

THEORY OF CHANGE



Purpose and focus

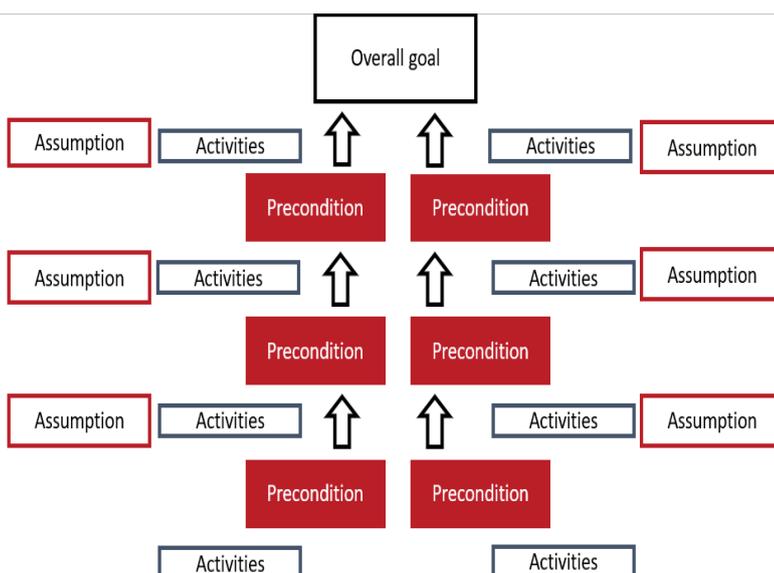
Theory of Change (ToC) is an approach to **planning, learning, reflection, monitoring** and **documentation of change**. Focus is on what we believe will change – not what activities we are planning to implement. ToC is built around a narrative about how we think change will happen. You start with the desired change and then work backwards. It is a theory in the sense that it represents the best idea about how we can support change. We can continuously test these ideas and improve them so that they are strengthened along the way.

Main concepts and steps in planning



1. **Analytical preparatory work:** context-, problem-, stakeholder-, and goal analyses.
2. **Objectives:** the change we hope to see after project implementation as well as the desired change in behaviour among relevant stakeholders.
3. **Preconditions:** a change/condition that must exist or be established in order to achieve our goal. A precondition must exist to be able to make the next step in our pathway (see below).
4. **Assumptions:** an expectation about how one conditions leads to another.
5. **Activities** are necessary to be able to achieve the preconditions.
6. **Critical assumptions** provide a helicopter perspective on our pathway and theory of change. They describe the most essential assumptions that needs to be monitored throughout the project.
7. **Narrative** that describes how we expect the change will happen. It explains the pathway narratively.

Pathway: logical chains of preconditions (step 2-4)



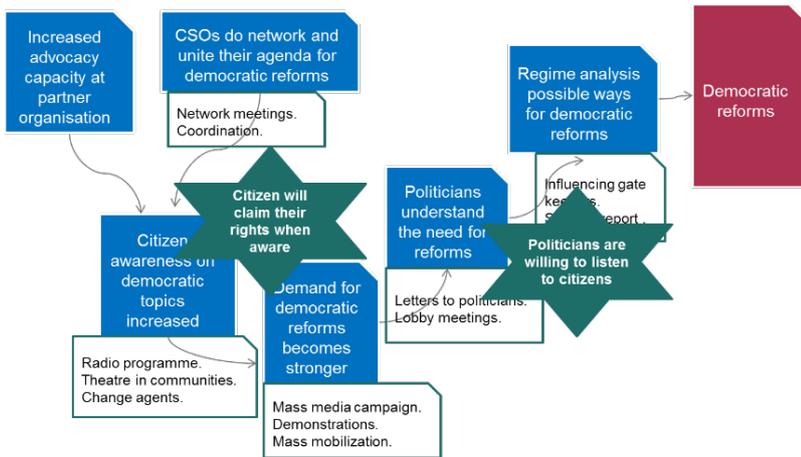
Start by describing the overall, long-term **goal** – what change do you want to see after the project has been completed?

Identify the **preconditions** (smaller changes) that are needed to achieve the goal. They are formulated as a new situation and not as an activity. Develop logical chains of changes that will lead to the overall desired change.

Formulate **assumptions** that explain what we expect to happen between each precondition. How reaching one precondition leads to the next precondition.

When preconditions and assumptions have been formulated, you can describe what **activities** are needed to achieve the preconditions.

Critical assumptions (step 5)



Look at your pathway from a helicopter perspective and see if there are overall assumptions that are essential for the theory. Some assumptions might be related, and you can then choose to formulate an overall critical assumption for them.

The critical assumptions are monitored during implementation to indicate if the theory proves to be correct. Otherwise, you will have to change the theory.

Narrative (step 6)

The theory of change is summarised in a narrative:

1. Start by describing the desired long-term change.
2. Describe what needs to be changed (preconditions).
3. Describe why you believe that it works. Explain the logic behind the chain of preconditions. This can e.g. be done by using words such as 'if', 'then' and 'because'.
4. Formulate the critical assumptions that will be monitored during implementation.

Narrative example

If Jacob buys a new bike, trains his daughter to run the bike, prepare the organising around biking to school, and at the same time motivates his daughter to bike to achieve greater freedom and independence – he will be saving time and earning more money while his daughter at the same time will be healthier and happier and have more social time with her friends.

Benefits

- ToC is a good tool for describing the strategy behind development projects.
- ToC focuses to a greater extent on changes than activities.
- There is a strong focus on continuous learning and early attention to 'incorrect' assumptions.
- ToC shows the complexity of reality better than other tools.
- ToC can also be used in connection with other project- and monitoring tools and methods.

Limitations

- ToC is not as structured as an approach like e.g. Logical Framework Approach or Outcome Mapping.
- It cannot be used for detailed planning of the project.
- The method demands a lot in relation to continuous testing of ones theory and to actively go and change it.