

Theory of Change: Good practice

This page sets out some suggestions about what might be considered good practice, adequate practice and inadequate practice in developing, representing and using programme theory, also known as theory of change or logic models.

How to develop it

1. Decide the process to be used - Who will be involved with what roles and responsibilities, and what sources of information will be used and prioritised.

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
Brainstorm with Post-It notes or just repackage planning documents	Systematic process drawing on previous planning, research and evaluation, plus insights from program managers and other key informants	Ensure processes in place for direct voice from clients in terms of what the project/ program is trying to achieve and how

2. Undertake a situation analysis - Identify the problems or needs that will be addressed, their underlying causes, and what strengths and opportunities could be leveraged

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
Only focused on problems	Include all relevant problems/needs and also identify existing resources and opportunities and analyse match with the organisation's mission and priorities	

3. Identify intended outcomes and impacts - In broad terms, not limiting them at this stage to what can be easily measured

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
Narrowly define impacts in terms of what can be readily measured	Describe intended outcomes and impacts in broad terms and address standards of performance and measurement plans separately	

4. Identify change theories - in broad terms, how it is understood that a particular change comes about

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
<p>Identify none or only one</p> <p>Only address one or two different levels of change – individuals, organizations, eco-system</p>	<p>Be explicit about different change theories at different levels and in different contexts, and the match with the organization's niche</p> <p>Identify change theories at the different levels</p>	<p>Identify the interconnections between change theories at the different levels</p>

5. Identify action theories - what will be done to activate each of the change theories

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
List activities	Identify activities to achieve specific outcomes at various levels and stages in the causal chain	Identify different activities relevant in different contexts

6. Address sustainability - how is it understood that the achievements of the project will be maintained (which might not involve continuing the project activities)

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
Not addressed	Strategy for sustainability is explicit and plausible	

7. Address scaling - how is it understood that the scale of activities and impact will be increased

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
Not addressed or not logically represented	Strategy for scaling is explicit and plausible	

8. Identify possible significant unintended impacts - (positive and negative)

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
<p>Possible negative impacts not addressed</p> <p>Possible unintended positive impacts not addressed</p>	<p>Possible significant negative impacts are identified and monitored as part of risk management</p> <p>Possible significant unintended positive impacts are identified and included</p>	<p>Strategies put in place where appropriate to reduce the risk of identified possible negative impacts.</p> <p>Ongoing scanning for additional possible significant unintended impacts</p>

9. Review and revise the theory of change - at periodic intervals and as necessary

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
<p>Either 'set and forget' or constant tinkering with little benefit</p>	<p>Develop a 'good enough' version and then iteratively review and revise to address important issues</p>	

How to represent it

Represent the theory of change – using one or more diagrams and narrative

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
<p>Use a linear logic model of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts</p> <p>Use one diagram for all purposes</p> <p>Develop an idiosyncratic diagram</p>	<p>Use an outcomes hierarchy diagram to show the change theories and explain the action theories in an accompanying narrative</p> <p>Use different but related versions for different purposes, especially in terms of levels of detail</p> <p>Develop a diagram which explicitly draws on theories of change for that portfolio</p>	<p>Use a triple column outcomes hierarchy which shows how activities and other factors jointly produce a chain of results</p> <p>Diagram which is integrated with nested diagrams for related projects, programs and the overall organization theory of change</p>

How to use it

Use the theory of change - to plan and integrate research, monitoring and evaluation

Inadequate practice	Adequate practice	Better practice
<p>Use only to identify indicators and specific causal relations to be tested</p>	<p>Use in all discussions of findings to shape and improve thinking about how the program or project works</p>	