

A Concept of Needs

Effective Extension education is an intentional effort,
carefully designed to fulfill certain specifically
predetermined and presumably important needs

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NEED IS a simple and innocent-appearing, four-letter word, but probably the most deceptively complex, basically significant, and far-reaching in its implications of all major terms in the vocabulary of the adult educator, Extension or otherwise. Hardly a day passes that the professional does not use the term. Since the central role of Extension is to help people learn to live better, programs must be in line with their needs. One of the greatest strengths of Extension has been its flexibility in helping people adjust to needs imposed by a changing environment.

The point at which professionals and lay leaders must come to grips most prominently with need identification and appraisal is the programming stage; needs must always be recognized and dealt with in some form and to some degree. Changes that are important to people are those which help them meet their needs for biological, economic, social, aesthetic, or moral well-being. Basically then, all programs for promoting change exist to help people meet their needs. The element of *needs*, therefore, becomes a central concern of the Extension educator.

Programs of "free choice participation" are successful only to the extent that they focus on and help meet recognized personal, family, group, or community needs. Since Extension audiences are free to participate or not, programs offered constitute a ballot for casting a vote: When people participate they vote favorably; when they do not participate they vote unfavorably. They determine their vote on the basis of an estimate of the probable value participation may give them. Participation, therefore, is on the basis of needs as people see them.

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Since adults examine program offerings according to what they consider important (their "felt needs"), the central problem in successful programming is to accurately identify what people want, think they need, and actually do need and get these woven into a realistic, well-organized, and concerted series of forceful activities. This may properly be called a program.

Effective programs are developed by identifying individual and group needs and interests and arranging action that helps meet them. Need identification is immensely complex. It is complex because people are complex: their problems and the technology that relates to solutions are complex; their customs and value systems are complex; the economic, social, and physical environment giving rise to needs, and in which needs must be met, are complex. The task is made more difficult by the fact that learners must exert effort in meeting needs. Needs identified as the basis for Extension programs, therefore, must be viewed by learners as sufficiently important to evoke voluntary action on their part.

To identify and evaluate people's needs, Extension educators must understand the nature and role of needs in the Extension process. On this point, writers advance a wide range of concepts of need. Some stress biological needs; others emphasize spiritual, social, individual, group, basic, education, economic, unfelt, felt, and many other identifiable uses of the term. Common, however, in all of these ways of referring to the phenomena is the fact that they each relate to the content or object of need.

The remaining part of this paper attempts (1) to synthesize and interpret research and writing in both the biological and social sciences related to the nature of need and (2) to formulate a conceptual framework that may be useful in understanding and dealing with the phenomenon in the Extension-adult education process.

THEORETICAL SETTING

One of the most profound discoveries of the twentieth century about the nature of man is that the laissez-faire approach to his economic and social development will not do the job—leaving people to their own initiative and resources is not enough. Diametrically, external stimuli must be used to activate people's natural tendencies to improve themselves and their living conditions. Recognition of this fact nearly 50 years ago was a central force in bringing the Cooperative Extension Service into being.

Extension programs are created and maintained to influence people to make changes in their way of living and of making a

being. The existence of such programs implies that the present situation is not what it should and could be, that something different should prevail, and that it is possible, through appropriate action, to attain a more desirable economic and social status. Another assumption is that it is possible and feasible for a person or group—officials, non-officials, or a combination of both—(1) to identify the status-quo and the nature of new conditions that could and should prevail, and (2) to devise means for achieving change in desirable directions. Hence, the entire process of Extension education implies a need for change. The question then arises: changes from what, to what, by whom, where, when, and by what methods?

Possibly the most basic fact to Extension programming is that effective activity results from choice, not from chance; it results from design, not from drift; it results from a plan, not from trial and error. Hence, effective Extension education is an intentional effort, carefully designed to fulfill certain specially predetermined and presumably important needs. Extension education, therefore, stems from belief in the need for change that results in progress—from the view that change in certain directions is good and that it is possible to help people find more satisfactory modes of meeting needs.

What is known about why people behave as they do suggests that man is an independent living system surrounded always by an environment with which he constantly interrelates. He is surrounded by other human beings, physical items, social and cultural norms, and economic, technological, and political conditions. Environmental forces exert constant influence over his behavior and, in turn, are influenced by him. He is rarely in a position to act totally as he chooses because he is a social being who does not wish to live alone. Consequently, he has concern for the elements in his environment—from the standpoint of his potential contribution to them and from what they may contribute to his welfare.

The environment of people varies in form and in degree of favorableness to progress. These variations stem from the past and present culture and from natural physical endowments. Regardless of his economic and social conditions, or of his ability to deal with them, there are usually external forces in his environment which man must learn to deal with if he is to survive and progress.

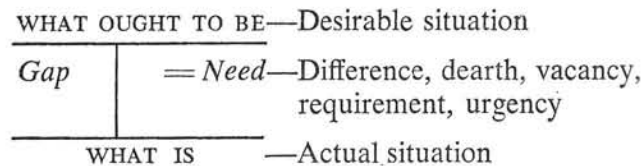
Man's well-being depends on keeping a balance between internal forces produced by energy (from food intake) and external conditions produced by environment. Hence, to keep the human system in equilibrium with external forces, certain "needs" must be met. Every person is continuously trying to attain those conditions of

living that make for satisfaction (balance). To the extent relationships between man and his environment get out of balance, he has needs. The nature and extent of needs, therefore, depend upon the nature and extent of imbalance. Hence, man's attempt to attain and maintain a satisfying equilibrium represent his real struggle for survival and improvement.

THE CONCEPT

Emerging from the framework within which people's needs seem to arise are important implications enabling us to assign rather explicit meaning to the term "need" and, therefore, build a functional concept. Six such implications will be identified and discussed:

1. *Needs represent an imbalance, lack of adjustment, or gap between the present situation or status quo and a new or changed set of conditions assumed to be more desirable.* Needs may be viewed as the difference between *what is*, and *what ought to be*; they always imply a gap as illustrated in the following diagram:



What is can be determined by a study of the situation. To be useful, facts must be carefully selected, analyzed, and interpreted through joint efforts of the Extension staff and lay leaders. Since people are concerned about their immediate situation, Extension workers and leaders can use properly selected and interpreted facts to arouse interest and indicate possible solutions to problems. Thus, facts help identify needs by pointing to gaps between *what is* and *what should be*. To be adequate, such facts must be obtained that generally fall into four categories: (1) current trends and outlooks, (2) people (what they think their needs are), (3) physical factors, and (4) public problems and policy.

Much care should be taken to avoid masses of data that defy useful analysis. Normally, data concerning the following questions will be adequate to reflect the essential nature of the situation for a given subject or problem area:

1. Does a need really exist?
2. Who has the need?
3. How many individuals or families have the need?
4. What is the people's attitude toward their situation?

5. Why does the need exist?
6. In what way is the need significant—economically, socially, or aesthetically?
7. What is the relative significance of the need?
8. What would likely be the consequences one or more years from now if no effort is made to meet the need?

What ought to be can be determined from research findings and value judgments of lay leaders and Extension workers. Research may show, for example, that the use of recommended practices in corn production can result in a 10 per cent larger yield. The farmer, on the other hand, may not see great value in reaching this level of production, or he may place greater value on spending available resources on some other goal (like modernizing his wife's kitchen).

Information about *what is* does not make a program; it only shows the situation. Surveys, therefore, can not result in a program; they can only help clarify existing conditions. From this point planners have to take another step—that of deciding what ought to be (the process of selecting program goals or objectives). Care should be taken to assure that the level of *what ought to be* is within the physical, economic, social, and mental possibilities of those who are to make the change. Finally, the nature and extent of need (width of gap) is an indication of the significance of the problem; the wider the gap, the greater the problem when the subject is assumed to be important.

2. *People's needs are identified by finding the actual, the possible, and the valuable through situation analysis.* Actual means *what is*; possible means *what could be*; valuable means *what ought to be*. In choosing needs on which to focus programs it is necessary to analyze conditions and possibilities and choose the most valuable. Then program objectives should be set that focus on changing people and conditions to the most valuable and possible. In this context, making the necessary analysis and decisions is the essence of need identification and selection.

3. *People have to recognize the gap between the actual, the possible, and the desirable, and place value on attaining the desirable before they become motivated to change.* The crux of the problem in programs of change is that people tend to passively resist change. Reluctance to change is not altogether due to a natural resistance but to an apparent lack of interest in change; people tend to feel comfortable with their established ways, even when new ones are demonstrate. When the status quo is seen as the ideal, desirable, or satisfactory situation, no need is recognized. Consequently, there is

no need for a program to promote change as the people view the situation. Programs must cause people to recognize the gap between the actual, the desirable, and the possible, and place value on attaining the desirable that is possible.

4. *Human behavior and the status of things can only be judged by some standard, and that standard can only be derived from a concept of what is valuable to attain.* Behavior and the status of things usually can be placed on a scale of opposites. The following are examples:

<i>Positive</i>	0	<i>Negative</i>
GOOD	+	BAD
EFFICIENT	+	INEFFICIENT
EFFECTIVE	+	INEFFECTIVE
ECONOMICAL	+	UNECONOMICAL
DESIRABLE	+	UNDESIRABLE
BEAUTIFUL	+	UGLY
HONEST	+	DISHONEST
LOVE	+	HATE
HEALTHFUL	+	UNHEALTHFUL

People tend to desire positive and avoid negative conditions, hence those on the positive side represent conditions most people value as desirable. Although the terms on each side of the scale appear to indicate opposites and absolutes, human behavior and the status of things tend to be relative to established norms or standards and are not, therefore, absolute.

Behavior and the status of things can usually be placed on some point between opposites. For example, the production of milk per cow can be placed at a certain point between good or bad, high or low, efficient or inefficient, economical or uneconomical. The attitude of a farmer toward an Extension agent can be placed on the scale at some point between love and hate. The average yield of grain per acre may be found at some point between economical and uneconomical. Home conditions of a family are of a quality which can be placed somewhere between good and bad, healthful and unhealthful, beautiful and ugly.

Human behavior near the positive side of the scale does not present a need for change equal to that near the negative side (assuming equal importance of the items). After programs have been carried out, gaps usually will still be present between the anticipated and the attained. Specific changes in behavior related to goals tend to be only partial, not complete; they tend to progress in a given direction, not to arrive suddenly; they tend to be preliminary, not

final. Hence, they tend to be means to ends, not the ends themselves. This is the essence of progress.

The central task facing leaders of Extension programs is that of helping people recognize what their behavior is like, what their farm and home practices and conditions are like, and what their communities are like (each in relation to what they could and ought to be)—and seeing all of this in relation to the knowledge, skill, and effort necessary to help people make changes that are possible and desirable.

5. *The needs of people may be classified according to different terms and categories.* As indicated previously, a wide range of classifications of needs is found in the literature. For simplicity and practical purposes they may be classified into three categories:

1. Physical needs—food, clothing, housing, activity, and the like.
2. Social needs—group status, affection, belonging, and so on.
3. Integrative needs—the need to relate oneself to something larger and beyond oneself, a philosophy of life, and so on.

From a psychological standpoint, needs may be classified into two broad groups: (1) *felt* or consciously recognized needs, and (2) *unfelt* or unrecognized needs. Regardless of the classifications used, in a free society all needs must become “felt” before they serve as motivating forces. Research indicates that adults often are not aware of many of their most important needs. To the extent this is true, adults have significant needs which are “unfelt.” It is not enough to base programs entirely on what people feel their needs are—these often may not represent their most important needs. Extension leaders must “dig deep” to identify significant needs which people do not recognize and plan educational effort to convert these into felt needs. Without this, programs will be less significant, tending to focus on every-day, short-term interests rather than on more basic long-time needs.

6. *Final decisions about the selection or rejection of needs to include in a program should be made with great care.* In the process of need identification many decisions have to be made. These decisions must relate to the *actual*, the *valuable*, and the *possible*. Ultimately they must become decisions about acceptance or rejection of items to be included in the Extension program. These are crucial decisions, not only because the future of people and their conditions will be influenced but because extensive physical and human resources will be committed. Indeed, these needs become the subject matter or content of a program and, consequently, the force that leaves the lasting mark on a person, family, or community.

Since they are translated into the objectives or goals of the program, they are central to the commitment of Extension resources.

In the process of making final decisions about what to include in a program, it should be kept in mind that the needs of people—economic, social, aesthetic, or moral—constitute the fulcrum on which rests the success of adult education. Harmonizing needs as people see them with those as viewed by the professional Extension worker or other adult educator is a significant responsibility of local leaders and professional workers. Any procedure for doing this that assures focus of programs on significant needs is a good procedure.

CONCLUSION

In every human and physical situation there are always (1) the facts, (2) people's understanding of the facts, (3) people's attitude or value judgments about the facts, and (4) people's action related to the facts. Probably the most powerful attitudes people have are those related to what should and what should not be in their situation. Hence, people tend to either approve or disapprove facts (as they see them) in relation to some desirable new condition. The process of merging useful technology from physical and biological sciences with that from the behavioral sciences and applying this to the problems of planned change is, therefore, the essence of Extension and the context in which people's needs play the major role.

HUMAN society is based on want. Life is based on want. Wild-eyed visionaries may dream of a world without need. Cloud-cuckoo-land. It can't be done.—H. G. WELLS.

THE OBJECT of living is work, experience, happiness. There is joy in work. All that money can do is buy us someone else's work in exchange for our own. There is no happiness except in the realization that we have accomplished something.

—from HENRY FORD as quoted in *Forbes*, XCI
(January 1, 1963).

SIT DOWN before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and whatever abyss nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.—T. H. HUXLEY.