

IPAL GUIDE 2

Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning



Developing a theory of change

A guide to developing a theory of change
as a framework for inclusive dialogue, learning and
accountability for social impact.

August 2009

The complete IPAL guides

Keystone has developed IPAL for organizations seeking to improve the way that they can contribute to significant and lasting change.

The present guide is part of the IPAL tool suite that helps organizations create a framework for developing strategies, building partnerships, planning interventions, gathering evidence of success or failure and, most importantly, analyzing and learning from this evidence through open dialogue among constituents and stakeholders who have a real interest in change.

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2. Developing a theory of change

A guide to developing a theory of change as a framework for inclusive dialogue, learning and accountability for social impact.

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A guide to identifying, documenting and analyzing evidence of impact (planned or unplanned), and learning from this in dialogue with constituents.

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Introduction

Different people use the term “theory of change” to mean different things.

For some people, it is simply a tool to explain (make explicit) the logic of our existing strategies. Used in this way it can be useful, but it does not take us beyond the level of thinking that informed those strategies.

In the impact planning, assessment and learning (IPAL) method, the process of developing a theory of change is an exciting and often liberating process of interaction and discovery that helps organizations see beyond their familiar frames and habits (even if these were quite effective), understand the full complexity of the change they wish to see, and imagine new solutions in dialogue with others.

The theory of change unfolds through a facilitated process of open inquiry and dialogue. Participants may hold different views and perspectives, but should share a broad commitment to change. The more the group reflects the voices of all constituents, the richer the dialogue is likely to be.

The process begins with a group of key staff and constituents of an organization coming together with a facilitator to imagine a **vision of success**. This is a short but specific picture in words of the sustainable future that they wish to help bring about. It describes real people, real relationships, institutions and cultures. It is not a remote, idealized and unachievable future. It must be a plausible picture of people behaving and experiencing life differently in a sustainable way that the organization, working alongside others, can meaningfully influence.

From this kind of vision of what success looks like, the participants explore the question: What needs to happen to make this vision a reality? For each element of the vision, the participants try to identify ALL the prior changes that they think are necessary if the vision of success is to be realized – NOT just what the organization can do on its own. Slowly, a set of **preconditions of success** begins to emerge.

From here, we map the **system** in which we work. This involves understanding where we are now and then identifying all the actors in our system that can influence our vision positively or negatively. We can then consider what kind of working relationships we can build with specific actors that will help us achieve our vision more effectively.

Most of us find it extremely difficult to think outside of the box of *what we do now*. The process of developing a theory of change takes us to a place where we can question our assumptions, see things through different eyes, and come to an exciting new shared understanding that reveals the full complexity of our context, but helps us begin to map the pathways that can lead us towards the outcomes we desire.

About this guide

This guide is addressed to organizations that are interested in developing from scratch or clarifying an existing theory of change of their work. It is also addressed to monitoring and evaluation consultants and facilitators.

The guide lays out the steps and activities for developing a theory of change and mapping the system in which the organization works. It provides guidelines for the time and resources required for each activity.

The development of a theory of change will usually take place in a workshop with managers, programme staff and some key external stakeholders. It is recommended that for most of it an external facilitator is used.

Duration of the workshop is usually 2 full days. If necessary, it can be shortened to a one-day initial workshop with all participants followed by a second day with a core management group. Some of the activities can be continued or carried out exclusively by a core management group in a separate meeting.

Post-workshop, the drafts are refined into a clearly written and comprehensive system map, and a shorter narrative statement of the theory of change.

Through dialogue the participants emerge with a much clearer understanding of the way change happens in the context, and the range of strategic options that are open to the organization – and to the other actors in the system. It provides a shared framework for understanding the system, planning specific strategies, gathering and documenting evidence of success or failure, demonstrating their contribution to impact and turning this information into real knowledge for their own improvement and for society at large.

Once it has emerged, a theory of change is a bit like a road map. It provides us with an understanding of the landscape and the routes and distances that we need to travel to get to our destination. We use a road map to help us plot the journey (i.e. develop strategies) from where we are now to where we want to be.

In order to develop a good theory of change we need to think in terms of plausible OUTCOMES that we can realistically influence.

It is surprising how difficult most people find it to think and write OUTCOMES.

It takes most people quite a lot of conscious practice before they start thinking in terms of outcomes rather than outputs or needs or activities. An outcome statement describes a **result** – a change that has taken place, NOT as a need statement or an activity that is still in process. Until they have mastered this ability, a facilitator must constantly be reminding people to rephrase their statements as outcome.

For example:

Outcome statement: Women in the community have organized groups and support structures to protect themselves and children from violence.

Need statement: Women in the community need to protect each other and children from violence.

Outputs: the products and activities that you do.

Outcomes: What we see as a result of our outputs.

A simple test that you can apply is to ask these questions of every statement that you make:

1. Is it written as an outcome?
2. Does it describe changes that we can **plausibly enable or facilitate** in people, groups, institutions or environments?

Step 1. Develop a vision of success

Introduction

How we imagine success is critical.

A vision of success is a clear picture of the achievable and sustainable future that the organization would like to see in the context in which it works. It can still be aspirational. And the organization does not have to feel that it can achieve this vision on its own.

The organization is not the centre of this universe. It is only one of a number of constituents acting and influencing the outcomes. Creating a vision of success involves identifying the key players (individuals, groups and institutions) and then describing the desired behaviours, attitudes, capabilities, values and the relationships between them in a situation where change is always happening.

The vision must be:

- **plausible** – it must focus on changes in and between people, groups and institutions that the organization can realistically influence. It should not point to an idealized state that is unachievable.
- **dynamic** – it should be a snapshot of a complex and dynamic system in which people and institutions are working effectively in relationships with each other and with outside agencies to solve problems and enhance the well-being of citizens and the environment.

We propose two activities below to help facilitate the process of creating a vision of success.

Activity 1: Creating an epitaph for the organization

This activity is a kind of tactic to shock people out of their complacency and satisfaction with what they do now, and think in terms of a bold long-term outcome.

It is a fun and challenging activity that gets people thinking, getting to the core of the purpose and reason for their work. It does this in lively every day speech, moving away from the formal bureaucratic language of a mission statement.

The purpose and “aha” moments we are seeking in this activity are:

Purpose

- *To shock people out of their fixation with their current activities and to make them think in terms of a clearly stated outcome - what they would like to be left behind once the organization has departed this earth.*
- *To capture in 15 words or less the essential transformation that the organization would like to see for a specific group or context.*

Aha!

- *The kind of clarity that comes when people realize that they can cut through the turgid ‘strategy-speak’ and reach this kind of clarity of purpose in a simple and every day way.*

Time:

- 1 hour

Resources:

- Cards and/or flip chart
- A wall poster of a blank tombstone (or other culturally acceptable alternative)

Process:

- The facilitator asks participants: **What would you like the world to remember your organization for?** To facilitate their thinking an epitaph metaphor is used: in the vast graveyard of dead CSOs, what would you like to have inscribed on the tombstone (or other non Christian equivalent were appropriate) of your organization?
- The facilitator asks participants to complete this sentence: “Because of [name of the organization]..... “ In the sentence they should describe the change in the behaviour and experience of the key constituents that they can influence.
- Participants may take some initial time individually, in pairs or small groups to come up with the organization’s epitaph
- The facilitator invites suggestions in a plenary discussion
- Whatever people blurt out is captured on cards or on a flip chart. For each statement the facilitator asks things like:
 - If you read this on a tombstone, would you stop and want to know more?
 - Is it powerful and snappy enough to be on a tombstone?

- Does it really say what you'd like to be remembered for?
- After a while the facilitator draws the different thoughts together into a single coherent statement
- As a concluding activity to show the value of this, and time permitting, the facilitator can ask participants to choose one project or activity and assess whether or not it is really contributing optimally to this outcome.

An epitaph needs to be a short, striking, memorable statement – one that would grab the interest of a passer-by in the cemetery and make them stop and think “This sounds like a really interesting organization – I wonder what its story is?”

It should capture as briefly as possible the **essential transformation** the organization would have made in the world.

It must be written as an **outcome** (e.g. a result that you would see if you were to visit the context at some future time). But the transformation must be one that the organization can plausibly influence.

Usually it will involve identifying one or more key actors (groups or institutions) in their context and how they are behaving and relating differently.

Note: This activity does reflect a certain Christian-centrism – but we have found that people in cultures that do not have the same tradition, are able to suggest an alternative or else understand and accept it for the purpose.

Case example: An epitaph a children's rights organization in South Africa

Effective, efficient and well-resourced communities are working with families and child-friendly government structures to ensure that the rights and welfare of children are realised.

Activity 2: Painting in the detail what success would look like

This activity continues the epitaph brainstorm, and elaborates on the essential transformation outlined on the tombstone. It describes in words, and also in a picture if the facilitator thinks this will be useful, what would be seen in the organization's context if it had achieved everything that it wanted to achieve.

The purpose and “aha” moments we are seeking in this activity are:

Purpose

- *To paint a picture in words of the sustainable, plausible and dynamic future that the organization and its constituents want to see*
- *A picture of what success would look like if they could achieve everything they wanted to achieve*

Aha!

- *The kind of clarity that comes when people clearly describe a set of specific, plausible and measurable long-term outcomes at which they can aim their interventions.*

Time:

- 2-3 hours

Resources:

- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Projector
- Keystone's theory of change interactive pdf template

Process:

- **Start by defining the range and scope-10 min**

Short discussion on what is sufficiently long time to be able to see the long term social change that the organization is working on and in which geographic area. Participants settle on a **time** horizon (e.g. 5,10 or 20 years) and define the geographical **range** of their work (e.g. in a specific community, region, or country)

- **Brainstorm the vision -2 hours.**

Participants try to imagine and describe what success **would look like** for them as an organization, if they had all the resources they needed and there were no major disasters to derail them from their path.

They are asked to identify the key constituents (people, institutions) that form their vision of success and their behaviours stated as outcomes.

A metaphor to use here is: “If the visitor who was fascinated by your epitaph went to visit your community, what would you want them to see? Who would be doing what?”

Another metaphor is the helicopter; participants are asked to imagine they are flying above the community in a helicopter. They are asked to imagine the changes they would see on the ground if they had been completely successful.

Here are some questions that will help participants describe the changes they would see in specific detail. It is important that the changes are always written in the form of outcomes and related to a particular type of actor.

- Which individuals, groups or institutions are essential parts of this future picture? Keep the list short, but make sure that it is a complete picture that includes relevant citizen groups (like women, workers, small farmers, children or youth) as well as appropriate government departments and businesses.
 - How might the physical and social conditions in which people live be different?
 - How would each of these groups or institutions be thinking, acting or relating to each other?
 - What attitudes and values would people have?
 - What might the public policies that affect them look like?
 - What new capabilities would specific groups have?
 - What new opportunities exist for whom?
 - To what extent have the vulnerable become active participants in their own development rather than just 'beneficiaries'?
- **Record the vision of success - 30min to 1 hour**

Using the theory of change interactive pdf template, a statement formulated as an outcome, is recorded for each constituent group of the vision of success. The facilitator projects the tool and fills it out in real-time.

Example: This is how the children's rights organization expressed its vision of success:



Step 2. Mapping the preconditions of success

Introduction

This is the second step in creating a theory of change.

Having developed a vision of success and understood the main actors in the system, the organization can begin to map the preconditions of success. These are all the changes that the organization believe **must take place** in the context in order to achieve lasting success.

For each element in the vision of success, the organization seeks to define the changes in the conditions, institutions, relationships, capabilities, attitudes and behaviours that are considered **essential for long term success**.

Some pre-conditions might be hard, tangible changes in conditions (such as access to vaccinations), but many will be intangible process outcomes (like changes in confidence, skills, capabilities, relationships, attitudes etc.) that are just as important if changes are to be made and sustained.

The guiding question is: What MUST happen in our context if our vision of success is to be realized?

Activity: Brainstorming and grouping the preconditions of success

The group now works systematically backwards from the long-term strategic vision of success and identifies the changes and processes that they believe are **absolutely necessary preconditions** to achieving each element of their vision of success. In other words, these are changes that they believe must happen if they hope to achieve the outcomes in their vision.

We are looking for changes in:

- conditions
- institutions
- relationships
- capabilities
- attitudes
- behaviours

Preconditions should be as specific as possible and could describe:

- What change?
- For whom?
- How good?
- By when?

For example, if the organization wants to achieve improved school performance among a group of children in a community, it might identify the following as necessary preconditions for success:

- The knowledge and skills of teachers is improved
- Learners have access to better learning materials.
- Parents take a more active role in supporting their children's education in the home.
- Parents are trained how to support early literacy.

The purpose and “aha” moments we are seeking in this activity are:

Purpose

- *To map, designing back from the vision of success, the necessary preconditions for success. This means all the changes that must take place in and among the actors in the system in order to realize the organization's vision of success.*

Aha!

- *When participants 'see' a clear pathway of short term and intermediate changes that lead to the long term outcomes in the vision - where the long-term outcome can be achieved by bringing about a number of prior, more easily achieved and measured, outcomes.*
- *When they see themselves in relation to other actors in a system and can identify strategies and relationships between actors that can bring about more effective interventions and more lasting results.*
- *When they recognize that changes in relationships and capabilities and other 'intangible outcomes' are as important, or even more important, than changes in material conditions alone.*
- *When they see their theory as the basis for planning and learning with constituents as well as for communicating success (ongoing contributions to long term sustainable change).*

Time:

- 3-4.5 hours

Resources:

- Cards
- Projector
- Keystone's theory of change interactive pdf template

Process:

- **Brainstorm the preconditions of success - 30 min**

Participants brainstorm **all** the preconditions that they can think of that are **necessary** for the long-term change to take place. These are written onto cards and stuck on the wall. As they are presented, the facilitator tests the pre-condition by asking:

- Does this statement describe clear and achievable outcomes?
- Why is this outcome necessary?
- How does it contribute to your long-term goals?
- Does it describe changes that the organization can plausibly enable or facilitate in people, groups, institutions or environments?

- **Grouping the preconditions for success - 3-4 hours**

Using the theory of change interactive pdf template projected on a wall, participants attempt to arrange related ideas into groups and then try to come up with a single statement that covers the most important points in each group.

The facilitator's role here is to ensure that

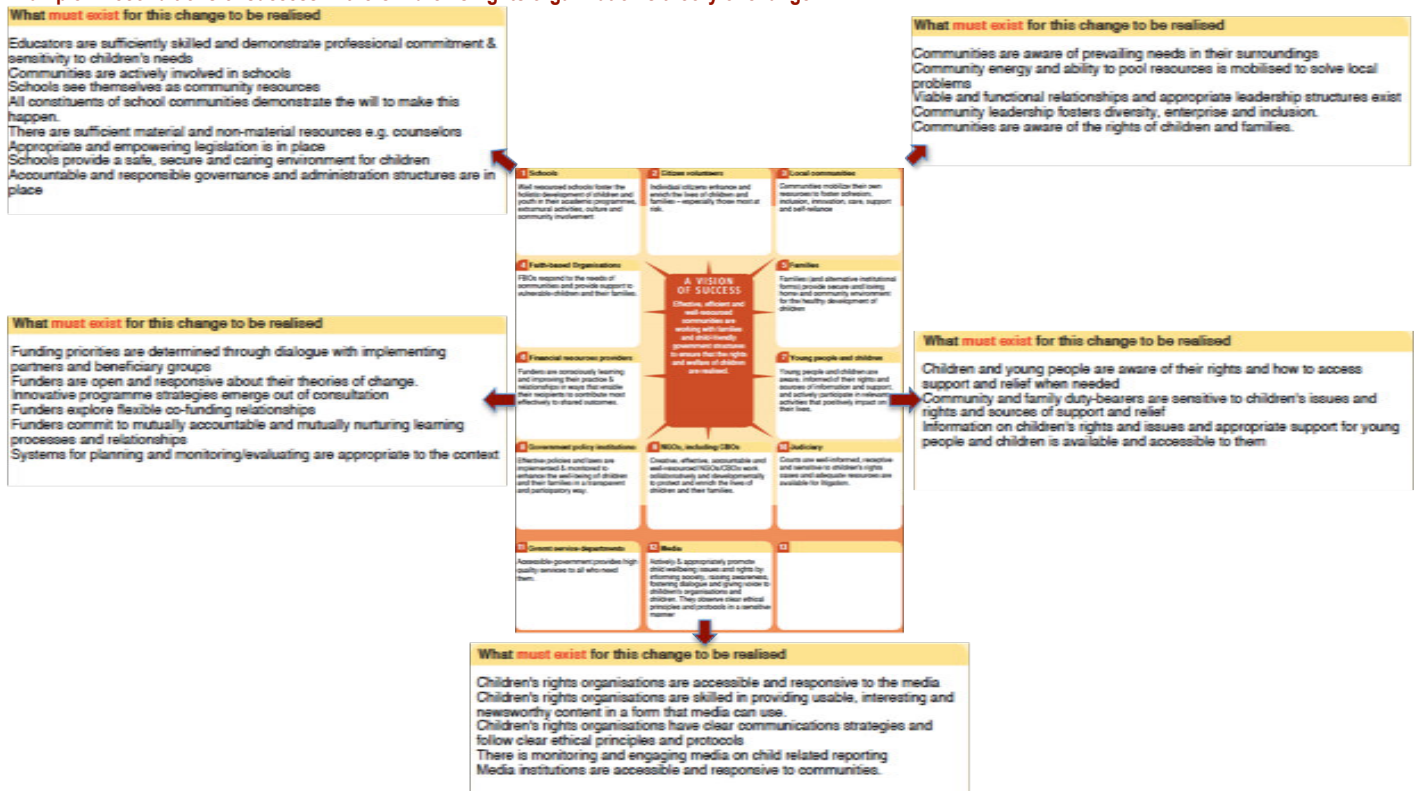
- the preconditions are also written as outcomes that are plausible, achievable and measurable
- there is a clear, logical link between the pre-condition and the long-term outcome
- The outcome really is a necessary precondition. Preconditions are not nice-to-haves. They are essential to success – so that it is difficult to imagine long-term sustainable success if the precondition is not there.

Note:

In the initial workshop itself, it may not be possible to map all the preconditions of success. In most cases, completing them will be done by the organization outside of the induction workshop. A smaller group should be tasked with completing the map.

Over time, the organization should discuss the emerging theory of change and refine it. In particular, it will require time to identify the indicators of success that will help them in the planning and monitoring of their strategies and programs as they slowly align these to their theory of change.

Example: Preconditions of success in the Children's rights organization's theory of change:



Step 3. System mapping

A Keystone guide to mapping the activity system and planning and managing collaborations

Introduction

Development is usually a long term, complex process involving many actors and interdependent processes. A single organization working on its own can seldom achieve all the changes required by its theory of change.

When organizations, including donors, begin to think of themselves as working in a system of actors towards shared **outcomes**, they can plan and act collaboratively without losing their individual focus or identity. Such an approach preserves the individual creativity and responsiveness of diverse actors while enabling practical synergies that lead to social learning and more effective solutions.

For any outcome that an organization is working towards, there are usually a number of other actors or social forces that influence the outcome positively or negatively. It is important to understand **the system** of forces and actors that is at work in the organization's context. The change the organization wants to bring about is most likely to be significant and sustainable if it can influence the actors in the system to support it.

Looked at from the other side, the change the organization wants to see is less likely to be sustainable unless the attitudes, relationships, values and actions of the other actors in the system support it.

Once an organizations has identified the actors, and the ways in which they influence the system, it is possible to

- Identify those who are working for similar outcomes
- Plan collaborative interventions that will enable the organization to achieve more together than it could alone.
- Identify those actors who might negatively influence the system and plan strategies to change their attitudes and practices or reduce the negative influence they might have.

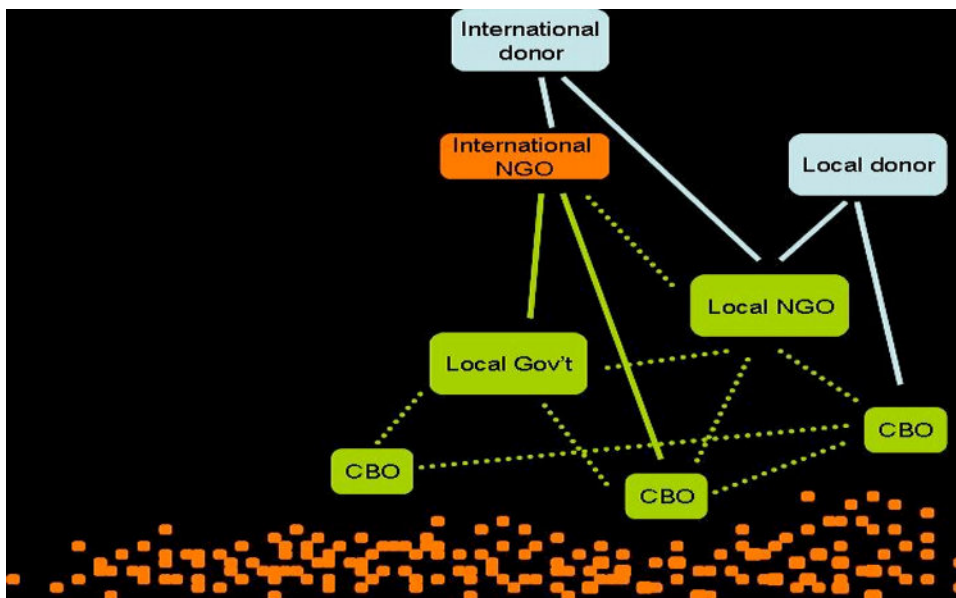
System mapping brings to consciousness what many effective organizations do anyway, and makes it a conscious part of their **theory of change** and their strategy.

Bringing about greater alignment in a system can itself be a crucial pre-condition for success. Relationship building is, therefore, often a strategic objective and indicator that the organizations is indeed making progress towards its long-term, sustainable outcomes.

The focus is on outcomes, not mission or culture

An activity system is a network of actors in a defined context who, consciously or unconsciously, influence what happens in that context.

In any system we are only one of a number of different actors that can influence the way change happens in the system. There could be a government department here, an NGO there and a private sector organization over there. And then there could be those who are just passing through.

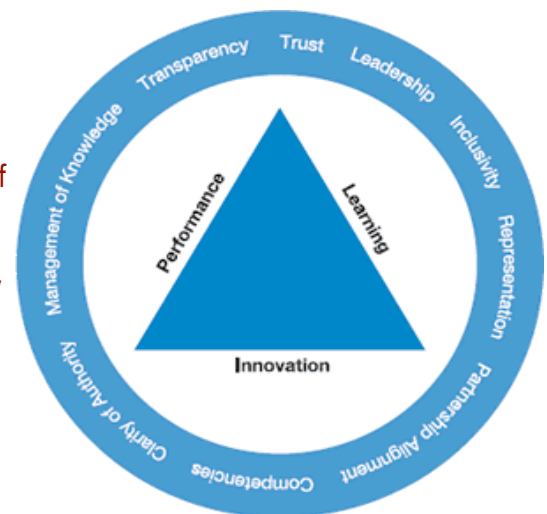


And many of these actors might have very different missions and purposes, yet be able to collaborate successfully to bring about some change that they all would like to see. Agreeing on shared outcomes is more important than absolute agreement on mission and values – although it will obviously be difficult to collaborate with an organization whose mission and values are directly opposed to our own.

Note:

It is not the purpose of this guide to enter the complex field of establishing and managing partnerships. Instead, we refer readers who are considering entering into partnerships for social change to AccountAbility's **Partnership Governance and Accountability (PGA) Framework** for the management of partnerships for sustainable development.

You can access it at www.pgaframework.org. It also has a very useful online self-assessment tool with which you can assess the quality of governance and accountability of any partnership according to the PGA 'principal enabling characteristics'.



Here are some other resources that will be helpful.

1. The Copenhagen Centre publishes a journal called **Partnership Matters**. See www.copenhagencentre.org for further details.
2. The Asian Development Bank has a set of case studies on NGO private sector partnerships against poverty. See www.adb.org.

Activity 1: Mapping the activity system

In this activity, it is important to involve people who have a wide range of experience and perspectives of the system the organization is trying to influence. At the least, there should be a representative group of the organization's management and field staff, as well as other constituents who might bring valuable experience and perspective.

The facilitator can be either someone from within or outside the organization. S/he should have good facilitation skills, but does not have to be expert in system mapping.

The activity can be used in smaller scaled down versions whenever the organization plans a specific activity or intervention.

The purpose and “aha” moments we are seeking in this activity are:

Purpose

- *To better understand the ways in which different actors can contribute towards achieving specific outcomes, and to see whether it is possible, over time, to bring about greater alignment and collaboration between actors in the system.*
- *To help an organization map the actors in an activity system that influences an outcome it wishes to achieve. It will help identify four kinds of actors in the system:*
 - *Those who are very influential in the system and who share a strong interest in achieving the outcome, and who have a similar mission and culture to the organization.*
 - *Those who are very influential in the system and who share a strong interest in achieving the outcome, but who may have a very different mission and culture (such as a business or government department).*
 - *Those who are currently not very influential, but who could become positive allies.*
 - *Those who have a negative influence in the system - and with whom collaboration is unlikely to work. Here you would think of strategies to counter or minimize their influence.*

Aha!

- *When people understand that lasting change also involves changing the ecosystem - and possible ways of doing this.*

Time:

- 2-3 hours

Resources:

- Whiteboard or flip-chart sheets

Process:

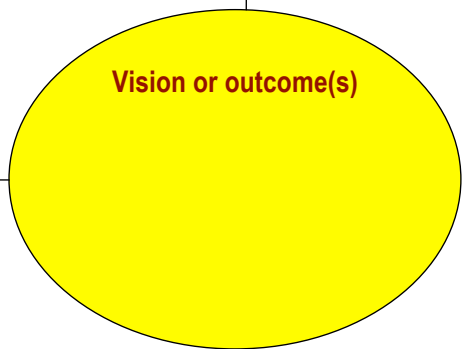
- Explain the purpose of the activity. If possible, discuss one or two case studies of system mapping.
- Draw a large diagram on a whiteboard or a number of flip chart sheets stuck together in the form of the template below.
- In the circle at the centre, discuss and write the desired outcome or outcomes the organization seeks to achieve. The facilitator can begin by writing the organization's vision of success into the circle. Or could choose an outcome that is much more specific and short term. It depends entirely on the context and what participants feel is most important at the time.
- The diagram outside the circle is divided into 4 equal segments:
 - a. Positive influence and similar primary purpose, culture and values to the organization
 - b. Positive influence but with a different primary purpose and culture to the organization
 - c. Neutral - weak or little influence now, but could become a positive influence.
 - d. Negative influence. Two sub-categories may be useful here:
 - Negative influence now but could change to neutral or positive.
 - Negative interest and dangerous – whose influence needs to be minimized.
- In pairs, participants identify all actors in their system and write on cards. When ready, groups come up and pin cards into the quadrants that they think best describes the actor. Closer to the centre circle indicates an existing strong relationship or connection. Further away indicates a weak relationship. The placing of actors is discussed and agreed.
- Other symbols can then be introduced: Green arrows, for example, could indicate where in the system the organization would like to shift a particular actor. A red cross might indicate an actor that participants consider to be a serious threat.
- Participants analyze and describe what emerges – what are the main features and lessons of this map? These are recorded by a designated note-taker.
- Participants explore the strategic implications of this – What relationships are they happy with? Where can they make them more effective? What specific steps should be taken, by who and when?

System mapping template

Positive influence with similar purpose, culture and values

Us

Positive influence but different purpose, culture and values.



Weak influence now but potential.

Negative influence: must we quarantine or can we persuade on side?

Activity 2: Analyzing the dimensions of change

Philip Thomas of the Generative Change Community (see www.gc-community.net) has designed an activity that helps organizations to examine their own assumptions and practice and distinguish the different dimensions of change that they currently address. The technique can be used to analyse other actors in the activity system as well. It can help an organization identify essential preconditions for success that it might otherwise overlook, and it can help as a frame for collaborative relationships.

Time:

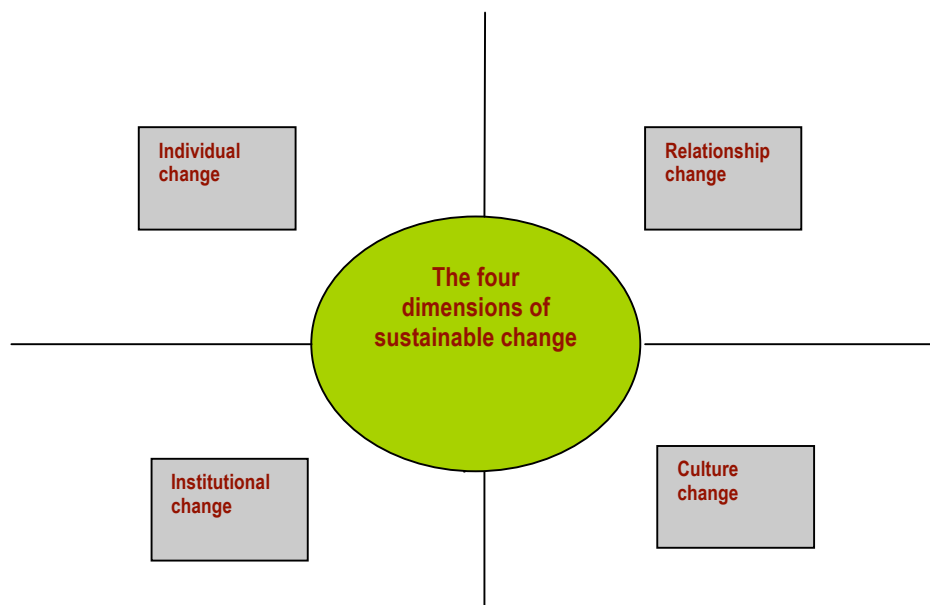
- 30 min

Resources:

- Clear floor space
- Masking tape
- Cards

Process:

- Using the tape delineate a four quadrant box on the floor
- The facilitator names and describes each quadrant as a distinct approach to change focusing on changing individuals, relationships, structures, or culture (see diagram below).
- Then the facilitator invites the workshop participants to step into the quadrant that best represents the approach they are taking in their current work
- The small groups within each quadrant then talk about the characteristics of their work that placed them there, why they believe that approach to be an effective one for bringing about societal change, and how it differs from the approaches in the other three quadrants



Example: Four Dimensions of Broad, Sustainable Change¹

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Individual</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal transformation • Help individuals grow and develop greater self-awareness • Education to broaden knowledge base • Training to broaden competency base • Attention to mental and spiritual health and growth • Make explicit and examine assumptions, mindsets, mental models <p>Transformations not only in “<i>what</i>” one knows, but “<i>how</i>” one knows (epistemology)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Relationships</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transforming relationships • Reconciliation / Conflict transformation • Building trust • Promoting respect and recognition • Increasing knowledge and awareness of interdependence • Changing patterns of dysfunctional relations
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Culture</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transforming collective patterns of thinking and acting • Changing the “rules” and values that sustain patterns of exclusion • Exploring and transforming taken-for-granted collective habits of thinking and behavior • Promoting more inclusive, participatory culture of “civic engagement” • Transforming patterns of overly simplistic and distorted discourse 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Structures / Systems</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transforming structures, processes, mechanisms • Lobbying for more just policies, greater transparency and accountability, institutional rearrangements • Just and equitable allocation of resources and services • Reforming processes

¹ This table captures the framework developed by Philip Thomas for the Workshop on Democratic Dialogue in Manila, September 24-25, 2007. It represents an integration of two important streams of work. One stream is the literature on social conflict and conflict transformation, which identifies four dimensions in which conflict creates change and where change must occur for conflict to be transformed to lasting peace (see Lederach, J. P., R. Neufeldt, et al. (2007). *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring, and Learning Toolkit*. The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame). The other is Ken Wilber’s Integral Theory (see Wilber, K. (2003). *Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice: IOS Basic and the AQAL Map*.)

Activity 3: Thinking about collaboration - placing actors on a 'relationship continuum'

Once we have completed the system map, and have identified certain specific organizations for special attention, we can create a 'relationship map' or 'alignment map' in which we place the actors on a 'relationship continuum' from alignment to partnership.

Time:

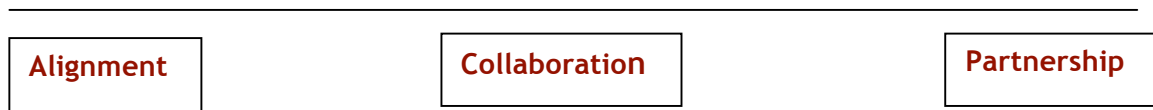
- 30 min

Resources:

- Whiteboard or flip-chart
- Cards

Process:

- On the whiteboard or flip-chart draw a continuum as shown in the diagram below



- Place the actors identified by the group in the place where they should stand in the continuum
- As actors are placed on the map, the group discusses what kind of relationship would be the most appropriate. Here are some questions to guide the discussion:
 - What skills, contacts or resources does each party bring to the relationship?
 - What should their respective roles be?
 - What advantages would be gained in this relationship?
 - What problems might arise?

Activity 4: Analyzing individual actors and creating a 'collaboration profile'

The purpose and “aha” moments we are seeking in this activity are:

Purpose

- *To analyze the actors in the ecosystem in terms of possible collaborative relationships would work best for specific relationships.*

Aha!

- *When people see the range of relationships that are possible and how these might be managed.*

Time:

- 20-30 min per actor

Resources:

- N/A

Process:

- When the group thinks they are ready to think more concretely about establishing relationships, here are some questions that may help create a 'collaboration potential profile' of a specific potential partner:
 - What specific outcomes would the collaboration focus on?
 - What is the organization's interest in achieving these outcomes?
 - Is there a direct alignment with the organization's mission? (Does this really matter?)
 - What are the respective capabilities? (resources, skills, networks, etc)
 - What is the current relationship with this actor?
 - What would the group like this relationship to be in the future? (Alignment, occasional or specific issue collaboration or partnership?)
 - What advantages would collaboration offer to both parties?
 - What risks might there be to collaboration (What are possible threats to an effective relationship – conflicting interests, capacity gaps, behaviors, etc.)
 - How would the relationship be governed and managed (accountability, values, learning, reporting, etc.)?
 - When/How would the relationship be reviewed and evaluated?

From Theory to Strategy

Once it has a basic theory of change the organization will proceed to do two things:

1. Begin to refine its theory of change in dialogue with its constituents and other stakeholders. Keystone's guide to stakeholder dialogue, "Learning with Constituents" (available at <http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/resources/guides>), provides guidance as to how this can be approached.
2. Begin to bring its strategies and programs in line with its theory of change. This will most likely be a process of adaptation rather than sudden change, and will emerge out of the organization's current planning processes. In doing so, the organization may wish to deepen its understanding of how it may work with others also affecting the problem it addresses.

The preconditions of success may include many outcomes that the organization cannot hope to achieve directly or on its own. But if they are really preconditions of success, the organization must consider them seriously – because unless all the preconditions are achieved, there is little chance of achieving long term sustainable change.

Sometimes an organization can organize others to achieve these outcomes. At other times it may have to develop new capacity itself. Or it can try to mobilize collaborations and partnerships that might achieve the preconditions that the organization itself cannot realize.

So, there are often two kinds of strategy that an organization will consider:

1. Strategies for changes that it can bring about by working directly with constituents.
2. Strategies for changes that it can bring about laterally in the system – perhaps influencing other actors in certain ways, trying to build relationships and partnerships for change, etc.

Armed with this kind of theory it can plan a wide range of strategies: some working directly with beneficiaries and some working laterally with other groups and institutions; some lasting a few weeks and focusing on a particular progress marker, and some lasting many years and focusing on long term outcomes. With this kind of theory underlying our strategies and providing a frame for learning and reporting, it can be flexible and adaptive with its strategies.

This kind of theory of change honors and indeed brings into view better than before, the complexity of sustainable change processes, and offers a framework for

- planning (flexible, multifaceted and diverse and collaborative) strategies,
- learning and adapting, through dialogues,
- building effective and mutually accountable relationships and partnerships around shared outcomes,
- new kinds of reporting,
- better stakeholder feedback

Appendices

Appendix 1: Comparing ‘logical framework’ approaches to a ‘theory of change’ approach

Method	Long term change <i>processes</i> or short term <i>projects</i> ?	Results and indicators of success (qualitative or quantitative)	How it fosters collaboration	How it fosters accountability	Does it yield comparative data?
Logframe	Ideally suited to short-term projects with limited, clearly defined objectives, indicators and outcomes. Works best where there is a simple linear logic - activities cause result. Rather rigid - not very flexible or adaptive - or sensitive to changes that might only become visible over time.	Tends to work best with quantitative indicators based on specific outputs (e.g. the results of a particular activity) and short term outcomes. Good for proving rather than improving.	Really focuses on the specific outputs of a single organization. Not really useful for identifying shared outcomes and assessing the contribution of collaborative relationships to shared long term outcomes.	Works best as a tool for reporting upwards to donors - and for assessing whether an organization has carried out the activities that it was required to do. Most often created internally. Not really useful for reporting to all constituents.	Tends to work best for single organizations with very specific activities. Outputs and outcomes tend to be very specific too. It is difficult to compare the performance of organizations with this kind of data.
Theory of change	Reflects and makes explicit the deeper understanding of context that informs strategies and relationships. It helps inform flexible and diverse strategies and can be used to track contribution to complex change processes. It provides indicators for measuring an organization’s contribution to long term social change over time. Tends to support flexible and adaptive strategies better in complex situations.	Makes use of long term and short term, quantitative and qualitative indicators of success within a framework of a pathway to change. Tracks changes in behavior, attitudes, relationships and capabilities that contribute to success.	Promotes identification of shared outcomes, and allows different actors to plan and track their collaborative contributions to shared outcomes.	Rooted firmly in inclusive stakeholder dialogue around shared outcomes. Enables public reporting that reflects shared learning.	Allows organizations to monitor their growing capability to influence change. Can yield data that allows us to compare the effectiveness of different approaches and organizations.

Appendix 2: The power of good theory and creative dialogue – a case study of a ‘whole school’ development initiative in South Africa

In December 2006, a group of 12 leading educational change practitioners and NGOs working across different sectors of school development invited Keystone to facilitate a strategy. Participants shared three main assumptions:

- Schools are the critical institutional element underpinning the entire education system and the society
- They function as complex micro-systems within the wider systems of society
- Current school development interventions are not having the impact they could

The workshop sought to develop a theory of change based on:

- A shared vision of success: Identifying the critical elements and features of a successful and effective school
- An analysis of the current change environment: Who are the leading actors in the change system, and what the existing enablers and inhibitors of success are
- Identifying the preconditions of success– what short and medium term outcomes are necessary in order to achieve ultimate success?
- What kind of intervention would be likely to be most effective in this context?

Participants called themselves the ‘Together Schools’ Initiative. Only a part of this dialogue is summarised below to illustrate the process. The full record was to be discussed widely and then turned into a funding proposal for support to develop a proper business plan.

Their epitaph

Every school in South Africa is a safe, healthy, happy and effective place of learning.

Then there followed a deep and detailed discussion of what 'success' would look like:

What would one expect to see in a school that the Together Schools Initiative has successfully engaged with? In other words, what would a 'safe, happy, healthy and effective place of learning' look like?

Safe

A safe school ensures both physical and emotional security

- The premises are secure and access is controlled, and learners can get to school safely
- The school is free of drugs and weapons
- At least one member of staff has specialised skills to identify and address safety related problems; including abuse, bullying, conflict etc.
- The school promotes supportive and caring relationships and employs creative and effective mechanisms to resolve conflicts

Happy

Characteristics of a happy school include:

- The school is a bright, clean and warm place – the physical premises of the school are maintained and inspire pride in the school
- The school community celebrates diversity and tolerance
- The school affirms different qualities and skills amongst learners and teachers and rewards achievement in many fields
- The school leadership is inspirational

Healthy

A healthy school also has a range of tangible and intangible characteristics. These include physical, value-based and skills-based features like:

- The school has clean water and sanitation, and the premises are kept clean and beautiful
- Primary health care services are provided – dental examinations, eye tests etc.
- No learner is hungry at school, and the school promotes awareness of health and nutrition
- The school encourages sport and physical activity in a way that is sensitive to individual needs and preferences
- The school provides reproductive health education and supports learners
- At least one member of staff has the skills to identify and provide support for physical and emotional health issues

Effective

Both tangible and intangible factors encourage optimal learning:

- The educators are competent and passionate. Educator development is encouraged
- Teachers have access to appropriate and high quality materials and resources – both in terms of content and methodology
- The school provides a varied, resource-rich learning environment, including access to libraries and information technology and outings, practical work etc.
- The school provides a physical environment that is conducive to learning; this includes ergonomics, adequate light, desks and chairs, shelter, temperature
- The school provides a relevant and broad education that prepares learners for life
- The school promotes and rewards creativity, innovation and experimentation

Cross-cutting

There are several cross-cutting characteristics of a successful school as well:

- Leadership is visionary, inspirational and competent
 - Competent: sound financial and administrative systems, strong management practices, good marketing and fundraising skills
 - Visionary: has a clear vision for the school, understands the schools needs, understands how best to achieve development/vision
 - Inspirational: motivating others, committed, responsive, accountable
- School governance is inclusive, representative, active and accountable. Members of the governance body are motivated, understand their role and have a broad range of skills to fulfil their responsibilities
- The school establishes relationships with government departments, local government, other service providers and the community to access relevant services and resources (human, skills, financial)

These could form the basis for an indicator framework for the monitoring, evaluating and reporting. It could form the basis of a school 'self-profiling tool' that could be used to establish a baseline profile, and then to track progress and reflect improvement over time.

The existing change environment

Participants then discussed why, given the large number of initiatives – many of them excellent – working to address these problems, there was so little evidence of significant and lasting impact on schools. Factors identified from their own experience included:

- The competitive environment among service providers discourages sharing of learning and best practice
- Interventions are planned and implemented as fragmentary short-term projects – often by outsiders; rather than holistic longer term developmental processes planned and controlled by schools themselves
- Success is measured in terms of outputs (e.g. number of training workshops etc), rather than outcomes (changes in behaviour, capabilities, conditions and relationships etc). There is little real effort to measure impact and build on it in an incremental and integrated way
- School leaders do not know what services are on offer and are unable to assess the quality of the service provider

Towards a theory of change

The workshop then developed the following Theory of Change to frame its strategies and its learning. Please note: This remains a work in progress to be developed further.

The vision of success

Every school in South Africa is a safe, healthy, happy and effective place of learning.

1. Schools have strong, capable and involved governance structures
2. School leadership is inspirational and effective, and is supported by effective management structures and systems
3. Schools are vibrant learning communities consciously managing their own development in partnership with government, business and community
4. Educators inspire, motivate and facilitate real learning both in the classroom and beyond
5. Learners are active participants in learning and school life
6. The physical environment of schools is safe and supports, inspires and enables learning

The preconditions of success (only the first three elements of the vision of success are broken down here):

1. Schools have strong, capable and involved governance structures

- a. The governing body complies with legal requirements
- b. The governing body is representative of key stakeholders (including learners, parents and community) and accountable and responsive to them for its decisions and actions
- c. The governing body contains relevant skills and understands its role
- d. The governing body is motivated and committed
- e. School governing bodies actively involves parents and other stakeholders in debate and decision-making

2. School leadership is inspirational and effective, and is supported by effective management structures and systems

- a. School leadership promotes a clear vision for the school's development that reflects input of key stakeholders
- b. School management motivates staff, educators, parents and learners
- c. School management promotes a nurturing and progressive approach to education
- d. School management has competent management and administration skills
- e. Systems support long term developmental processes
- f. Reporting and accountability systems support creative innovation, learning and build confidence and trust
- g. Schools are able to plan and track their progress in relation to outcomes over time

3. Educators inspire, motivate and facilitate learning both in the classroom and beyond

- a. Educators have relevant knowledge, skills and values to facilitate learning within their subject areas

- b. Educators have access to the resources and facilities they need to facilitate learning – includes learning spaces and materials
- c. Educators have extra-curricular competence in counseling, sports, arts and culture
- d. Educators have access to and incentives for further professional development

Towards a strategy for Together Schools

Participants agreed that the Together Schools Initiative should see its role in terms of:

1. Helping schools build the capacity and the systems for taking control of their own development
2. Facilitating effective school level partnerships for holistic and integrated development
3. Facilitating linkages between schools and resource providers (e.g. business) and service providers (e.g. NGOs and professional consultants)
4. Ensuring accountability to constituents and quality standards

A tentative operational strategy emerged

1. Interested schools would approach Together Schools
2. At an initial meeting with school leadership and other key stakeholders, schools would be assisted to develop their own vision of success and theory of change
3. Schools would map their assets and identify priority needs in an inclusive dialogue process
4. Together schools would assist schools to identify appropriate funders, service providers and broker the appropriate relationships
5. Together schools would evaluate interventions by service providers based on carefully directed feedback from schools, and maintain some kind of quality assurance or rating system for providers. This would make providers more accountable to their customers and raise their game. Schools resource providers could make more informed choices

What unique value might such an initiative offer the different constituents?

For Schools:

- Builds the capacity and systems of schools to plan and manage a holistic and integrated long-term strategy for their own development together with key constituents
- Provides access to resources and service providers
- Provides a system for schools to evaluate service providers so that all can better select those that provide real quality
- Assists to develop long term relationships for sustainability
- Provides a framework for comparative outcome-based monitoring and evaluation – schools can measure their progress against their own benchmarks and against similar schools

For Service Providers:

- Provides the opportunity for collaborative interventions leading to more effective impact.
- Provides access to resources and work opportunities
- Provides lower transaction costs for income received i.e. less dependence on time consuming fundraising and reporting to multiple donors; also long-term engagements
- Facilitates sharing of resources, experience, learning and practice

For Resource Providers:

- Maximises social return on investments by demonstrating actual change and the real cost of this change
- Assures the quality of the interventions and reduces risk
- Facilitates long-term relationships that are responsive to the needs of the company/funder such as reputation, opportunities for staff volunteering, morale building etc.
- Contributes to the achievement of Black Economic Empowerment Charter compliance

For Government:

- Facilitates effective social partnerships and inter-departmental co-operation
- Provides information on what works that can inform policy
- Provides access to skills