

Theory & Practice

Objective: Use theory to develop a community-based programmatic intervention to solve a problem or address a need.

You will develop a theory-based strategy for an intervention or program designed to help solve the need or problem identified in the “Mid-Range Theories” assignment. This is **not** a detailed list of activities. Theory-based interventions and programs develop a strategy that links activities (based on predictor variables) to outcomes (based on outcome variables). Put another way, your theory and the theoretical model (map) you have created informs or guides your strategy – it tells you how to get from activities (like an educational program) to an outcome (like behavioral change).

For example, I use the theory of planned behavior when I develop adult educational programs. This theory has four summative, predictor constructs, attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention (see example under Mid-Range Theories assignment). Each of these has one or more primary or indirect or sub-constructs. In an adult educational setting, I usually have only a few hours – sometimes as few as two – to influence participants’ behavioral intention and ultimately their behavior (the outcome construct). In this context, it is very difficult to affect some of the predictor constructs. Attitude, for example, is hard to change in a short time and in interchanges that are not highly individualistic. Based on the existing research base, I decided that the construct of perceived behavioral control is the predictor construct that I can most likely affect in these settings. Specifically, the research indicates that I can enhance the participant’s self-confidence in his/her ability to complete the desired behavior successfully and that I can reduce perceived barriers to behavior. I therefore use an educational strategy that focuses on these constructs rather than others like attitudes or norms. This has many implications for the way I train, for the nature of the activities or learning experiences that I try to create. For example, I need to give participants opportunities to draw upon what they already know and to understand that what I want them to do is not “100% new” to them. This reduces perceived behavioral barriers. I need to give them challenging opportunities in the classroom setting to apply what they know – “tough” problems to solve. This gives them confidence that they will be able to deal with “run of the mill” applications of the knowledge they gain because they know they already made some “hard” applications. It is important to use discovery learning – letting them figure out where to get information -- rather than giving them “canned” information. As a result, my approach differs from that of many trainers, for example, trainers who focus on providing knowledge or information. “My” theory says that knowledge is a necessary precursor for behavioral change (you have to know what to do), but does not in and of itself produce behavioral change (an insufficient condition). Therefore, my theoretical perspective leads me to focus on application and specifically on generating a high level of self-confidence in ability to perform the desired behavior(s). My theory informs my praxis. It tells me **why** people do (or do not) change their behavior and leads me to focus on the constructs that I can address effectively in a classroom setting with limited exposure to the participants.

Draw upon your text, other required readings, and additional sources of information about your theory/theorist and the research body built on this theory to develop your answers. Go beyond the material covered in your annotated bibliography. Make sure you draw upon the body of contemporary research that calls upon your theory and consult the scholarly literature that deals with applications of your theory to problem solving -- examples of how the theory has been used to inform practice. Cite and reference all of the materials you use to develop your responses. Do not just “stick in” citations. Make it clear in your response how you drew upon a piece of

literature in formulating your response. Include the following components in this assignment. Number your responses.

1. Attach a copy of the table identifying and defining the major components in the theory you will use as the basis for your intervention from the Mid-Range Theories assignment.
2. Attach a copy of the conceptual map of the theory submitted in the Mid-Range Theories assignment.
3. Attach a statement of the problem or need that you want to address from the Mid-Range Theories assignment.
 - a. Provide evidence regarding the extent of the problem or need. Here is an example from one student's thesis.

"The most current survey of homelessness in the U.S. puts the number of homeless around 754,000 nationwide (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2005; The Associated Press, 2007). Work opportunities are declining consistently despite increases in real wages. Many jobs offer fewer benefits and pay less compared to the cost of living than they did in the past. The real value of the U.S. minimum wage was 26% lower in 2004 than it was in 1979 (The Economic Policy Institute, 2005). Falling real wages reduce an individual's ability to secure housing. In addition to the ballooning problem of low wages, public assistance has declined since the mid 1990's (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). The current level of assistance from several major sources, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), is below the poverty level in every state by an average of 29% (Nickelson, 2004). In addition, fewer people are enrolled in and/or qualify for welfare benefits as a result of current welfare reform laws. These families struggle to obtain medical care and even to meet basic needs like housing. Current economic and real estate trends are causing a drastic decrease in affordable and low-cost housing units throughout the U.S. Between 1973 and 1993, the availability of low-rent housing units decreased by over 2 million units, despite the fact that the number of people in need of these units has soared (Daskal, 1998). In addition, the amount of federal support for low-income housing decreased by 49% between 1980 and 2003 (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2005). These trends have created waiting lists for affordable housing units supported by government subsidy or private agencies like Habitat for Humanity. Other factors that contribute to the prevalence of homelessness are inability to secure healthcare or healthcare benefits, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. Homelessness is a complex issue that forces people to choose between basic needs (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006)."

4. Identify a specific community that will be the target of your intervention. Indicate the extent of the problem in that community. The student goes on to say:

"The Gainesville Office on Homelessness conducts a yearly point-in-time survey in conjunction with the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry. According to the most recent release on April 12, 2007, there are 952 identified homeless men, women and children in Alachua County, 317 of them under the age of 18 (Gainesville/Alachua County Office on Homelessness & Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry, 2007)."

5. Identify and describe the target audience for your program or intervention. Who suffers from the need? Who are the people who should participate in your program? Be specific. For example, assume that you are concerned about a growing incidence of child abuse in rural communities in Alachua County. You want to implement an intervention that focuses on parenting skills, based on the theory of planned behavior. If the problem is child abuse, your target audience undoubtedly includes parents reported and/or charged with child abuse. You might decide that you also want to include new, first-time parents based on the assumption that they have little experience with parenting and may include a considerable number of “potential” abusers. However, your target audience is **not all parents**. The abusers and potential abusers are the people who need to change their behavior.
6. State the goal of your intervention. This is not an activity. It is a change in the prevalence, severity, or nature of the problem or need that you have identified. For example, your goal might be to reduce reported child abuse by 50% in rural communities in Alachua County. Goals are “the big picture,” what you want to achieve over the long term. Do not be ridiculously optimistic, but do not reduce the goal to something trivial either. Use the scholarly literature to try to determine a “reasonable” goal. If you cannot set an absolute number like “50%” (often the case, unfortunately), be honest and state a more generalized goal, such as “The incidence of reported child abuse in Alachua County will decrease or remain the same.” In other words – it won’t get any worse. Not a great goal, but better than an increasing incidence. Do not just invent numbers.
7. Identify the outcomes that you must achieve through your intervention in order to achieve your goal. The outcomes are measurable changes that show progress toward the goal. For example, I once developed a training program for building contractors. The overall goal was to reduce the negative environmental impacts of new building construction. One of the outcomes was “Homes constructed by contractors who participate in this program will use 25% less energy than those constructed by non-participants.” Be as specific as you can. These outcomes are usually the basis for the summative evaluation of a program – they are critical.
8. Identify the key constructs (components) that will form the basis for your intervention. This will depend on the context in which you envision implementing your intervention. For example, the theory of planned behavior has four main constructs and many sub-constructs. If I were working in a context in which I had long term, repeated exposure to participants, I might well decide that I need to focus on attitudes and norms as well as perceived behavioral control. In the very brief, single-episode interactions that characterize much of my professional work, it seems unlikely that I can affect these more deep-rooted aspects of behavior effectively, so I focus on perceived behavioral control. Explain your logic in selecting certain constructs as the focus for your intervention. Explain why you decided **not** to focus on those that you decide to leave aside. Draw upon the research literature and examples of interventions based on your theory in your responses.
9. Identify the objectives for your project. Objectives are statements of the knowledge and skills, behavior and/or conditions that are necessary to achieving the desired outcomes. These come from your theory – specifically from the constructs that are the focus of your intervention. Be specific. What do you want participants to know and be able to do? What behavior specifically do you want them to adopt? What aspect of their lives do you want them to change? For example, I conduct a training program about the National Organic Standards, the laws covering organic foods in the U.S., for professionals who advise

farmers. Based on the theory of planned behavior, it is not surprising this program focuses on behaviors. One behavioral objective is “After completing this module, participants will be able to recommend mechanisms and methods for organic growers to use to manage insects, weeds and diseases that are in compliance with the National Organic Standards.” In other words, I want them to be able to go out and advise farmers about permitted pest management techniques. There is a learning objective (knowledge) that is directly related to this behavioral objective: “Participants will know what kinds of physical, biological, cultural and chemical methods of pest control are permitted under the National Organic Standards.”

10. Describe and give examples of the kinds of activities or specific programmatic operations (sometimes called inputs in logic models) that you could use to implement your approach. I do not expect a detailed list. Rather, I want you to demonstrate that you understand how your theoretical approach and the specific decisions that you have made with regard to the constructs that will be the focus of your program influence what you actually “do” in the program. In my training, for example, I use discovery learning, building on prior experience and knowledge, training past routine performance expectations (though ones), and interactive learning as key components of training. Explain how your decisions about theoretical framework and choice of the constructs for your program influence or determine the actual kinds of activities you implement.
11. Explain how you would evaluate your programmatic intervention. Include two aspects of evaluation.
 - a. First, **during program implementation**, how will you know if it is “working” or not? How will you know if you are achieving the desired objectives? Indicate the specific measures you will make and set performance standards for each. For example, I routinely conduct pre- (before training) and post (after training) tests of self-efficacy in adult training programs. This is because I focus on perceived behavioral control and it is critical for me to know whether I am succeeding in enhancing self-confidence. I often also conduct a post-test of behavioral intent -- do the participants plan to behave differently? These evaluation procedures tell me if my program is “working” in terms of achieving the conditions that my theory says are necessary for behavioral change. I measure them during program implementation because I need to adjust my activities if I am not achieving these objectives. You can state performance standards several ways. For example, one of my standards may be that “participants show an increase of at least 25% in their confidence in the ability to ___ (desired behavior goes here).” I often state this standard statistically: “Pre-and post test scores of ability to ____ (desired behavior goes here) will differ significantly at the 95% confidence interval.” In the work with the contractors, one standard for behavioral change was “Over 50% of participants in this program will adopt five or more of the recommended practices for reducing energy use in new buildings.”
 - b. Second, how will you evaluate the outcomes of your program and, if possible, your progress toward achieving your goal? This is the **final or summative evaluation**. For example, I conducted a follow-up evaluation of actual change in behavior by the contractors who participated in our program. I also asked them how many homes they had built during the year, how many square feet (on average) they measured, and where they were located. This, information, combined with the knowledge of which energy-saving features they included in the homes they built, allowed me to **estimate** the reduced energy demand, a contributing factor to the overall project goal.