

What drives effective use of a Theory of Change approach?

1. What core principles should underpin the use of Theories of Change?
2. Should we promote learning over accountability through a Theory of Change approach? If so, how?

1. Core principles

From an evaluation perspective....

- A Theory of Change should be *evaluable*
 - “*The extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion*”
OECD/DAC
- *Dimensions of evaluability*
 - Evaluability in principle: Is the design/ToC evaluable
 - Evaluability in practice: Is the data available
 - Institutional context: Practicality and utility

Online consultation re evaluability criteria

- Consistently presented and read
- Verifiable events
- Plausible relationships
- Testable relationships
- Complete chain of events
- Ownership and agreement
- Embedded within resources

MandE NEWS email list, 3000+ members, in 2012

DFID funded Review of literature on evaluability

133 documents, 44% from
international agencies, in
2012

07/04/2015

1. Project Design (as described in a Theory of Change, Logical Framework or narrative)	
Clarity?	Are the long-term impact and outcomes clearly identified and are the proposed steps towards achieving these clearly defined?
Relevant?	Is the project objective clearly relevant to the needs of the target group, as identified by any form of situation analysis, baseline study, or other evidence and argument? Is the intended beneficiary group clearly identified?
Plausible?	Is there a continuous causal chain, connecting the intervening agency with the final impact of concern? Is it likely that the project objective could be achieved, given the planned interventions, within the project lifespan? Is there evidence from elsewhere that it could be achieved?
Validity and reliability?	Are there <i>valid</i> indicators for each expected event (output, outcome and impact levels)? i.e. will they capture what is expected to happen? Are they <i>reliable</i> indicators? i.e. will observations by different observers find the same thing?
Testable?	Is it possible to identify which linkages in the causal chain will be most critical to the success of the project, and thus should be the focus of evaluation questions?
Contextualised?	Have assumptions about the roles of other actors outside the project been made explicit (both enablers and constrainers)? Are there plausible plans to monitor these in any practicable way?
Consistent?	Is there consistency in the way the Theory of Change is described across various project multiple documents (Design, M&E plans, work plans, progress reports, etc.)?
Complexity?	Are there expected to be multiple interactions between different project components [complicating attribution of causes and identification of effects]? How clearly defined are the expected interactions?
Agreement?	To what extent are different stakeholders holding different views about the project objectives and how they will be achieved? How visible are the views of stakeholders who might be expected to have different views?

Cautions

- An evaluable theory may or may not be good theory. I.e. one that works / is proved correct
- Evaluability is not a black & white condition
- There are multiple dimensions of evaluability
- These will often need context specific weightings
 - According to purpose of evaluation and project context

2. Learning versus accountability

In open ended programs, where activities get chosen (and adapted) over a period of time ***starting with a detailed Theory of Change is not practical.***

- In this type of situation there should be ***accountability for learning.***
 - E.g. “To identify through a retrospective analysis any causal relationships that exist between AMNEP outputs and development outcomes that could be put to practical use, either in later stages of this project or in others like it” DFAT Vietnam 2014

- “Rick on the Road” blog, Thursday, April 05, 2012: *Criteria for assessing the evaluability of Theories of Change*
- Davies, R., 2013. *Planning Evaluability Assessments: A Synthesis of the Literature with Recommendations. Report of a Study Commissioned by the Department for International Development. Working Paper 40*