

[Develop theory of change / programme theory](#)

A programme theory or theory of change (TOC) explains how an intervention (a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy) is understood to contribute to a chain of results that produce the intended or actual impacts.

It can include positive impacts (which are beneficial) and negative impacts (which are detrimental). It can also show the other factors which contribute to producing impacts, such as context and other projects and programmes.

Different types of diagrams can be used to represent a theory of change. These are often referred to as logic models, as they show the overall logic of how the intervention is understood to work.

Why is a theory of change used?

A theory of change can be used to provide a conceptual framework for monitoring, for evaluation or for an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework.

A theory of change can be a very useful way of bringing together existing evidence about a programme, and clarifying where there is agreement and disagreement about how the programme is understood to work, and where there are gaps in the evidence.

It can be used for a single evaluation, for planning cluster evaluations of different projects funded under a single program, or to bring together evidence from multiple evaluations and research.

When are theories of change developed?

A theory of change is often developed during the planning stage of a new intervention. It can also be developed during implementation and even after a programme has finished. When an evaluation is being planned, it is useful to review the programme theory and revise or elaborate it if necessary.

How are theories of change developed?

A theory of change can be developed by programme staff, by an external evaluator, by programme designers, or collaboratively with the community.

How are theories of change represented?

The diagrams used to represent a theory of change (usually referred to as logic models) can be drawn in different ways.

Sometimes they are shown as a series of boxes (inputs->processes->outputs->outcomes->impacts), sometimes they are shown in a table, sometimes they are shown as a series of results, with activities occurring alongside them rather than just at the start. These different types are shown as different methods on this page (below).

Methods

Processes for developing a theory of change

- [Articulating mental models](#)

Articulating mental models involves talking individually or in groups with key informants (including program planners, service implementors and clients) about how they understand an intervention works.

- [Backcasting](#)

Backcasting is a method that involves envisaging alternative futures.

- [Existing documents](#)

Reviewing documents produced as part of the implementation of the evaluand can provide useful background information and be beneficial in understanding the alignment between planned and actual implementation.

- [Five Whys](#)

The Five Whys is an easy question asking option that examines the cause-and-effect relationships that underly problems.

- [Generic change theories](#)

Generic change theories can be applied across different sectors - for example, motivation, deterrence, capacity development.

This page provides links to some resources that outline these change theories.

- [Group model building](#)

Group model building involves building a logic model in a group, often using sticky notes.

- [Previous research and evaluation](#)

Using the findings from evaluation and research studies that were previously conducted on the same or closely related areas.

- [SWOT analysis](#)

The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool that encourages group or individual reflection on and assessment of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a particular strategy and how to best implement it.

Ways of representing a theory of change in a logic model:

- [Tiny tool results chain](#)

Tiny tool results chain maps both positive and negative possible impacts from an intervention.

- [Logframe](#)

Logframes are a systematic, visual approach to designing, executing and assessing projects which encourages users to consider the relationships between available resources, planned activities, and desired changes or results.

- [Outcomes hierarchy](#)

An outcomes hierarchy shows all the outcomes (from short-term to longer-term) required to bring about the ultimate goal of an intervention.

Unlike results chains, it does not show the activities linked to these outcomes.

- [Realist matrix](#)

A realist matrix focuses on the causal mechanisms at work in a programme or project. It specifies what exactly in the programme creates the outcomes, and under what conditions.

- [Results chain](#)

"Results chain or pipeline logic models represent a program theory as a linear process with inputs and activities at the front and long-term outcomes at the end.

- [Triple column](#)

A triple column/row theory of change diagram shows the causal pathway in terms of intermediate outcomes, activities that directly produce these, and the influence of other factors and programs.

Approaches

A number of approaches include recommendations about how to develop a logic model as part of undertaking an evaluation:

- [Collaborative outcomes reporting](#)

Collaborative outcomes reporting (COR) is a participatory approach to impact evaluation based around a performance story that presents evidence of how a program has contributed to outcomes and impacts, that is then reviewed by both technical experts and

- [Outcome Mapping](#)

Outcome Mapping is an approach that helps unpack an initiative's theory of change and provides a framework to collect data on the immediate, basic changes that lead to longer, more transformative change.

- [Realist evaluation](#)

Realist evaluation aims to identify the underlying generative causal mechanisms that explain how outcomes were caused and how context influences these.

Resources

- [Learning for sustainability: Theory of change](#)

Annotated list of resources about developing and using a theory of change.

- [Purposeful program theory: Effective use of theories of change and logic models](#)

This book, by Sue Funnell and Patricia Rogers, discusses ways of developing, representing and using programme theory and theories of change in different ways to suit the particular situation.

- [Theory of change](#)

This guide, written by Patricia Rogers for UNICEF, looks at the use of theory of change in an impact evaluation.

- [Theory of change software](#)

Describes different options for using software to help create a logic model.

- [Theory of Change: Good practice](#)

PDF

120.32 KB

This paper sets out some suggestions about what might be considered good practice, adequate practice and inadequate practice in developing, representing and using a theory of change.

- [52 weeks of BetterEvaluation: Week 12: Having an adequate theory of change](#)

Many evaluations use a theory of change approach, which identifies how activities are understood to contribute to a series of outcomes and impacts. These can help guide data collection, analysis and reporting.

Manager's guide to evaluation

- [Describe the theory of change](#)

This section of the Manager's guide to evaluation explains how and why you might use a theory of change when commissioning and managing an evaluation.