Success Works Guide to Project Logic

Success Works uses Project Logic as a key process in all of our evaluations. Sometimes project logic is also useful for strategic planning or in order to build understanding and consensus around a program or initiative.

Project Logic unpacks the logic underpinning the program or project that is being evaluated – not the evaluation itself. The Project Logic identifies 'what they were thinking when they designed this program or initiative'.

In evaluation, the reason for developing a Project Logic is to be clear about the activities, outputs and expected outcomes of the program, particularly the short term outcomes. It is not possible to evaluate a program based on its long term outcomes (as they are too far away and there are too many other factors that will impede their achievement). Nevertheless, the Project Logic depicts the logical flow from short to medium to long term outcomes. Short term outcomes should be possible to investigate as part of the evaluation. Once identified, the outputs and short term outcomes become the foundation for the evaluation questions.

This guide describes each of the components of a Project Logic as we use them at Success Works.

Components of a Project Logic

Context

This describes the context for the project or program in summary form. The context is the situation the Department or agency found itself in that made it necessary or important for the program to be developed. For example:

- Ageing population
- High levels of service demand
- High levels of staff turnover
- Poor outcomes for client group

It is important to understand and document the context as part of the Project Logic this can become a subject for the evaluation itself, eg was the understanding of the context correct?

Were there other factors in the context that were not identified or considered when the program was developed?

Inputs

These are the things that 'come into' the program or project, i.e., staff, skills, guidelines, funding, training, pre-existing relationships, technology etc. Inputs are typically:

- Human resources –staff, consultants, customers
- Financial resources – grants, budget
- Capital resources – space, buildings, offices
- Technology – computer hardware and software, communications equipment
- Materials – office supplies, consumables
- Knowledge – pre-existing research or knowledge that led to the development of the initiative or program, guidelines
- Relationships – pre-existing networks and relationships
- Skills and training – the pre-existing skills of the people who will be involved in the program

Program Activities

These are the things that are funded by the initiative, i.e. what they actually do. Activities are the actions that are needed to implement the program. Another way to think about it is to think about what the money for the program or initiative is being spent on – ie what is being done with the money? The aim is to identify exactly what is being funded by this specific program or what it is that they do with the funding and other inputs provided. Typical activities are:

- Individual case management
- Group programs
- Product development
- Provision of services
- Staff training
- Policy advocacy
- Building capacity
- Grant funding

Outputs

These are the things that are produced by the program activities. They are generally countable and form the basis of the major quantitative data questions for a program evaluation. Outputs are the direct products of the program or initiative. Outputs can include things like:

- Number of participants
- Number of programs operated
- Percentage of clients completing the program
- Number of agencies involved
- Number of products developed
- Number of agencies funded

It is important that outputs can be linked directly back to the activities of the program or initiative and vice versa, that each activity can be linked to an output – if there is no clear link you are either missing an activity or need to remove the output from the Project Logic.

It is also important to note that an output is not a target. It should not include specific numbers or expectations. If the output is about increasing or decreasing something, express it as such (Increased participants, increased percentage of clients completing the program).

Short term outcomes

Outcomes are the changes that the program or initiative is intended to achieve.

Short term outcomes are the things that the subjects of the program or project are expected to do immediately after the program or project as a direct result of their involvement. They are not directly within the control of the program or project (these would be outputs) but are the immediate changes that the program is trying to make for its subjects. The idea is that if the program is being delivered effectively, the short term outcomes can be hoped for. Outcomes are therefore subject focused rather than focused on the program or project. Examples include:

- Clients develop new relationships
- Clients obtain knowledge
- Participants develop skills
- Agencies develop protocols
- Agencies implement programs

It is important that the short term outcomes identify changes that are directly attributable to the activities of the program or initiative. They should also be demonstrable within a short timeframe. They should be written in terms of the change that is expected to be demonstrated.

For client based programs directed towards change it is important to remember changes in behaviour are preceded by changes in attitude and that attitudes are changed through the acquisition of new knowledge. In the short term one might expect to find changes in knowledge, in the medium term, changes in attitude and behaviour and in the long term changed behaviour and practices.

Medium term outcomes

These are the changes that are assumed to take place after the achievement of the short term outcomes. Again they are subject focused but may include a broader range of subjects than just those who participated in the program activities (if the program or project is assumed to make changes that will apply to the broader population). Medium term outcomes include the leaps of faith that expose the underlying logic, They expose what the program designers want to happen as a result of the program (not necessarily what will happen). Examples include:

- Clients change their attitudes and behaviour
- Agencies work together effectively
- Participants share their knowledge with others

Medium term outcomes are not generally measured as part of an evaluation because they will be impacted by a variety of other factors and it is difficult to isolate the actual impact of the initiative or program. However it is sometimes possible to identify that the changes expected are happening, particularly if the evaluation takes place over an extended period.

Long term outcomes

These are the ultimate goals of the program. They are the changes the program designers want to see in the world as a result of their program. They are often contained within the program documents and descriptions. Generally there should be no more than one or two long term outcomes. Examples include:

- Lower rates of recidivism
- Lower rates of alcohol and drug use
- Improved health
- Intergenerational cycle of abuse broken

By definition, these outcomes are not within the control of the program and are not measurable. They are linked to the program by hypothesis and logic only. They are included in the project logic as a way of demonstrating the link between the outputs and short term outcomes and the issue the program designers wanted to influence.

Assumptions

Underlying assumptions are also documented as part of a Project Logic. The aim is to document and expose all of the written and unwritten assumptions that went into the design of the program which are implicit within the Project Logic. The assumptions too need to be part of the evaluation, i.e. to what degree were the assumptions correct? The assumptions will often guide the development of a project model or the program delivery, and where the outcomes have or have not been found to have been achieved, it might be necessary to revisit the assumptions to see if they were valid.

Evaluation Questions

In an evaluation, the final stage of working with the Project Logic is to develop the evaluation questions. Evaluation questions are the questions the evaluators ask of the evaluation data. They are not the questions asked in interviews or focus groups.

The form of the questions depends on the nature of the evaluation.

- For formative evaluation the evaluation questions should start "What has been learnt about …?"
- For process evaluation the evaluation questions should start "In what way…?
- For summative evaluation the evaluation questions should start "To what extent…?"

The questions are formed from the:

- Outputs
- Short term outcomes.

Questions should also be based on the Context and Assumptions. The starting point for these questions should be "Was the understanding that XX is the case correct based on this evaluation?" Validation for the context and assumptions may also come from the literature review.

SuccessWorks

Name of Project

Context:

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes

Assumptions: