Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes: Using a misunderstood approach, successfully
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Input-Output-Outcome model is used extensively in the UK. Given its pervasive nature, you would think the model would help front line organisations explain their services to auditors and funders. It does not.

This paper explains why the model fails in the UK public sector, and what you can do to make it work. The paper also explains how you can change how you use the model, so it can be a much more effective model of change for you, your organisations and the people you serve.

Our findings are that the UK public sector provides almost no guidance on the richness behind the input, output, outcome, model and how the model can really be used and exploited. Worse still many examples mislead the user. As a result, anyone trying to develop Inputs, outputs and outcomes can quickly get in a muddle. The problems really start when trying to link these three components together: simply saying, outputs lead to outcomes, does not provide any method to model what can be a complex situation. You need to explain what causes change to happen. If your model does not describe change clearly, how can an external auditor judge a service, or programme?

This paper explains the origins of this approach, called “The Logic Model” in social change evaluation. Knowing this will help you define and explain the logic of your model of social change. In doing so we provide a set of simple improvements that will enhance your input-output-outcome model.

Take care though. The origins of this model lie in external evaluation. What an external body needs to assess the impact of a programme is quite different from what you need to manage that same programme. What is needed is an approach that will also help the designers and managers of a programme by providing feedback and learning on what works. The paper also explains where this fits in and how to achieve this.

It would be sensible to integrate external evaluation with the management processes the organisation uses. It makes it easier to explain to funders what they are doing, why and what works. Again we explain how this can happen.

Deeply hidden at the heart of this model is a ‘Theory of Change’. Your ‘Theory of change’ should explain how you will change the outcomes of the people you serve. To get to this model you have to step well beyond the simplistic view of input-output-outcome model. You have to explain your strategies that will bring about your change. Do this and the tools change to useful tools of outcome design and management.

Finally, the paper suggests that a significant problem with public sector change is not in the quality of thinking about change. The problem is in the way that thinking gets translated into action (and poor explanations of models actually undermine effective change). This paper cuts through this poor example to help you translate your strategy into effective organisational or social change.
1 THE CHALLENGE OF THE INPUT-OUTPUT-OUTCOME MODEL

The input-output-outcome model is used extensively in the UK public sector. The model has attractive simplicity. It is a model that allows a provider of funds, such as central government departments, to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the services of the organisations they fund. It is a model that many struggle to apply effectively.

The model can be found in UK central government bodies¹ and external assessors such as the Audit Commission and European Court of Auditors². It is regarded as good practice for most public sector front line service providers ranging from city councils and parts of the NHS to emergency services and tax collection.

Given its pervasive use, you would think it would be well understood and easy to use; that it would help front line service providers serve their communities and improve their services. You would think the model would help front line organisations explain their services to their auditors and funders. It does not!

Executives, Performance Managers and Managers with responsibility for delivering change are using the approach. They are trying to justify funding or expenditure, explain what they do to their auditors and regulators, or wanting to improve services and deliver change for their community. Wherever they sit, they are struggling to exploit this apparently simple model of inputs - outputs - outcomes. Instead of helping, this model is more likely to cause confusion and consternation.

They are very clear what they want to deliver and how: that is not the problem. The problem is that the model does not help them explain their services. It does not help them manage the delivery of their services. It does not help them improve the lives of their communities. Why? More importantly, what can you do about it? If you have been struggling, this paper will help you. This paper will explain why this apparently simple model, is so difficult to apply. It will help you exploit the model and hopefully make your life simpler.

First, this paper explains the origins of the model, contrasting how the model is described and used in the UK public sector with how it is applied elsewhere. Secondly it provides some simple techniques that will make it easier and simpler for you to use the model.

Finally, by explaining the heart of the model, and applying the model in the way we do, by turning the model inside out, we help you understand how it can be a much more effective model of change for you, and for your organisations.
2 APPARENT SIMPLICITY CAUSES PROBLEMS

The approach seems to have an attractive simplicity. Tell us what your inputs, outputs and outcomes are. They will show us your efficiency (the ratio of inputs to outputs) and your effectiveness (the ratio of output to outcomes). The inputs provide a view of economy. For this reason, in the UK, the approach is often referred to as the 3 Es model, (economy, efficiency and effectiveness).

![Diagram of Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes]

However, it is not always obvious how to apply what seems an intrinsically simple and intuitive model. We find clients often ask for help developing the Input-Output-Outcome model and preparing for questions from external auditors and regulators.

They are struggling because they have little documentation about how the approach should operate and how they should create this model. To find out what guidance the public sector was provided with, we investigated many government websites that made reference to the approach. Beyond definitions of inputs, outputs and outcomes, and some simplistic examples, the UK public sector provides almost no guidance as to how this model should be developed.

2.1 DIFFICULTIES USING THE MODEL

Auditors and central government bodies put a lot of importance on the model, so the lack of guidance is puzzling. We come across many front line organisations trying to apply the model and having difficulty using what appears to be a simple approach.

They can easily define an input, an output, or an outcome: that is simple. The problems start when linking these three components together: in making sense of what causes change to happen. They have almost no guidance on how to think through the model and link the pieces together.

Inputs are easy to define: people, money, resources, time. Outputs are relatively easy as well. However, between these two can be such a complex set of relationships that it feels as if every input influences every output. How do you untangle this to get meaning from it? How do you make it useful? Between inputs and outputs is the issue of choice of strategy, with finite resources. What skills, knowledge and capabilities need to be applied? How do they influence the outputs? How do we apply limited resources cleverly? The space between inputs and outputs causes a problem.

“Beyond definitions of inputs, outputs and outcomes, and some simplistic examples, the UK public sector provides almost no guidance as to how this model should be developed.”

“...The problems start when linking these three components together. In making sense of what causes change to happen”
They also tell us that the outcomes are difficult to define. Again, it is not that they do not know what they are trying to achieve and for whom: They are usually very clear about what they want to happen. Rather, it is the process of defining outcomes that are complicated. Outcomes for whom? By when? What about multiple beneficiaries? What about groups we influence directly, who then influence others to change? Some linkages between outputs and outcomes are strong whilst others are more tenuous. Partners and other parties also play a part. Simply saying outputs leads to outcomes, does not provide any method to model what can be a complex situation.

2.2 THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH DIFFICULTIES

As a result of this lack of guidance, we see people getting in a tremendous muddle, being confused rather than creating the clarity they seek.

We have seen the results produce diagrams that are overly simplistic pictures. Others have produced ridiculously over-complicated spaghetti charts. Neither are useful. Neither provides an understanding of how the outcomes are generated nor outputs created. Such diagrams are difficult to use and create no value.

These problems do not help program design: it does not help with the subsequent management of the project. Of course it gets worse, because external auditors and regulators want these models for their assessments.

How can an external auditor judge a service, or programme, if the model does not describe it clearly?

2.3 WE HAVE NOT FOUND IT DIFFICULT

In one case we found, you could have displayed the project diagram in A0 size and still been unable to disentangle the story of what influenced what, where, when and how. To understand the complexity, imagine several hundred arrows littering the ground. I am sure you have seen similar, though perhaps not as bad.

By asking the right questions, in the right way, about this project we were able to create a clear, intuitive picture on just two pieces of A4 paper: one page showing the intention; the second page showing progress so far. When we showed these to the project sponsor (a senior clinician) within a minute she had started validating the pictures. She wanted them for her project management meetings, so they could review and track progress easily. The model showed inputs, outputs and outcomes, but was clear and useful.

When we help clients we come at this whole problem from a different angle: the angle of the underlying strategies and mechanisms of change. It turns out this is the approach that the originators of the model also use. So, we never face the difficulties these public sector clients face. They tell us that we clarify their situation, turns seemingly complex situations into simple to understand pictures: ones that also show the inputs, outputs and outcomes. We produce models that help external bodies assess what is promised and being delivered: models that also help the organisation manage the delivery and make sure it happens.
To understand where the root of these problems lies, we first need to understand where the model comes from, who uses it, and for what purpose. As soon as you understand what these organisations are trying to do, and why, things become much clearer.

The idea of “Inputs – Outputs – Outcomes” comes from the evaluation of social change programs in the United States. It is a part (and only a part) of what is called a ‘Logic Model’. The Logic Model is part of an extensive toolset that was developed by, and is used by, fund providers and others interested in social change. It is for evaluation of programmes designed that bring about social change. This model is used by fund providers to evaluate whether they should invest their funds in a third party. It is used to see if promised outcomes are being delivered. It is also used to understand “What works”. It is used, primarily, for external evaluation.

Three organisations have established a reputation in this area for their approach: the United Way of America; the WK Kellogg Foundation; and The Innovation Network. All three are either evaluating the programmes they fund, attempting to improve the effectiveness of social change programmes as a whole, through better evaluation, or both. Each one provides extensive manuals and guidelines. All three refer to their approach as “Logic models”. They provide detailed information about how to develop inputs, outputs and outcomes, but only as a part of a much wider and richer “Logic Model” approach.

The phrase “Logic Model” gained popularity in a book about the evaluation of social change programs, the ‘Handbook of practical program evaluation’, Wholey’. This book references work going back to the 1980s. Prior to the book, within this sphere of “Program evaluation”, the Logic Model was also known as an “Impact model”. Both are a part of “Program theory”: the theory of how social change programmes deliver benefits.

Program Theory is really important in this story. It is where the program designers (not just evaluators) ask, how will we achieve these goals and how will this change come about? Program theory is looking not just at inputs, outputs and outcome, but why a program is successful. It is looking for what the literature calls “the theory of change”. The theory of change describes how the inputs will be transformed into outputs and how those outputs bring about outcomes. A theory of change is used in all these guidelines from social change evaluators. The “Theory of change” brings a whole new dimension to this model. It is the piece that the organisation being funded is focusing on.

These sources are the rich, well thought through, well trodden path that spawned the use of the input-output-outcome model by practically every public sector body in the UK. Yet in the simplistic way that the input-output-outcome model is described, you cannot easily find any references to this rich field of literature and experience. Curiously this background, the ideas of Logic models and theories of change, the rich source of information, the references, are completely missing from the UK literature. One could never tell by reading the UK public sector literature that rich thinking and well tested methodologies sit behind this deceptively simple idea: thinking and methodologies that are waiting to be applied.

“This model was created by fund providers to evaluate whether they should invest their funds and if promised outcomes were being delivered”

“Curiously this background, the ideas of Logic models and theories of change, the rich source of information, the references, are completely missing from the UK literature.”
3.1 INSIDE THE LOGIC MODEL

Let us look in more detail at the logic model. Clearly, this model is for is for the evaluation, by external bodies, of the activities of another party and the evaluation of their programs. The introduction to the WK Kellogg Logic Model paper describes the approach as:

“a blueprint for designing and conducting evaluations, either independently or with the support of an external evaluator/consultant.” ... “It is written for project directors who have direct responsibility for the ongoing evaluation of W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded projects.”

As this diagram below shows, external evaluation should answer the questions:

1) Should we fund this in the first place? Will it deliver benefits?
2) Is this program working and producing the promised outputs?
3) Are we getting value for the money we invested? Are the promised outcomes actually happening?

It is now easier to understand why the approach would be so popular for the Audit Commission and central government departments for their evaluation of the effect of the direct service providers (Hospitals, Local Government, prisons, etc) in the public sector. They clearly wanted a tool for external evaluation. However it appears they have not picked up all of the toolbox and left many important ones behind.

Programme evaluators also want to understand how and why the program is working. They want to get inside and see what works, so that the knowledge can be used elsewhere. It is more than a black box: it is not simply asking whether the funds will produce changes for peoples’ lives. The model also asks how the funds will change people’s lives. What is the theory of change?

Conclusions

A model designed for external evaluation serves quite different purposes and will have quite different characteristics from a model for internal management (such as the Balanced Scorecard or EFQM). This suggests that alternative mechanisms for establishing how a programme should be designed and managing that programme may be appropriate. Though, of course, having an approach that also serves the funds providers or external evaluators would make sense.

However the model’s origins would suggest this is not primarily a tool for internal management and programme design, but evaluation and tracking.
4 IMPROVING THE BASIC INPUT, OUTPUT, OUTCOME APPROACH

As so many people struggle with the Input-output-outcome model, let us look at the Logic Model from which they were derived to tease out some basic principles and advice that would help improve their approach. These insights in this paper come from contrasting what is described in the United Way and WK Kellogg papers, with the application of the approach as described in UK public sector documents, informed by what we find works from our perspective.

The Logic Model contains more than simply inputs outputs and outcomes. As the diagram below shows, it also includes goals, strategies, target populations and three forms of outcomes. This picture is derived from one of two such pictures within the United Way guidelines, though similar components are in the other documentation.

**The main components of the Logic model**

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4.1 DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN GOALS AND OUTCOMES

All the logic models make a clear distinction between the programme’s goals and the outcomes. Goals are what the programme is to achieve. Outcomes are the specific benefits that the beneficiaries, sometimes called the Target Population, will receive.

The Logic Model shows clearly that the whole sequence programme starts with the program’s goals, and the theories about how those goals will be met. Then the Target Population are identified. Clearly this makes sense: what are we trying to achieve with this programme and how do we believe we will achieve it, and who will be the beneficiaries? None of this subtlety seems ever to be provided in the UK literature.

An outcome should make it extremely clear who the beneficiaries are and what change will happen. This example comes from a United Way document:

> “Students in Thresher Middle school participating in music lessons will have improved music skills on their instruments”.

Not only are program goals rarely described in the UK literature they are often confused with outcomes. For instance OFWAT use this ‘Strategic priority’ of Anglian Water as examples of an outcome:

> “In 25 years we will increase the resilience and reliability of our water and wastewater services.”

Yet knowing that Strategic objectives belong to the programme and outcomes to beneficiaries, it is easy to see their mistake. Anglian Water state they want to “Increase the resilience and reliability of our water and
wastewater services”. Good. As an outcome it begs the question, who will benefit and what outcome will they receive from this increased resilience?

We have come across the same problem as in the OFWAT document, in many examples and in the practice we have encountered. This lack of a clear distinction between goals and outcomes causes all sorts of problems.

Recommendation:

Be clear about your goals as an organisation and recognise that the outcomes of beneficiaries are not the same. They are from a different perspective.

4.2 FAILING TO DEFINE THE BENEFICIARIES

We have seen a consistent problem in the application of the Logic Model in the UK public sector. This involves the outcome part of the model and structure of the outcomes. It seems intuitive that, if you are to define outcomes, you have to first define for whom those outcomes occur. You may indeed serve several different groups of beneficiaries (Target Populations) for different reasons. So, the very first question should be, ‘Who are the beneficiaries (Target Populations)?’

This stage of defining and clarifying the Target Population in any detail is very rarely stated in the UK literature. We are yet to find an example that makes this explicit as a separate stage of the process. It is left implicit. Though the literature always says that outcomes are for beneficiaries, in the examples, outcomes are usually stated with a passing reference to the beneficiary. We have rarely seen these done as lists of beneficiaries, and their particular outcomes. We have seen many examples that have failed to define them clearly.

The United Way manual explicitly starts its approach by asking for “Target populations”. They say that the Target Population should “…clearly describe the client population you are serving” and “…once you have clearly described the target populations then the strategies used to move them towards your desired outcome should make more sense”.

Benefits often occur in layers. The first (direct) beneficiary may have outcomes that ripple through to influence another set of beneficiaries further along the chain. For example, the health of an individual affects their family; the grant receiver creates hospitals (first beneficiary), that patients can come to (second beneficiary), that provides respite for their community (third beneficiary).

This seems blindingly obvious: a vital first step. When we are describing how to develop the value chain model of a strategy map, the first stage is to establish the players in the community and how they will benefit or be influenced by the organisation’s strategy. Only when you have the value chain can you start to develop the strategies and business model. The United Way approach follows the same principles. It is curious that this is not made clear in the advice provided by UK government advisors.
Recommendation:

You must have a clear idea of the beneficiaries and how they relate to one another BEFORE their outcomes are defined. Creating a clear map of the beneficiaries, and how they relate to one another, is a first step in understanding and developing the nature of the chain of outcomes and their consequences. Outcomes should be developed separately, and explicitly, for each set of beneficiaries.

4.3 OUTCOMES EVOLVE THROUGH TIME

Because a beneficiary’s outcomes evolve over time, the outcomes that the Target Population receive immediately may differ from those they gain later, and differ again from their ultimate outcomes. For instance, if a person stops smoking now, their immediate health may well improve: hopefully they will live longer. The detailed descriptions of the approach all recognise that outcomes will evolve. The Logic development process clearly shows that the evolution of outcomes for a target population should be assessed as potential short, medium and long term, outcomes.

Again, this fundamental piece of thinking is blindingly obvious when stated. Yet, it is a distinction that I have rarely seen such a distinction made in the UK literature or in practice.

Yet, our clients are smart intelligent people. They know that outcomes change and evolve. They know that the actions they take have short and long term consequences. For instance, in the NHS they clearly realise that short term cost cutting often also undermines the long term preventive initiatives that will eventually lower the fundamental cost model. Yet rarely, using the input – output – outcome model, do they show this.

Recommendation

Outcomes clearly evolve over time. They are not simply immediate. Nor are the initial effects the same as the eventual outcomes. We want change to happen over time. So it is important to be clear about and state explicitly when you expect the outcome for a beneficiary will happen, and how their outcome will evolve and change over time.

4.4 PRODUCING EVALUATION MEASURES, NOT MANAGEMENT MEASURES

All the guidelines refer to the use of performance measures. However, performance measures from the Logic Model are to evaluate the inputs, outputs and outcomes. These are clearly useful because you want to be able to show an external evaluator or funder what you are achieving. Thinking through the model and having a clear rationale for the choice of measures you propose to those evaluators will help your credibility. It will focus your attention as well.

But let us be clear: what an external body needs to assess the impact of a programme, is quite different from what you need to manage that same programme. You have a much more detailed focus on the internal
workings, to ensure that things are being done in the right way, and the ‘leading indicators’ are looking good well before the outputs are even produced and the outcomes start to happen.

Having said that, this is primarily a model for external evaluation, it should be obvious that preparing yourself for that evaluation and thinking through things, from the external evaluator’s perspective, is extremely sensible. The WK Kellogg model development guide agrees:

“Most of the value in a logic model is in the process of creating, validating, and modifying the model ... The clarity of thinking that occurs from building the model is critical to the overall success of the program”

Recommendation

Evaluation measures are useful for an external evaluator. They are useful, but not sufficient, for internal management. Internally, management need a far richer and more sophisticated set of measures than the external evaluators. For internal management, a separate, more rigorous, approach (such as the Balanced Scorecard) is needed to design and develop performance indicators and measures.

4.5 EVALUATION INCLUDES “WHAT WORKS?”

Does the approach have any internal management roles? WK Kellogg explicitly say the approach should also help the managers of a program by providing feedback and learning about what works. They say,

“Although evaluation is useful to document impact and demonstrate accountability, it should also lead to more effective programs, greater learning opportunities, and better knowledge of what works”

The United Sun Logic Model manual builds on this, saying:

“The logic model and its processes facilitate thinking, planning and communication about program planning and its actual accomplishments”. “... focused on outcomes-based funding, the logic model provides an effective framework for program planning and outcome measurement reporting and can be utilized to inform allocation decisions.”

The external evaluator does want to know about the activities that are being undertaken. They are interested in “What works” and not just “whether it works”. Of course, that should be audit good practice: looking for lessons learnt that can be applied elsewhere.

What is clear though, despite the side benefits, this Logic model is primarily a tool of external evaluation. It is NOT a tool of internal management.
**Recommendations**

_This is not a management model. This is primarily a model of external evaluation used by funders to understand how their funds will be used for change; and to explain and demonstrate that the changes (outcomes) happened._

_Of course, it would be sensible to integrate the Logic model elements with whatever management processes the organisation uses, because this will help them explain to their funders what they are doing, why and what works._

**4.6 WHAT LINKS THE INPUTS AND OUTPUTS?**

The critical piece in our minds has always been the links between the inputs, outputs and outcomes. Where the model fails most dramatically is in its lack of understanding of what links the inputs to outputs and the outputs to outcomes: the strategies and actions.

In the UK we see very little emphasis on the links between these pieces. All the emphasis is on the pieces themselves; counting the inputs, looking at the outputs and assessing the outcomes. Yet these linkages are where things happen. Fail to understand them and you fail to have any depth of reality in the model.

The approach we have always used with clients takes the view that the arrows between the boxes are just as important as the boxes, if not more so. How is this tackled in the Logic Model and Theory of Change.

In the WK Kellogg Logic Model guide, the emphasis is also on the activities (or what United Way call strategies) that link the inputs and outputs. This asks such questions as, “How are these inputs being deployed?” A good example is this piece from United Way which clearly shows a) Strategies that require b) inputs, that c) feed activities, d) that create outputs etc. They say,

_“Clearly strategies, and activities that support them, help here. I would add that a diagnosis of the strategy and the problem it is designed to address would also aid clarity at this point.”_

Again this is backed up in the WK Kellogg manual

_“If program planners don’t have any hypotheses guiding them, their potential for learning from the initiative is low, and the program is probably in trouble”_

I cannot resist highlighting the words **strategy** and **hypothesis**. It is clear that different strategies for the deployment of resources will create either quite different outcomes or quite different qualities of outcome. Also, it is the strategy that determines the types of activities. So there appears to be a clear and explicit
assessment of strategies (and choices going in here – not simply counting inputs and assessing what outputs are created.

**Conclusion**

*It is not about the boxes (inputs, outputs, outcomes), but the links between inputs outputs and outcomes are far more important. Merely defining the inputs, outputs and outcomes is clearly inadequate. Moreover it is likely to lead to failure as a management model and lack insight as an evaluator’s model. Instead, you need a hypothesis about how change will happen, that these strategies (change model) will address.*

“The links between inputs outputs and outcomes are far more important... you need a hypothesis about how change will happen”
5 A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF PROGRAMME DESIGN

It is clear this ‘program evaluation model’ is far richer than even the Logic Model. In fact even the Logic Model is not the place to start. Rather you need to go two steps back to the Theory of Change and the strategies that will bring about change.

Having studied the various guidelines, and thought through how we use the similar approach with our clients. The diagram below shows the program, not simply from the evaluator’s perspective, but from the perspective of the organisation designing and managing the programme of change.

The approach is to develop your theory of change, and then (and only then) to extract the components for the Logic Model and for external evaluation. This would seem to come as a dramatic revelation to most who have read or applied the UK Public sector version of the simplistic Input, output, outcome model.

The diagram below shows the approach from the programme designer’s perspective. Here you can clearly see that further components support the model: goals, a strategy, a theory of change, and hypotheses about how outcomes will come about. If you have ever tried to create inputs outputs and outcomes they are the missing pieces that help you link them together. They are the hypotheses about how change will happen, the Theory of Change, the strategies for change that will be employed.

The full picture of Programme Design & Evaluation

“You need to go two steps back to the Theory of Change and the strategies that will bring about change”
5.1 LOGIC MODELS AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

From the perspective of the organisation designing and running the programme, let us look at the “Theory of change” in more detail. What is the difference between the Logic Model and the “Theory of change”?

In “Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart”\(^\text{12}\), Helene Clark suggests that, whilst logic models describe the activities of change, they are NOT theories of change that have a hypothesis about how change will happen. This seems a subtle distinction, but is really important. She describes (my emphasis):

Logic models:
- Usually start with a program and illustrate its components
- Graphically illustrate program components, and creating one helps stakeholders clearly identify outcomes, inputs and activities

Whereas, Theories of Change:
- Link outcomes and activities to explain HOW and WHY the desired change is expected to come about
- May start with a program, but are best when starting with a goal, before deciding what programmatic approaches are needed

This is an important distinction. Are we explaining a programme that has already been set up? Are we thinking through how to achieve a goal and designing a programme? They are quite different questions.

Conclusion

This distinction becomes more important when we come to realise that the Logic Model is loved by auditors and external evaluators, (as would be fit its origins as a program evaluation tool). It is not a tool of analysis, construction, or hypothesis and strategy development; rather it is a tool that is more often applied AFTER strategies and hypotheses have been developed.

We need a process which develops a theory of change from which a logic model can be extracted, so how you manage and what the auditors want, fit together seamlessly. We need an approach that distinguishes between program design and program evaluation. Fortunately we have that.

5.2 CONSTRUCTING A PROGRAM THEORY

The WK Kellogg paper makes an extremely clear distinction between program evaluation and program design. In its Logic Model Development Guide, they offer a Logic Model development template for developing a ‘Theory of change logic model’ to apply when designing a programme. They say,

“Successful programs create change and are built on a solid knowledge of what works – your program’s theory.”
The emphasis is on developing models and theories of change, testing them and finding out what works; then spreading that experience far and wide to create further social change.

Only later do subsequent chapters set out how you move to the logic model (inputs: outputs: outcomes) to plan for evaluation. In other words, having identified your goals, developed a theory of change and designed your programme, then, and only then, do you need to extract the components for the logic model’s external evaluation.

The WK Kellogg Logic Model guidelines, provides a “Theory of change template” to help you work through the components of the model. The figure below shows their “Logic model development program planning template”. As soon as you see this Theory of change template you realise where many of the missing pieces are. They are all, pretty much, in this model. As WK Kellogg say,

“It is essential to start program design with the basics”

They define the basics as completing a six part model as shown below. Of course this model does not tell you what the theories of change are, nor does it tell you what strategies to apply. What it does provide is a framework within which to capture these elements and from which you can develop the Logic Model. From the Logic Model you can ultimately choose the inputs, outputs and outcomes. The model is turned on its head.

**WK Kellogg: Logic Development Planning Model**

![Diagram of the WK Kellogg Logic Development Planning Model]

As soon as you see this Theory of change template you realise where many of the missing pieces are.”
As a Programme Evaluator, it is clear that if you want to understand “What works” and apply those lessons elsewhere, you need this level of understanding of the proposed programme and the hoped for outcomes.

As a Programme Designer or Manager, you need this level of understanding to manage your program to a successful conclusion. It is fundamental design. It is just a great shame that these models are so hidden behind the input - output - outcome model.

Conclusion

This is the place to start. Just as with any strategy or design the approach is to think through the goals and problems and people’s needs, before getting into mere detail like measures and indicators of success.

“As with any strategy or design the approach is to think through the goals and problems and people’s needs, before getting into mere detail like measures and indicators of success”
6 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

As a strategy and transformation consultancy our interest in is helping transform organisations so they are more effective. It is apparent that deep behind the input-output-outcome model is a framework designed to help organisations design, manage and bring about social change.

6.1 THE RICHNESS OF STRATEGIC CHANGE

Finding such a rich model in the middle of this approach may surprise many people: it does not surprise us. Behind the simplistic facade there is a rich and well thought through approach. It is an approach that helps evaluators establish whether funds will (and are) be used appropriately and whether lives will be (and are) changed.

It is an approach that also helps those being evaluated to explain their strategies, make choices about how to achieve their goals and make it easy for their evaluators to understand what is going on. It is an approach that should help both parties to work out “What works”. “This is an approach that the organisation, external evaluators and the target population will benefit from: a win-win-win”.

6.2 THE REALITY OF SIMPLISTIC DESCRIPTIONS

What stands out is the shockingly simplistic way the input-output-outcome model is explained in the literature issued by various UK bodies and auditors. One would think you simply created inputs outputs and outcomes. As we have seen, of course you don’t.

The simplistic way in which this model is described is appalling. We find this with other models that are described in the public sector literature. Reading the literature on the Balanced Scorecard you would, like this model, think it was merely a way of collecting measures in perspectives. Their approach to risk is similarly simplistic.

In reality there is a deep change model which describes strategy and provides a systematic way for executives and teams to manage their strategy, learning from it as they progress. Again this is hard to tell. There is a tendency to describe models in simplistic terms, thereby removing all their richness and therefore their effectiveness.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

Some might suggest that this simplistic approach is how auditors and external evaluators see such change: “Simply give me the performance measures, so I can see what you are doing and evaluate your efficiency and effectiveness”. We disagree. To say this would be unfair to the many sensible and constructive auditors I have met.

External auditors and program evaluators want the programmes they evaluate to be more effective. They want change to succeed. They want to pass on that information to others.
Merely focusing on inputs outputs and outcomes will not achieve this. Going further and applying the externally focussed logic model is only part of the picture. Only through also understanding the goals, theories of change, strategies and other components of the Logic Planning Development Model, will a full picture be available. The theory of change is as important for external assessors as it is for internal management.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AND MANAGERS OF CHANGE

Yes, this is primarily a tool for external evaluation. It is a tool for looking at the organisation or programme of change from the outside in. That is why inputs, outputs and outcomes are so useful.

At its core this model has many pieces useful for the design of programmes of change: the Logic Model, the Theory of Change and the Logic Development Planning Model. These pieces will help the managers to design a better programme of change. They will also help them to manage and deliver the programme better.

Importantly, they will provide the information that auditors and external evaluators are looking for, as a by-product. The work is not merely serving the external evaluators, but will also help the management and delivery of the programmes internally. This is a win-win.

To achieve this requires that the approach is started, not from the outside in, but from the inside out. It is achieved by conducting a sensible and thorough programme design: then, and only then, providing the external pieces that result from effective design. The way to develop inputs, outputs and outcomes is to turn the model inside out. They are the last pieces that are produced.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR HOW CHANGE IS MANAGED IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why creating change in the public sector is so difficult. The models only focus on the inputs, outputs and outcomes, not the mechanisms and strategies for change. As a consequence, they are merely describing the effect of they want to happen, rather than having a clear strategy for delivering change: whether that is within the organisation or within the community. Using this approach simplistically means you are not thinking about the deeper, underlying cause and effect, hypotheses, analysis or goals that bring about change.

This is not a problem of quality of thinking. I know plenty of experts in the public sector who do have clear views of how change should occur.

This suggests the problem with public sector change is not in the quality of thinking about change: rather the problem is in the way that thinking gets translated into action. Only by understanding the tools in a deeper, richer way, can we hope to properly describe how change should occur and manage that change successfully. That way we can improve public sector provision and improve the lives of the communities we serve. That surely is the objective.
Thank you for taking the time to read this case study. We are happy to talk about what you found and the potential implications for your organisation’s strategy and the outcomes for the people you serve.

Now you have some of the insights our thinking, approach and how we create implement strategy and change in organisations and their communities.

To find out more, or to have a conversation about how performance management could be improved in your organisation, simply send us an email or pick up the phone.

A Niche Consultancy

We are a niche consultancy. We specialise in Fourth Generation Balanced Scorecards that improve how you manage strategy and performance. We are experts in making Balanced Scorecards work as a tool of strategy and performance. We help you to manage such organisations better, so you can get the best out of your people and measurably improve your financial performance and results.

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We want to pass our skills to you, our clients, as quickly and effectively as possible. That way you get sustainable results and we get a good reference site. We don’t hold back. We ask hard questions and push our clients to uncover and address the deeper elements that stop performance happening. Deep expertise: Our skills are based on practical experience and research, so you can improve and develop.

For more information

For more information or to have an informal discussion about your needs, call Excitant directly and ask for Phil Jones. The number is 08456 809 208 (in the UK) or from outside the UK +44 1780 784 887. Or send our Managing Director, Phil Jones, an email via info@excitant.co.uk, Thanks.

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