, but what he or she really needs is water.

A *need* is something without which unsatisfactory functioning occurs.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, a *want* is a conscious desire without which dissatisfaction (but not necessarily unsatisfactory functioning) occurs.

Let's try a more complex example to demonstrate the distinction between wants and needs. If you ask 14-year-olds whether they really need to know how to do algebra, they might tell you that it is one of life's cruelest inventions and a completely unnecessary one at that. What they are expressing in this case are wants and not needs. It is a fact that, in virtually all societies around the

world, some understanding of algebra (and mental arithmetic) is essential to make sure that one does not get “ripped off” when buying timber for building a house or when buying food for one’s family. Getting ripped off is clearly unsatisfactory functioning, so a certain level of knowledge in algebra and arithmetic is a need.

### The Context Dependence of Needs

Another important point here is that needs are highly context dependent, with context having many dimensions such as geographical, cultural, and historical. A century ago, we did not need to be able to get from one side of the Pacific Ocean to the other in less than a day, but in today’s business environment, that is expected. A firm doing business overseas would fall way behind its competitors (a clear example of unsatisfactory functioning) if representatives traveled only by sea and took weeks to get to their overseas customers. The context has changed, and the need has changed with it. As another example, basic living condition needs are defined differently in different countries because “satisfactory functioning” is defined differently.

If needs are context dependent, does that mean that they all are arbitrary? Not at all. Common sense and good evaluation practice dictate that we need to clearly define the context and justify why we classify certain things as needs. If there is disagreement on this, so much the better. It can help to spark an important dialogue about how “need” should be defined in a particular context, and this is an extremely important conversation to have.

This is not meant to imply that you, as an evaluator, are somehow infallible. Evaluation is a tough job that is difficult to get right, and you should *always* be open to the possibility that you have missed something, incorrectly assumed something, included something irrelevant, or made some other blunder. What we try to do throughout this book is make the evaluation’s methods and findings as **systematic** (step-by-step and thorough), **objective** (free from unacceptable bias), and **transparent** (easy to follow) as possible. This makes it easier for you and others to pinpoint exactly where you might have gone wrong as you drew your evaluative conclusions.

### The Evaluative Attitude: An Important Attribute for an Evaluator

Remember that if your critic is right, change what you have written or said. If your critic is wrong, see whether you can find a way to explain what you have written or said better so that others do not jump to the wrong conclusion as well.

All serious criticism is valuable because it allows you to correct and/or clarify. Knowing this, and actively seeking out such criticism, is central to being a good evaluator. After all, useful criticism is what we sell, so seeking it out ourselves is “walking the talk.”

### Different Kinds of Needs

We have distinguished needs from wants. Now we need to make sure that we understand the different kinds of needs. Basically, there are three dimensions on which we can distinguish needs.

The main dimensions that distinguish the different kinds of needs are as follows:

1. Conscious needs versus unconscious needs
2. Met needs versus unmet needs
3. Performance needs versus instrumental needs<sup>2</sup>

The distinction between *conscious needs* and *unconscious needs* is a fairly straightforward one—the things we know we need versus the things we do not know we need. And, as pointed out earlier, there are things that we *think* we do not need but that we actually do need. The term *unconscious* is not meant to imply that these needs are not known to anyone; rather, it just implies that the needs are not known to the person who has the needs.

A trickier distinction is that between *met needs* and *unmet needs*. The idea here is that just because someone already has something does not mean

that he or she does not need it. Suppose that a group of rural farmers has good irrigation to their crops. Does this mean that irrigation is not needed? It is true that irrigation is not an unmet need in this case, but it is certainly something that, if taken away, would probably cause seriously unsatisfactory functioning, including possible crop loss.

Why bother with looking at needs that are already met? Whatever we are evaluating is designed to address unmet needs, right? Yes, but do not forget unintended consequences. A good evaluand is something that not only adds good things (e.g., services, products, opportunities) but also does not take away something important in the process. For example, building a new factory in an economically depressed town may provide employment for local people, thereby addressing an unmet need. But what if it also drains most of the town's water supply and/or seriously pollutes the air, thereby taking away the previously met needs of clean air and water? Evaluation involves not only looking at how well problems (unmet needs) were addressed but also looking at whether any new problems or benefits were caused.

The third (and most difficult) distinction is that between *performance needs* and *instrumental needs*. A performance need is a state of existence or level of performance that is required for satisfactory functioning. Roughly, it is a "need to do" something, a "need to be" something, or a "need to be able to do" something. In contrast, an instrumental need is the product, tool, or intervention that is required to address the performance need.

If we say that traveling executives need lightweight laptop computers, that is an example of an instrumental need. If we say that these executives need to be able to access e-mail and files while on the road, that is the performance need. The important thing to notice here is that the performance need is a lot easier to argue as a defensible fact than is the instrumental need. After all, one could also access e-mail and files through a handheld computer or personal digital assistant (PDA) or by using business centers or Internet cafés. If an executive has possession of or access to one of these, he or she might not need a laptop at all.

In short, the performance need is the *actual or potential problem*, whereas the instrumental need is the *proposed solution*. In needs assessment, we are concerned with the performance needs and not the instrumental needs. As we will see, this has major implications for needs assessment methods.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT METHODS: A TWO-PHASE APPROACH

Needs assessment, as conceptualized here, consists of two phases:

1. Identifying and documenting performance needs (severity documentation phase)
2. Investigating the underlying causes of performance needs (diagnostic phase)

### **Identifying and Documenting Performance Needs**

The first phase of the needs assessment is the most intuitive one for most people. Typically, it involves starting with the “presenting needs,” that is, the unmet performance needs that have caught the attention of stakeholders. For example, perhaps a community has noticed an increase in drug abuse by teenagers or a school is concerned about a high dropout rate among its students.

The first step is to document the extent of this presenting need by gathering some hard evidence (usually quantitative data) about the magnitude of the problem. This might involve asking police for records of teen drug arrests or examining school records to find out how high the dropout rate is. In many cases, it is helpful to locate some comparative information (e.g., similar statistics from earlier years, data from similar communities in the city or state) to gain a comparative sense of the severity of the problem.

The second step is to flesh out this information by finding out more about the individuals in need. Is the drug use (or the tendency to drop out of school) more prevalent among boys or girls or within a particular demographic group (e.g., age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status)?

The third step is to look for other types of performance needs apart from the one or two that were originally noticed. Have there also been problems with truancy, violence, bullying, or other crimes? This step often involves a combination of open-ended inquiry, such as asking parents, teachers, police, and community members, and collection of hard data (statistics) as corroborating evidence.

Not all evaluations require such extensive documentation of the nature and extent of the needs within a particular population. But at the very least, the evaluation team should make some effort to lay out the evidence of the need that led to the development of the evaluand in the first place.

By the end of this first phase, the evaluation team should have a clear picture of the nature and extent of the needs within the target community. The next phase involves delving deeper to understand the underlying causes of those needs.

### Investigating the Underlying Causes of Performance Needs

One big problem that is frequently encountered in organizations is a premature jump to instrumental needs. For example, suppose that there is a problem with poor employee performance. Very often, people jump straight to the conclusion that a training program is needed to address the performance problem, go ahead and implement it, and then wonder why it does not work.

One method that may be useful for helping people to understand the nature of this problem is to use a logic model to illustrate (and then discuss) the assumption being made.

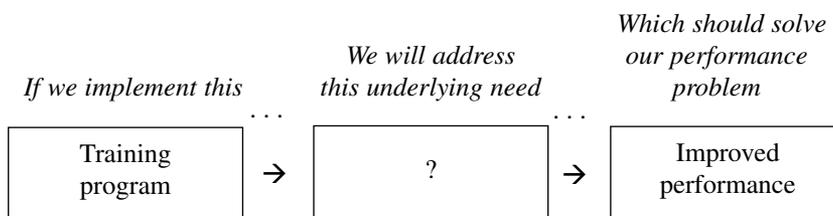
A **logic model** is a diagram that illustrates the cause-and-effect mechanism(s) by which an evaluand meets (or is supposed to meet) certain needs or achieves (or is supposed to achieve) certain effects.

**Program theory** is a description of the mechanism by which the program is expected to achieve its effects. A program theory can be expressed in a narrative or picture, or it can be depicted in a simple logic model.

The term **program logic** is often used in cases where the program theory is very simple or straightforward.

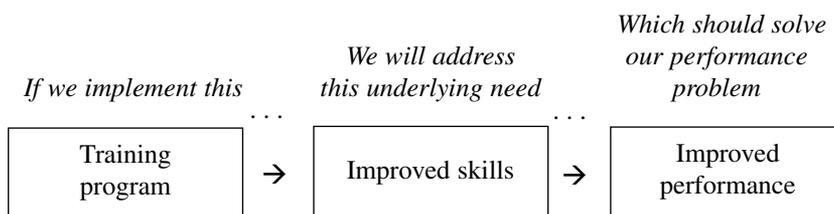
Let's use an example to illustrate. Suppose that you have been asked to evaluate a training program that had been put in place by a manager or human resources person to address a performance problem among a certain group of employees. What is the assumed underlying need? Why is a training program thought to be the correct solution? Let's map it out using a logic model (Exhibit 3.4).

#### Exhibit 3.4 Identifying the Underlying Assumption Linking Treatment to Performance Needs



What is assumed to be the underlying cause of the performance problem whenever training is proposed as the solution? That would be a skill deficit (Exhibit 3.5).

**Exhibit 3.5** Underlying Assumption Linking Treatment to Performance Needs



Part of conducting a good needs assessment is the task of checking any assumptions such as this to find out whether or not they are the true cause of a performance need. Sometimes the cause is quite different from what was assumed (in which case the wrong intervention was implemented), and sometimes there is more than one cause of the performance need (in which case it is likely that only a partial solution was implemented).

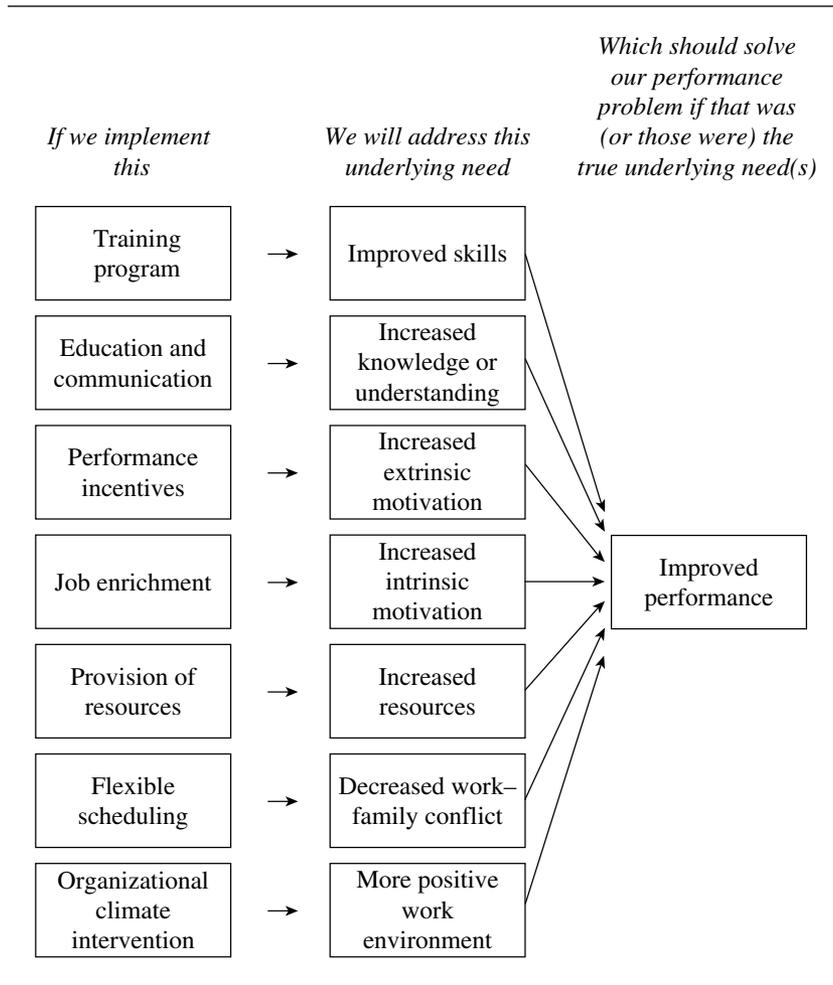
When checking assumptions regarding needs, it is a good idea to use a logic model to map out each of the possible underlying needs (or causes of the performance need) so that they can be systematically checked and confirmed or ruled out. In the case of an employee performance problem, a list of possible causes (or underlying needs) would include the following:

- Skill deficit
- Lack of knowledge or understanding
- Lack of extrinsic motivation (incentives)
- Lack of intrinsic motivation (interest)
- Lack of resources
- Work–family conflict
- A negative psychosocial work environment

Each of these underlying problems would need to be addressed by a somewhat different intervention. Exhibit 3.6 shows the intervention that might be implemented in response to each of the above underlying needs. For

example, if a major cause of the performance problem were a lack of intrinsic motivation (or interest in the work), one possible intervention would be something called job enrichment—removing some of the job’s structure/control, increasing accountability, adding more challenging assignments, and finding other ways to make the work more meaningful and interesting.

**Exhibit 3.6** Interventions Needed to Address the Various Possible Underlying Needs (causes of poor performance)



Clearly, it is preferable to look into the underlying causes of identified performance needs at the program design stage. However, if this has not been done, the evaluator will need to check whether all important underlying needs were met, regardless of whether they were identified originally. In many cases, there is more than one cause of a performance need (or the causes are different for different people), and a multifaceted solution (or different solutions for different people) is required.

The use of a logic model in this way also has benefits further down the line. It helps to identify not only the *final outcomes* that are needed (e.g., improved performance) but also the *intermediate outcomes* that should be checked on to see whether whatever was causing the performance need has been addressed. We explore the use of logic models more in Chapter 5 when we learn how to deal with the causation issue.

#### *Pop Quiz: Different Kinds of Needs*

Suppose that you are asked to do a needs assessment for either an after-school program for urban youth or a PDA for high school students.

If you asked potential participants or users, “What do you need?” What kinds of needs would you most likely be tapping into? (circle one type of need on each line)

- Conscious needs or unconscious needs?
- Met needs or unmet needs?
- Performance needs or instrumental needs?

On a separate piece of paper, list the types of needs that you would still be missing after asking that question.

The key point of the preceding pop quiz is to realize that the information you can get from asking potential participants about their needs is just the tip of the iceberg. Much of the most important information must be gathered in some other way. In the next section, we look at some of the strategies available for drilling into the iceberg.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT DESIGN, STRATEGIES, AND METHODS: A SIMPLE EXAMPLE

As we saw in the previous sections, a good needs assessment must be concerned with performance needs—conscious and unconscious, met and unmet. Let's illustrate how to do this with an example from a program with which the author has worked. A community organization runs a grantsmanship workshop to help members of local community organizations and schools learn how to write grants and obtain funding for programs and activities that benefit the community. Participants are also offered follow-up technical assistance after the workshop as they develop and submit their proposals for funding.

To figure out what outcomes to look at, we first need to identify our consumers<sup>3</sup>:

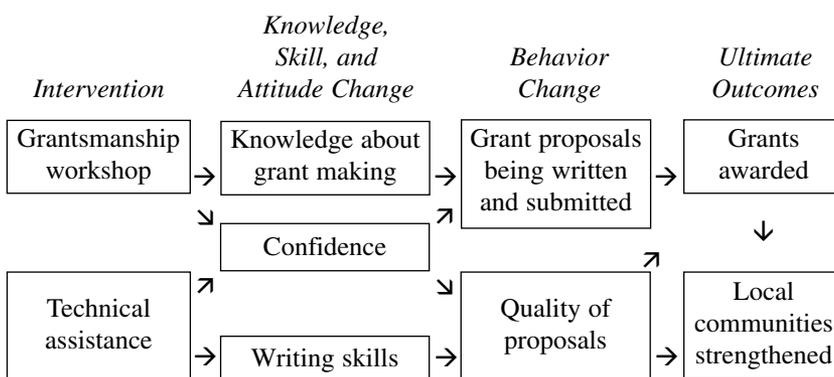
- *Actual or potential program recipients.* These include (a) people who have participated (or are participating) in the grantsmanship workshop and (b) other community organization or school members who would potentially benefit from participating in the workshop.
- *Downstream impactees.* Most important, these include the organizations where the participants work and the communities they serve. In the case of schools, this means the students, their families, and the wider community. In the case of community organizations, this means the communities that are served by those organizations.

For this particular evaluation, the documentation of the extent of the needs was relatively minimal. The reason for the development of the program in the first place was to find ways in which to help strengthen the local community. In particular, local knowledge revealed that several local community organizations and schools had ideas and energy to contribute to the community but lacked the funding to be able to do so. Based on this information, it was determined that there was at least enough need to justify offering a grantsmanship workshop.

The more important part of the needs assessment for this program was the diagnostic phase. Here, we took the primary purpose of the program and drew a simple logic model that showed the mechanisms by which the program should fulfill its purpose. This particular model (Exhibit 3.7) is a simplified version of the original that was constructed by the program director (who had

extensive expertise in grant writing and firsthand knowledge of the participants' needs) in collaboration with the author. Thus, the logic model represents the director's view of how the program should work, but with some input from an evaluator.

**Exhibit 3.7** Simple Logic Model for the Grantsmanship Workshop



Starting with the program's purpose (the ultimate outcomes identified on the right-hand side of the model), the director was able to use her knowledge of grant writing and of the local community to work backward through the model to identify the underlying needs. To be awarded grants, the participants needed to write and submit high-quality grant proposals. To write and submit high-quality grant proposals, people needed certain knowledge about grant making, confidence that they could put together proposals, and writing skills.

The logic model identifies several different kinds of needs, ranging from knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to create and submit high-quality grant proposals with a good chance of being funded to the ultimate long-term need (stronger communities). The logic model also helps the evaluation team to identify which outcomes we can reasonably expect to see improvements in early on (e.g., increased knowledge, better skills, improved attitudes) and which outcomes would be futile to assess too early (e.g., grants awarded, strengthened communities).

To identify the specific knowledge that participants needed about grant making, the director compiled an initial list, based on the steps to putting together a good proposal, when she designed the workshop. After running the workshop,

she identified one or two other areas of required knowledge, and these elements were added to the list. The final list of required knowledge was as follows:

- Knowing what kinds of things can and cannot get funded by grants
- Knowing where to find grants
- Knowing about other funding opportunities and sources apart from grants
- Knowing that behind every charity or foundation, there were people wanting to make the world a better place; that is, understanding the perspectives or missions of foundations and of people reviewing proposals
- Knowing the elements that go into grant proposals
- Knowing how to write grant proposals (e.g., structure, steps involved)
- Knowing how to design a grants pursuit plan and schedule
- Knowing whether a person's community organization or school was ready to pursue grants and other funding opportunities

In addition to this knowledge, the director noted after running the first workshop that confidence was a major barrier to people getting started on developing proposals. Finally, it made sense to us that some basic level of writing skills was required to be able to develop good proposals. These skills might be developed somewhat as part of the workshop and follow-up, but participants were also encouraged to draw on help when they needed it.

I have deliberately chosen a simple example here to show clearly how the pieces fit together. In this case, having access to a specific individual with good content knowledge and some basic evaluation training (a 3-day workshop) made the development of a logic model and the identification of needs relatively straightforward. The evaluator's role in this case was to draw out this information, help hone the thinking, and package it in a way that could be applied immediately to an evaluation.

To connect this to the early theory of needs assessment, remember that we needed to cover both met needs and unmet needs, that is, the needs that may already be met in some people but unmet in others and that need to be addressed for the workshop to achieve its purpose. In this case, the met needs are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that give rise to "satisfactory functioning or better"—the characteristics of those who are writing successful grants already. The unmet needs correspond to any current lack of knowledge, skills, or attitudes that gives rise to unsatisfactory functioning—the barriers to writing successful grants.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT DESIGN, STRATEGIES, AND METHODS: OPTIONS FOR MORE COMPLEX CASES

For a much larger budget program, the first phase of the needs assessment (documenting the magnitude of the need) often must be significantly more detailed than that just described. The key for this example would be an investigation of (a) untapped potential to deliver programs to the community and (b) evidence that the community needs the programs that could be offered.

The diagnostic phase of a more detailed needs assessment would seek to identify the reasons for the untapped potential in the community organizations. In the grantsmanship workshop example, knowledge of the underlying needs was already at the director's fingertips. But in another situation, the evaluation team might need to do some detective work to identify what distinguishes people in the community who are already pulling in good grants from those who are not yet able to succeed at that level.

Recall that in a needs assessment, it is important to look at both conscious and unconscious needs. *Conscious needs* are those that the actual or potential workshop participants themselves are aware of, whereas *unconscious needs* are those that we need to track down by other means (e.g., by asking experts in grant making or reviewers of proposals). This is why a needs assessment should never consist of only a survey of potential workshop participants asking what they think they need. According to the director of this particular program, many participants vastly underestimated what they needed to know to write grants and have them funded.

### Critical Point: Working With Stakeholder Input

Whenever you are working to gather input from stakeholders (as with this needs assessment task), bear in mind that your job is not just to collect their opinions and report those as the needs. Some of the things that people tell you will not be legitimate needs (e.g., things that will advance them in their careers or get them some political mileage, "hobby horses" that are not grounded in any valid link to needs, things that they are simply not knowledgeable about). There is no need to figure all of this out while you are gathering the information, but be sure to increase your awareness of such things and make a brief note of anything that strikes you as needing further thought later.

As a guide for designing needs assessments, Table 3.3 lists some strategies we can use to identify each of these different kinds of needs (met, unmet, conscious, and unconscious), as applied to the grantsmanship workshop example. Some of these are repeated from the earlier discussion and are presented here for easier reference. As mentioned previously, the information unearthed by a needs assessment identifies the outcomes we should look at when evaluating the program.

**Table 3.3** Strategies for Identifying Different Kinds of Performance Needs for Participants in a Grantsmanship Workshop

	<i>Conscious Needs</i>	<i>Unconscious Needs</i>
<i>Met Needs</i>	<p>Ask graduates of the workshop and other grant writers (especially those who hailed from similar community settings) what skills, knowledge, and experience gained in grantsmanship training have been most useful in helping them to succeed in getting funding.</p>	<p>Ask experts and proposal reviewers about the skills, knowledge, and other characteristics of the best grant writers with whom they have ever worked.</p> <p>Identify the community organizations that are most successful at maintaining and growing their funding streams. Ask what knowledge, skills, and other capabilities have made them successful and what they seek out when hiring grant writers.</p>
<i>Unmet Needs</i>	<p>Ask grant writers what skills, knowledge, and experience they really needed when they first started trying to write grants but had not learned in any formal training they received.</p> <p>Ask grant writers about instances when they have seen other relatively new grant writers do poorly. What skills and/or knowledge were they missing that were most problematic?</p>	<p>Ask people who employ grant writers for examples of people they have hired who turned out to be incapable of doing the job they were hired to do. What was missing from these individuals' repertoires?</p> <p>Ask employers and clients what knowledge, skills, and abilities are hardest to find when they are looking for good grant writers.</p>

<p><i>General Sources (all four types)</i></p>	<p>Talk to highly experienced and top-performing grant reviewers, identify the elements of a high-quality proposal, and map out the knowledge and skills required to complete each element.</p> <p>Do some “job shadowing”; that is, observe grant writers with different skill levels in action while they are in the process of identifying sources of funding, writing, and submitting proposals. Note areas of excellence and of problematic performance.</p> <p>Look at examples of proposals produced by grant writers. What were their strengths? Where were they lacking?</p>
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Note that the diagnostic phase of the needs assessment is an inherently open-ended inquiry. That is why qualitative methods are most prevalent here. In contrast, the earlier documentation of performance needs in the community usually focuses on the magnitude of needs that are thought to exist. That is why the methods used for the first phase of the needs assessment are typically more quantitative.

## IDENTIFYING OTHER RELEVANT CRITERIA

Once you have identified the main needs for the program, your next step is to think through what other considerations might be relevant to this evaluation. Table 3.4 lists the main possibilities that should be considered in addition to needs (Scriven, 2003) and shows how they would be applied to a grantsmanship workshop with follow-up technical assistance.

The list of criteria in Table 3.4 should be kept alongside the list we generated from the earlier logic model-based needs assessment. You may have noticed some overlap between the two. That is not a problem. Together, the two lists will form the main ingredients for generating a complete list of criteria under the headings of Process Evaluation, Outcome Evaluation, Comparative Cost-Effectiveness, and Exportability (KEC Checkpoints 6–10). We address this in the next chapter.

**Table 3.4** Other Relevant Considerations for Identifying Relevant Criteria (from the Key Evaluation Checklist) Applied to the Evaluation of a Grantsmanship Workshop

<i>Consideration</i>	<i>Relevant Aspects for Case Example</i>
Criteria of merit from the definitions and standard use	<p>[At the basic level, what does it mean to have completed a workshop on grantsmanship? What should it consist of or include at a minimum? What outcomes should be assessed?]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Inclusion of all major steps required to identify and obtain funding</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Outcomes: Grants written, submitted, and funded</li> </ul>
Legal requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Selection of people into the workshop is in compliance with the law</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Participant and staff legal rights are protected (e.g., zero incidence of sexual and other forms of harassment)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Financial and other accountability</li> </ul>
Ethical requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Fairness or equity with which workshop participant and staff needs and concerns are handled</li> </ul>
Fidelity to alleged specifications (“authenticity,” might need an “index of implementation”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Extent to which actual program reflects what is advertised to participants and the grant-writing profession as a whole (and, presumably, what was specified in the original design, although one should not penalize a program for improving on the original design)</li> </ul>
Personal and organizational goals, if not goal free; alignment with organizational strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Fit with or contribution to the organization’s strategic goals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Fit with or contribution to the goals of the participants and their community organizations</li> </ul>
Professional standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Meets any relevant content guidelines (e.g., professional association guidelines)</li> </ul>

<i>Consideration</i>	<i>Relevant Aspects for Case Example</i>
Logical (e.g., consistency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Workshop makes sense “as a package” (i.e., not disjointed or inconsistent)
Legislative	<input type="checkbox"/> [This one might not apply in this case but is worth checking if the program is in compliance with relevant legislation.]
Scientific/ Technical	<input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Content of workshop corresponds to current knowledge in grant writing; no flawed, incorrect, or badly outdated content <input type="checkbox"/> Outcomes: Proposals produced by participants are highly rated by experts and proposal reviewers
Market	<input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design: Attractive to prospective participants (i.e., generates sufficient enrollment)
Expert judgment	<input type="checkbox"/> [For those aspects of program quality that are not able to be assessed in other ways,] the extent to which recognized grant-writing experts consider this to be a good workshop
Historical/ Traditional/ Cultural standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Content/Design and implementation: Relevance to participants’ communities <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Respect for diverse cultures and viewpoints as well as understanding of the key issues in the contexts where they [plan to] work <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation: Teaching approach fits reasonably well with local norms and culture-linked learning styles (although one should not penalize a program for having learning experiences that bring in a perspective from outside the culture)

## NOTES

1. This is an adaptation of Scriven’s (1991) definition of a need as “anything essential for a satisfactory mode of existence or level of performance” (p. 242).

2. This is from Scriven (1991), except that Scriven uses a medical metaphor, referring to the latter as “treatment needs” (p. 242).

3. There might be more needs to consider than those of the groups listed here (e.g., needs of other staff within the participant organizations, employers within the community), but let's keep things simple by focusing on the needs of the program recipients and downstream impactees.

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

Entries in Scriven's (1991) *Evaluation Thesaurus*:

- Consumer
- Consumer-based evaluation
- Critical competitors
- Goal achievement evaluation
- Goal-based evaluation
- Goal-free evaluation
- Monitoring
- Needs assessment
- Objectives
- Terror

Altschuld, J. W., & Witkin, B. R. (2000). *From needs assessment to action: Transforming needs into solution strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bickman, L. (1987). The functions of program theory. In L. Bickman (Ed.), *New directions for program evaluation* (No. 33, pp. 5–18). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCrae, D., & Whittington, D. (1997). *Expert advice for policy choice*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Munger, M. C. (2000). *Analyzing policy: Choices, conflicts, and practice*. New York: Norton.

Rogers, P. J., Hacsí, T. A., Petrosino, A., & Huebner, T. A. (Eds.). (2000). Program theory in evaluation: Challenges and opportunities [special issue]. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 87.

Scriven, M. (1974). Prose and cons about goal-free evaluation. In W. J. Popham (Ed.), *Evaluation in education: Current applications* (pp. 34–42). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Weiss, C. H. (1997, Winter). Theory-based evaluation: Past, present, and future. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 76, 41–56.

Witkin, B. R., & Altschuld, J. W. (1995). *Planning and conducting needs assessments*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## EXERCISES

1. (a) What is the purpose of doing a needs assessment as part of an evaluation of a mature program? What is it for? How does it fit into the

- evaluation? (b) Are there any evaluations for which a needs assessment might not be necessary? If so, describe them. If not, why not? (A suggested answer to this question is provided in the “Answers to Selected Exercises” section.)
2. On two pages or less, outline how you would go about conducting a needs assessment for your chosen evaluand. Identify your primary consumers and downstream impacttees, and indicate how you would identify met and unmet needs as well as conscious and unconscious needs.
  3. Draw up a table like Table 3.4. Keep the left-hand column the same, but in the right-hand column, outline how each of the considerations listed applies to the evaluand that you identified at the end of Chapter 1.

