Introduction to Programme Evaluation:
Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

This course provides a systematic overview and introduction to programme evaluation.

After completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Use programme evaluation terminology correctly and with confidence
2. Be able to indicate the typical logic and evaluation questions implicit in Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman’s (2004) hierarchy of programme evaluation
3. Elicit a programme theory for a specific programme and depict this theory using any one of the two documenting formats you have studied
4. Test the plausibility of the programme theory by reviewing and collating relevant social science research and theories
5. Assess whether a programme was implemented as intended
6. Assess whether a programme benefited the those who received it
7. Assess whether those who received the programme are better off than those who did not
8. Design a monitoring framework and data base
Session 1: Introduction to programme evaluation terminology; Needs assessment (13 October)

During this session, we shall deal with Learning Outcomes 1 and 2. You will be introduced to the terminology of programme evaluation, the reasons why we evaluate programmes and the relevant evaluation questions for each level of evaluation (e.g. implementation, outcome or impact evaluation). We shall focus on the following questions/issues:

- What is a programme?
- What is programme evaluation? What is programme monitoring?
- Programme evaluation as a transdiscipline
- Different approaches to programme evaluation
- Three main purposes of evaluation (exploratory, summative or formative)
- How does programme evaluation differ from research?
- Role descriptions of those involved in programme evaluation:
  - Evaluator
  - Beneficiaries/recipients/participants
  - Programme staff
  - Programme manager
  - Programme stakeholders
  - Programme sponsors
- A step-wise approach to evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004)
- Appropriate evaluation questions for each step/level
- Level 1: Needs assessment

Reading:

Donaldson (2007), Chapters 1 and 3
Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2004), Chapter 3
Maposa and Louw-Potgieter (2010)

Session 2: Programme theory: Eliciting, presenting and assessing the plausibility of programme theory (14 October)

During this session we focus Rossi et al.’s (2004) second step, namely Programme Design and Theory (Learning Outcomes 3 and 4). We explore how to encourage stakeholders to articulate how their programme will change the beneficiaries or the problem. Then we practise how to present these stakeholder ideas by means of two different, but standard, programme theory formats.

- What ideas do programme stakeholders have about how their programme is supposed to work?
• How do you document these ideas, called the programme theory, in two conventional programme evaluation diagrams (i.e. variable-oriented programme theory depiction and a logic model)?
• How do you get agreement among stakeholders for a programme theory?

Thereafter, we focus on a theme which revolves around Learning Outcome 4, testing the plausibility of stakeholders’ programme theory by means of social science research.

• Is the consensual programme theory of the stakeholders a plausible theory?
• How do we decide on plausibility?
• How do we enhance the stakeholders’ programme theory?
• How do we deal with a consensual but implausible programme theory?
• How do you get agreement amongst stakeholders for this programme theory?

Reading:

Bickman (1987)
Donaldson (2007), Chapter 2
Donaldson and Lipsey (2006)
Maposa and Louw-Potgieter (2012)

Session 3: Assessing programme implementation (or process), outcomes and impact (15 October)

This step in the Rossi et al. (2004) hierarchy deals with programme roll-out (Learning Outcome 5). Here we assess whether the programme was implemented as intended. In other words, we contrast the ideal programme and the actual programme for implementation fidelity. We ask questions about who received the programme, how the programme was delivered and whether there were sufficient resources to deliver the programme adequately.

Thereafter we deal with the heart of programme evaluation, namely the change the programme was supposed to bring about in the lives of the beneficiaries (Learning Outcome 6). We assess whether the programme beneficiaries are better off after the programme than before; and we go a step further and assess whether the programme, beneficiaries are better off after the programme when compared to those who have not received the programme (Learning outcome 7).

Reading:

Patton (2008), Chapter 7
Posavac and Cary (2007), Chapters 3 and 4
Wright and Louw-Potgieter (2010)
Session 4: Programme monitoring (16 October)

During this session, you will be introduced to a much neglected part of programme evaluation, namely programme monitoring. We will revisit the evaluation questions we asked for process and outcome evaluations and explore how to answer these with relevant data. For outcome measurement, we shall design relevant outcomes, indicators, measures and standards (Learning outcome 8).

Reading:

Kusek and Rist (2004) Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5

Session 5: Test and summary (17 October)

During the first hour of this session, you will write a test. All the material we have covered in Sessions 1-4 will be assessed. The test will consist of a number of questions that require short, written answers. It will count 50 marks and contribute 30% towards the total mark of this course.

After the test, we shall deal with any questions you have, or with outstanding issues.

Finally, we shall discuss the course assignment.

Assignment 1: In this assignment, you have to apply your programme evaluation knowledge by designing:

- a programme theory for a specific programme (the programme will be supplied as a case study)
- a framework for monitoring programme implementation and outcomes.

This assignment will contribute 70% towards your total mark for the course.

Deadline: To be agreed. Please submit electronically to the lecturer at Joha.Louw-Potgieter@uct.ac.za

References:


