Outcome Mapping

INTRAC

Outcome Mapping focuses on changes in the behaviour of the people, groups and organisations influenced by a programme. Like the logical framework, it is a planning methodology that has implications for how monitoring and evaluation is conducted. However, Outcome Mapping is designed to deal with complexity, and is not based around linear models of change.

Outcome Mapping was originally developed by the International Development Research Centre in Canada, and the first comprehensive Outcome Mapping manual was produced in 2001. Outcome Mapping seeks to identify and assess changes in the behaviour of people, groups and organisations with which a programme works directly. It does not seek to prove causality or attribution for those changes, but instead attempts to show logical linkages between the changes and a programme's activities, thereby enabling a programme's contribution to change to be understood (Earl et. al., 2001)

Outcome Mapping is a participatory planning methodology, although it has implications for how monitoring and evaluation is conducted. It is based on principles of participation and purposefully includes those implementing a programme in both design and data collection so as to encourage ownership and the use of findings. It was designed to be a *"consciousness-raising, consensus-building, and empowerment tool for those working within a development programme"* (ibid, p4).

Some people use the complete Outcome Mapping methodology, whilst others apply only some of its elements and principles. Outcome Mapping forms part of a portfolio of tools and methodologies that address complexity, and increasingly are being seen as alternatives to the more linear, measurement-based models of the logical framework and results-based management.

How it works

Outcome Mapping is designed to be used at the beginning of a programme, after the main focus of that programme has been decided. There are three key stages to planning an outcome map (ibid, p3).

1. The first stage, *Intentional Design*, helps a programme establish consensus on the changes it aims to help bring about, and plan the strategies it will use. It helps answer four questions:

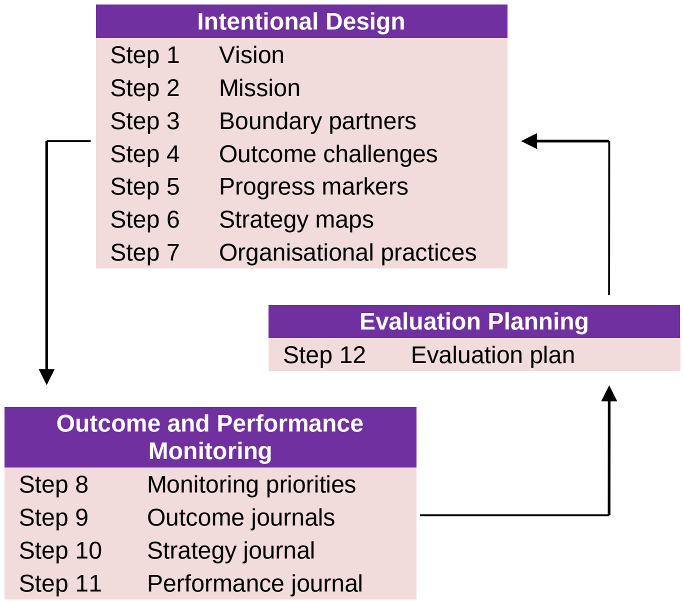
    - what is the vision to which the programme wants to contribute?
    - who are the programme's boundary partners?
    - what are the changes that are being sought?
    - how will the programme contribute to the change process?

2. The second stage, *Outcome and Performance Monitoring*, provides a framework for the ongoing monitoring of the programme's actions and the boundary partners' progress toward the achievement of 'outcomes'. Monitoring is based largely on self-assessment.

3. The third stage, *Evaluation Planning*, helps the programme identify evaluation priorities and develop an evaluation plan.

These key stages, and the steps within them, are summarised in the following diagram. Each of the individual steps are designed to be addressed at the planning stage, using a participatory process, and wherever possible involving a full range of stakeholders. A brief explanation of the individual steps of Outcome Mapping is contained below.

(Note that these explanations are taken directly from the Outcome Mapping manual produced by Earl et. al. in 2001. Interested readers should access that manual for a more complete explanation of each stage, and a set of workshop exercises that can be used to facilitate Outcome Mapping.)

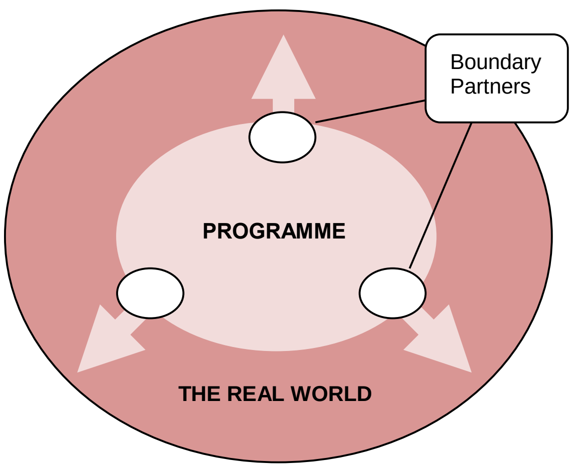


Note that although the steps are all designed to be used at the planning stage, they also set the scene for how monitoring and evaluation will be conducted later on. For example, journals may be developed that will later be used for ongoing monitoring.

Firstly, a vision is developed (STEP 1) that reflects the large-scale development-related changes that the programme hopes to encourage. It describes economic, political, social, or environmental changes that the programme hopes to help bring about. The programme's activities should contribute to the vision, but not be solely responsible for achieving it.

Next, a mission statement is developed (STEP 2) that describes how the programme intends to support the vision. The mission statement states the areas in which the programme will work towards the vision, but does not list all the activities which the programme will carry out.

Then boundary partners are identified (STEP 3). These are the individuals, groups, or organisations with which the programme interacts directly and where there will be opportunities for influence (see diagram below). Boundary partners may be individual organisations but might also include multiple individuals, groups, or organisations if a similar change is being sought across many different groups (for example, research centres or women's NGOs).



In STEP 4 an outcome challenge statement is developed for each boundary partner. It describes how the behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of an individual, group, or institution will change if the programme is extremely successful. Outcome challenges are phrased in a way that emphasises behavioural change.

A set of progress markers are then identified (STEP 5) for each boundary partner. These are visible, behavioural changes ranging from the minimum one would *expect to see* the boundary partners doing as an early response to the programme, to what it would *like to see,* and finally to what it would *love to see* them doing if the programme were having a profound influence.

These progress markers (see example) represent changes that are easily measureable, and would show if progress is being made towards the desired outcomes of the programme. They are designed to show progress as a body of markers, rather than as individual indicators which are more common in the logical framework approach.

Expect to see partner ...	• undertaking training to interact with communities better • inviting communities to contribute opinions • visiting communities in the field on a regular basis
Like to see partner ...	• developing policies and protocols for engaging with communities • receiving and discussing comments from community groups • regularly meeting to consider communities' opinions and comments • making amendments to projects based on community feedback
Love to see partner ...	• developing projects and programmes alongside communities • inviting community representatives onto decision-making forums • being accountable to communities through regularly reporting on progress and lessons learned

In STEP 6 a strategy map is developed to identify the strategies used by the programme to contribute to the achievement of each outcome challenge. For most outcome challenges, a mixed set of strategies is used because it is believed this has a greater potential for success.

The purpose of STEP 7 is to identify the organisational practices that the programme will use to be effective. These organisational practices describe a well-performing organisation that has the potential to support the boundary partners and sustain change interventions over time.

Monitoring and evaluation priorities are then identified (STEP 8) to focus time and resources on where they are most needed. Monitoring priorities are divided into organisational practices, progress toward the outcomes being achieved by boundary partners, and the strategies that the programme is employing to encourage change in its boundary partners.

STEPS 9-11 consist of the development of journals to monitor progress over time in the three areas described above. Firstly, an outcome journal is established for each boundary partner. It includes the progress markers set out in step 5; a description of the level of change as low, medium, or high; and a place to record who among the boundary partners exhibited the change.

Then, in order to provide the programme with a systematic way to monitor its actions in support of its boundary partners Outcome Mapping provides a strategy journal, which can be adapted. This journal records data on the strategies being employed, and is filled out during the programme's regular monitoring meetings.

A performance journal is also created for the programme which records data on how it is operating as an organisation to fulfil its mission. This is then filled out during regular monitoring meetings.

The final step (STEP 12) is to develop a descriptive plan of a proposed evaluation. This outlines the evaluation issue, the way findings will be used, the questions, sources and methods to be used, the nature of the evaluation team, the proposed dates and the approximate cost. This information is intended to guide the evaluation design.

Strengths and weaknesses

Unlike some advocates of the logical framework approach to planning, supporters of Outcome Mapping do not claim it appropriate in all situations. This, added to the fact that Outcome Mapping is rarely forced on organisations as a condition of funding, means debates surrounding Outcome Mapping are less intense than those surrounding the logical framework. But there is still a divergence of opinion; some who have used Outcome Mapping love it as a tool, and some dislike it.

Some of Outcome Mapping’s strengths for M&E can be listed as follows.

- It introduces monitoring and evaluation at an early stage of a programme, and ensures that monitoring and evaluation is built into programme design.

- Outcome Mapping is a participatory tool and therefore encourages multi-stakeholder dialogue, as well as learning amongst different participants. It is designed to contribute to the development process itself.

- Because it is based on outcomes of observable behaviour change, it can be more intuitive for field workers to grasp than the sometimes more abstract language of objectives.

- It encourages programmes to assess both the outcomes of programmes – thus focusing clearly on change – and the processes through which those outcomes are generated.

- It is much better than linear planning tools at dealing with complexity. Outcome Mapping does not seek to show direct attribution for change resulting from a single source. This means Outcome Mapping may be more appropriate for the monitoring and evaluation of programmes with multiple inputs.

- Because Outcome Mapping involves the identification of a spread of possible outcomes (progress markers) ranging from those stakeholders expect to see to those they would like or love to see, it avoids the need for precise predictions about the pace of change at the beginning of a project or programme. This means it is particularly useful when the pace of change cannot easily be predicted.

- Because of its focus on boundary partners, Outcome Mapping is good at dealing with programmes with a special focus on organisational change. It can therefore be used to support the monitoring and evaluation of capacity development – an area which people find particularly difficult to assess using more linear tools (see Simister and Smith, 2010).

However, Outcome Mapping is not appropriate in all circumstances. Some of its limitations have been described as follows.

- Because it deals with contribution rather than attribution it cannot easily be used for processes that demand hard measurement of results, such as cost-benefit analysis and assessment of value for money.

- As with any participatory methodology, Outcome Mapping requires a great deal of time, effort and patience to do well. Significant resources are required both in terms of programme staff and the people, groups and organisations being supported.

- Outcome Mapping may be best used at the level of small programmes or larger projects. It is not a tool that is necessarily appropriate for handling large, complex programmes, because it may be difficult to identify who will change and how. Earl et. al. (2001) point out that to be effective, Outcome Mapping must be sufficiently specific to enable the identification of key groups who will be influenced by a programme. Equally, Outcome Mapping may not be appropriate for small projects where the investment of time needed would not be proportional to the likely benefits.

- The journaling approach to tracking progress means the technique generates a lot of data, creating challenges for data analysis.

- Outcome Mapping is good at identifying changes within supported groups who are part of the process, partly because it encourages self-reflection and self-assessment. It may not be so useful at identifying change for people, organisations or groups that lie outside a programme, such as the targets of policy influencing work.

- Outcome Mapping does not focus predominantly on impact assessment. It recognises the need to look at long-term changes in people’s lives brought about by development interventions, but regards this as the responsibility of a programme's boundary partners. If donors require in-depth impact assessment then Outcome Mapping needs to be supplemented by other tools and methodologies.

- In comparison with the logical framework, Outcome Mapping is less able to provide a short, concise summary of a project, programme or the work of an organisation.

Adaptations

Although Outcome Mapping can be, and frequently is, used as a methodology in its entirety, it is often adapted, and can be used in conjunction with other methodologies such as the logical framework. Indeed it is perfectly possible to embed an outcome map within a logical framework, or set logframe indicators that can be generated by Outcome Mapping processes.

Individual features of Outcome Mapping – such as the setting of progress markers at expect to see, like to see and love to see levels – are often used, even if the entire methodology is not. Many organisations have also carried out work that is based on the principles of Outcome Mapping – such as participatory planning, understanding of complexity, valuing contribution rather than attribution – without necessarily adopting the process in its entirety.

Further reading and resources

The most comprehensive guide to Outcome Mapping is a guide written by Earl et. al. in 2001 (see reference below). This is available at http://www.outcomemapping.ca/download.php?file=/resource/files/OM_English_final.pdf. There is also an Outcome Mapping community website at www.outcomemapping.ca which is regularly updated and contains much information on how Outcome Mapping is being used and applied. Further information, and a more comprehensive reading list, can be found at the Better Evaluation website at http://betterevaluation.org/

References

- Earl, S, Carden, F and Smutylo, T (2001). *Outcome Mapping: Building learning and reflection into development programmes*. Evaluation Unit, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada.
- Simister, N and Smith, R (2010). *Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult?* Praxis paper no. 23, January 2010, INTRAC, Oxford.

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INTRAC is a specialist capacity building institution for organisations involved in international relief and development. Since 1992, INTRAC has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on monitoring and evaluation. Our approach to M&E is practical and founded on core principles. We encourage appropriate M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts, and we work with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs.

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