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EDTECH 505 – Spring 2015

*Submission 3a - Summarize the essence of chapter 4 in at least 250 words. No maximum.*

Chapter Four addresses the need for and the development of an Evaluator's Program Description. The development of this document is fairly straight forward. It seems intuitively obvious that prior to evaluating a program, an evaluator would need to learn some specifics about a program. Equally obvious is the need to obtain those specifics from direct conversations with stakeholders and participants in the program.

While the chapter discusses the development and need for an EPD, I was surprised that it did not dig deeper into the interview process, specifically the process of separating opinion from facts. The chapter specifies that the EPD will change based on the classification of the interviewees, but it fails to address that each of the interviewees may have a different agenda. An evaluator must have the ability to distinguish between facts, opinions and agendas. The chapter touches on the fact that program owners and sponsors may be most concerned about impacts, but neglects to mention that this concern may skew or taint their answers, and when an evaluator analyzes these responses, they must do so through a prism that accounts for these concerns.

I do appreciate, however, the authors stressing developing a rapport with the staff. One of the previous chapters discusses the need for evaluator credibility, and developing a relationship with those who are being evaluated can increase that credibility. By its very nature, evaluation raises the hackles of those being evaluated. They're suspicious of anyone sent in to observe behaviors and outcomes. The "We're from the government. We're here to help" adage applies. Thus it is necessary for any evaluator to establish a bond of trust in order to prove that they do have the best interests of the work group at heart, and at the end of the day, their product, that is to say their evaluation, will lead to improvements.

Establishing this bond also facilitates the data gathering process. The initial conversations may be general in nature, but by opening the door with generalities, the evaluator creates opportunities to delve into specifics at a later date, hopefully ensuring that future conversations will be unfettered by defense mechanisms. By convincing individuals to provide open and honest feedback, the evaluator increases the likelihood that they will turn out an effective product.

*Submission 3b - Discuss your proposed Evaluation Report course project in light of what you have learned in the last few B&D chapters and/or from your participation in the discussions the past few weeks. Anything changed? Unexpected problems identified? Etc. Minimum 250 words. No maximum.*

To this point, Chapter 4 was the most helpful and most ironic of the chapters. Part of the troubleshooting training I gave, and am subsequently evaluating, dealt with the need to receive and process non-editorialized data. The first step in the troubleshooting process is to develop a problem statement. While it may appear simple at first blush, it is actually one of the hardest parts of the process. The reason for this is the same reason the authors of the text encourage evaluators to develop a connection with those they are evaluating.

Un-editorialized data is one of the most difficult things to obtain. As I told the class, as human beings, we are born problem solvers. Because of this, our minds try to solve a problem even before it has been sufficiently identified. This same concept holds true with evaluations. There is an overwhelming need for an evaluator to maintain their objectivity. One of the benefits of hiring an outside evaluator is the fact that they are an objective third party. This objectivity has its advantages and its limitations. Although objective, an outside evaluator will need to quickly come up to speed on a program they are seeing for the first time. This steep learning curve may become a hindrance later on in the evaluation.

Throughout my evaluation of the troubleshooting training. I've been extra careful to maintain my objectivity. My ego, of course, wants it to be this training to be the best most effective class ever given. Because of this, I have to be extra guarded to maintain my objectivity. The fact that I am examining evaluation data gathered by others helps maintain this neutrality. It also helps that I am incredibly critical observing others perform tasks at which I personally excel. Lastly, and perhaps most important, is the fact that this evaluation is too important to get wrong. As both an employee and someone who owns a home within 2 miles of the plant, I know that our current engineering workforce has not done a good job with troubleshooting and fixing things at the plant. In order for them to get better, and my property values to stay high, this training must be scrutinized and judged to be effective.