11-1-2008

Outcome Mapping

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Abstract

{Excerpt} Development is about people—it is about how they relate to one another and their environment, and how they learn in doing so. Outcome mapping puts people and learning first and accepts unexpected change as a source of innovation. It shifts the focus from changes in state, viz. reduced poverty, to changes in behaviors, relationships, actions, and activities.

Development agencies must show that their activities make significant and lasting contributions to the welfare of intended beneficiaries. But they may well be trying to measure results that are beyond their reach: the impacts they cite as evidence are often the result of a confluence of events for which they cannot realistically get full credit.

Outcome mapping exposes myths about measuring impacts and helps to answer such questions. A project or program that uses the framework and vocabulary of outcome mapping does not claim the achievement of development impacts, nor does it belittle the importance of changes in state. Rather, it focuses on its contributions to outcomes (that may in turn enhance the possibility of development impacts—the relationship is not inevitably a direct one of cause and effect.) More positively, because outcome mapping limits its concerns to those results that fall strictly within a project or program's sphere of influence, development agencies can become more specific about the actors they target, the changes they expect to see, and the strategies they employ.

Comments
Suggested Citation

Serrat, O. (2010). *Outcome mapping.* Washington, DC: Asian Development Bank.

Required Publisher's Statement

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Rationale

Development is about people—it is about how they relate to one another and their environment, and how they learn in doing so. Outcome mapping puts people and learning first and accepts unexpected change as a source of innovation. It shifts the focus from changes in state, viz. reduced poverty, to changes in behaviors, relationships, actions, and activities.

Development agencies must show that their activities make significant and lasting contributions to the welfare of intended beneficiaries. But they may well be trying to measure results that are beyond their reach: the impacts they cite as evidence are often the result of a confluence of events for which they cannot realistically get full credit. The questions that they cannot easily answer are

- How can assessment of impact move beyond attribution to documenting contributions to social change?
- How do you methodically and reasonably capture the richness of what is occurring in projects or programs?
- How do you effectively involve stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation of projects or programs?
- How do you effectively integrate monitoring and evaluation into projects or programs from the planning stage?
- How do you decide what to monitor and evaluate?
- How do you notice, explain, and respond to unexpected results?

Outcome mapping exposes myths about measuring impacts and helps to answer such questions. A project or program that uses the framework and vocabulary of outcome mapping does not claim the achievement of development impacts, nor does it belittle the importance of changes in state. Rather, it focuses on its contributions to outcomes (that may in turn enhance the possibility of development impacts—the relationship is not inevitably a direct one of cause and effect.) More positively, because outcome mapping limits its concerns to those results that fall strictly within a project or program's sphere of influence, development agencies can become more specific about the actors they target, the changes they expect to see, and the strategies they employ.[1]

Definition

Outcome mapping is a (still evolving) method for planning, monitoring, and evaluating development activities that aim to bring about social change. It was developed in 2001 by the International Development Research Centre to clarify what human, social, and environmental betterment projects or programs hope to contribute and then focus monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within their direct sphere of influence. The fundamen-

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[1] Characteristically, for example, the evaluation of a water purification project focuses on whether water quality has improved. Outcome mapping also examines whether the beneficiaries maintaining the system now have and use the knowledge and skills, tools, and other resources needed to keep it running in the long term, for instance, by monitoring contaminant levels, changing filters, or bringing in experts when needed.

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Box: A Glossary of Outcome Mapping Terms

Boundary Partners. Individuals, groups, or organizations with whom the project or program interacts directly and whom it hopes to influence.

Evaluation Plan. A short description of the main elements of an evaluation study to be conducted.

Intentional Design. The planning stage of outcome mapping at which a project or program gathers consensus on the macro-level changes it wants to influence and the strategies to be used.

Mission. An ideal description of how the project or program intends to support the achievement of the vision. The mission states the areas in which the project or program will work but does not list all the activities in which it will engage.

Monitoring Priorities. A process by which data and information are systematically and regularly collected on a project or program over time.

Organizational Practices. Eight separate practices by which a project or program remains relevant, innovative, sustainable, or connected to its environment. The practices are
   • prospecting for new ideas, opportunities, and resources;
   • seeking feedback from key informants;
   • obtaining the support of your next highest power;
   • assessing and (re)designing products, services, systems, and procedures;
   • checking up on those already served to add value;
   • sharing your best wisdom with the world;
   • experimenting to remain innovative; and
   • engaging in organizational reflection.

Outcome Challenges. The description of the ideal changes a project or program intends to influence in the behavior, relationships, actions, and activities of a boundary partner.

Outcome Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring the progress of a boundary partner in achieving progress markers over time.

Performance Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring how well a project or program is carrying out its organizational practices.

Progress Markers. A set of graduated indicators of changed behaviors of a boundary partner that focus on the depth or quality of the change.

Strategy Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring the strategies a project or program uses to encourage change in the boundary partner.

Strategy Map. A matrix that categorizes six strategy types (causal, persuasive, and supportive; each aimed at a specific individual or group and at a specific individual or group's environment) that a project or program employs to influence the boundary partner. Strategies are aimed at either the boundary partner or the environment in which the boundary partner operates.

Vision. A description of the large-scale economic, political, social, or environmental changes that the project or program hopes to encourage.
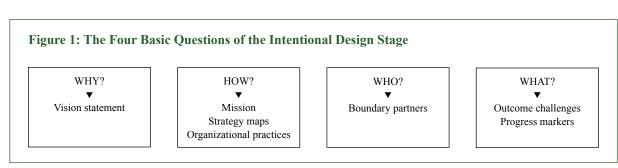
Source: Summarized and adapted from Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

tal premise of outcome mapping is that for each change in state there are correlating changes in behavior that are best encouraged if continuing responsibility has been devolved to local people and local institutions.
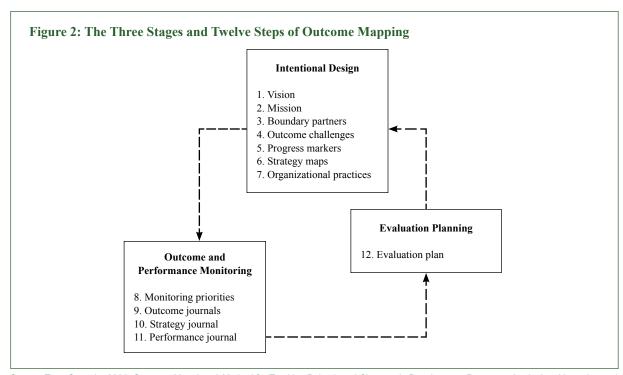
The Stages of Outcome Mapping

The full process of putcome mapping involves three stages of thinking:

- **Intentional Design.** This stage helps the project oir program design team clarify and reach consensus on the macro-level changes it would like to support and to plan appropriate strategies. The design team should clearly express the long-term, downstream impacts that it is working towards, bearing in mind that the project or program will not achieve them single-handedly. These desired impacts will provide reference points to guide strategy formulation and action plans, rather than serve as mere performance indicators. Progress markers, which will be used to track performance, should be developed for each boundary partner. They will identify the incremental—and often upstream—changes that the project or program sensibly hopes to influence, prompt behavioral change, and build the foundations of sustained social change. After clarifying what changes the project or program hopes to influence, the design team should select activities that maximize the likelihood of success. In short, the intentional design stage articulates answers to four questions: why? how? who? what?

- **Outcome and Performance Monitoring.** This stage provides a framework for monitoring actions and the progress of the boundary partners towards outcomes. The performance monitoring framework builds on the progress markers, strategy maps, and organizational practices developed at the intentional design stage. There are three data and information collection tools: an outcome journal to monitor boundary partner actions and relationships, a strategy journal to monitor strategies and activities, and a performance journal to monitor the organizational practices that keep the project or program relevant and viable. These tools will provide workspace and processes and help the design team reflect on the data and information that it has collected and how these can be used to improve performance.

- **Evaluation Planning.** This stage helps the design team set priorities to target evaluation resources and activities where they will be most useful. Evaluation planning outlines the main elements of the evaluations to be conducted.

Figure 1: The Four Basic Questions of the Intentional Design Stage

WHY?	HOW?	WHO?	WHAT?
▼	▼	▼	▼
Vision statement	Mission Strategy maps Organizational practices	Boundary partners	Outcome challenges Progress markers

Source: Terry Smutylo. 2005. Outcome Mapping: A Method for Tracking Behavioural Changes in Development Programs. *Institutional Learning and Change Brief No. 7*. Available: www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/briefs/ILAC_Brief07_mapping.pdf

Figure 2: The Three Stages and Twelve Steps of Outcome Mapping

Intentional Design

1. Vision
2. Mission
3. Boundary partners
4. Outcome challenges
5. Progress markers
6. Strategy maps
7. Organizational practices

Evaluation Planning

12. Evaluation plan

Outcome and Performance Monitoring

8. Monitoring priorities
9. Outcome journals
10. Strategy journal
11. Performance journal

Source: Terry Smutylo. 2005. Outcome Mapping: A Method for Tracking Behavioural Changes in Development Programs. *Institutional Learning and Change Brief No. 7*. Available: www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/briefs/ILAC_Brief07_mapping.pdf.

Benefits

People involved in national and local policy-making, staff and consultants of development agencies, and field personnel can use outcome mapping. Used prospectively, it can help

- Understand and influence more effectively human and ecological well-being
- Plan and measure social change in projects or programs
- Foster social and organizational learning
- Identify individuals, groups, and organizations with whom one might work directly to influence behavioral change
- Bring stakeholders into the planning and monitoring and evaluation processes
- Strengthen partnerships and alliances
- Plan and monitor behavioral change and the strategies to support those changes
- Monitor the internal practices of projects or programs so that they remain effective
- Design an evaluation plan to examine particular issues more precisely

The Importance of Participation

Outcome mapping is based on principles of participation and iterative learning. It is usually initiated through a participatory workshop led by an internal or external facilitator who is familiar with the methodology. It purposefully includes those implementing the project or program in the design and in data and information collection to encourage ownership, use of findings, and adaptation. It is a consciousness-raising, consensus-building, and empowering methodology. The process for identifying the macro-level changes, selecting the monitoring priorities, and designing the evaluation plan is intended to be participatory: wherever feasible, it should involve the full range of stakeholders. Engagement means that stakeholders will derive benefit and be credited for fulfilling their development roles; projects and programs will be credited for their contributions to this process.

Further Reading

Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

Outcome Mapping Learning Community. Available: www.outcomemapping.ca/

Evaluation @ IDRC: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/evaluation/

For further information

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