

## ToC (Theory of Change)

### 1. What is the ToC?

The theory of change is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence.

### 2. Who developed it?

The theory of change was not developed by a single individual but has evolved over time through the contributions of many practitioners and theorists in the field of social change, development, and evaluation. However, its formalization and widespread adoption are often credited to organizations and thought leaders in the non-profit and philanthropic sectors during the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Key contributors to the development and popularization of the theory of change include:

1. **Carol Weiss:** A prominent figure in the field of program evaluation, Weiss introduced the concept of "theories of change" in the context of evaluation and policy research. She emphasized the importance of understanding the underlying assumptions and causal pathways of social programs.
2. **ActKnowledge and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change:** These organizations have played significant roles in refining and disseminating the theory of change framework. They have developed resources, tools, and workshops to help practitioners design and implement theories of change.
3. **Philanthropic Foundations:** Foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has been instrumental in promoting the use of the theory of change as a strategic planning and evaluation tool. They have funded initiatives and provided guidance to non-profits on how to develop and use theories of change.

The theory of change has become a widely adopted framework in various sectors, including education, public health, social services, and international development, due to its utility in clarifying goals, strategies, and expected outcomes, as well as in improving accountability and effectiveness.

### 3. What types of initiatives is it useful for?

The Theory of Change (ToC) is vital for organizations to plan, implement, and evaluate their social impact initiatives. It goes beyond a visual diagram and acts as a guiding blueprint, providing insights into the effectiveness of programs and products and the outcomes for stakeholders. This framework that can be applied to a wide range of initiatives across various sectors:

1. **Social Programs and Non-Profit Initiatives:**
  - **Community Development:** Addressing issues like poverty, housing, and urban renewal.
  - **Youth and Education Programs:** Enhancing educational outcomes, reducing dropout rates, and increasing access to education.

- Health and Wellness Programs: Improving public health outcomes, promoting mental health, and combating diseases.
- 2. Public Policy and Government Initiatives:
  - Policy Advocacy: Influencing legislative changes and public policies.
  - Environmental Programs: Addressing climate change, conservation, and sustainable development.
  - Economic Development: Initiatives aimed at job creation, economic empowerment, and reducing inequality.
- 3. International Development:
  - Poverty Alleviation: Programs targeting income generation, food security, and access to basic services.
  - Human Rights and Social Justice: Initiatives focused on gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion.
  - Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Aid: Coordinating and evaluating relief efforts in response to crises and natural disasters.
- 4. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Private Sector Initiatives:
  - Sustainability Programs: Implementing green practices, reducing carbon footprints, and promoting ethical supply chains.
  - Community Engagement: Corporate programs aimed at giving back to communities, such as educational scholarships and health initiatives.
- 5. Educational and Research Projects:
  - Academic Research: Structuring research projects to investigate complex social issues.
  - Program Evaluation: Assessing the impact and effectiveness of educational interventions and training programs.
- 6. Philanthropic Foundations:
  - Grantmaking Strategies: Designing and evaluating grant programs to ensure they achieve their intended impact.
  - Capacity Building: Strengthening the capabilities of nonprofits and community organizations to achieve sustainable outcomes.
- 7. Collaborative and Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives:
  - Cross-Sector Partnerships: Coordinating efforts among various organizations, including government, non-profits, and private sector entities, to address systemic issues.
  - Community-Led Initiatives: Empowering local communities to develop and implement solutions to the challenges they face.

The theory of change is particularly useful for any initiative that aims to create complex social, economic, or environmental change. It helps stakeholders understand and communicate the causal links between activities, outputs, and desired outcomes, ensuring a strategic approach to planning, implementation, and evaluation.

#### 4. What are the main objectives of the ToC?

A theory of change helps to identify solutions to effectively address the causes of problems that hinder progress and guide decisions on which approach should be taken, considering UN comparative advantages, effectiveness, feasibility and uncertainties that are part of any change process. Specifically, the objectives include:

1. **Clarify Goals and Outcomes:**
  - Clearly define the long-term goals and desired outcomes of an initiative.
  - Identify intermediate outcomes and milestones that lead to long-term goals.
2. **Articulate Assumptions:**

- Make explicit the underlying assumptions about how and why certain actions will lead to the desired change.
  - Ensure these assumptions are evidence-based and can be tested and validated.
3. **Map Out Pathways:**
    - Develop a logical sequence of steps or pathways from current activities to the achievement of long-term goals.
    - Identify necessary preconditions for each step in the pathway.
  4. **Design Effective Interventions:**
    - Plan specific activities and interventions that are believed to lead to each intermediate outcome.
    - Ensure that interventions are strategically aligned with the desired outcomes.
  5. **Enhance Stakeholder Engagement:**
    - Engage stakeholders, including beneficiaries, in the development and refinement of the theory of change.
    - Ensure stakeholder perspectives and insights are incorporated into the planning process.
  6. **Facilitate Monitoring and Evaluation:**
    - Establish clear indicators and metrics for measuring progress toward each outcome.
    - Provide a basis for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
  7. **Improve Communication and Transparency:**
    - Clearly communicate the initiative's goals, strategies, and expected outcomes to stakeholders.
    - Increase transparency and accountability by showing the logical connections between activities and outcomes.
  8. **Support Adaptation and Learning:**
    - Use the theory of change as a tool for learning and adapting strategies based on what is working or not working.
    - Allow for flexibility to adjust the approach as new information and insights emerge.
  9. **Strengthen Strategic Planning:**
    - Aid in the strategic planning process by providing a comprehensive roadmap for achieving desired changes.
    - Ensure that resources are allocated effectively to the most critical activities and interventions.

Overall, the theory of change aims to enhance the effectiveness and impact of initiatives by providing a detailed, evidence-based plan that links actions to outcomes in a logical and transparent manner.

## 5. How does the METHOD work?

TOC uses backwards mapping, requiring planners to think in backwards steps from the long-term goal to the intermediate and then early-term changes that would be required to cause the desired change. This creates a set of connected outcomes known as a “pathway of change”.

The theory of change works by providing a structured framework to articulate, implement, and evaluate an initiative's strategy to achieve its goals. Here's a step-by-step explanation of how it works:

### 1. Define the Long-Term Goal:

- Clearly articulate the ultimate objective or desired change you aim to achieve.
2. **Conduct Backwards Mapping:**
    - Starting from the long-term goal, work backwards to identify all necessary preconditions or intermediate outcomes that must be achieved to reach that goal.
  3. **Develop an Outcomes Pathway:**
    - Create a visual representation or map that outlines the sequence of outcomes leading to the long-term goal.
    - Ensure each outcome logically leads to the next, showing the cause-and-effect relationships.
  4. **Identify Assumptions:**
    - Articulate the assumptions that underlie the connections between outcomes.
    - Ensure these assumptions are based on evidence and can be tested.
  5. **Design Interventions and Activities:**
    - Specify the actions, strategies, and interventions that will be implemented to achieve each intermediate outcome.
    - Ensure these activities are aligned with the pathway to the long-term goal.
  6. **Establish Indicators and Metrics:**
    - Develop indicators for each outcome to measure progress.
    - Determine how data will be collected, analyzed, and used to inform decision-making.
  7. **Engage Stakeholders:**
    - Involve key stakeholders, including beneficiaries, partners, and funders, in developing and refining the theory of change.
    - Incorporate their insights and feedback to ensure the theory is comprehensive and realistic.
  8. **Implement the Plan:**
    - Carry out the planned interventions and activities.
    - Ensure resources are allocated effectively and stakeholders are engaged in the implementation process.
  9. **Monitor and Evaluate:**
    - Continuously track progress using the established indicators.
    - Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and whether they are leading to the expected outcomes.
  10. **Adapt and Learn:**
    - Use the evaluation results to learn what is working and what is not.
    - Make necessary adjustments to the strategy and activities based on the findings.
    - Update the theory of change as needed to reflect new insights and changes in context.
  11. **Communicate Progress:**
    - Share progress, successes, and lessons learned with stakeholders.
    - Ensure transparency and accountability by reporting on the outcomes and impact of the initiative.

By following these steps, the theory of change helps organizations to plan strategically, implement effectively, and continuously learn and adapt to achieve their desired impact.

## 6. What skills and knowledge are useful for using the ToC?

Using the theory of change effectively requires a combination of skills and knowledge in various areas. Here are some key competencies:

1. Strategic Thinking:
  - Ability to see the big picture and understand how different components of a program or initiative fit together.
  - Skills in identifying long-term goals and working backwards to map out the necessary steps to achieve them.
2. Analytical Skills:
  - Capacity to analyze complex problems and identify underlying causes and effects.
  - Skills in breaking down large goals into smaller, manageable outcomes and activities.
3. Facilitation and Communication:
  - Proficiency in facilitating discussions and workshops with diverse stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the theory of change.
  - Strong communication skills to clearly articulate the theory of change and its components to various audiences.
4. Research and Evidence Gathering:
  - Ability to gather and synthesize evidence to support the assumptions and pathways in the theory of change.
  - Skills in conducting literature reviews, interviews, and other research methods.
5. Project Management:
  - Knowledge of planning, organizing, and managing resources to bring about the successful completion of specific project goals and objectives.
  - Skills in developing timelines, managing budgets, and coordinating activities.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation:
  - Proficiency in designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and measure impact.
  - Skills in selecting appropriate indicators and data collection methods.
7. Critical Thinking:
  - Ability to challenge assumptions, ask probing questions, and think critically about the logic and feasibility of the theory of change.
  - Skills in identifying potential risks and unintended consequences.
8. Adaptability and Learning:
  - Capacity to learn from experience, adapt strategies based on new information, and update the theory of change as needed.
  - Skills in reflective practice and continuous improvement.

By combining these skills and knowledge areas, practitioners can develop, implement, and refine a theory of change that effectively guides their initiatives toward achieving their desired outcomes.

## 7. USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

<https://practicalaction.org/pmsd-toolkit/tools/theory-of-change/#:~:text=In%20a%20nutshell%3A%20A%20theory,and%20impacts%20on%20target%20groups.>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory\\_of\\_Change](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_Change)

Taplin, D. H., Clark, H., Collins, E., & Colby, D. C. (2013). Theory of change. *Technical papers: a series of papers to support development of theories of change based on practice in the field*. ActKnowledge, New York, NY, USA.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYfSwXfvjw0>

<https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-7-Theory-of-Change.pdf>