

METHOD PLAN OF CHANGE (THEORY OF CHANGE)



Area of CoP Activity: Taking Action as a Community

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Design
Prototype

CoP Success Factor: Leadership
Strategy

EIGE Step: Step 1: Getting Started
Step 3: Setting up a GEP
Step 4: Implementing a GEP
Step 5: Monitoring Progress and Evaluating a GEP
Step 6: What Comes After the GEP

Group Size: 8-25

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: Plan of change is based on the theory of change, which is viewed as a tool and methodology to outline the logical sequence of an initiative from inputs to outcomes. The outlining of the logical sequence is supported by critical thinking about the surrounding conditions that influence the plan, the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors, and the different interpretations or certain assumptions about how and why that order of change might emerge.

More Information: Vogel 2012

PLAN OF CHANGE (THEORY OF CHANGE)

Short Description

Plan of change is based on the theory of change, which is viewed as a tool and methodology to outline the logical sequence of an initiative from inputs to outcomes. Alternatively, it is understood as “a deeper reflective process and dialogue amongst colleagues and stakeholders, reflecting on the values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit people’s underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of the initiative” (Vogel, 2012: 3). However, theory of change benefits from combining both approaches. The outlining of the logical sequence is supported by critical thinking about the surrounding conditions that influence the plan, the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors, and the different interpretations or certain assumptions about how and why that order of change might emerge.

When to use

When you want to apply critical thinking to the design, implementation and evaluation of gender equality plans or other initiatives intended to support change. It helps to make assumptions explicit. Assumptions act as ‘rules of thumb’ that influence our choices, and they reflect deeply held values, norms and ideological standpoints.

These assumptions shape the design and implementation of plans. If we make these assumptions explicit, it will allow us to check, debate and enrich them to strengthen our plans. By critically reflecting, theory of change could support plans’ innovation and adaptation in response to dynamic contexts. It encourages constant “questioning of what might influence change in the context and drawing on evidence and learning during implementation” (Vogel, 2012: 4). Thus, theory of change thinking can stimulate improvements in plans, “beyond responses towards more realistic and feasible interventions that are responsive to dynamic contexts” (2012: 5).

How to

A: Brief explanation

Plan of Change helps to expose how our current plan is organised, check if our new ideas are logically consistent, or examine if a specific action will work. The method can help rethink our plan completely, and from the start help to focus on what changes the project could influence. You can use this method to start off projects or as a tool for project management. It illuminates what we know and don’t know and where we should be focusing our efforts on. This should ultimately help us to ask the right questions, to ensure the project develops with according to the aim, and end with the expected effect.¹

B: Detailed Step-by-step guide

- Book a meeting for at least 1.5 hours (2 hrs for virtual), inviting relevant participants that as a group possess deep knowledge of the focus area. Print the template (or write the headlines on a flip chart, or Mural, etc.) and use it as the focal point for the discussion. Let your participants know what the subject of the activity is to allow them to think ahead and prepare their outputs (optional).
- In the template we work from “impacts” and work towards “resources”, but you can also begin with “resources” and work towards “impacts”. It is important to ensure everyone operates with the same definitions of the headings to ensure mutual understanding. Before you begin your work, introduce the method, and clearly explain what each category means as suggested below to ensure a common understanding of these categories by all participants*.
- If you have many participants, you could divide them into smaller groups (breakout rooms) to work on each category and then after 10 min. bring them all back into the plenary to select the most recurring themes/ideas.

*) It’s important to distinguish both the long- and short-term impacts as it helps to understand and create a change strategy.



¹ The description and the steps are adapted from www.mind-lab.dk

- **LONG-TERM IMPACT:** this impact can be characterised as the “big picture”, the ideal scenario, and as such it is often quite speculative. It can be based on the belief that some short-term impacts and results may one day lead to broader applications or a wider development.

e.g. An increased rate of GE plan implementation in RFOs and RPOs.

Write all desired long-impacts the project should achieve on post-it notes. If possible, write how you wish to evaluate these impacts.

- **SHORT-TERM IMPACT:** is the development of a temporary solution or a partial solution to the bigger problem, which is hoped to be resolved after further developments and implementation. Following from the example above a short-term impact leading to this could be:

e.g. RPOs and RFOs are able to monitor and evaluate the state of play of gender equality in the institutions (which will make them realise they need to implement GE plans).

- **RESULTS:** are the outputs, the products of your activities. Describe the results that would lead to the desired impacts. Be aware, that there might be several different results in the activities. Write the results on post-it notes and attach them to the template.

e.g. The production of the Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring Tool (GEAM).

Draw pathways between the impacts and results – and discuss which results precede a given impact.

- **ACTIVITIES:** Write down activities (actions, instructions, contact points or control visits) the plan will consist of on post-it notes. Are all the relevant activities included? If there are activities that are performed by others, then you should also consider adding them:

e.g. Designing, piloting, refining, translating the GEAM tool.

Draw pathways to impacts and results.

- **RESOURCES:** List the resources (finance, people, buildings, IT, etc.), that will be used to implement the activities. Who and what do you need?

e.g. Existing GE surveys, Athena Swan surveys, quantitative researchers, experts’ panel for focus groups, software: Survey Monkey, SPSS, financial support, etc.

Draw lines to connect resources with activities, results and impacts of short and long term.

- Identify the **critical assumptions** the plan is based on and list them.

e.g. We assume that we have enough quantitative researchers and expertise to design the tool.

- You are now ready to work with your change plan. What questions does your change plan pose, and how will you proceed to work with new activities and resources, to achieve the aimed effects?

Additional ideas / information:

Alternatives²:

Group discussion:

- What are the main types of changes that we want to support?
- What are the main 3-5- development conditions that need to be in place for change even to be possible?
- Identify the 3 most important relationships between these conditions and write them as affirmative statements
- Discuss in the group, use drawing and cards to develop the discussion.

Another simple starting point:

- Share a story of change in a group discussion
- Ask: What happened? Who was involved? What do you think helped the change happen? What, if anything, did we contribute? How do we know?
- Discuss and use as an opportunity for reflection

Some guiding issues and questions to use in the process:

The context for change – how change happens

Who are we aiming to support and why?

(clarifying the target group and prioritising the key issues they face, if appropriate)

Who are the groups, and what are the structures and processes that influence change in the target group's lives?

(ranking them in their importance to the target group; and showing whether they influence change positively, negatively or both)

- How do we know? – what is the basis for our understanding/ learning?

Our organisational (or programme) contribution to change

What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives?

- What is our overall vision for change as an organisation/programme?
- What are the key four or five long-term changes to which we can contribute?

Who and what needs to change in order to achieve those long-term changes?

- What changes need to happen at other levels or dimensions in order to achieve the long-term changes (e.g. at community level or in policy or systems).
- What factors relationships or approaches influence change at each level?
- Who are the groups we can influence? What changes need to take place in them?

What factors relationships, approaches, pathways influence change at each level?

What are the three to five key factors to which we can contribute that will be vital in bringing about 24 change? (i.e. our core beliefs about how we influence change)

- How do we know? – what is the basis for our understanding/ learning?
- Why do we think that change will happen that way? (our rationale/ assumptions)
- What are the risks (external and internal) that might prevent change taking place?
- How might we need to tailor our approach to groups with specific vulnerabilities?

Applying our theory of change

- How will we know and measure if we have brought about change?
- How will we apply it to our organisation, programme and learning processes?

² All the alternative questions have been taken from Vogel (2012: 23-24).



Template

PLAN OF CHANGE

LONG-TERM IMPACT	SHORT-TERM IMPACT	RESULTS	ACTIVITIES	RESOURCES

REFERENCES

Vogel, Isabel. 2012. *Review of the Use of 'Theory of Change' in International Development*. Available from: <http://isabelvogel.co.uk>.