

Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart

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Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart

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TOC vs. Logic Models! What a headache!

- Terms often used interchangeably
- Confusion by funders and grantees about expectations
- Limited knowledge on how to use
- TOC and LMs can “blend” into each other

...but it is worth the trouble to figure this out...

- Yet, funders almost all demand one or the other
- Both can greatly improve program design and evaluation (but in different ways)

So what's the problem?

- Everyone talking about TOCs and LMs, but not meaning the same thing
- Grantees being penalized by confusion when funders not sure
- Underuse of their power to improve programs
- Neither term is clearly defined in literature

So, let's set the record straight ...

Logic Model - United Way format is most widespread

Theory of Change – less standardized, but has core components

..and for the history buff: Logic Models

- 30 year history
- Clear identification of goals (outcomes)
- First widespread attempt to depict program components so that activities matched outcomes

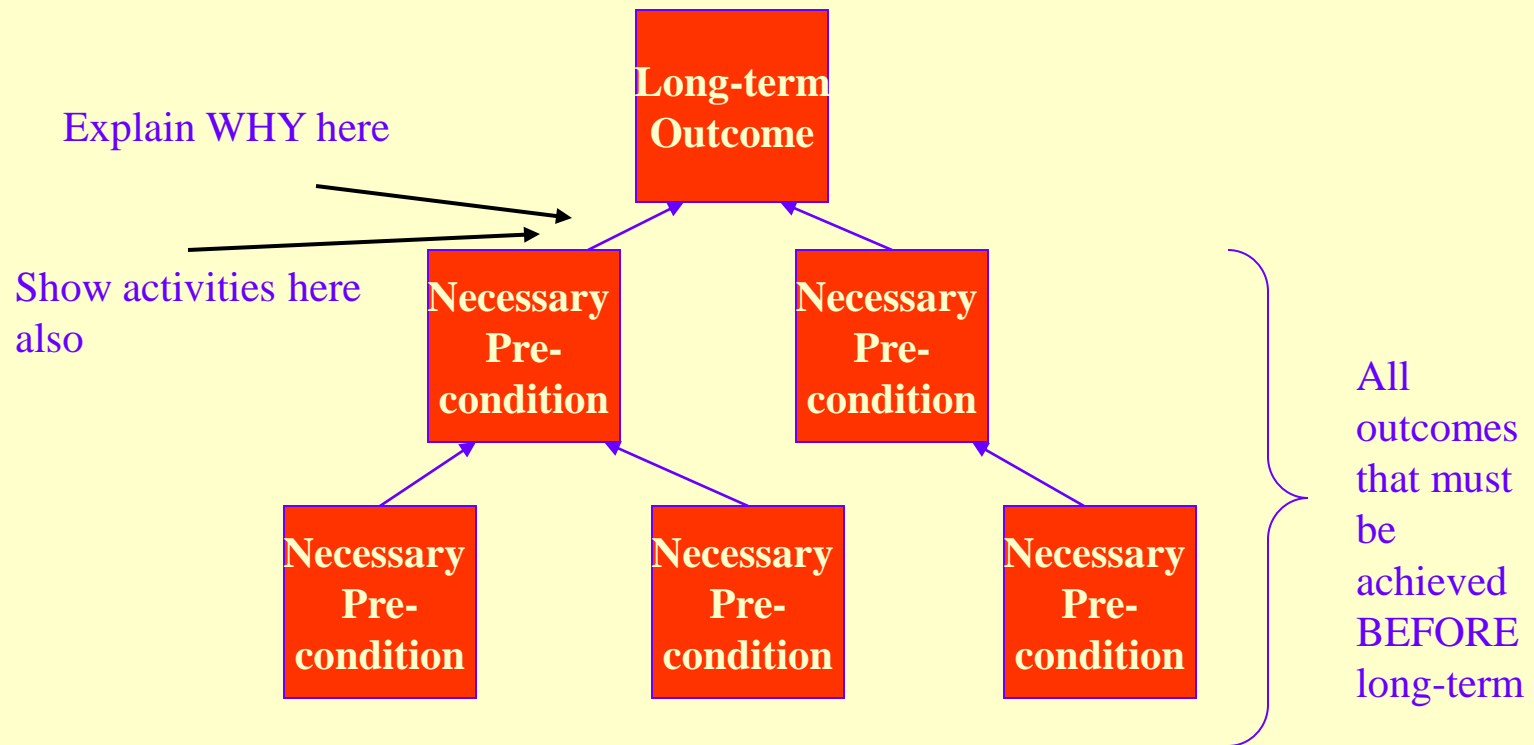
What is a logic model?

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Inter- mediate Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes

Theories of Change

- Popularized in 1990s to capture complex initiatives
- Outcomes-based
- Causal model
- Articulate underlying assumptions

What is a Theory of Change?



Let's Look at an Example

[Project Superwomen](#)

How are they different?

Logic models graphically illustrate program components, and creating one helps stakeholders clearly identify outcomes, inputs and activities

Theories of Change link outcomes and activities to explain HOW and WHY the desired change is expected to come about

How are they different?

(1)

Logic Models *usually* start with a program and illustrate its components

Theories of Change may start with a program, but are best when starting with a goal, before deciding what programmatic approaches are needed

How are they different?

(2)

Logic Models **require identifying program components**, so you can see at a glance if outcomes are out of sync with inputs and activities, but they don't show **WHY** activities are expected to produce outcomes

Theories of Change **also require justifications** at each step – you have to articulate the hypothesis about why something will *cause* something else (it's a causal model, remember!)

How are they different?

(3)

Logic Models don't always identify indicators
(evidence to measure whether outcomes are
met or not)

Theories of Change require identifying indicators

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

How are they different?

Because, you need to know HOW WELL a precondition needs to be met in order to get to the next goal.

What does that mean?

Example: How often do students need to attend the after-school program in order for their reading tests scores to improve?

How are they different?

A Logic Model would tell you that the after school program is an activity and improved reading scores is an outcome. It might tell you that attendance at the after school program is an intermediate outcome.

How are they different?

But it wouldn't tell you that:

“students need to attend after-school programs at least 3 days per week for a minimum of 60 days, and the curricula must focus on love of reading and literacy, IN ORDER FOR test scores to rise”

How are they different?

Summary

Logic Models	Theories of Change
Representation	Critical Thinking
List of Components	Pathway of Change
Descriptive	Explanatory

When to Use?

Logic Models are great when you need to:

- Show someone something they can understand at a glance
- Demonstrate you have identified the basic inputs, outputs and outcomes for your work
- Summarize a complex theory into basic categories

When to Use?

Theories of Change are best when you need to:

- Design a complex initiative and want to have a rigorous plan for success
- Evaluate appropriate outcomes at the right time and the right sequence
- Explain why an initiative worked or did not work, and what exactly went wrong

It's obvious by now:

Theories of Change are a lot of work and take time.

On the other hand, Logic Models are often too simplistic to be helpful.....

So, can we have the best of both worlds?

We suggest,

Undertake a TOC process that is a manageable scope for your organization. Make sure you get stakeholders to articulate what has to happen IN ORDER for goals to be met and their assumptions about why....



Then,

Summarize your theory in ways that serve the purposes of your different constituents, such as residents, funders, Boards, etc.

A Logic Model that is a summary of an underlying theory is a much more powerful tool.