



CONCEPT PAPER

THE THEORY OF CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The purpose of this concept paper is to provide an overview of the Theory of Change. In a commissioned report detailing an implementation evaluation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF, Act 67 of 2008), the Department of Planning and Monitoring Evaluation (DPME) recommended that SAQA, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Quality Councils *'must create theories of change that clarify how the specific NQF objectives are expected to be achieved'* (recommendation 1.1). As a precursor to implementing this recommendation, it is important and necessary to orientate SAQA to the Theory of Change, which while not an unfamiliar approach, has yet to be rigorously applied within SAQA's monitoring and evaluation context.

2. SCOPE AND METHOD

In providing a brief overview of the Theory of Change, the concept paper aims to address the following key questions:

- a) What is the Theory of Change? (Definitions, conceptualisations and origins)
- b) How does one develop a Theory of Change? What are steps?
- c) Is there a difference between the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework? If so, what are these differences?
- d) What are the strengths and limitations of the Theory of Change?

The concept paper additionally aims to provide some practical diagrammatic illustrations of the Theory of Change.

Desktop research was the primary method used for sourcing relevant information about the Theory of Change. This involved gathering and analysing information already available in print or published on the internet, resulting in a collection of secondary data.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

The questions identified in the scope will be addressed in turn in the sections which follow.

3.1 WHAT IS THE THEORY OF CHANGE?

This section provides a synopsis of how the Theory of Change is understood or defined and also provides an indication of its early origins.

3.1.1. Definitions and conceptualisations

- The Theory of Change is a specific type of **methodology** for planning, participation, and evaluation that is used in the philanthropy, not-for-profit and government sectors to promote social change. The Theory of Change defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change).

- ActKnowledge, an affiliate organisation of the Center for Human Environments at the City University of New York (CUNY), is an action research organisation committed to working with community organisations, not-for-profits, foundations and government agencies that are transforming traditional institutions and creating social change (<https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Center-for-Human-Environments/Research-Sub-Groups/ActKnowledge>). ActKnowledge provides a substantial repository of resources and lessons on the Theory of Change.

Taplin & Clark (2012), under the auspices of ActKnowledge (<http://www.actknowledge.org/publications/actknowledge-publications/>) describe the Theory of Change as a **tool** which can be used for planning, framing of issues, and for monitoring and evaluation. The Theory of Change expresses long-term outcomes, preconditions, and interventions, and can therefore underpin visioning papers, strategic and/or annual plans, and goal-setting processes. Specifically in relation to its function as an evaluation tool, the Theory of Change identifies the specific goals of the program and connects those goals with specific interventions. *'Data can then be collected to evaluate progress toward the stated goals as well as the effectiveness of interventions in producing outcomes'* (p1).

- ActKnowledge's Center for the Theory of Change (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/>), describes the Theory of Change as a *'comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context'*, and states that the Theory of Change is especially focused on mapping out or "filling in" what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved.
- Keystone, a UK-based organisation which seeks to improve the effectiveness of social change organisations, has developed useful guidelines for organisations seeking to contribute to 'significant and lasting change'. These guidelines are developed within the context of Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning (IPAL). Keystone likens the Theory of Change to a road map and states that, like a road map, the Theory of Change *'provides us with an understanding of the landscape and the routes and distances that we need to travel to get to our destination. A road map helps us plot the journey (i.e. develop strategies) from where we are now to where we want to be'* (IPAL Guide 2, <http://keystoneaccountability.org/>). Keystone views the process of developing a theory of change as interactive, facilitated and transparent, and one which enables an organisation to fully understand the complexity of its context, question its assumptions, consider different perspectives and arrive at new shared understandings.
- Taplin & Clark (2012), under the auspices of ActKnowledge (<http://www.actknowledge.org/publications/actknowledge-publications/>), also view the process of developing a theory of change as participatory. They provide a nuanced 'process' definition of the Theory of Change as follows: *'Theory of change is a rigorous yet participatory process whereby groups and stakeholders in a planning process*

articulate their long-term goals and identify the conditions they believe have to unfold for those goals to be met. These conditions are modeled as desired outcomes, arranged graphically in a causal framework' (p1). Collins, Taplin and Clark (2016) state that the Theory of Change 'allows the identification of the short-term and intermediate steps that need to occur to realise a long-term result or outcome' (ES - 1¹).

- In a presentation/video entitled: 'How to Build a Theory of Change for an Impact Evaluation', Howard White, the former Executive Director of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation states that a theory of change documents the causal links between inputs, activities, outputs and intermediate and final outcomes, and identifies the underlying assumptions (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWutrZwzP18>).

Taplin et al (2013:2) provide a useful summary which encapsulates what the Theory of Change is:

'At its heart, Theory of Change spells out initiative or program logic. It defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify changes that need to happen earlier (preconditions). The identified changes are mapped graphically in causal pathways of outcomes, showing each outcome in logical relationship to all the others. Interventions, which are activities and outputs of any sort, are mapped to the outcomes pathway to show what stakeholders think it will take to effect the changes, and when. Theory of Change provides a working model against which to test hypotheses and assumptions about what actions will best bring about the intended outcomes. A given Theory of Change also identifies measurable indicators of success as a roadmap to monitoring and evaluation'.

The aforementioned authors (2013:2) also make a distinction between the Theory of Change as a process and a product, and refer to discussions about which (the process or the product) adds more value:

'Theory of change is both process and product: the process of working out the theory, mainly in group sessions of practitioners and stakeholders led by a capable facilitator; and, as the product of that process, a document of the change model showing how and why a goal will be reached. There is a good deal of discussion as to which provides more value—the group process of reflecting on the work, surfacing assumptions, creating transparency and building consensus; or the product, a sound and complete plan with plausible potential for producing the change desired'.

Common amongst these, and other conceptualisations of the Theory of Change, is the notion that organisations need to engage with, map or 'theorise' **what change is desired (result or outcome), and what needs to be done (activities, interventions) to bring about this change**. It is also evident that the theory of change can refer to either a product (i.e. the method used to create a theory of change) or a process (i.e. the process of developing a theory of change).

¹ ES - 1 = Executive Summary, page 1

Comic Relief, a major UK charity with a vision of a just world free from poverty, commissioned a review of its Theory of Change approach. In undertaking the review, James (2011:6) explored how others were defining and approaching the Theory of Change, and discovered that a variety of different terms were used to describe the Theory of Change:

- Programme theory/ logic/ approach
- A road map for change
- A causal pathway/ chain/ model/ map
- Pathways mapping
- Intervention theory/ framework/ logic
- A process of open enquiry and dialogue
- A clear and testable hypothesis
- A logic model
- A blueprint for evaluation
- Back to basics
- A direction of travel
- A sense of direction

The review also found that individuals and organisations had different understandings and perspectives about the Theory of Change, with much overlap evident (ibid). James (2011:7) discusses some of the emerging categories evident in the various understandings and perspectives of the Theory of Change:

- **Evaluative or formative** – many evaluation specialists find the more formative approach of the Theory of Change useful, however, right from the start, their emphasis is on using the Theory of Change for evaluation. Those foregrounding learning, influence or shape the process quite differently. Theory of Change which is focused on evaluation can also be ‘prospective’ (designed from the beginning of a programme) or ‘retrospective’ (carried out at the time of the evaluation to understand what has underpinned practice) (citing Shapiro, 2005).
- **Explanatory or exploratory** – some approaches set out to clearly explain the Theory of Change for a programme or organisation to ‘learn or test whether it works’, while others seek, through interacting, to explore their theory without any preconceptions.
- **Linear or complex** – some approaches are more linear, setting out to depict specific steps of ‘cause and effect’ which can be tested at each level, while other approaches conceptualise the Theory of Change within a complex system or network, reflecting the ‘the complexity of change processes’ and showing the ‘actors, chains, linkages and learning loops’.

Additionally, people thought of the Theory of Change at either a **macro level** (e.g. development perspectives, organisational theories of change and sector or target group theories of change) or at a **project or programme level** (ibid). In terms of applying the Theory of Change, two approaches emerged (these approaches are not always distinct with overlap being possible): 1) an approach which looks at **how programmes bring change** and develops a linear path of cause and effect, and 2) an approach which **explores how change happens more broadly**

then analyses what that means for the part that a particular organisation or programme can play (ibid). James (2011:ES, 2-3²) articulates these approaches as follows:

Approach 1:

‘Approaches in the first category focus on articulating the programme logic: defining the long-term changes that organisations desire to bring (often starting with the overall vision) and then mapping back from those to identify changes that need to happen at other levels (the pre-conditions); and the interventions that will cause each change to happen, making explicit the rationale behind them. They can range from basic logic models that only identify inputs, outputs and outcomes, but attempt to explain the rationale behind the model; to more complex flow charts and diagrams that map the pathways for change and include specific indicators at each level of change’.

Approach 2:

‘Approaches in the second category take a more complex and systemic view of development, believing that even when the programme logic is carefully worked out, other factors outside organisations’ control can cause a programme to fail. These tend to involve broader, contextual analysis of how change happens – including exploring other actors and defining their role in change – before analysing how an organisation or programme contributes to change’.

The differences between Approach 1 and 2 resonate with the ‘linear versus complex’ dichotomy drawn by James (2011) in describing the various perspectives people have of the Theory of Change – while at the same time acknowledging that overlap does exist and that it is not always possible to fit things neatly into categories.

3.1.2 Origins of the Theory of Change

The Centre for the Theory of Change sheds light on the origins of the Theory of Change. There does not appear to be a definitive indication of when the term ‘Theory of Change’ was used, however, its origins are alluded to in the work of various evaluation theorists and practitioners involved in the application of programme theories to evaluation for many years (including Huey Chen, Peter Rossi, Michael Quinn Patton and Carol Weiss, to name a few). Reference is made to Kirkpatrick’s ‘Four Levels of Learning Evaluation Model’ in the late 1950’s and further advancement is evident through the CIPP framework (context, input, processes and products) developed by Daniel Stufflebeam and logical frameworks (logframes) or logical models, which depicted causal chains typically comprising inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes linked to long-term goals (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-origins/>).

Logical frameworks (Logframes) represented an advance by providing a framework through which the ‘relationships between a program’s components could be drawn out and articulated’ (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-origins/>).

However, various US writers such as Weiss, Chen and Patton drew attention to the challenges in evaluating complex social or community change programs when it was not exactly clear what

² ES, 2-3 = Executive Summary, pages 2-3

the programs had set out to do or how - and therefore difficult to evaluate whether or how they had achieved it (James, 2011). The US based Aspen Institute and its Roundtable on Community Change gave attention to these issues (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-origins/>). The work of the Roundtable resulted in the publication in 1995 of *New Approaches to Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives*. Carol Weiss, a member of the Roundtable's Steering Committee on Evaluation, hypothesised in the book that complex programmes were difficult to evaluate because the assumptions that underpin them were 'poorly articulated'. She argued that stakeholders of complex community initiatives were usually not clear about how the change process will occur and as a result gave little focus to the 'early and mid-term changes' that need to occur for a longer term goal to be achieved. Her criticism therefore pertained to the lack of clarity about the "mini-steps" involved in attaining a long term outcome which, in her view, made evaluation of the complex initiative challenging and lessened the chance of *all* critical factors related to the long term goal being addressed.

Weiss popularised the term "Theory of Change" to describe the set of assumptions that explain both the 'mini-steps that lead to the long-term goal and the connections between program activities and outcomes that occur at each step of the way' (ibid).

3.2 HOW DOES ONE DEVELOP A THEORY OF CHANGE? WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

Taplin & Clark (2012) and Taplin et al (2013) provide a useful synopsis of the key components of the Theory of Change, namely, **outcomes and pathways, indicators, rationales interventions, assumptions and a narrative**. Their description of these components is discussed next, supplemented with some additional insights, where necessary.

Outcomes and pathways

The Theory of Change disrupts usual ways of planning initiatives – *'it turns conventional planning on its head because it pushes groups to first work out their goals or desired impact and work backwards on outcome pathways rather than engage in conventional forward oriented "so-that" reasoning'* (Taplin et al, 2013:3).

Outcomes and pathways are regarded as the 'building blocks' of the Theory of Change (Taplin et al, 2013). A Theory of Change represents outcomes in an outcomes pathway. Outcomes in a Theory of Change denote changes in condition, including but not limited to, *'a policy, law, behavior, attitude, knowledge, state of the environment - among people, institutions, and environments'* (ibid:5). An outcome is not "distribute fliers to all residents", or "immunise children", rather "all children are immunised" may be a valid outcome. Both long-term and intermediate (or short-term) outcomes are included (ibid).

A pathway is the *'sequence in which outcomes must occur to reach your long-term goal'* (Taplin & Clark, 2012:3). Pathways are represented by vertical chains of outcomes linked to each another by arrows, proceeding from early outcomes at the bottom to longer-term outcomes at the top. Pathways represent a 'causal logic'; each level along the pathway shows the chain of outcomes that must be achieved for the next outcome up the chain to be achieved (ibid).

Impact is usually ‘reserved’ for the ultimate goal of an initiative, and the reason for this is explained further, together with what organisations typically decide to be responsible for (Taplin et al, 2013:5):

The term “impact” is often reserved for the ultimate goal of an initiative, but is not a measurable outcome of that initiative alone. For example, if an organisation works to provide job training, education programs, and career counseling, it may be that the ultimate reason for doing this is to create sustainable family incomes and reduce poverty in the community. It was the reduction in poverty that drove the initiative, but the organisation may not be directly accountable for reducing poverty. What an organisation usually decides to be directly accountable for is the Long Term Outcome. This is a clearly stated, focused, measurable and plausible goal for the initiative.

What is termed an ‘accountability ceiling’ distinguishes the Impact level from the long-term outcome and its preconditions (see Figure 1). This ceiling is not fixed but can be ‘moved up or down’ as the group of people developing the Theory of Change become more informed about the opportunities and limits of the work (Taplin et al, 2013).

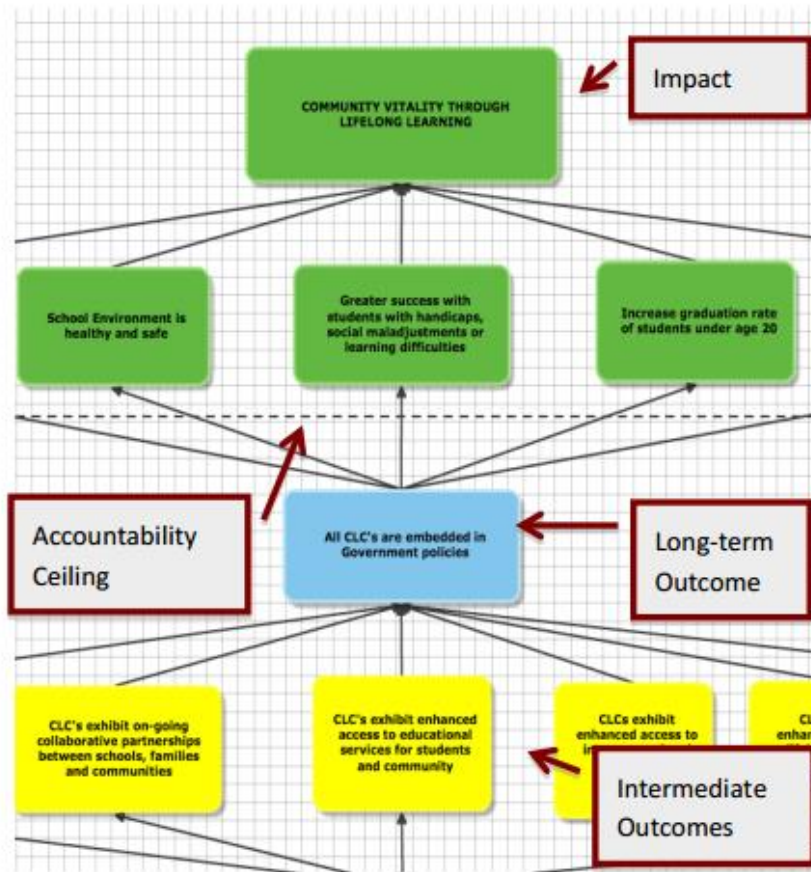


Figure 1: Distinguishing Impact Level and Long Term Outcome (Taplin et al, 2013)

All outcomes needed to get to the Long-term Outcome in an outcomes pathway are preconditions to the Long-term Outcome and the Impact. Preconditions describe what has to change if the ultimate goal or impact is going to be realised. Preconditions (which are also outcomes) are 'mapped backwards' in pathways from the Long-term Outcome to the present and the near future (Taplin et al, 2013).

Indicators

Every outcome in the Theory of Change should be clearly defined and assigned one or more indicators of success (Taplin & Clark, 2012). As implementation continues, organisations collect and analyse data on key indicators to monitor progress on the Theory of Change. Indicator data show whether changes are occurring as predicted or not. Using the indicator data program staff can adapt and refine the change model as they obtain insights about the strengths and limitations (ibid).

In terms of their role, indicators are typically seen as operationalising the outcomes, i.e. they make the outcomes understandable in 'concrete', 'observable' and 'measurable' terms. The relationship of indicator to outcome may be confusing to some, with the following formula providing some clarity: "I'll know (outcome reached) when I see (indicator)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change.

Interventions

Once outcomes have been mapped in an outcomes framework, the Theory of Change then describes the types of interventions (a single program or coordinated initiative) that lead to the outcomes represented in the outcomes framework. Each intervention is linked to an outcome and this illuminates the often 'complex web of activity' needed to effect change. The framework provides a working model against which to test hypotheses and assumptions about what actions will best produce the outcomes in the model. The processes of implementation and evaluation need to be transparent – and adherence to the Theory of Change method enables this so that those involved are informed about what is happening and why (Taplin & Clark, 2012). The logic for placing an intervention (Taplin et al, 2013:6) is explained as follows:

Outcome A sets up the conditions that allow Outcome B to unfold. Nevertheless, Outcome A (and other outcomes in the same phase of work) may not in itself be sufficient for Outcome B to transpire. Therefore, to achieve Outcome B, we need intervention #1. The intervention, or symbol for that intervention, is placed on the connector between Outcome A and Outcome B

Rationales

Rationales in a Theory of Change explain the connections or links between the outcomes and why one outcome is needed to achieve other outcomes or preconditions (Taplin & Clark, 2012; 2013).

Assumptions

Assumptions explain the contextual underpinnings of the Theory of Change. Research frequently supports rationales and assumptions, '*strengthening the plausibility of the theory and*

the likelihood that its stated goals can be achieved' (Taplin & Clark, 2012:1). It is important to make explicit the assumptions and risks of an initiative (Taplin et al, 2013). Three types of assumptions are evident (Ibid:7) and are quoted here:

1. 'The causal framework of preconditions and activities leading to long-term outcomes and impact represents a set of assumptions that underlie the choice of preconditions and the order in which they appear in the pathway;
2. The specific relationships drawn between outcomes in a pathway rest on assumptions. Assumptions of this type may relate to why the group thinks one outcome is a precondition to another. ActKnowledge terms assumptions of this type as "rationales"; and
3. Assumptions may be made about the context or environment within which the initiative will operate. Assumptions of this type involve beliefs about conditions that exist in the context/environment which are critical to the theory. As an example, proponents of an employment training program may assume jobs will be available in the occupations for which people are being trained. If that assumption should prove false, then the goal of getting people into good jobs will not be met. Assumptions of this type are best made explicit as preconditions within the pathway: in this example, "jobs are available" as a precondition will test that assumption. Assumptions of all types are implicit in the arrangement of outcomes in the pathway, and should also be made explicit, giving rationales for specific causal connections, and in writing the narrative'.

Narrative

A written narrative supplements the graphic model in Theory of Change and explains the logic of the framework (Taplin & Clark, 2012; Taplin et al, 2013).

Taplin and Clark (2012:2) summarise the steps involved in mapping out an initiative through various stages:

1. Identifying long-term goals and the assumptions behind them
2. Backwards mapping from the long-term goal by working out the preconditions or requirements necessary to achieve that goal--and explaining why.
3. Voicing assumptions about what exists in the system without which the theory won't work, and articulating the rationales for why outcomes are necessary preconditions to other outcomes.
4. Weighing and choosing the most strategic interventions to bring about the desired change. Developing indicators to measure progress on the desired outcomes and assess the performance of the initiative.
5. Undertake a quality review which should answer three basic questions: Is the theory 1) plausible, 2) "doable" (or feasible), and 3) testable?
6. Writing a narrative to explain the summary logic of the initiative.

In relation to the quality review, Taplin et al (2013:13, citing Kibusch, 1997) expand on the criteria which can be used to determine 'good quality' in a Theory of Change. In other words, what constitutes a good quality Theory of Change? The criteria are explained below:

- **Plausibility** – refers to the logic of the outcomes pathway. Does it make sense?

- **Feasibility** – refers to whether the initiative can realistically attain its long-term outcomes. Considerations, for example, would pertain to whether there are adequate resources, whether the scope requires refining, whether partners are required, etc.
- **Testability** – refers mainly to the indicators and considers whether they are ‘solid and measurable’
- **Scope** – an appropriate scope is necessary to enable an actionable theory to be communicated to the relevant audience

Keystone’s Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning (IPAL) Guide 2 (2009) provides a guide to developing a Theory of Change as a framework for inclusive dialogue, learning and accountability for social impact. In terms of the IPAL method, the process of developing a Theory of Change is *‘an exciting and often liberating process of interaction and discovery that helps organisations see beyond their familiar frames and habits (even if these were quite effective), understand the full complexity of the change they wish to see, and imagine new solutions in dialogue with others’* (p4). This method sees the Theory of Change develop through a facilitated process of open discourse and inquiry which enables varied views and perspectives to enrich the discussion, but at the same time expects participants to share a general commitment to change. In reviewing the IPAL method, the following steps can be regarded as encapsulating the process involved in developing a Theory of Change (<http://keystoneaccountability.org/>):

1. A group of key staff and constituents of an organisation imagine a **vision of success** together with a facilitator. This is a short but specific picture in words of the sustainable future they wish to bring about. It describes real people, real relationships, institutions and cultures. It is not a remote, idealised and unachievable future.
2. After envisioning what success would look like, participants would need to explore the following question: What needs to happen to make this vision a reality? For each element of the vision, participants need to identify all the prior changes they think are necessary if the vision of success is to be realised. Slowly a set of **preconditions** begin to emerge which could describe: What change? For whom? How good? By when?
3. The **system** in which the organisation finds itself is then mapped. This involves understanding where the organisation is currently and identifying all the actors in the system that can influence the vision positively or negatively. This will enable the organisation to consider what kind of working relationships need to be built with specific actors that will help the organisation achieve its vision more effectively.
4. Specific strategies may be planned.
5. Evidence of success or failure is gathered and documented. Participants are provided with an indication of their contribution to impact – this information can be used to shape their own improvement and the improvement of society at large.

Within the South African context, the National Evaluation Policy Framework approved by Cabinet on 23 November 2011 highlights the need for an effective Theory of Change in interventions. In line with this Framework, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) has issued Guideline 2.2.3: *‘Guideline for the planning of new implementation programmes’* (2013), hereafter referred to as the DPME Guideline. This guideline sets out the requirements for implementation programmes. Key among them, are the requirements to have a clearly defined Theory of Change and a LogFrame. According to the DPME Guideline (2013:3), programmes should have the following:

- ‘a clearly defined theory of change which shows the core logic of the process assumed in the intervention, as well as the critical assumptions;
- a logframe (impact, outcomes, outputs, activities, inputs, and their associated assumptions) as well as explanation of the causal mechanism of how these activities and outputs will results in the intended outcomes;
- a management unit within the department responsible for the delivery of that defined set of services and functions; and
- a clear budget allocation which can be tracked, e.g. at the sub/(sub) budget programme level’.

Annexure 2 in the DPME Guideline provides the structure of the Logframe which the DPME recommends should be used in plans, programmes and projects. This Annexure has been included in this concept paper as **Appendix A**.

In terms of the DPME requirements, it is evident that the Theory of Change and the LogFrame are integrated, leveraging the strengths of both approaches. This does, however, lead one to question whether there are indeed differences between the two approaches. The next section attempts to shed some light on this.

3.3 IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK?

It should be noted that the term ‘Logical Framework’ also refers to ‘Logframe’ and ‘Logical Model’, all of which are typically used interchangeably. Furthermore, in exploring the differences between the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework, it should be noted that some also use the terms ‘Theory of Change’ and ‘Logical Framework’, ‘Logframe’ and Logical Model interchangeably.

Brown (2016) makes a distinction between the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework, and draws a comparison between the two approaches (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/theory-change-vs-logic-model-ann-murray-brown>).

A brief summary of the comparison is provided below:

1. The Theory of Change is pitched at a more strategic level, providing the ‘bigger picture’, while the logical framework depicts the change process at a programme level. The latter focuses on a specific pathway within the theory of change.
2. The development of a Theory of Change typically starts from the ‘top’, with the identification of a goal and then involves working backwards to map the outcome pathways. The question that is asked is ‘if we do X then Y will change because...’ By comparison, a Logical Framework is typically developed after a Theory of Change or intervention/programme is developed. The Logical Framework usually starts at the ‘bottom’, showing, amongst other things, the inputs, activities, and outputs that lead to the goal. The question that would be asked in developing a Logical Framework is ‘If we plan to do X, then this will give Y result’.

3. The Theory of Change focuses on the complex interplay between various social, economic, political and institutional processes that underlie societal change. It illustrates the various pathways leading to change, even if these pathways are unrelated to the programme in question. The mapping of the process is not always linear but multi-directional and cyclical, resembling messy 'artwork'. By contrast, the Logical Framework, 'true to its name', sets out the intervention in a logical and sequential manner – 'neat', 'clean' and 'tidy'. It is typically only components directly linked to the programme which are reflected. It is linear, depicting how activities lead to outputs which lead to outcomes which lead to the goal. There is typically no cyclical processes or feedback loops.
4. The Theory of Change explains the 'why' the 'how' and has justifications at each step. It provides a justification for why one outcome leads to the next. Additionally, the Theory of Change is not a final document and can be amended and updated to accommodate contextual changes. By contrast, the Logical Framework does not explain why activities are expected to lead to outcomes and has limited flexibility, allowing minimal room for unexpected outcomes.

Figure 2 illustrates the differences in the mapping process between the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework (<http://whatworks.org.nz/frameworks-approaches/logic-model/>).

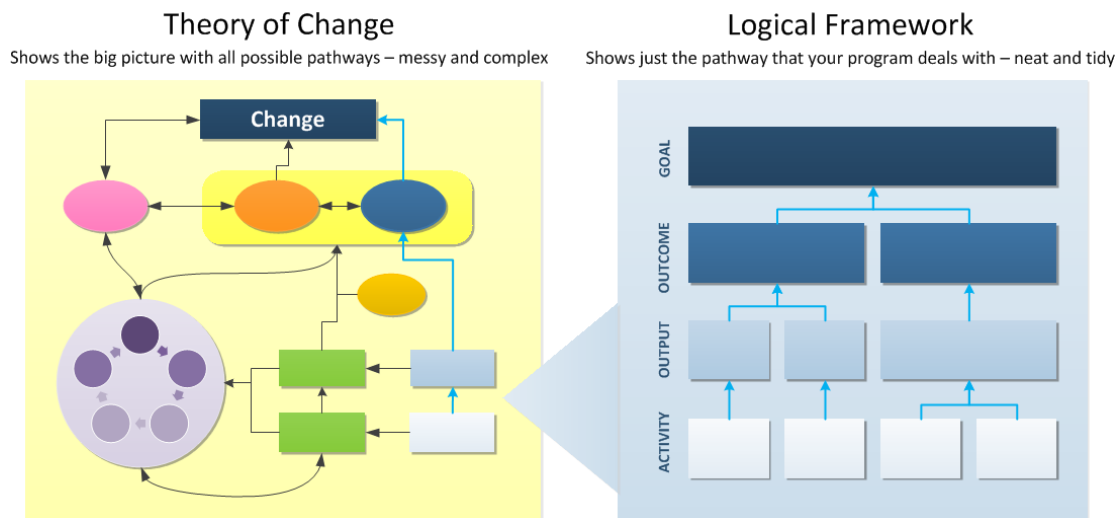


Figure 2: Mapping process of Theory of Change and Logical Framework

While from Brown's (2016) comparison and Figure 2 it does appear that there are distinctions between the Theory of Change and Logical Framework approach, confusion may still exist as these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. As discussed earlier, James (2011) spoke about how Theories of Change can range from simple logic models to more complex flow charts - suggesting that Logical Frameworks are themselves Theories of Change and that Theories of Change can be represented differently – some simpler and linear – others more complex, mapping pathways for change and indicators at each level – and some taking a more systemic and contextual view.

The DPME Guideline (2013:6) makes reference to 'expressing the Theory of Change as a Log Frame' which suggests that the two approaches are seen differently but can at the same time

be combined or integrated. Viewing the Theory of Change and the Log Frame as complementary is likely to augur well for their combined use in the development of theories of change for initiatives or programmes.

Essentially, it appears that the Theory of Change takes the Logic Model further. Logic Models will invariably depict initiatives in terms of 'resources, activities, short and long-term outcomes'. This set out helps to clarify goals and communicates how an initiative works to others. The Theory of Change takes these approaches further as it requires specific details about the goals and what is required to attain them (the conditions). As such, it is a more useful guide (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-benefits/>).

Grantcraft (2006:3), an organisation which has provided useful information on the Theory of Change (amongst other things) as part of its Evaluation Techniques Series, has also made a distinction between the Theory of Change and a Logic Model, which resonates with what has been discussed thus far. This distinction is include below:

'A theory of change takes a wide view of a desired change, carefully probing the assumptions behind each step in what may be a long and complex process. Articulating a theory of change often entails thinking through all the steps along a path toward a desired change, identifying the preconditions that will enable (and possibly inhibit) each step, listing the activities that will produce those conditions, and explaining why those activities are likely to work. It is often, but not always, presented as a flow chart'

'A logic model takes a more narrowly practical look at the relationship between inputs and results. It is often presented a table listing the steps from inputs or resources through the achievement of a desired programme goal. Some grant makers make use of separate logic models to chart the implementation components of a theory of change'

Grantcraft furthermore acknowledges that there are many hybrid approaches which are less simplistic than a traditional Logic Model but not as comprehensive and complex as Theories of Change.

Overall therefore, it appears that the Theory of Change represents a necessary and important advancement of the Logical Framework – and that both approaches may be used in conjunction with each other where needed.

3.4 WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE APPROACH?

Benefits

Some benefits of the Theory of Change approach are briefly highlighted below:

- The Theory of Change is a form of critical theory that ensures a transparent distribution of power dynamics. Further, the process is necessarily inclusive of many perspectives and participants in achieving solutions.

This is contrary to an erroneous belief that it is simply a methodology for planning and evaluation (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change).

- There has been a marked increase in the use of the Theory of Change in planning and evaluation among international NGOs, philanthropies, government agencies, the UN, and other key organisations in both developed and developing countries. New areas of work have emerged, for example relating the Theory of Change approach to ‘systems thinking and complexity’. Viewing change processes in a linear manner has been replaced by recognising that change processes have multiple feedback loops that need to be understood.

The Theory of Change is therefore ‘strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning’ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change).

- James (2011:18-19) found that Theory of Change processes a) assisted people to air differences and disagreements to reach a common understanding, b) enabled a focus on what matters, by helping people focus on ‘what they did, what others were doing, their resources and their personnel’, c) enabled the questioning of the theory – where programmes redefined their approach after ‘thinking through’ their theory of change, d) provided a framework for learning and evaluation (e.g. clarifying key areas of focus for tracking, improving the quality of evaluations by refining questions asked by evaluators, serving as a basis for evaluation which focuses on whether an organisation is achieving its long-term changes and whether its ‘core beliefs and strategies work’), e) strengthened advocacy by helping to focus advocacy targets, and f) improved the clarity of communication to boards, donors and other stakeholders about what was being done.
- A completed Theory of Change has key benefits. ‘You will have: a) a clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur that not only allows you to be accountable for results, but also makes your results more credible because they were predicted to occur in a certain way, b) a visual representation of the change you want to see in your community and how you expect it to come about, c) a blueprint for evaluation with measurable indicators of success identified, d) an agreement among stakeholders about what defines success and what it takes to get there, and e) a powerful communication tool to capture the complexity of your initiative’ (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-benefits/>)
- The Theory of change can be used in the following ways: a) ‘as a framework to check milestones and stay on course, b) to document lessons learned about what really happens, c) to keep the process of implementation and evaluation transparent, so everyone knows what is happening and why, and d) as a basis for reports to funders, policymakers, boards’ (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/toc-background/toc-benefits/>).

A key limitation of the Theory of Change approach

Despite the various benefits of the Theory of Change approach, there remains confusion about what the Theory of Change actually means, and this poses a challenge to its effective use. Some programme developers refer to Theories of Change, however upon closer inspection it is evident that these theories are at their core log frames or other approaches which do not fully represent the complexity of the Theory of Change approach. Therefore, a lack of uniformity exists in understanding the approach and the necessary methods to implement it (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change).

4. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE

The Figures which follow are illustrations of a theory of change approach.

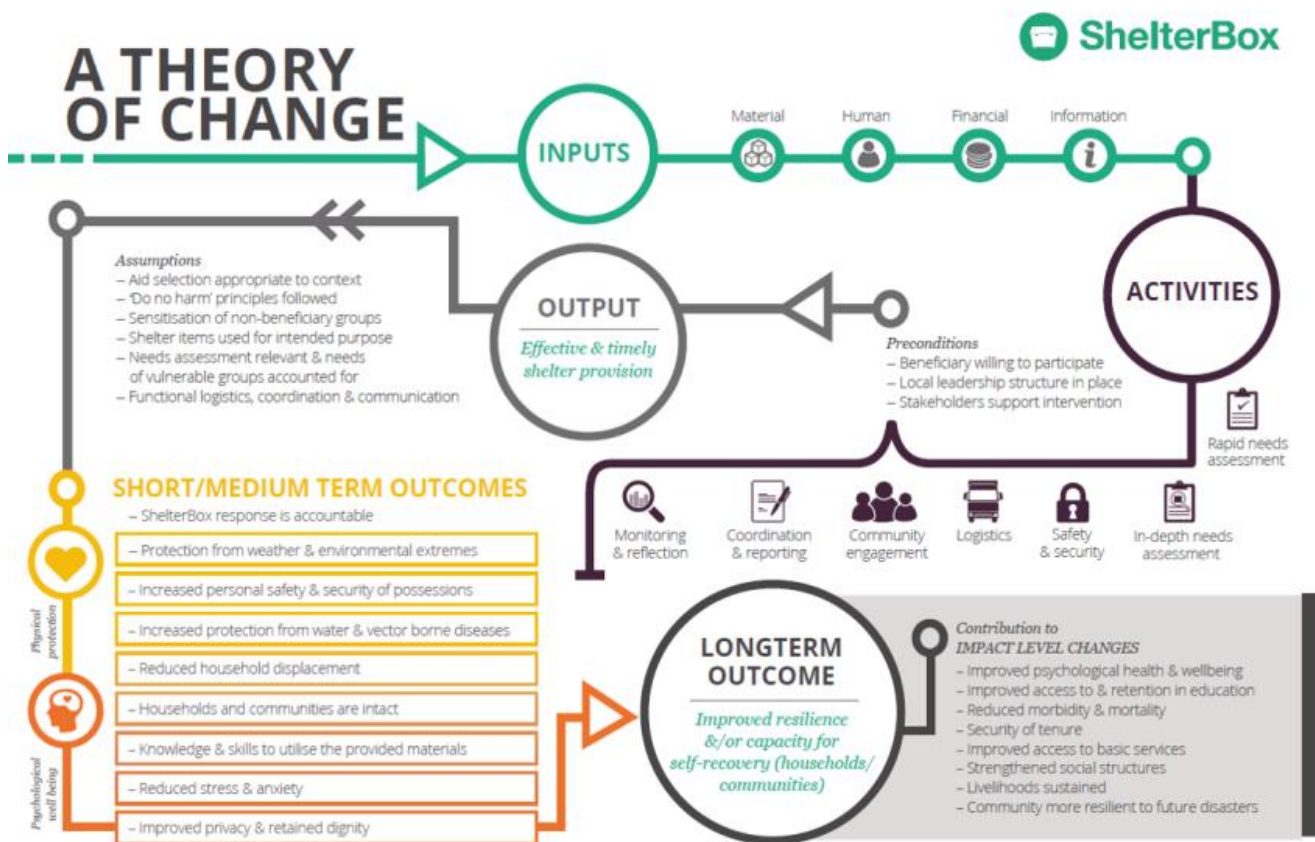


Figure 3: Illustration 1 of a Theory of Change (Chris Warham, Shelterbox)

The Theory of Change: An Overview: Y Chetty (2018)

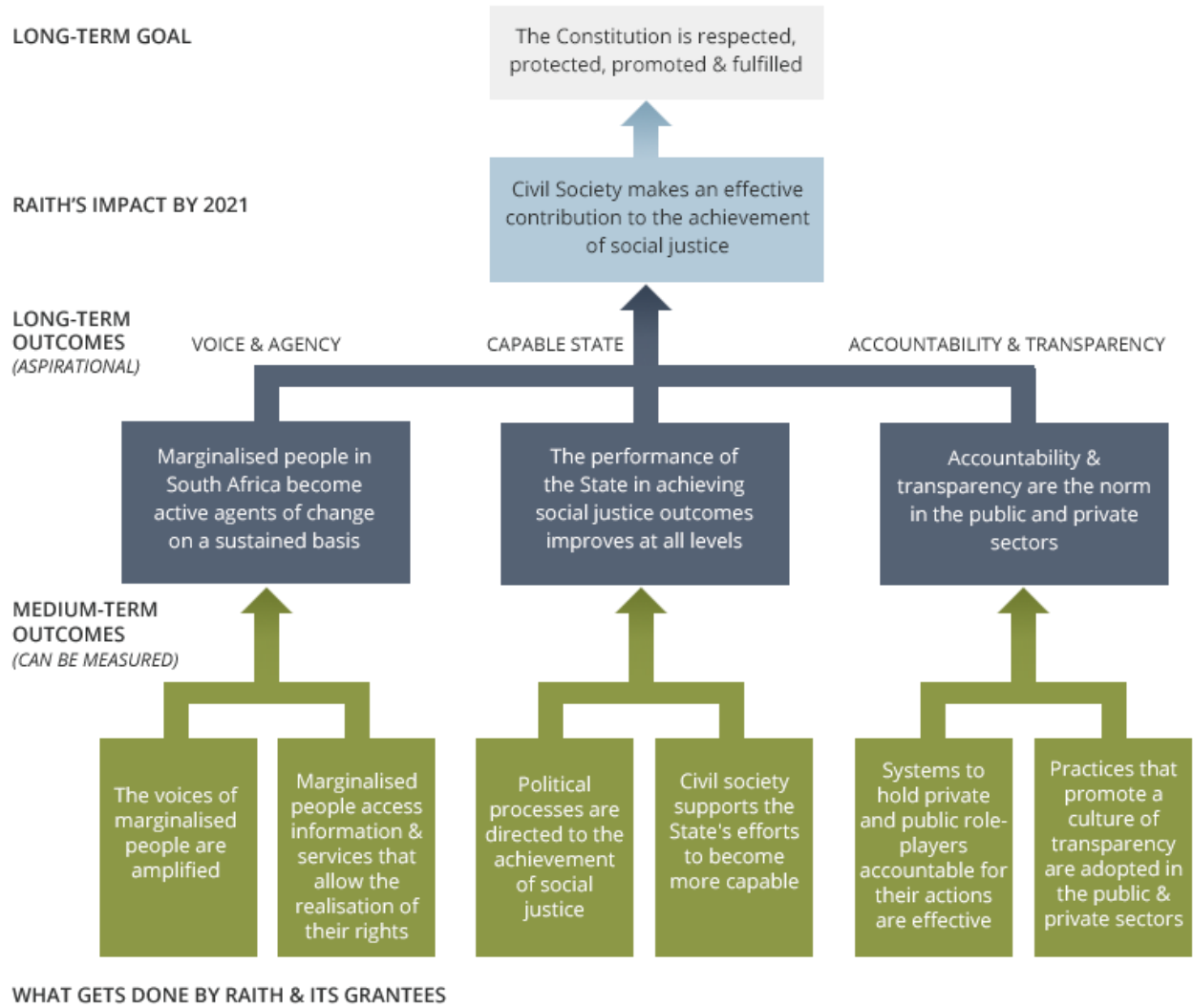


Figure 4: Illustration 2 of a Theory of Change (Raith Foundation, South Africa)

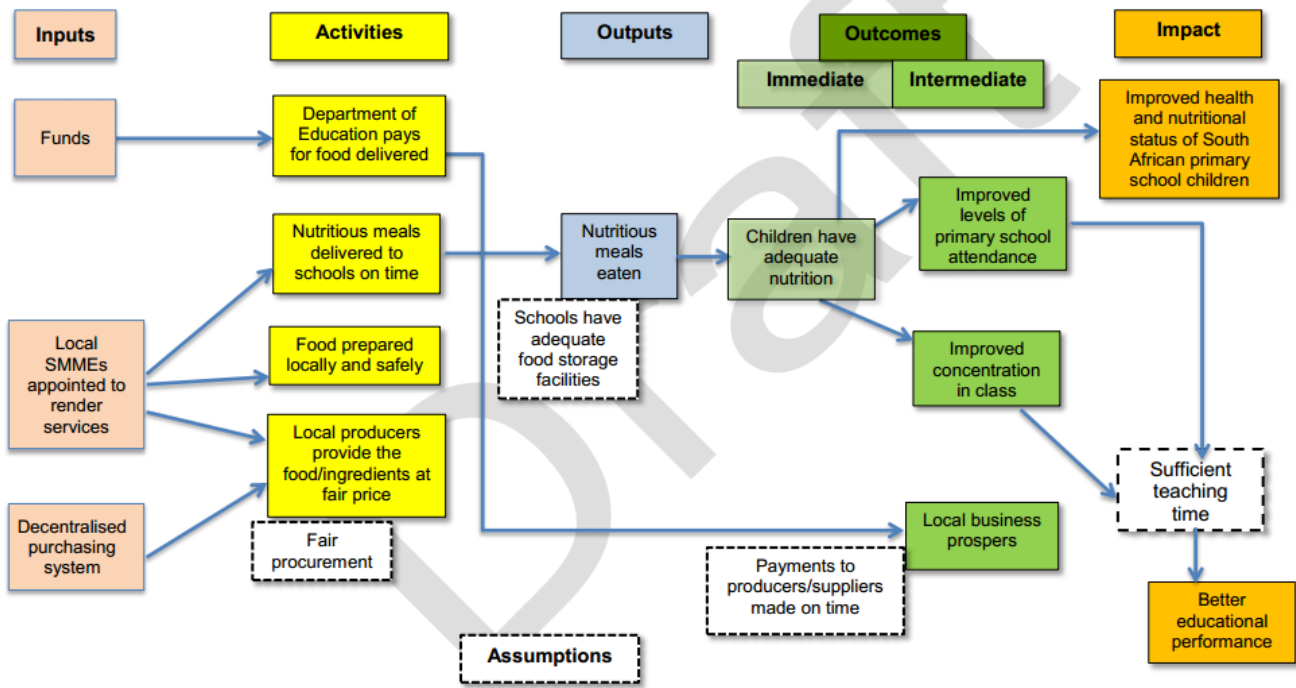


Figure 5: Illustration 3 of a Theory of Change (DPME Draft Evaluation Guideline 2.2.3, Annexure 1)

5. CONCLUSION

This concept paper has aimed to provide an overview of the Theory of Change. In doing so, it has focused on definitions and conceptualisations, origins, steps involved in developing a Theory of Change, strengths and limitations of the Theory of Change and some illustrations. The purpose of the paper is to orientate SAQA to the Theory of Change ahead of its preparations to develop Theories of Change for the NQF objectives. SAQA can draw on this information to develop an approach which will work optimally within its unique context.

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Appendix A: DPME LOGFRAME STRUCTURE

Annex 2: Logframe structure for use in plans, programmes and projects

Note if the implementation programme is a unit at a very aggregated level there may be two levels of outcomes, **intermediate** (eg changes in the systems) and **final** (eg improvements in service delivery), where **impact** would then be impacts on livelihoods.

Narrative summary	Performance indicators ⁴				Means of verification	Assumptions
	Indicator	Baseline 2010/11	Target 2011/12 (SMART)	Target 2012/13 (SMART)		
Impact (the development results of achieving specific outcomes)						
Outcome (the medium-term results for specific beneficiaries, "what we wish to achieve")						Assumptions for outcomes to lead to impacts
Outputs (the main products/services/building blocks towards achieving the outcome)						Assumptions for outputs to lead to outcomes
O1						
O2						
O3						
O4						

Activities to achieve the outputs
O1
1.1.
1.2.
O2
2.1 etc

Resource considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main implementation components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary budget for at least 3 years

⁴Performance indicators must demonstrate the scale of the programme
DPME