Developing a Model for Implementation of an Evaluation Component in an Orientation Program

by Priscilla Kibbee

Evaluation should be an ongoing activity that originates with identified educational needs. The author outlines a continuous model using a flow chart, which will re-evaluate those needs yearly from a variety of sources utilizing the Delphi technique.

Ideally, evaluation is an ongoing activity that begins at the first identification of the need for an educational program, proceeds throughout the planning and implementing phases, and extends well beyond the length of the program itself. It is a vital part of the ongoing educational endeavor. It results from systematic planning, involves a regular and comprehensive review of all phases of the program, including the subsequent activities of all those who participate, and serves as a mechanism for improving present and future program and participants.1

Realistically, if evaluation is done at all in an orientation program, it is usually a patchwork affair. You have a group of new employees that need certain knowledge and skills, you teach them these skills, and they start on the job. Input for the course content comes from job descriptions and supervisor requests. Feedback on the effects of the instruction from the supervisors is usually verbal and rarely extends past the beginning of the orientee's employment. Often the only feedback is negative.

When I decided to "revamp" our orientation program for paraprofessional mental health workers (MHWs), I felt that I had an excellent opportunity to develop an ongoing evaluation model for continuous evaluation and change in the program to meet the ever changing needs of the clientele the program serves (the patients), which is the real focus of the program.

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The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing
The model I developed is in the form of a flow chart, which is essentially a visual representation of a process that describes the steps necessary to complete a given project.

In developing a flow chart the total project is broken down into three components: (1) decisions to be made, (2) alternative courses of action to be taken, and (3) tasks to be carried out. The use of a flow chart helps to avert errors in the execution of a given process. It does so in two ways. First, a flow chart delineates the most important points to be considered; these are generally presented in the form of questions. Secondly, a flow chart specifies the most appropriate courses of action to be taken, based on the answers to these questions.  

In obtaining information on the competencies and knowledge needed by beginning MHWs, I will use a modification of the Delphi technique to query the MHWs at three stages of employment (at the end of orientation, end of six months, and end of one year), their supervisors, and program heads. The Delphi technique, a method of developing and improving group consensus, was originally used at the Rand Corporation to arrive at reliable predictions about the future of technology. It essentially refers to a series of intensive interrogations of samples of individuals by means of mailed questionnaires concerning some important problem or question; the mailings are interspersed with controlled feedback to the participants.  

I will use a questionnaire based upon the MHWs' job descriptions, the competencies and knowledge presently being taught in the orientation, and MHW job functions from the literature. Respondents (MHWs, supervisors,
FIGURE 1
MODEL

What competencies and knowledge are needed by beginning (within first six months) MHWs? At what point should these be taught?

Survey literature

Check MHWs job descriptions

Check competencies and knowledge being taught in present orientation program

Develop list of possible competencies and knowledge

Ask: which 20 of these items do you feel are needed by beginning MHWs?

MHWs at end of orientation

MHWs at end of six months

MHWs at end of one year

MHWs supervisors

Program heads

Make new list

Add filled in items

Delete items not checked

Identify respondents by program

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Ask: at what point during employment (beginning, three months, six months) should these items be taught? List items in order of importance.

MHWs at end of orientation  
MHWs at end of six months  
MHWs at end of one year  
MHWs supervisors  
Program heads

Arrange items in order of importance by number  
Arrange list in three time frames

Delete  
Yes  
Does item have low number?  
No

Does list of competencies and knowledge match outcome of present orientation program

Yes  
Continue present orientation program

for each item

Develop behavioral objectives  
Develop curriculum for each behavioral objective  
Develop evaluation tool for each behavioral objective

Is this item significant to only one program?

Yes  
Could it best be taught by that program?  
No  
Ask program RN or staff coordinator to incorporate item in program orientation

Take list  
Check each item

Yes  
No

Volume 11, Number 5, 1980
and program heads) will be asked to pick the 20 most important skills and information needed to perform this type of work. There will be several blank spaces where additional items not covered might be included.

The results of the first listing will be refined; items not responded to will be deleted; items written in will be added, and respondents will be identified by program.

This new list will then be redistributed to the same group and the recipients asked to rate in order of importance, those items on the list that they find significant. They will also be asked to specify at what point during the MHW's initial employment that they would first need these skills (i.e., after orientation, by the end of three or six months). After completion by the respondents, this list will be divided among the three time frames. Items with a very low number will be eliminated.

If an item is identified as relating to one program (of the four in our facility), I will then discuss the feasibility of it being taught in the separate program orientation with the program RN or staff coordinator. If that were not feasible, that particular item would only be taught to employees hired for that program.

For each list, behavioral objectives will then be developed for each competency or knowledge required. The designation of objectives for each offering provides a basis for evaluating the output. Additionally, it provides a basis for content specific to the objective.

For each objective, a curriculum will be developed. Curriculum is a process designed to bring about desired changes in learner knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For each objective, testing tools will then be developed and/or utilized, depending on their level on the taxonomy.

The process will be repeated on a yearly basis. If, at the end of the second questionnaire, it is found that the items needed were the same ones currently being taught, the program will not be changed.

References


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