

## **Review of Witkin and Altschuld's 1995 Three Phases Needs Assessment Model**

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### **Needs Assessment Level**

The needs assessment model that I have chosen to review was produced by Witkin and Altschuld in 1995. It not only includes the needs assessment model, but also indicates what needs to occur before and after the needs assessment.

According to kaufman's OEM model, Witkin and Altschuld's model would represent the Macro, Micro, and Mega levels. The Witkin and Altschuld model looks at a system and asks external and internal participants to evaluate what is best for that organization's own interests. According to Kaufman, the benefits of having a needs assessment at Macro level would be a linking of organizational interests to society. The drawback is that it does not fully address the societal needs to the level that the Mega level would. Kaufman also indicates the benefits of the micro level results as being useful in developing objectives that help reach Macro results, which help reach Mega(societal) results. "The Mega level is beneficial because it helps link the efforts of the organization to the needs of the society." (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). "Factors outside the system (social, economic, environmental) may be contributing to the maintenance of the need" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

Alschuld and Witkin needs assessment model is a useful listing of procedures for prioritizing and decision making regarding programs and organizational elements. In today's terms, it would mean that it is connected to Micro, "prioritizing gaps between desired results vs current results at the individual, group or department performance level" (Kaufman Guerra-Lopez ). The benefits of having a model at this level would include an alignment of the programs and processes of the organization with internal employees, management and stakeholders. "The Mega level is beneficial because it helps link the efforts of the organization to the needs of the

society” (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). Macro level is beneficial because it combines all organizational elements to create one cohesive organizational system which in turn may benefit society.

According to Altschuld “ needs assessments deal with questions such as What results should be accomplished at the societal, organizational and individual levels”(Altschuld & Watkins, 2014). According to Altschuld “ needs assessments deal with questions such as What results should be accomplished at the societal, organizational and individual levels”(Altschuld & Watkins, 2014).

Witkins and Altschuld saw the problems other needs assessment models were having. Among some of the concerns, were confusing means and ends, equating an opinion survey with a needs assessment, confusing levels of need and failing to use data to set priorities. The intent of this model was to solve these issues and streamline their version of the needs assessment into a three step process that not only includes the needs assessment, but the before and after process as well. “Needs assessors should identify and understand needs before prematurely jumping to solution strategies”( Altschuld, 2004).

The features that are introduced by Witkin and Altschuld are a three phase process with what they define as three different levels running throughout. Level one includes the individuals being served, Level two includes people who deliver the intended services to the people being served and level three includes the supporters of the overall organization.

### **Characteristics and Functions of a Needs Assessment Model**

Witkin and Altschuld ‘s model consisted of three phases. Phase one is preassessment or exploration, Phase two is needs assessment and data gathering. Phase three is post assessment

that consists of putting the assessment into action. In Phase one, the model seeks to understand the information that people already know about a given situation or system. It looks at the focus of the assessment, as well as analyzes the scope of the assessment process. This multi-step process would include, reviewing previous reports and discussing if actions were taken and needs met. If the needs have been met, why were they met? Indications of changes in conditions are also looked at. Existing data is gathered and high priority goals are selected to be looked at.

Phase two is the needs assessment. Witkin and Altschuld explain this stage as “a set of needs statements in tentative order of priority”( Witkin & Altschuld ,1995 ). The purpose of this phase is to compare what currently exists to what should exist. This includes a four step process. Step one, the system to be analyzed is assessed. The needs assessment could be of an entire system such as a community health organization, or a subsystem such as a school program. You must define who the needs assessment is for and what the boundaries or parameters for your needs assessment are. Step two is identifying what state or condition you are trying to reach. Step Three, priorities are set for the different needs. Step four, the causes for the needs are analyzed.

The next phase is Phase three. “Phase three is the bridge from analysis to action”( Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). It also prioritizes which needs are most important. Witkins and Altschud have laid out a chart listing the different steps in the process. This would include, setting priorities of the need, selecting solution strategies to meet the need, proposing an action plan, evaluating quality and total needs assessment, and preparing written records and oral briefs.

### **Benefits and Limitations.**

The benefits of this particular model include a clearly defined process for what occurs before during and after the needs assessment. In addition, key stakeholders within the needs assessment process are clearly labeled. One drawback is the manner in which the 1995 Witkin &

Altschuld processes are explained can sometimes be confusing. The later versions do a better job in clarifying the confusing issues.

This particular model has a great influence on helping organizations solve their problems. It helps organizations prioritize organizational needs in order of importance. It also allows flexibility for the stakeholder to refine the needs during the entire needs process.

“NA is a planning process with the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program organizational improvement and allocation of resources (Witkin & Altschuld 1995)(Lee, Altschuld, White 2006).

### **Application of A Needs Assessment**

The Problem: An inner-city school has been asked to be the recipient of a number of refugee children fleeing a war-torn country. There are ten schools in the district, one high school, two middle schools and seven elementary schools. They serve a population of students that is lower middle class. The school is integrating the immigrant children into a K-8 school within the school system. The immigrant children have just arrived at the school. The school must assess the needs of the students’ educational level, and social and economic needs so they can be serviced by the school properly.

#### Phase One-Preassessment.

The first step that was undertaken in assessing the needs was forming a Needs Assessment Committee. The committee consisted of two professional experts on immigration, two school administrators, several school parents, the PTA president and two school board members. Next, the committee evaluated what is already known. They looked at data available within other school systems regarding integrating immigrant children into a school.

They created a written memorandum, or report, that included the results. They discovered that other school districts had to add 20% in student funding for every 10 immigrant students. Before the increase in funding, student immigrant test scores were low. After additional funding and resources were applied, students' testing results increased by 50%. Based on the data, they formulated questions that needed to be addressed.

The committee addressed level one needs of the students being serviced. What language did they need to speak? What type of materials would they feel most comfortable using? They addressed Level two needs of the service providers. How many ESL teachers needed to be hired? What languages did they need to speak? How many school psychologists and general education teachers needed to be hired? They also looked at the administration's level two needs. What funding resources (level three) were needed? They indicated that the purpose of the assessment was to determine the proper staff and resources necessary to support the students' daily educational, emotional and social needs. Next, they designed an assessment and planned out an evaluation plan. A formative review of the information available was done.

#### Phase two- Assessment.

This is where the needs assessment takes place. In step one, areas of concern that need to be addressed are identified. A potential problem was whether the students were not being serviced properly by the school. Based on a previous review of the grade levels of the particular school system, it was determined that the children would be placed at the K-8 school. The Needs Assessment Team determined that it would be best to keep the assessment boundaries to that particular school.

Step Two, the Needs Assessment Team collected and analyzed level one data about the newly arrived 30 student immigrants. The educational level of the immigrants ranged from

kindergarten level through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They gathered data on the current state and education level of each of the students.

A chart was used to show the difference between what is and what should be. The status of the immigrant students indicated they had education levels ranging from kindergarten through eighth grade, however, they spoke mostly Arabic, not English. The language did not match up with the predominantly English-speaking school students.

A survey was created and distributed to support staff utilizing a five-scale rating. The survey was used to gauge what they felt the school needed to support the immigrant students. The results indicated that the support staff felt more resources would be necessary. “Surveys are prominent in needs assessment (Altschuld & Witkin 2000) and usually contain items for rating the “what should be” as well as motivation or other proximal scales on key topics or issues”(White & Altschuld, 2012).

Interviews were done with ESL and general education teachers to assess their knowledge of the children immigrants. Overall, teachers felt that more resources were required for servicing this particular student population. The team discovered the data they previously had on ESL teachers, school psychologists and general education teachers was accurate. They organized the data. The district had only 1 ESL teacher trained in the Arabic language that could service the immigrant students. They had 1 psychologist and 25 general education teachers.

This helped the needs assessment team to better understand the results they wanted. They indicated the importance of providing a quality education for 100% of the immigrant children that have entered the school system.

The data was assessed and compared between what is the current state and the result desired. The needs statement was formulated. According to school district data 20% of incoming

students would be supported by current level of ESL teachers and school psychologists. More specialized staff is needed in order to support the immigrant population that is attending the school.

Step Three, needs are prioritized and become the engine that drives the action plan in phase three. A general priority is set. The needs of the level one immigrant children are looked at again and the targeted needs statement is refined to also indicate that the performance factor of level two administrators and staff have a direct influence on the immigrant children's success.

Step four, A causal analysis was performed to determine why the immigrant students are not learning effectively under the staff and administration. A fishbone chart was used to categorize the information. It identified key targeted issues relating to how other students, staff and administrators needed to interact with the immigrant students.

The chart showed that the academic staff lacked the knowledge about the immigrant students' needs. It also indicated that the immigrant students would benefit from increased resources that included books and specialized ESL materials.

A causal analysis chart was created detailing the priority ranking of the needs. It indicated that the language spoken by the student immigrants is a huge barrier that needed to be overcome and was of high importance. The problems the teachers and support staff are having instructing the immigrant children potentially are caused by a lack of knowledge of what resources are available. The needs assessment team ranked this as a high-level priority. The causal analysis also looked at if the cultural understanding of the students and staff was a contributing factor in the students' ability to succeed. The analysis found students needed to be taught the differences in word meaning between Arabic and English. It also found that the staff



needed to become better educated on the specific cultural differences. This in turn affects what level three resources are needed.

In step five, all the data was combined together and tabulated in a data chart. It was organized into different categories. The different categories included causal factors previously mentioned on the immigrant students, administration and staff. The data was synthesized in step six. Resources within the system were looked at. The data indicated that staff needed to possibly shift the school ESL teacher into a room closer to where the students could access the resources. It also indicated that more books needed to be purchased by the district and two more ESL teachers needed to be hired. However, the school's budget is affected by the school district's overall funding resources and is outside the initial control of the school.

#### Phase Three Post Assessment

The first step in this process is setting priorities. Based on the data and research from phase two, the Needs Assessment Committee discussed what priorities needed to be set. It had been previously stated that the student immigrants spoke mainly Arabic and not the schools main language of English. During the post assessment, the committee decided that the students need to communicate with faculty and staff was of the most urgent importance.

Without an ability to communicate, immigrant students would not be able to learn no matter what physical resources the school had. They placed hiring two ESL teachers and shifting the current ESL teachers to be closer to the students as top priority. This was followed by the need for books and resources for the ESL teachers to use with the immigrants as the next highest priority. Cultural awareness training for classroom teachers was also considered very important and given a high ranking.

In Step two solution strategies, the question is asked will the solution work? In the case of this particular scenario, will the increased ESL teachers and additional resources, and cultural training lead to the immigrant students success in the classroom resulting in increased test scores in their reading, math and science ability? This will benefit the school and district's overall test results, as well as provide our society with more competent and capable elementary students. After much deliberation, the post-assessment team decided that increasing ESL teachers and additional resources would be of benefit to the school and school district, which in turn would benefit society. The team began looking at alternative solutions to get the best result. They suggested moving other ESL teachers from other schools, however the previous data showed a shortage of ESL teachers across the district. Ultimately, they decided finding funding would be the best option.

During step three, the needs assessment team creates documents to advise stakeholders of the solution. The stakeholders then decide whether to act on the proposed solution. The post assessment team defined the purpose of the action plan. The first step was creating a description of the solution. Increasing ESL teachers and resources would result in increased immigrant success in school testing scores which would lead to overall school success. The rationale behind this solution was included. It indicated the committee had arrived at this decision through an in-depth study. The root cause of the immigrants' failure to thrive in the school environment was due in part to them not understanding the English language. A proposed timeline was created.

It was indicated that this was an emergency situation and needed to be implemented quickly within the next month. Funding needed to be secured, hiring needed to take place and resources needed to be bought. This whole process was mapped out in a success flow chart. The schools allocated funding budget indicated that it would be able to pay for three more ESL

teachers and resources. The money was allocated in a budget chart. The Needs Assessment Committee looked at the forces acting for and against the proposed solution. Based on previous results from school community meetings, the team determined that the majority of staff, school officials, and parents were in favor of this solution. The team implemented the proposed solution as planned.

Step Four, finally after implementation, the needs assessment was evaluated. The program was evaluated based on the success flow chart. Results indicated that the program's milestones had been met and the program was flowing smoothly. The team had properly implemented the funding, teachers had been hired, and cultural awareness training was underway. A focus group was conducted of the Needs Assessment Committee's overall views of the success of this project. The results indicated that the success of the program could potentially be utilized and modeled by other school districts.

### **Conclusion**

“In 1979 Kamis-Gould called on professionals to do a better job of measuring needs. More than a decade later Witkin (1994) supported that call to action and in 2010 Altschuld (see Altschuld & White 2010; White & Altschuld 2012) again called for more research and investigation into assessment methods” (Watkins & Altschuld, 2014). The needs assessment process is constantly changing and evolving. New innovative techniques and methods are being discovered. The 1995 version that Altschuld and Witkin produced has been updated and the three phases process has been streamlined. Altschuld and Witkin truly paved the way for other researchers who are currently advancing the needs assessment field.

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