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Dealing with complex reality in planning, monitoring and evaluation – Choosing the most suitable approach for a specific context

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Colophon



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Contents	Page
Acronyms	5
Introduction	6
A wind of change is blowing through the PME landscape	6
The aim of this working paper	6
Overview of the content	7
Part 1 – Challenges to consider when choosing a Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) approach	8
Challenge 1 – Results Based Management: a concept that hides more than it reveals?	8
Challenge 2 – Managing for results in contexts of varying complexity	14
Challenge 3 – Finding the balance between accountability and learning in PME	21
Challenge 4 – No time to waste	23
Towards an analytic framework	28
Part 2 – Choosing from a colourful pallet of PME approaches	30
Outcome mapping (OM)	32
The Logical Framework Approach (LFA)	40
Most Significant Change (MSC)	45
Advantages and disadvantages of LFA, OM and MSC	48
The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) – PME in the context of influencing policy	49
Five Core Capabilities Model – ECDPM	55
Towards a PME approach decider: choosing the right PME approach for your context	60
Conclusion and recommendations	62
Demystifying PME	62
Three important considerations for PME	62
References	65

List of figures

Figure 1: Ripple model for capacity development	9
Figure 2: Stakeholder map of the Swayamsiddha project	10
Figure 3: Internal and external results of capacity building interventions	12
Figure 4: PME layers up and down one example of a results chain	13
Figure 5: Depiction of the hard and soft dimension framework	15
Figure 6: Cynefin framework	18
Figure 7: An attempt at the integration of Cynefin and hard/soft typology	20
Figure 8: Three phases of the Outcome Mapping process	33
Figure 9: Three types of project stakeholders and the nature of the relationship between them.	35
Figure 10: Monitoring opportunities in OM and associated monitoring journals	38
Figure 11: Illustration of an outcome mapping framework for capacity development	39
Figure 12: 4x4 matrix of logframe	41
Figure 13: The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)	50
Figure 14: Two-dimensional form of the Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix (AIIM)	51
Figure 15: Example of force field analysis relating to the problem of deforestations.	52
Figure 16: SWOT analysis as a monitoring tool for capacity of programme team	53
Figure 17: Elements of capacity	56
Figure 18: Five capability monitoring frameworks	57
Figure 19: PME approach decider tool	61

List of tables

Table 1: Management options for the various dimensions of the hard and soft dimensions framework	16
Table 2: Elements and processes related to planning, learning and accountability	22
Table 3: Key principles of accountability and learning	23
Table 4: Difference between conventional and participatory evaluation	27
Table 5: Overview of PME approaches	31
Table 6: Set of progress markers to monitor changes in behaviour of college administrations, one of the boundary partners in an environmental education programme in Zimbabwe	36
Table 7: Advantages and disadvantages of LFA, OM and MSC	49

Acronyms

DPRN	Development Policy Review Network
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy management
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LFA	Logical framework approach
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OM	Outcome mapping
PME	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development Programme
RBM	Results based management
ROMA	RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach
SMART	Specific-Measurable-Appropriate-Relevant-Timing
VVOB	The Flemish Office for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance

Introduction

A wind of change is blowing through the PME landscape

It is as if a wind of change is blowing through the field of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) for development. It is a wind of critical questioning of current practice, experimentation with new approaches, ongoing confusion, growing expectations and learning which is being stirred by various development actors at different levels trying to address specific challenges in their work. It is also the result of growing concern that the tools for PME need to be diversified so that development actors can be more adaptive to their specific working contexts.

In our quest to realise more effective and efficient result-based management (RBM), the dominant approach that has been used in the last twenty years, and is still being used, by the majority of donors and major development actors has been the logical framework approach (LFA). A lot has been written about the strengths and the challenges of the LFA (Hummelbrunner, 2010; Ambrose and Roduner, 2009; Bakewell and Garbutt 2005; Gasper 1997). We have also witnessed lively debates between LFA supporters and those who prefer other more qualitative and non-linear approaches. At the same time, on the basis of the Paris Declaration, the voices calling for improvements in working towards results have never been louder. We will probably not answer these calls by trying to prove the merit of one approach over another.

The underlying issue here is not how good or bad an approach is, because every approach has its strengths and weaknesses. A more important issue is to analyse how suitable a specific approach is for use in a specific context. 'If we only have a hammer in our toolbox, then every problem becomes a nail'. There is nothing wrong with the hammer as such. A hammer remains an essential tool for hammering something into place, but it becomes a problem if you only have a hammer to fix your bicycle's flat tyre. Specific approaches also come with underlying principles that inform their implementation and their suitability for a specific context. A good carpenter may not hammer his or her way through every carpentry job, but instead opt for precise measurement and fitting when making or repairing some delicate piece of woodwork. **A PME approach in this paper therefore refers to both the tools and techniques together with the underlying principles that come with the approach.**

More and more often, we see organisations experimenting with new PME approaches, such as outcome mapping (OM), Most Significant Change (MSC), social frameworks¹ and many more. This is all evidence of a growing energy that seeks change in our PME practice and this change is a response to real problems that we face on a day to day basis in our work.

The aim of this working paper

In general terms this paper is intended to support the ongoing PME debate. By unpacking a number of practical challenges related to PME that we face in our often complex

¹ The social framework, developed by Rick Davies, provides a format for describing an expected pathway of influence through a wider network of people, groups or organizations.

<http://mande.co.uk/2008/uncategorized/the-social-framework-as-an-alternative-to-the-logical-framework/>

development programmes we seek to formulate an analytical framework that can help to assess which PME approaches are suitable in which combination for which context. We use this analytical framework to explore a number of PME approaches in such a way that it can diversify our PME toolbox and can improve our judgement about the selection of a specific approach, not because of the approach itself but because of choosing the most suitable approach for a specific situation.

More specifically the paper seeks to inform an ongoing dialogue supported by the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) between development practitioners, back donors, policymakers and academics about the suitability of Logical Framework and Outcome Mapping as PME approaches in complex contexts. In addition, the paper aims to support a large-scale action research process (2010–2012) supported by the Dutch Government through PSO², which involves several Dutch organisations experimenting with alternative PME approaches such as OM, MSC, the five capability model, etc.

PME as way to strengthen capacity

This paper does not focus on PME of capacity development. Instead the paper looks at PME as a way to strengthen the capacity of development organisations who operate at different levels both in the North and the South. The paper seeks to support the implementation of alternative PME approaches that show great potential for use in complex situations so that the development actors that use these approaches are better equipped to learn from their development results and to strengthen their internal adaptive capacity. The paper therefore assumes that such learning centred and complexity oriented PME approaches will strengthen the capacity of organisations to deal with complex processes of social change.



The various reviewer comments in the text provide questions and thoughts for further discussion and reflection.

Overview of the content

The first part of this paper tries to clarify four important challenges related to PME that one needs to consider before choosing a suitable PME approach.

1. We first examine the challenge of **unpacking the meaning of results** and determining which results to look for, and learn from, in PME.
2. We then focus in more detail on the challenge of **establishing the level of complexity at which we are working** in order to be able to choose a PME approach that fits a specific level of complexity.
3. Next we explore the challenge of **finding a balance between learning and accountability** by identifying some common principles that underpin both processes.
4. Finally we dig deeper beyond the frequently heard challenge that **we do not have time for PME** by looking at the importance of joint reflection and participation.

² PSO is an association of sixty Dutch development organisations. The association concentrates on capacity development in civil-society organisations in developing countries.

Based on these challenges an analytical framework is then proposed that can help practitioners to analyse which PME approach is best suited to which context or situation.

In the second part of the paper we use the analytical framework to explore a number of PME approaches as regards their suitability for specific contexts and specific needs. The following PME approaches are explored: OM, LFA, MSC, ROMA and the five capability model.

Through its practice-oriented focus this working paper hopes to add value to the large body of writing about PME. It poses some real questions that are faced by practitioners in the field all over the world. Being practitioners ourselves, we are also able to talk for a large part on the basis of our own experience.



Reviewers comment: There are other challenges that NGOs face and which are not part of the scope of this paper. For example, What do specific PME approaches require of staff in terms of skills and competencies? Especially as NGOs work on so many different levels with different people with different backgrounds. How difficult are new PME approaches to integrate in one's own organisation. This involves dealing with intra-organisational constraints and acceptance by senior managers, as introducing new concepts requires a change management process in itself.

A word of caution

This paper has to be seen as a work in progress. At this stage the authors do not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of the large body of literature relating to PME. Instead, based on our own field experience and recent PME insights from literature, we attempt to provide a framework that can help practitioners to select PME systems that are suitable for a specific context. We hope that this paper will provide a basis for further discussion that will contribute to the further development of the paper.

Part 1 – Challenges to consider when choosing a PME approach

‘One of the rarest managerial skills is the ability to understand which tools will work in a given situation and which will misfire’ (Clayten et al., 2009, in Harvard Business Review).

Challenge 1 – Results Based Management, a concept that hides more than it reveals?

Donor agencies and policymakers are increasingly faced with the demand by their constituencies to show concrete results from the funding they have invested in development programmes. RBM is one of the principles for improving aid in the Paris Declaration and has been an important step towards fulfilling this demand. At the same time, however, even after many years of acquiring experience in using conventional PME approaches, such as the logical framework, the reality is that donors, policymakers and field staff still face problems when it comes to receiving all the necessary information about concrete results and effectiveness from the programmes they fund or support.

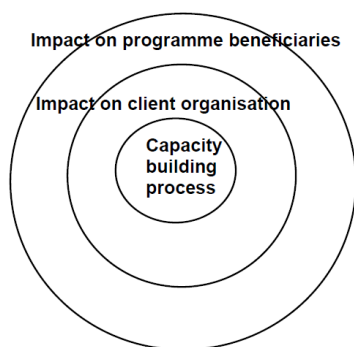


Reviewers comment: What is necessary information, and what is not? What about overambitious goal setting by implementers and donors which makes it rather impossible to come up with “all” the information. At the same time it seems that the “information needs” change during the course of an intervention.

Morgan and Baser (2008) give an example of a common interpretation of results-based management as articulated in an evaluation of the Asian Development Bank: “Results-based management involves identifying the impact of an intervention, formulating its outcome, specifying outputs and inputs, identifying performance indicators, setting targets, monitoring and reporting results, evaluating results and using the information to improve performance. A good quality design and monitoring framework is an integral-at-entry results-based management tool that clearly identifies key project objectives with measurable performance indicators, establishes quantified and time-bound milestones and targets for the indicators at each level of the project and specifies the sources of the data for tracking implementation progress. Lacking one or more of these elements at entry weakens a project’s design quality.”

What do we mean with results?

Results can mean different things to different people. Results can also be situated at different levels of a development process. The metaphor of the ripples formed by a stone thrown into a pond of still water helps us to explain this concept of different results at different levels. If the intervention is the stone thrown into the water, the ripples moving outward are then the changes that the intervention is contributing to (Crawford and Perryman, 2004).



James (2009) uses this model to illustrate the three main levels at which you can monitor and evaluate a capacity building intervention (Figure 1). The model in this instance shows that results can be found at the level of the client organisation (first ripple) who is directly involved in the capacity building process and at the level of the beneficiaries (second ripple) who receive services from the client organisations and who may be the ultimate beneficiaries of the capacity building programme (stone) or another intermediary actor.

Figure 1: Ripple model for capacity development (James, 2009)

How far along the ripples are we going to look for results?

This is a real practical question because very often we come across lots of ripples before reaching our ultimate beneficiaries. This is reflected in the stakeholder map below (Figure 2) of the well-known ‘Swayamsiddha’ project, which is often used during OM³ workshops (Smutylo and Ortiz, 2004). The figure clearly shows the various intermediate actors that exist between the implementing programme, namely Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in collaboration with BAIF (a Development Research Foundation in India), and the ultimate target groups such as ‘families’. The diagram shows that an implementing programme or organisation often has to work through intermediate actors.

³ Outcome Mapping is a learning-centred PME system developed by the International Development Research Centre (Earl *et al.*, 2001). This approach is discussed in part 2 of this paper.

Changes at each level are necessary in order to contribute to changes at the level of the ultimate target groups. These changes are not under the control of the implementing programme. In fact, the implementing programme may have a direct influence on the NGO but it only has an indirect influence on the next level, for example the police and community leaders. Changes at any of these intermediate levels that are significant for further changes at the level of the ultimate target groups can actually be seen as some kind of result to which the programme may have contributed. It would, therefore, be a mistake for a programme to look only for results at the level of the ultimate target groups, because a lot of results at the intermediate layers would then be missed and the programme would find it very hard to understand why any changes that they may observe at the ultimate target level came about. We will come back to the ‘why’ question later on in this paper.

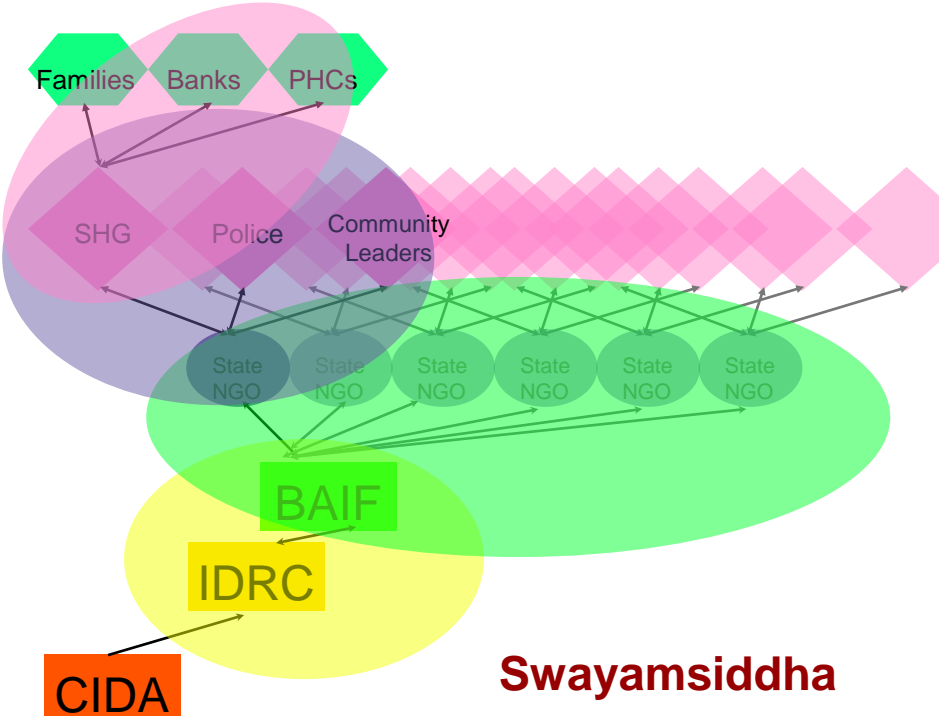


Figure 2: Stakeholder map of the Swayamsiddha project (Terry Smutylo and Natalia Ortiz, 2004)

If we apply the ripple model to the Swayamsiddha example, the implementing programme would be the centre and each actor level would correspond to a ripple. The further the actor is away from the implementing organisation, the further away the ripple would be.

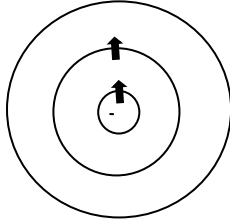
An actor map like the one in Figure 2 can provide organisations with a powerful tool to clarify their theories of change and to determine at which actor level in the model they will look for results depending on the information needs of the various actors. Of course, such a stakeholder map does not show the whole picture. There are so many other factors and actors that are not shown that, in real life, will have an influence at various levels. Nevertheless such a map is still a big step forward towards establishing the system you are working with. As such the model can help programme stakeholders to specify roles, responsibilities and expectations of various actors along the various levels and open up

opportunities for meaningful interaction and dialogue with the actors in the intervention. In other words it prepares the ground for concrete social learning between the various actors during implementation. Interaction with the actors will help assess the context in which these actors operate or live. In reality the ripple model often does not represent a still water surface but rather a flowing river with lots of unexpected corners and turns and ‘rocks, logs and wind affecting its flow’ (James, 2009: 4). The heavier the flow of the river, which is often the case with complex social change contexts, the more difficult it will be to see the ripples.

From which ripple do we start our M&E and in which direction do we go?

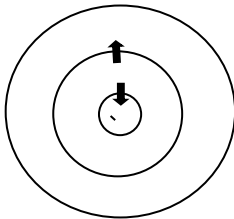
Having a good idea of the various ripples or the patterns of influence in our stakeholder map is essential for the development of a functional PME system. The next question is ‘how to link together PME at all the different levels’ (Simister and Smith, 2010: 9) and where in our map or our ripple model should we start our monitoring and evaluation (M&E)? Simister and Smith (*ibid.*) present three possible scenarios which can be useful to consider when developing a PME system because different scenarios (or combinations of them) will suit different approaches:

1. Starting from the support activities (i.e. the stone in the pond) and from there trace changes forward across the ripples that can be attributed to the support activities. This is



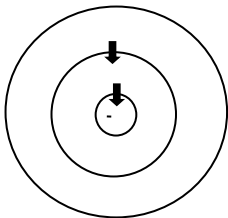
a common practice in predictive PME approaches such as the logical framework and has the advantage that it makes attribution easier to assess. It also focuses on the quality of the support given. This scenario is less suited for dealing with complex contexts, for example in situations in which support comes from different sources.

2. Starting from the direct recipient of the support activities. In this case you start by attempting to monitor the outcomes (e.g. capacity of an organisation, specific behaviour,



of actors that are supported directly, etc..) at different points in time in order to show change. When changes in outcomes are identified these can be tracked backward to find out what has caused or contributed to these changes and forward to see how these changes have also contributed to other outcomes at a different level. Such an approach is better suited to deal with situations where support is given from different sources. However, it is not suitable for assessing the attribution of outcomes to specific support activities. Organisational assessment tools are often used in this scenario in the case of capacity development programmes. Outcome Mapping which focuses monitoring on the outcomes at the level of the direct partner would also fit well in such a scenario.

3. Starting from impact level. This scenario would start looking for changes at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries and then work backward to establish what has contributed to



these changes. It is important to realise that impact is influenced by many factors and a major research effort is often needed to figure out the contribution of one specific development programme. If the resources allow, however, the scenario can also provide a way to show

how different development programmes can together contribute to wider changes at society or community levels.

How far should we measure?

To make things even more complex, results can also be obtained (often unknowingly and extremely difficult to measure) beyond the ripples or the context of a programme. Simister and Smith (2010) illustrates this in Figure 3 for capacity development programmes by showing how the improved capacity of partners can, on the one hand, result in improved project outputs and outcomes but, on the other hand, can also result in improved contribution to wider civil society outside the context of a specific project for which the capacity development may have been aimed. While it will be difficult to measure wider results like these, especially in the case of more general capacity development designed to strengthen leadership or organisational systems, it may be important to be able to illustrate this type of results by highlighting specific examples whenever we see them happening because they can be effective for learning (Simister and Smith, 2010).

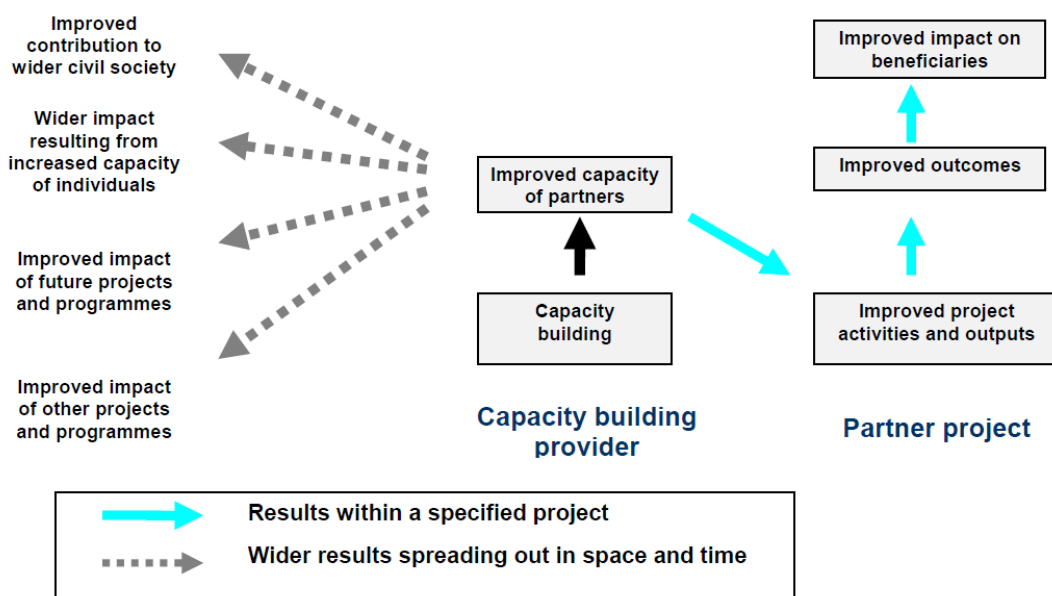


Figure 3: Internal and external results of capacity building interventions (Simister and Smith, 2010)

Which information about which results is needed by whom and for which purpose?

Clarifying **which information about which results** is needed **by whom and for which purpose** is crucial for any PME plan in the context of a result-based management system, for the following reasons:

1. Different information needs. Different stakeholders may have different information needs which are not always compatible (James, 2009). Sometimes donors might want the PME system to provide information on the changes at the level of ultimate beneficiaries for accountability purposes. On the other hand, implementing partners or NGOs might want the PME system to provide information that helps them to learn about what works and what does not work in order to inform future planning and implementation. Furthermore, final beneficiaries might have an interest in PME information to make and keep the programme or project accountable to their needs. Some trade off will be needed between

these various information needs (*ibid.*) and will have to be considered when developing a PME system. The information needed and its projected use will determine which approaches and tools are most suitable within a PME system for planning, data collection, data analysis and honest reporting (Simister and Smit, 2010). PME carried out for learning purposes may not satisfy accountability needs and vice versa. Satisfying both accountability needs and learning needs can be a difficult balancing act (Earl et al., 2001). Later on in this paper we will see how this balancing act can be addressed by becoming accountable through a predominant focus on learning.



Reviewers comment: It may be difficult to attribute an information need to a specific stakeholder. Each stakeholder may have different PURPOSES for which information is needed and sometimes information needs can fulfill multiple purposes and sometimes it cannot. As a result, start with purpose and then go to information type.

2. Different PME layers. In the ripple model discussed above we saw that there are many layers to PME up and down the results chain, with each layer generating different information needs as regards different results for different reasons by different stakeholders (Barefoot collective, 2009). Different actors will develop their PME systems according to their own information needs and those of the actors from the neighbouring levels and sometimes levels further away. The result is different layers of PME systems. Figure 4 provides an insight into just a few of these possible layers. Clarifying these layers will be crucial in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and frustration in the development and implementation of PME systems (*ibid.*).

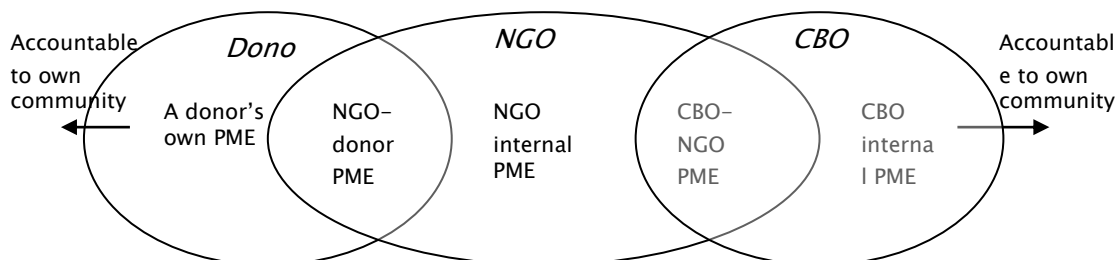


Figure 4: PME layers up and down one example of a results chain (Barefoot collective, 2009)

The various layers may also contribute to competing demands on PME. The donor may want information on the short-term results of the programme it supports in order to be accountable to its own community (e.g. the public or parliament). The implementing NGO might want to report results to the donor but may also want information in order to learn how to improve its services and to strengthen its own capacity, or simply for basic programme management (Simister and Smit, 2010). Some NGOs see results as a source of pride in accomplishments, while others regard them as necessary in order to convince donors to continue their support or as benchmarks for effectiveness (De Coninck et al., 2008).

3. *Problem of ultimate impact.* There are a number of challenges (with methodological implications) which emerge when results are understood to be the final impact of an intervention in terms of a sustained positive change in the livelihoods or wellbeing of a large number of beneficiaries (Carden and Earl, 2003):

- Many factors, beyond the intervention, contribute to impact. To demonstrate that a programme has caused development improvements, poses serious measurement problems for an organization.



Reviewers Comment: ‘Some of the thinking around ‘policy influencing’ and advocacy PME is more advanced in this area. It is gradually being recognised that it is never possible to prove anything – even in physical sciences – and the only valid scientific approach is to argue a case for what has changed and what your contribution was, using all the evidence that you have acquired (in this case that you have contributed towards development improvements). You then put the information in the public domain, and invite others to challenge you if necessary. This kind of ‘peer review’ could be useful for PME of capacity building as well’.

- For sustained change to take root, ownership needs to shift to local actors on whom the external programme, in fact, has the least influence.
- Assessing long-term impact often fails to provide information or feedback that allows programmes to improve their performance. ‘It often provides clueless feedback that neither tells the organisation about their specific contributions to development change nor provides data on how to improve its efforts’ (*Ibid.*).
- The heavy emphasis on demonstrating the impact of programmes often ignores the development of learning capacities within organisations themselves.

Methodological implications

We hope the few pages above have shed some light on the fact that ‘results’ within RBM can mean different things. Different monitoring approaches will be needed depending on the results that we want to look at and learn from in our PME systems. Baser and Morgan (2008) recommend the following (p.92):

- “Encouraging some serious discussion about the strengths, weaknesses and comparative advantages of different approaches to RBM...
- Finding ways to make the shift from input/output/outcome logic models to recognising ‘fuzzy’ realities and emergent outcomes... Creating a broader view of what constitutes ‘results’. From a capacity perspective, the focus should widen to include the intangible, the longer term, the strategic and those aspects of capacity and results that are valued by country participants...”

Challenge 2 – Managing for results in contexts of varying complexity

Hard and soft programmes

As we try to clarify what we mean by Results Based Management in development it is helpful to differentiate between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ projects or programmes. Crawford and Pollack (2003, 2004) argue that the distinction between hard (positivist, rationalist, scientific) and soft (interpretive, qualitative, constructivist) world views has a pervasive impact on what is done, how it is done and why it is done. They developed a framework that can help us to

estimate the softness or the hardness of our projects or programmes (see Figure 5). Based on research over several years, the framework identifies seven dimensions in the analysis of hard and soft aspects of projects or programmes. The further we move towards the right on the scale for each of the seven domains in Figure 5, the more a project or programme can be typified as 'soft'. It may even happen that both ends of the spectrum for a particular domain apply at the same time. The framework is not meant as a checklist for diagnosing the softness or hardness of programme. Instead it provides a framework for discussion that can help programme stakeholders to develop a deeper understanding of the programmes they are involved in. One might not be surprised to find that many development projects or programmes can be situated in the 'soft' domain which is characterised by limited goal clarity and tangibility, a lack of quantifiable indicators, substantial external influences, many possible alternative solutions, a need for high stakeholder participation and high stakeholder expectations as regards culture, meaning and value.

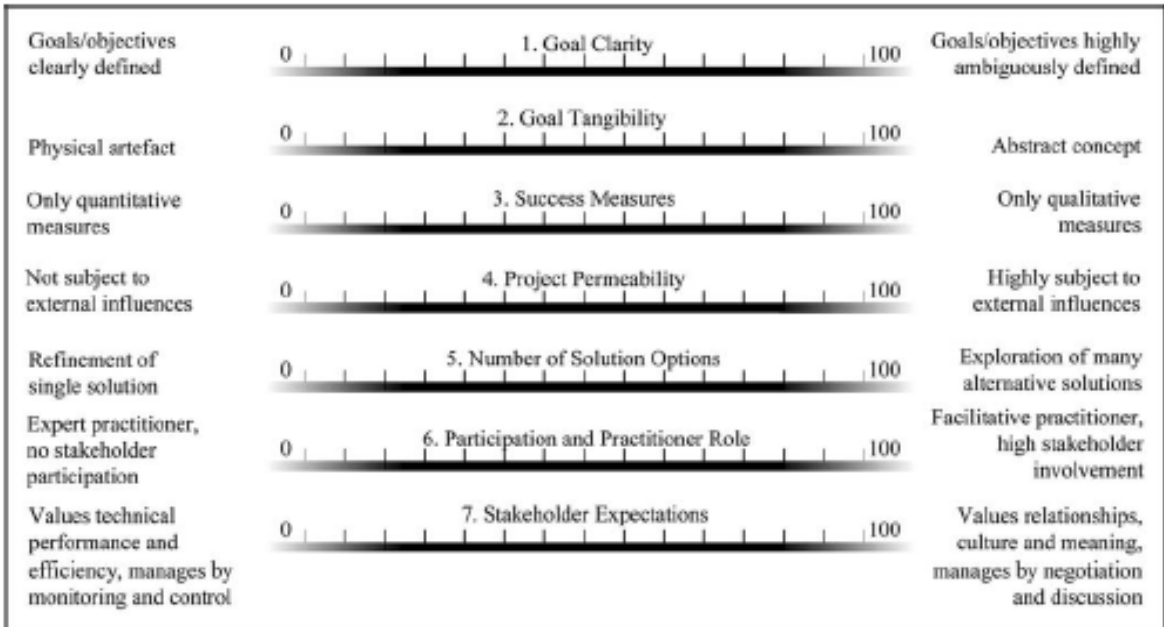


Figure 5: Depiction of the hard and soft dimension framework (of Crawford and Pollack, 2004)

In relation to the ripple model discussed above, the softer the project or programme, the more difficult it will be to see the ripples because of the multitude of contextual factors that affect the flow of the river beyond the control of the intervention. The typology of projects or programmes as soft or hard is important because it provides a basis for choosing appropriate management approaches. This will in turn inform the PME approaches and tools that are most suitable for a particular project or programme. Table 1 illustrates management options for the various dimensions of the hard and soft dimensions framework.

Management options for <u>hard</u> projects/ programmes	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <i>Hard</i> ←————→ <i>Soft</i> </div>			Management options for <u>soft</u> projects/ Programmes
	Goals/objectives clearly defined.	<u>Goal/objective clarity</u>	Goals/objectives highly	
Focus on the solution to a	Goals/objectives clearly defined.	<u>Goal/objective clarity</u>	Goals/objectives highly	Focus on learning, exploration and problem

predetermined problem.			ambiguously defined.	definition through negotiation, debate and accommodation.
Define goals in tangible terms.	Physical artefact (engineering or construction projects).	<u>Goal/objective tangibility</u>	Abstract concept (e.g. organisational change projects).	Rely on subjective interpretation and judgement of goals.
Quantitative monitoring techniques.	Easier to formulate quantitative indicators and measures.	<u>Success measures</u>	Easier to formulate qualitative indicators and measures.	Qualitative monitoring techniques.
Concentrate on the management of identified issues and optimise the quality and delivery of objectives.	Not subject to external influences.	<u>Project permeability</u>	Highly subject to external influences.	Focus on learning and exploration, allowing deliverables to be tailored to the local environment and emergent knowledge concerning risks and benefits exploited. Include a wide variety of stakeholders to gain insight from multiple perspectives on the situation.
Focus on the optimisation of the predetermined solution without undue examination of its intrinsic value or alternatives.	Refinement of single solution.	<u>Number of solution options</u>	Exploration of many alternative solutions.	Emphasis on learning, debate, participation, in order to explore alternatives and seek innovative solutions.
Team members are seen as expert in their fields with clearly defined roles.	Expert practitioner, no stakeholder participation.	<u>Degree of participation and practitioner role</u>	Facilitative practitioner, high stakeholder involvement.	People are encouraged to cross professional boundaries. A participative, collaborative, facilitative approach to negotiate between multiple perspectives and to develop participant ownership.
Manage by monitoring and control. People are assumed to act in predictable ways.	Values technical performance and efficiency.	<u>Stakeholder expectations</u>	Values relationships, culture and meaning.	Manage by negotiation and discussion. Emphasis is on the people who will take the action to improve the situation and ultimately

				judge the success of any intervention.
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Table 1: Management options for the various dimension of the hard and soft dimensions framework (adapted from Crawford and Pollack, 2004)

When we apply this hard and soft dimensions framework to capacity development programmes, different types of capacity development will situate differently along the various dimensions of the framework. More technical capacity development (Simister and Smith, 2010), also called first order capacity development (Baser and Morgan, 2008), which is aimed at addressing a specific and tangible issue concerning an organisation’s activities or structure (Simister and Smith, 2010) would be situated more in the hard dimension. **Technical** or **‘first order’ capacity development** would therefore not seek to change the vision, culture, values that lay behind the activities of the organisation. It instead seeks to strengthen certain activities that are carried out, often within the context of a specific project or programme and is often a result of a practical need which is determined by some kind of needs analysis. On the other hand, **general capacity development** (Simister and Smith, 2010), which is also called **‘second order’** capacity development (Baser and Morgan, 2008), focuses more on helping organisations to strengthen their overall performance and their ability to adapt themselves within a changing context. Such capacity development is less confined to a specific technical task, but is more complex and long term and can require in-depth reflection on the underlying values, culture and vision of an organisation which determine its activities and which is not limited to immediate practical needs (*ibid.*). In the case of general or second order capacity development it is very common for no-one to know exactly what the outcomes of the process will be. It is obvious, therefore, that a PME system that seeks to monitor such a process will need to help people capture such unpredictable outcomes and learn from them!

For some, the ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ typology may not be that attractive. Firstly, the typology is limited to only two domains (hard and soft) which may be too broad and stereotypical. Secondly, the terms hard and soft can easily give rise to various associations that can make people uncomfortable. The association of ‘soft’ as ‘easy going’ and not being very serious can serve as an example. Then there is ‘hard’ meaning authoritarian and business minded. Fortunately we now have the Cynefin framework, developed by Kurtz and Snowden (2003), which allows us to further categorise the soft and the hard domain and as such broadens our toolbox to determine the context for which we need to select a suitable PME approach. The Cynefin framework is discussed in the next chapter.

Simple, complicated, complex or chaotic?

We are starting to realise more and more that social development involves complex processes. We say they are complex because they are often unpredictable and affected by multiple actors and factors beyond any development intervention that is being carried out (Verkoren, 2008). The unpredictable nature of human behaviour, linked as it is with the multitude of interacting relationships between various actors, makes social systems and therefore social development processes complex (Woodhill, 2008). This realisation has important implications for Results Based Management as it questions the relevance of results

based planning models that assume linear cause-and-effect relationships and predictable outcomes when dealing with complex situations.

As with any PME tool or approach it is important to use it for the purpose or context it serves. Therefore, in the context of development, it is essential to analyse the actual situation first and determine its level of complexity and then identify the most suitable PME tool. The Cynefin framework (see Figure 6) developed by David Snowden and Cynthia Kurtz (Kurtz and Snowden, 2003) helps us to identify the types of leadership patterns, learning processes and intervention strategies that are appropriate for different levels of complexity (Woodhill, 2008). As such it complements and broadens the ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ framework of Crawford and Pollack that we discussed above.



Figure 6: Cynefin framework

Developed by David Snowden, www.cognitive-edge.com

The Cynefin framework is a ‘sense making or decision making’ framework which helps organisations to differentiate between situations or processes that are ‘simple’, ‘complicated’, ‘complex’ or ‘chaotic’ and make decisions accordingly. It is important to make this differentiation when developing PME systems.

- *Simple* refers to situations where cause and effect are obvious, repeatable and predictable. The approach is sense – categorise – respond. Organising a routine meeting could be labelled a simple task for which no thorough analysis or strategic planning is needed. Simple quality standards and following a protocol of best practices could be enough to ensure the meeting is properly organised.
- *Complicated* refers to situations where cause and effect are detectable but separated over time and space. Some expert knowledge or investigation is needed to establish the cause and effect relationship. The approach is sense – analyse – respond. Good practices can be developed for such situations. Drawing on the insights of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) capacity development study, the complicated domain may be characterised by a ‘relatively stable environment, a short-term horizon, clear boundaries in terms of time and resources, the absence of political conflict over means and ends, and technical or logistical objectives that could be specified relatively easily’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 92). The authors give the example of how the ‘machine-like’ structure, procedures and outcomes of the Rwanda Revenue Authority lent itself to control-oriented management.

- *Complex* refers to situations in which cause and effect is understandable in retrospect but cannot be predicted and is often unrepeatable. Frequently it is also undetectable because of the multitude of external factors and actors that cannot always be known or understood. The approach in complex situations is probe – sense – respond. This involves the emergent practice of trying out specific interventions and then learning what works and what doesn't work. On the basis of that knowledge one can then respond by scaling up or replicating (Woodhill, 2008). Long term general or second order capacity development processes that seek to strengthen the ability to learn, adapt and innovate would fit in this complex domain (Baser and Morgan, 2008). Integrating environmental education as a subject in the national curriculum of teacher education in a 6 year education programme in Zimbabwe turned out to be a rather complicated and predictable process while the subsequent implementation of the revised curriculum without donor funding became a much more messy and unpredictable process with many unexpected outcomes (Van Ongevalle et al, 2010).
- *Chaotic* refers to situations in which the relationship between cause and effect is not detectable. In such situations there is often no time for planning and one needs to act immediately (e.g. in emergency situations after natural disasters). The approach is to act – sense – respond.
- *The central part, 'disorder*, represents the space of not knowing which domain we are in. In such case we will interpret the situation on the basis of our personal preference for action. This can sometimes result in making a decision for a specific action that is not appropriate for the situation, e.g. addressing a complex problem with complicated action response.

The logical framework which is common within most RBM systems, largely treats development as either a simple or a complicated problem that can be solved through rigorous analysis (e.g. problem and solution trees) and thorough planning (e.g. SMART indicators: Specific–Measurable–Appropriate–Relevant–Timing). Such an approach may suit the simple and complicated domains of development (e.g. infrastructure projects and technical capacity development) but it faces some limitations for dealing with complex systems that involve people and a lot of unknown external factors that can have an effect along the way (e.g. general or second order capacity development, social change, sustainable development, etc.), (Ramalingam, 2008). Often, a single programme may contain different domains of the Cynefin model and each domain, be it simple, complicated, complex or chaotic and will require different PME approaches (Rogers, 2010).

Reflecting on the outcomes of a conference on rigorous evaluation practice that embraces complexity in May 2010 in Utrecht, Jess Dart (2010) recommends the following underlying principles of programme design for the complex domain of the Cynefin framework:

1. Short cycles of measurement and reflection.
2. Inclusion of approaches that catch unexpected outcomes such as MSC technique.
3. Sense-making approaches to decide what to do about the unexpected outcomes.
4. Broad outcomes that are not too prescriptive.
5. Iterative programme logic/programme theory.

6. Participatory approaches because they often allow spaces for sense-making, deliberating on outcomes and ensuring that changes in programme direction are appropriate to different stakeholder groups.



Reviewers Comment: Two other documents that are worth reading are: Eoyang, G. H., & Berkas, T. H. (2000). Evaluation in a Complex Adaptive System. In M. R. Lissack, Managing Complexity in Organizations: A View in Many Directions (pp. 313–335). IAP. And also an article by Plsek, P., Lindberg, C., & Zimmerman, B. (1997). Some Emerging Principles in Managing Complex Adaptive Systems. The first article is more to discover principles for evaluation in complex systems, while the second is more directed to intervention in complex systems.

Integrating Cynefin and soft/hard framework

Integrating the Cynefin domains with the soft/hard typology may help organisations to analyse the level of complexity in which they are working. Figure 7 makes a simplistic attempt at such integration. The simple domain is closer to the hard typology while the complex one is more aligned to the soft typology. Complicated is then in the middle. Within this integrated model, the parameters of the soft/hard typology can provide a framework for discussion to determine if one is working on an issue which is simple, complicated or complex. The chaotic domain was left out in this integrated model because the link with the soft/hard typology was not that clear. It needs to be stressed that this integrated model has no intention to suggest a replacement of both models. It merely provides a tool that can help organisations to discuss the level of complexity in which they are working.

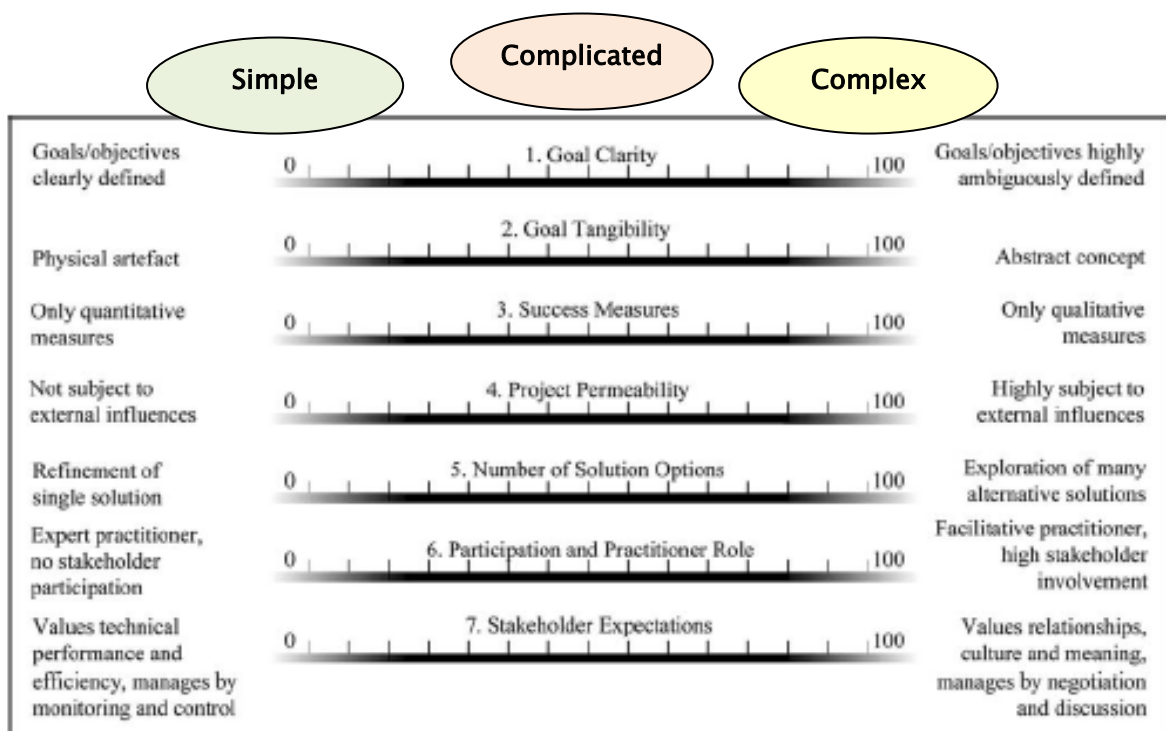


Figure 7: An attempt for integration of Cynefin and hard/soft typology

Methodological implications: From planners to learners

Complex situations are characterised by the unpredictable nature of human behaviour, a multitude of unpredictable interactions between a multitude of different actors, and a wide variety of contextual factors beyond the control of any intervention. An essential implication for PME that emerges from this complexity is the importance of learning. Learning is so essential because it allows us to work towards concrete results in a complex context in which it is difficult to predict those results on the basis of rigorous planning. This does not mean that good planning is no longer necessary. On the contrary, it is essential that there is clarity about what we want to work towards, with whom and for what purpose. It is also necessary at the start to have an idea of what we will do in our interventions. However we cannot hold rigidly to predetermined results or outcomes that were formulated during a planning process when working in complex contexts. As a result we need to learn on a much more regular basis about what is working and what is not and strengthen what is working and discard what is not working. The predetermined outcomes during the planning phase therefore do not work as targets to measure success or failure but instead provide us with pointers that can help us to learn how we are faring in our programmes or projects and to change course if necessary. Our challenge is to organise our PME systems in such a way that they can help these learning processes. For this reason we need to discuss the challenging balance that often exists between learning and accountability in PME.

Challenge 3 – Finding the balance between accountability and learning in PME

‘The highest level of accountability is not that you did what you said you would, but that you are getting better at serving the underlying intent of what you said you were going to do’ (Smutylo, in Ortiz, 2004).

Accountability is often associated with some kind of reporting or justifying how the funds received were used and how they contributed to some kind of results. It is not surprising that this kind of upward accountability is made a priority because it is often directly linked with the condition for receiving funding. The survival of many organisations depends on this type of accountability. This reality makes it difficult to find the balance between accountability and learning. However, over the years the traditional upward and one-way accountability has evolved into a more dynamic definition that entails a wider set of stakeholders.

Box 1: *‘Accountability is the process through which an organization makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment’ (One World Trust, ‘pathways to Accountability’) (Whitty, 2008)*

Deprez (2010) refers to the following definition of accountability: ‘giving an account to another party who has a stake in what has been done. It evokes a sense of taking responsibility but it also holds the meaning of being held responsible by others – being held to account’ (Crawford 2004: 72).

This definition refers to a more dynamic understanding of accountability that entails a wider set of stakeholders (for a similar dynamic definition of accountability see Box 1). Such wider definitions go beyond the one-way upward accountability process which we often experience in reporting mechanisms to donors in our development programmes. More and more we also see forms of downward

accountability to the beneficiaries (i.e. rights based approaches) and public accountability towards the wider public. Also, ‘taking accountability of oneself’ can be another meaning of accountability in which case accountability is about identity and commitment to one’s ideas and strategies (Guijt, 2010).

Keeping a healthy balance between accountability and learning in our PME systems is often no easy task. This is not surprising if you look at what these concepts entail. Deprez (2010) provides a useful overview of the elements and processes related to the three key purposes of PME, i.e. planning, learning and accountability (Table 2). You will find many elements in the ‘wish list’ of organisations when they talk about their expectations of a PME system.

KEY PURPOSES OF M&E	ELEMENTS AND PROCESSES INCLUDED
PLANNING	Better management, improved programme strategies, adjustment planning, strategic planning, decision-making, outcomes monitoring, progress and process monitoring ...
LEARNING	Adjustment planning, improved effectiveness, organisational learning, action learning, organisational strengthening, capacity building, understanding stakeholder perspectives, negotiation, stronger partnerships, self-knowledge, knowledge creation, learning needs, evidence and theory building, policy formulation, publications, ownership, empowerment, self-assessment ...
ACCOUNTABILITY	Impact assessment, summative evaluations, audits, quality control, donor accountability, downward accountability, public accountability, transparency ...

Table 2: Elements and processes related to planning, learning and accountability (Deprez, 2010)

A question which is relevant for the purpose of this paper is whether a strong focus on learning can satisfy our accountability requirements? For example, the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) sees PME firstly as a process for learning because it believes this to be the best way to strengthen its accountability function (Earl et al., 2001). Correspondingly, learning and reflection are at the heart of the OM approach developed by IDRC. Guijt (2008) refers to accountability as a subset of learning. “You can not be accountable if you do not learn. And you need to know how well you live up to performance expectations in order to learn”(Guijt 2010, p277).

Drawing from the work of Whitty (2008) on accountability in the context of the global accountability framework (One world trust, 2005) and the work of Deprez (2010) on learning centred PME systems, we identified four common key principles that apply to both accountability and learning. These principles are illustrated in Table 3. A focus on these key principles may help us to balance learning and accountability in our PME systems.

Key principles	Accountability	Learning
Participation	Concerns the way in which an organisation involves stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities. Participation gives stakeholders a voice in the activities of the organisation, creating ownership of the results and a greater likelihood of the uptake and legitimacy of the research (Whitty, 2008).	Essential for social learning involving multiple actors who collect information, digest it, consciously co-create knowledge and ensure that intentions are sufficiently shared (Guijt, 2008).
Reflection	Enables organisations to reflect on and learn from their experiences. Furthermore, only through a transparent evaluation process can an organisation report on its activities & results to its stakeholders (Whitty, 2008).	Facilitates continuous learning from experiences in order to improve future practice (i.e. experiential learning) (Kolb, 1984)
Transparency	Describes the way in which an organisation makes information available about their activities and aims. It will also include information about their work, their expertise and their key stakeholders (Whitty, 2008).	Learning requires an atmosphere of trust and open communication which allows an openness to feedback and participation. All essential elements for sense making (Deprez 2009, Dart 2010)
Feedback mechanisms	Describes ways in which an organisation invites comments and critique of its activities. A feedback mechanism allows stakeholders to comment and if necessary acquire redress for the organisation's prior acts (Whitty, 2008).	Feedback plays an important role in shaping human practices because it is a crucial mechanism in human learning (Leeuwis, 2004)

Table 3: Key principles of accountability and learning (Deprez, 2009)

The key principles of accountability and learning in Table 3 provide us with criteria that can help us assess the suitability of a PME approach for a specific context. A PME system that facilitates these four key principles will be more suitable when we work in complex contexts where continuous and systematic learning is an essential strategy to deal with the unpredictability of social change processes and where we are also expected to be accountable towards a wide variety of actors such as donors and beneficiaries. We will examine these key principles in more detail in the next section.

Challenge 4 – No time to waste

In 2007, a PSO supported action research that was intended to help Dutch NGOs learn, showed that the lack of time was the factor most frequently mentioned by NGO staff as obstructing learning (Smit, 2007). In the same study, monitoring and evaluation were hardly mentioned as an enabling factor for learning. The lack of time for reflection applied to project-related reflection, but even more so to wider organisational reflection. It emerged that only a few members consciously took the 'profits' of their learning with them in order to experiment and develop new practice.

This lack of time was also referred to as a reason for not applying knowledge and learning tools during a study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) of the knowledge and learning practices of 13 international organisations (Ramalingam, 2005). Interestingly, the same study also points out that the lack of time for learning is actually the result of the way time is prioritised and that this is determined by both internal dynamics and external pressures and demands. In fact, many staff members saw knowledge and learning as tantamount to a 'solution looking for a problem', rather than a means or a process for improving what is already being done.



Reviewers Comment: Is learning re-engineering (in a simple system) or recognising new patterns (in a complex system)? If you would ask the staff about learning in the sense of re-engineering, I am sure they can think of something that they learned and fine tuned in their logistical processes, ...

A similar challenge emerged in a study by Catherine Fisher (2010) with regard to promoting a systemic approach towards capacity development by the information department at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Staff were used to the department's service delivery role, and were 'doers' who learned by doing. The results of this learning were implemented but not always documented or shared and, as a result, staff members had no overall view of the work done by the department. In addition, while staff were able to explain the aspects of what they did, they were not able to talk about **why** they did it that way.

Many organisations will recognise this situation. How easy it is to continue doing what we are used to and what we are best at without asking ourselves why or without linking our individual learning to strategic decisionmaking at organisational level. This is quite natural because it allows us to stay in our recognisable comfort zones. There is a danger though. If we do not talk about why we carry out our activities we will not talk about the changes that our activities are contributing to. An immediate result of this situation is the common observation that many monitoring reports are predominantly activity reports with little information or analysis about the effects of these activities at the level of the groups or institutions targeted by those activities. An easy way to maintain the status quo is to claim that we do not have time to reflect or to ask these difficult questions.

A recent evaluation of capacity development activities of Belgian NGOs (Huysse, 2010) showed the importance of PME systems that facilitate learning about the outcomes of capacity development activities in order to keep these capacity development processes meaningful and alive. In fact what this evaluation shows is that organisations that are involved in capacity development need to be more explicit about their capacity development approach and regularly and systematically reflect on its effects. While this may sound logical, the reality shows that many organisations face serious challenges as regards operationalising such a learning-oriented PME system. This was also illustrated in the large ECDPM study on capacity development in which most of the organisations that participated in the study did not monitor or evaluate capacity systematically (Baser and Morgan, 2008). The question is what can we do about it? How do we slow down to create space for reflection and learning?



Reviewers Comment: I think we also have to take “institutional inertia” into account. People who feel for the new learning centred PME system can be caught up in the organisation and lack persuasion skills and sometimes vision to embed the system naturally into the organisation. At Dark and Light we weave changes into our ISO quality system which safeguards that proposed changes are followed, and do not depend too much on one’s hobbyhorses.

Space for joint reflection

Investing in joint reflection at various levels on our own learning, both implicitly and explicitly is key (Smit, 2007). The mistake we often make is to keep these concepts about learning too vague and not translate them into concrete actions. In such cases it is difficult to change deeply engrained behavioural patterns in organisations, such as a lack of time for reflection. It is therefore essential to create the space to actually get together with the relevant actors and make collective sense of the concrete significant observations we have made or insights we have gained during our daily activities and interactions. In other words, the learning has to be made very tangible. Box 2 provides an example provided by the Flemish Office for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB), showing how real such learning can be.

Box 2: A big challenge for the VVOB ‘quality education and vulnerability programme’ in Zimbabwe was to motivate local partners to participate in programme activities, especially after big organisations were used to paying considerable allowances in the past. This situation made the team and their partners reflect on their assumptions about why they would want to motivate people to become interested in the programme. This reflection resulted in a consensus that no allowances would be paid and that the programme would only work with people who had a genuine interest in participating. It was a tricky decision in a context of economic meltdown, but a decision that was in line with the programme’s vision. In fact the reflection blew some kind of new life into this vision. Although initially difficult, the monitoring process showed that this approach resulted step-by-step in a growing group of active participants (i.e. college students and lecturers) in the programme who participated not because of the allowances but because of a genuine interest in the programme activities (e.g. life skills training workshops). Feedback of these insights to college administrators and local authorities resulted in them becoming more supportive of the programme and contributing their own scarce resources.

The key is to draw lessons that are then used to inform decision making and future planning and to provide feedback on these lessons learned and decisions to the actors who were not present at these joint reflections but who are stakeholders in the programme. PME systems that can facilitate such space for joint reflection will help us to learn and to ask ourselves the question **why** we are doing things on the basis of the outcomes and the situational context we learned from.

Deprez (2010) regards the process of conceptualisation and of learning lessons as an essential step in the framework for VECO – Vredeseilanden’s Planning Learning and Accountability (PLA) system. ‘This step focuses on the process of drawing lessons which differentiates learning from simple information exchange and analysis’ (Britton, 1998: 17). Lessons learned in this context refer to knowledge generated in one situation which can be generalised to other situations in order to improve action (Deprez, 2010). Such lessons can be learned during scheduled events such as self-assessment workshops, partner meetings

and reflection meetings, and these are often part of the PME system. However, informal interactions during field visits, informal conversations and ad hoc meetings can also provide very important lessons. The lessons learned from such informal events are often not captured in formal PME systems and mechanisms are therefore needed. Box 3 shows how VVOB tries to learn lessons during informal interactions.

Box 3: Every Monday morning all the members of the programme support team meet in the VVOB office to reflect on the previous week and to study the plans for the coming week. Besides highlighting the major activities undertaken, every team member is expected to share any lessons learned that they think are significant for the programme. This routine has helped team members become more reflective. As one of them mentioned, “Somehow the weekly reflection meeting has helped to pull us out of our comfort zones and to stimulate us to be on the lookout for unexpected insights and lessons and to document them so that we can share them during our weekly reflection meetings with our colleagues”. Important lessons are documented during the meeting and provide input for management meetings and the 6-monthly monitoring cycles.

Participation

Providing the necessary space for reflection is actually only one side of the coin. The other side relates to the relevance of the learning process that occurs during such reflection meetings. In fact we are quite good at organising all kinds of reflection activities with various techniques that are intended to help us deepen our reflection. However, very often we face challenges to keep the momentum or the rhythm of such moments and to draw meaningful lessons during such sessions. We face an even bigger challenge in terms of implementing these lessons in practice and monitoring the effects. In other words we find it difficult to keep our action learning cycles in motion. The question is what can we do about this?

We believe that looking for better reflection tools is important but not the only answer. We also need to consider whether the reflection process remains relevant to the participants outside the context of the reflection activity. Surely, many of us know the situation of there being very good workshops with lots of insightful reflections and good commitments for action but then, after the workshop, of people seeming to go back to real life and get on with their work or their lives and forget about what was learned or planned during the workshop. It is then up to the workshop organisers to make sure that there is some follow up. In many cases the story ends with a workshop report on our hard discs or on our desks.

This problem was written about years ago. As long ago as in 1997, Estrella and Gaventa wrote that conventional PME approaches did not respond to people’s needs and real life contexts. Instead they referred to Abott and Guijt (1997: 9) who encouraged ‘the inclusion of beneficiaries and other project participants in locally relevant processes of gathering, analysing and using information’. Table 4 helps us to clarify what we mean by participation in evaluation processes. To our understanding, this also applies to PME in general.

	Conventional	Participatory
Who	External experts	Community members, project staff, facilitator
What	Predetermined indicators of success, principally cost and production outputs	People identify their own indicators of success, which may include production outputs
How	Focus on 'scientific objectivity'; distancing of evaluators from other participants; uniform, complex procedures; delayed, limited access to results	Self-evaluation; simple methods adapted to local culture; open, immediate sharing of results through local involvement in evaluation processes
When	Usually upon completion of project/programme; sometimes also mid-term	More frequent, small-scale evaluations
Why	Accountability, usually summative, to determine if funding continues	To empower local people to initiate, control and take corrective action

Source: Narayan-Parker 1993: 12

Table 4: *Difference between conventional and participatory evaluation, (Estrella and Gaventa, 1997).*

Active participation goes further than merely attending PME activities and also involves participation in a process that is relevant for the life or work of the participant and in which he or she has an active role in the sense-making process and a voice in future decision making based on the lessons learned. Such participative processes can take time to evolve and will probably not happen by themselves. In some cases they can be purposely avoided because they may threaten existing power positions and well-established ways of working (Vare, 2008).

However, if we do invest time in such active participation, trust and transparency among the participating stakeholders can be effectively enhanced and ultimately lead to strong partnerships. Elements of such partnerships include shared vision, clear intents and purpose, negotiation processes, clear roles and responsibilities, flexibility and openness to change (Horton et al., 2003).

A practical way to foster such active participation is through promoting open communication and feedback. Communicating M&E findings and decisions taken – based on the collected data – recognises and acknowledges the contributions from local actors by showing that the data is actually used (and for what). It is an important feedback mechanism that can improve transparency, downward accountability and trust. Stimulating quality feedback is almost synonymous with stimulating and contributing to learning (Leeuwis, 2004, in Deprez, 2010). However, feedback loops to the ‘lower’ levels are lacking in many M&E systems and this means they are excluded from the learning process.

Feedback is the information we get about the outcomes, characteristics and/or consequences of our actions, and it helps us to evaluate these. Feedback can trigger learning processes especially when it is somehow ‘disturbing’. As a consequence, programmes that plan for and develop culturally appropriate (constructive) feedback mechanisms are stimulating and contribute to learning. Deprez (2010) refers to Guijt (2008) who argues that

the monitoring of processes which foster learning needs to move beyond the 'intra-organisational' perspective, i.e., monitoring systems based on a single organisational perspective, or for which the location of responsibility for decision-making is centralised. Development is not delivered in that form. Increasingly 'messy partnerships'⁴ are involved in development programmes. In the common set up of head office, country office and local partners it can be a challenge to have one organisational perspective and can already be seen as such a messy partnership. Monitoring processes have to cater for the need to understand the partners that have converged around concerted action and what they bring to the mix. Open communication and feedback will be essential in order to learn from these partnerships.

Towards an analytical framework

From the challenges that we discussed in part one, we filter three questions that can be used as an analytical framework that may help us to analyse the suitability of a PME approach for a specific context or situation.

1. How does the PME approach help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

'Results Based Management' is a concept that can hide more than it reveals. This is because results can mean different things to different actors and different actors also have different roles, responsibilities and expectations as regards those results. This can lead to a rather problematic state of confusion, especially (as is often the case) when you are dealing with complex situations in which no one is very clear about the nature of the results at the various levels, or if you are dealing with a variety of actors and stakeholders. To be clear about roles, responsibilities, understanding and expectations among these actors and stakeholders can be a real challenge but is an important condition to be able to develop a useful and practical M&E plan. The question is to what extent the Planning phase of the selected PME approach supports this role clarification process.

Firstly it is important to clarify the intervention logic or the planning with a specific focus on the actors that play a role in it. Some would call this an 'actor focused theory of change' while others may simply call it a flexible intervention logic that is build up around a shared vision and a clear understanding of the roles and expectations and influence pathways of the various actors involved in the intervention. As we choose a suitable PME approach for our interventions it can be helpful to reflect on how a specific approach will help us to clarify the relationships, roles and expectations of the various actors in the intervention.

Secondly we have seen that different actors may have an interest in different types of results at different levels. Some of those demands will need to be satisfied and it is therefore

⁴ Messy partnerships refer to a convergence of different actors for concerted action driven by a common overarching vision and a perception of added value in joint work. The various differences that can exist between the actors such as governance structure, culture, mandate, capacities, priorities and commitment to collective efforts, are the basis of this messiness (Guijt, 2008).

important to know which PME approach is suitable for tracking which results. So it will help to clarify which type of results a particular PME approach focuses on.

2. How does the PME approach contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

In our work, we may be faced with different levels of complexity. It is suggested in part one of the working paper that so-called linear and predictive PME approaches are more suitable for simple and complicated contexts. PME approaches that are more learning-centred, less predictive and more focused on context could be better suited for complex social change processes. It is clear that a one-size-one-fit PME approach will not do the trick. We will need to analyse if we are dealing with a simple, complicated, complex or chaotic situation and choose and customise an appropriate PME approach or a combination of approaches that make sense for the particular context. Therefore when choosing a PME approach it will be necessary to find out for which level of complexity (i.e. simple, complicated, complex or chaotic) this particular approach is most suitable.

Also in part one we have drawn from a broad meaning of accountability, namely of being accountable to multiple stakeholders, in both upward and downward directions and to oneself. The key principles that underpin this wider meaning of accountability are the same principles that underpin learning, i.e. participation, reflection, transparency and feedback. We have also seen that these principles are crucial in making sure that this learning is action-oriented, leading to concrete action by the participants involved in the learning process. Part one of the paper suggests that social change programmes which are guided by strong learning-oriented practices will be better equipped to comply with many different accountability needs. An important characteristic of any PME approach (or combination of approaches) to consider is therefore how far it has the potential to stimulate action-oriented learning among stakeholders about the progress towards the development objectives at various levels.

3. How does the PME approach contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity⁵ of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

The previous question looked at learning about the development objectives. This question looks at the internal learning (adaptive capacity) of the change agent itself, be it the programme, partner organisation, network, or Northern NGO. In this action-research programme, PME is seen as a way to strengthen the adaptive capacity of development organisations and networks both in the North and the South in order to remain able to deal with complex processes of change.

⁵ Internal adaptive capacity refers to the capacity of an organisation or an actor to sustain and renew itself, to remain able to deliver development results and to continuously to adapt to changing conditions and context. The core capability 'to adapt and self-renew' from the ECDPM capability framework (Baser and Morgan, 2008) helps to explain this: 1) to improve individual and organisational learning; 2) to foster internal dialogue; 3) to reposition and reconfigure the organisation; 4) to incorporate new ideas; and 5) to map out a growth path.

However, we fully understand that choosing the right approach for a specific context and purpose is one thing. The way a PME approach is implemented can be a totally different thing. PME approaches come with specific underlying principles and values that guide their implementation. As we implement alternative PME approaches that are believed to be better suited for use in complex situations then it will be important to find out how their implementation contributes to the strengthening of internal adaptive capacity at the level of the Northern NGO and its Southern partner organisations/networks.

We will use the three questions above as an analytical framework to question each of the PME approaches that we will present in part 2.

Part 2 – Choosing from a colourful pallet of PME approaches

‘Development, and social transformation, benefit not from a battle of methodologies or approaches, but from taking the appropriate elements of either approach appropriate to the context and using them to influence the deepest social change possible.’ (Kaia Ambrose and Natalia Ortiz)

Now it is time to take the next step. This means trying to choose a PME approach or a combination of approaches that are most suitable to our specific context. To help us do that, this part of the paper will examine a number of PME approaches that practitioners may consider when designing a PME system. The aim is to give the reader some idea about which approach could be useful for which context. To do that we will question each approach on the basis of the insights that we gained in part one.

In part one we outlined a number of challenges related to PME. On the basis of these challenges we can ask ourselves how different PME approaches address the following questions:

1. How does the PME approach help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention? To address this questions it is helpful to explore the following two sub-questions:
 - a. How does the PME approach help to clarify an actor centred theory of change? (i.e. the intervention logic or the planning with a specific focus on the actors that play a role in it.)
 - b. How does the PME approach help to clarify which type of results a particular PME approach focuses on?

2. How does the PME approach contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs? To address this questions it is helpful to explore the following two sub-questions:
 - a. For which context or level of complexity is a particular PME approach most suitable?
 - b. How does the PME approach stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

3. How does the PME approach contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity⁶ of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

In part two we will apply these questions to the following PME approaches: OM, LFA, MSC, ROMA, five capability model for capacity development. Table 5 below outlines the rationale for choosing these particular approaches.

PME approach	Rational for inclusion in the overview
Outcome mapping	Integrated complexity oriented PME approach that offers a potential alternative to the logical framework. Many organisations in the PSO action research ⁷ pilot outcome OM. OM is also part of the DPRN communication process ⁸ .
Logical Framework	Standard PME approach required by many back donors. The logical framework approach is also part of the DPRN communication process.
Most Significant Change	Popular monitoring and evaluation approach used to learn about impact at the level of the beneficiaries. Several organisations in the PSO action research pilot MSC.
ROMA	Integrated PME approach specifically directed towards policy influencing.
Five Capability Model	Recent PME framework for capacity development. The model is also piloted in the PSO action research.

Table 5: Overview of PME approaches

We fully realise that this list of PME approaches is by no means complete. There are many other PME approaches that would deserve a place. This was unfortunately not possible within the context of this review. However, we would like to remind the reader that this paper is a working paper that we hope will trigger further discussion and additional information that will allow us to continue developing the paper and add additional PME approaches to our analysis. We therefore invite readers to forward their comments to the authors.⁹

⁶ Internal adaptive capacity refers to the capacity of an organisation or an actor to sustain and renew itself, to remain able to deliver development results and to continuously to adapt to changing conditions and context. The core capability 'to adapt and self-renew' from the ECDPM capability framework (Baser and Morgan, 2008) helps to explain this: 1) to improve individual and organisational learning; 2) to foster internal dialogue; 3) to reposition and reconfigure the organisation; 4) to incorporate new ideas; and 5) to map out a growth path.

⁷ The PSO supported Thematic Learning Programme (2010–2012) involves large-scale action research with 15 Dutch organisations into the use of alternative PME systems for complex contexts of capacity development.

⁸ DPRN process (2010) 'Strengthening Monitoring and evaluation in development projects that deal with complex social contexts' (<http://pme.global-connections.nl/>).

⁹ Note that some of the PME approaches that are discussed here also feature in an ECDPM paper (ECDPM, 2006) that analyses various PME approaches in the context of capacity development through a set of questions for each approach: WHAT are they monitoring/evaluating?; WHOSE capacities are they monitoring/evaluating?; WHY are they

Outcome mapping (OM)

A brief overview of outcome mapping

'The focus of Outcome Mapping is on people and organizations. The originality of the approach is its shift away from assessing the products of a programme (e.g., policy relevance, poverty alleviation, reduced conflict) to focus on changes in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people and organizations with whom a development programme works directly' (IDRC, Barefoot guide, 2009).

The evaluation unit of the IDRC developed the OM approach because it had encountered fundamental challenges in assessing and reporting on development impact (Earl et al., 2001). While development organisations are under pressure to demonstrate that their

programmes result in significant and lasting changes in the well-being of large numbers of their intended beneficiaries, such 'impacts' are often the product of a confluence of events for which no single agency or group of agencies can realistically claim full credit. As a result, assessing development impacts, especially from the perspective of an external agency, is problematic.

To address this challenge, OM was developed and piloted by various southern partners. OM takes a learning-based and use-driven view of PME guided by principles of participation and iterative learning, encouraging evaluative thinking throughout the programme cycle by all programme team members and direct partners.

Central to OM is the concept of **outcomes** defined as '*changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organisations with whom a programme works directly*' (Earl et al., 2001). The programme cycle in OM consists of three phases, sub-divided into twelve main steps (figure 8):

1. Intentional design: planning for the programme via a participatory process of consensus building.
2. Outcome & performance monitoring,
3. Evaluation planning.

monitoring/evaluating (purpose, use of results)? and HOW are they monitoring/evaluating? We see our questions as a way to give organisations additional information that can help them to choose the right approach that suits their specific context.

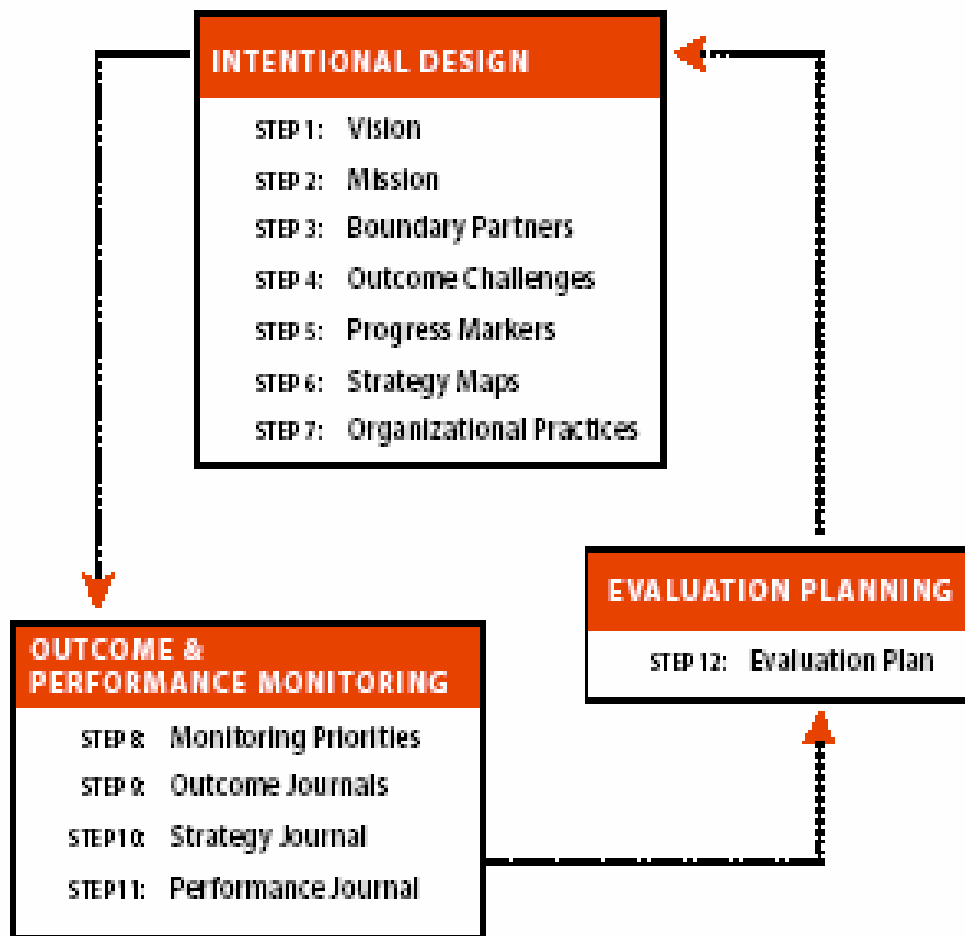


Figure 8: Three phases of the Outcome Mapping process (Earl et al., 2003:4)

An important assumption underlying OM is that local structures (boundary partners) control change. **Boundary partner** is a crucial concept in OM, and is defined as follows: ‘they are those individuals, groups, or organisations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate opportunities for influence’ (Earl et al., 2001). External agents, like development programmes, ‘only facilitate the process by providing access to new resources, ideas, or opportunities for a certain period of time’ (Earl et al., 2001). This is displayed in Figure 9, in which the three circles visualise the different players in development programmes, and the kind of relationship that can be developed with them (control, direct influence, indirect influence).

The planning stage in OM is different from the conventional logframe approach in a number of areas. Planning always starts with a discussion of the development of a vision and a mission for the programme, followed by a stakeholder analysis and an identification of the boundary partners, which forms the basis for the development of outcomes (i.e. changes in the behaviour or relationships between the boundary partners) and strategies (i.e. support strategies used by the programme team to help the boundary partners achieve their outcomes). The project logic in OM is centred around the boundary partners, and not around the desired final change of state (improved services, products, or infrastructure), as in the logframe-based approaches. By thinking in terms of influencing endogenous actors

(boundary partners), instead of replacing them with parallel project units, OM integrates sustainability thinking and capacity development processes directly into the design of the programme.

A linear cause and effect relationship is replaced in OM by a view of development as a complex process that occurs in open systems. In practice this means that OM recognises that impact will be influenced by many factors and actors beyond the programme which cannot all be predicted or even known. In response, the OM intentional design or planning process helps to ensure clarity about what we want to work towards, with whom and for what purpose, and what our interventions will entail. At the same time, however, OM does not adhere rigidly to predetermined results or outcomes that were formulated during the planning process. Instead the approach seeks to promote a learning process about what is working and what is not, and strengthen what is working and discard what is not. The predetermined outcomes during the planning phase therefore do not work as targets to measure success or failure but instead provide pointers that can help a programme to learn about progress and to change course if necessary.

The equivalent of logframe indicators in OM are called progress markers and are grouped per boundary partner. In contrast to the SMART indicators in the logframe approach, they do not represent targets to be reached but rather points of reference to motivate stakeholders' reflection, learning, and consensus, and to guide their actions and interaction (Ortiz, 2004).

How does outcome mapping help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

Does outcome mapping help to clarify an actor centred theory of change?

Through the intentional design process, programme stakeholders get a very clear idea about their position and their role and responsibilities in the programme logic. This process is more than just a stakeholder analysis. It also leads to the mapping of the various spheres of influence and interest on the part of different stakeholders.

A first step is the development of a shared vision which clarifies the overall purpose of the programme and also helps to identify the ultimate beneficiaries within the sphere of interest of a programme. A mission exercise then helps everyone to focus and get their feet back on the ground in order to determine the specific areas in which a programme will work.

The next step is a very crucial one. It involves the identification of the boundary partners. These are the individuals, groups or organisations with whom the supporting organisation will work directly in order to contribute to the vision. The boundary partners are local actors that, even without the supporting programme, will work to achieve the vision and will continue to be present even when the support programme has ended. The support programme only facilitates the process by providing access to new resources, ideas, or opportunities for a certain period of time (Earl et al., 2001). The boundary partners fall within the sphere of influence of the supporting programme. The ultimate beneficiaries are situated in the sphere of interest of the supporting programme that has only an indirect influence on them through the boundary partners. The sphere of control refers to the

support programme or programme implementing team that has control over its own activities.

The resulting partner map is shown in Figure 9. We call it an actor-focused theory of change because it clearly spells out how the various partners intend to work towards the vision and how the various partners relate to each other. This helps to clarify the roles, expectations and responsibilities of the different stakeholders. At the same time the intentional design also helps to determine the system in which the programme will work.

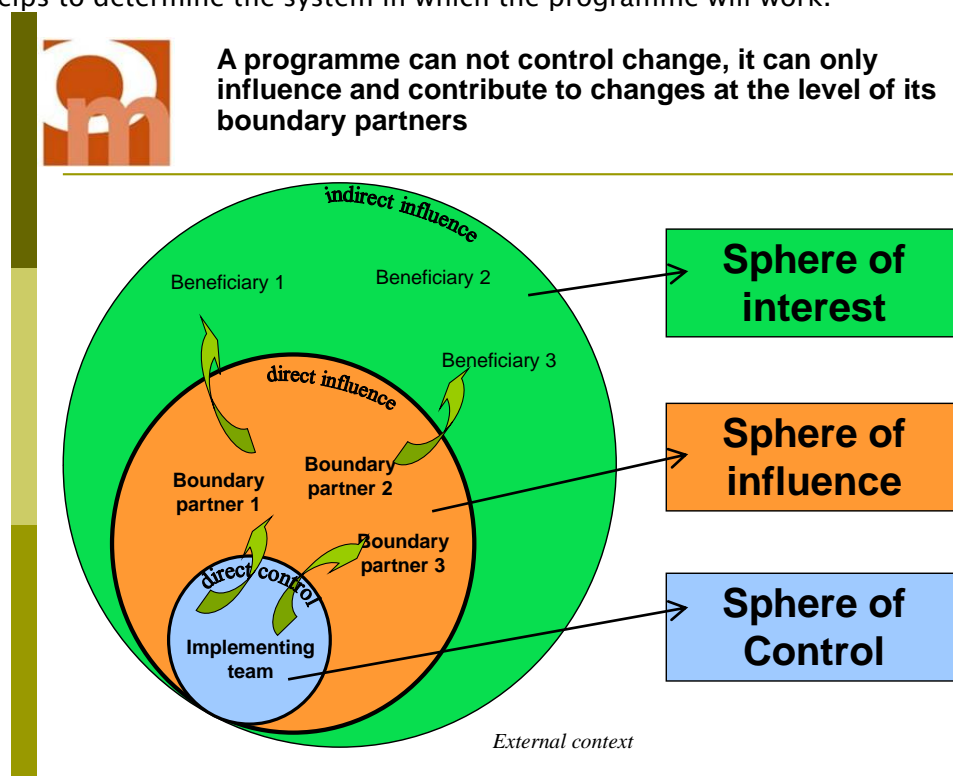


Figure 9: Three types of project stakeholders and the nature of relationship between them (Earl et al., 2001)

On which type of results does outcome mapping focus?

OM focuses on outcomes as changes in behaviour, actions, professional practice or relationships of the boundary partners (Earl et al., 2001). These outcomes are situated in our direct sphere of influence. The significance of these outcomes is determined on the basis of how these changes contribute to the vision. OM provides the tool of the outcome challenge and the progress markers to help us monitor the changes at the level of the boundary partners.

- ***The outcome challenge.*** Description of the ideal changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities and/or actions of a boundary partner. The aim of the programme is to help bring about the changes (Earl et al., 2001). The outcome challenge can be seen as a smaller vision statement at the level of a boundary partner.
- ***The progress markers.*** A set of graduated progress markers is developed for each outcome challenge. These progress markers are descriptions of specific behaviours of a specific boundary partner. Progress markers are graduated, which means that some will

describe changes that the boundary partners may achieve more easily or more quickly while some will describe more long-term and fundamental changes. All in all the progress markers describe the complexity and logic of the change process for a boundary partner to achieve its outcome challenge. Table 6 shows a sample set of progress markers.

Boundary partner: College administrations	
St²eep EXPECTS to see the college administrators	
1.	Providing office space and equipment for the EE coordinators.
2.	Authorising lecturers to participate in EE activities.
3.	Chairing the National Management Team.
4.	Facilitating a reduced teaching load for the college coordinators.
St²eep would LIKE to see the college administrators	
5.	Attending EE activities.
6.	Supporting college EE policy development and implementation.
7.	Providing transport, finances and other resources for EE activities.
8.	Including and positioning EE, high on the agenda of staff meetings.
9.	Including and positioning EE, high on the agenda of academic board meetings.
St²eep would LOVE to see the college administrators	
10.	Incorporating EE in the college strategic plan.
11.	Appointing full time EE coordinators.

Table 6: Set of progress markers to monitor changes in behaviour of college administrations, one of the boundary partners in an environmental education programme in Zimbabwe (VVOB, 2008).

Direct support by the boundary partners could be interpreted as an instrumental way of contributing to the vision or positive changes at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries. It is important to realise, however, that the boundary partners are local actors who will continue to provide services even after the support programme has ended. By thinking in terms of supporting and influencing local actors instead of replacing them with parallel project units, OM integrates sustainability thinking and capacity development processes directly into the programme design.

How does outcome mapping contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

For which context is outcome mapping suitable?

Outcome Mapping is more suitable for complex or soft programmes where results cannot be predicted. That means that the changes that you are trying to contribute to are out of your control and are influenced by many actors and factors outside the scope of the programme that cannot all be foreseen and known in advance. The best you can do is to get the intention clear together with the actors that you seek to support (i.e. the boundary partners) and map the outcomes that you expect and the support strategies that will be implemented. This map can then be used for regular monitoring to see if any progress has been made according to the intentional map and to look for any unexpected outcomes. This then forms the basis of learning together with the boundary partners about what works and what not and of making adjustments to the original intentional design as necessary.

A necessary condition for OM is the presence of local actors that are willing to enter into a collaborative partnership in order to change (i.e. develop their capacity) so that they can better contribute to the vision. This vision therefore needs to be shared by the boundary partner and should not be the vision of the support programme alone. As such OM is more appropriate for soft or complex programmes that run over a longer period of time, such as programmes that are intended to bring about social change or general (i.e. second order) capacity development.

How does outcome mapping stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

Learning is the central focus of the PME approach in OM. Even in the planning stage a strong basis is laid for future learning during the monitoring process. The whole intentional design is built up around expected outcomes (i.e. changes in behaviour) of the boundary partners. This is different from other planning models such as the logframe which is often build up around the desired final change of state (e.g. improved services, products or infrastructure).

An outcome challenge is developed for each boundary partner and describes the ideal behaviour that the boundary partner would like to see happening in order to contribute to the vision. Progress markers are formulated to help the boundary partner monitor progress towards the outcome challenge. Each progress marker is a specific practice or behaviour and together they describe the change process that a boundary partner may go through in order to achieve its outcome challenge. Progress markers do not represent targets to be reached, but rather points of reference that help the boundary partners and other stakeholders to monitor and reflect on their progress. As such the progress markers provide a framework for dialogue and learning. This learning can provide insights into why progress was made or not and which factors contributed to or hindered progress. The support strategies implemented by the supporting organisation are also reviewed. This dialogue also opens up space to talk and learn about unexpected changes.

The fact that the monitoring relates to the practice or behaviour of the boundary partners actively involved in this monitoring process means that the reflection and learning is relevant to the life or the work of the learner (i.e. the boundary partner). The same applies to the supporting organisation that is also involved in the monitoring process. On the one hand this organisation is questioned about the support it has given and on the other hand it takes part in the dialogue on the progress of the boundary partners. As such OM provides a strong platform for social learning between the various programme actors that have a direct stake in the programme. In this setting, upward accountability is satisfied by the information that is acquired about the changes at the level of the boundary partners which information represents the results to which the supporting organisations have contributed. Downward accountability from the support organisation to the boundary partner is also satisfied through taking the support organisation to account about its support strategies during the monitoring exercise.

To assist the data collection and analysis, OM also provides specific monitoring tools such as outcome journals, strategy journals and performance journals:

- Outcome journals: facilitate monitoring of the progress of a boundary partner in achieving progress markers over time. An example of an outcome journal customised for the VVOB

'quality education and vulnerability programme' (2008–2013) can be found at <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=177>.

- *Strategy journal*: facilitates monitoring the support strategies a programme uses to encourage change in the boundary partner. An example of a strategy journal customised for the VVOB 'quality education and vulnerability programme' (2008–2013) can be found at: <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=178>.
- *Performance journal*: facilitates monitoring how well the programme is implementing its organisational practices.

Figure 10 illustrates which information is captured by which type of monitoring journal.

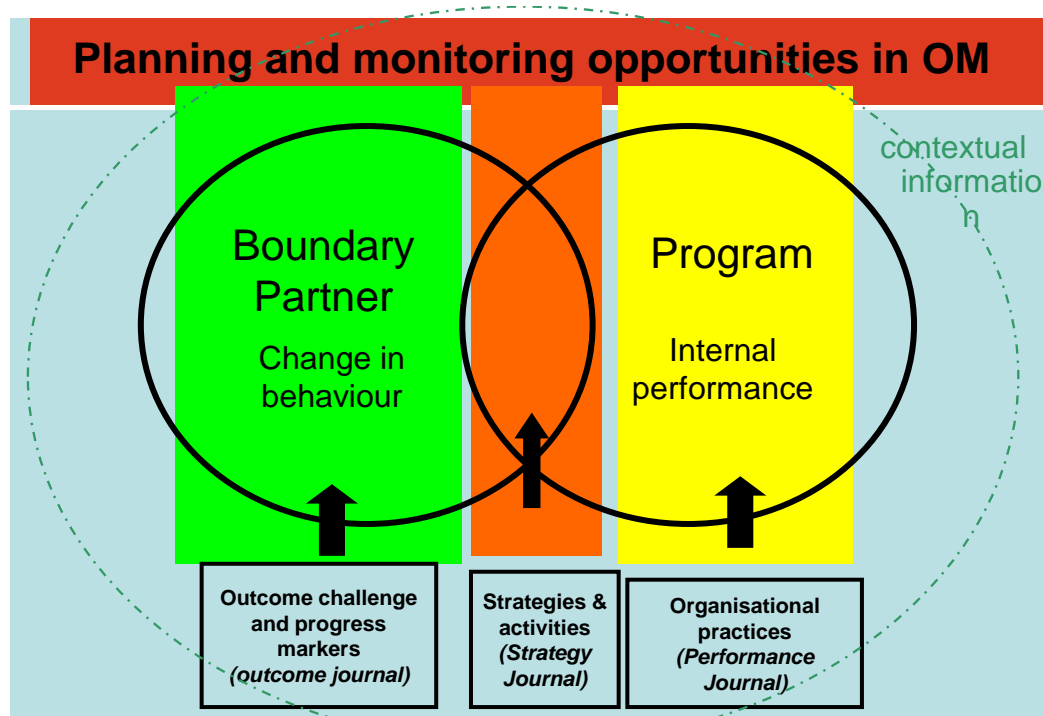


Figure 10: Monitoring opportunities in OM and associated monitoring journals.

There is no one way in which the OM journals are used. Programme teams usually customise the journals to make them useful within their specific contexts. In some cases boundary partners complete the outcome journals, while in other cases the programme team takes the lead in this process. In certain instances the journals are mainly used as a guide for dialogue between the various stakeholders during monitoring meetings. It is important, however, that the monitoring journals help to track change at the level of the boundary partners and that specific lessons are learned which are then used to inform future planning.

How does outcome mapping contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

An outcome mapping intentional design always involves a focus on changes in behaviour and relationships of the boundary partners of the organisation who supports them. This setup provides a conducive monitoring framework for capacity development. The changes in the boundary partner can be seen as the outcomes of the capacity development process. The

support activities by the supporting organisation can be seen as the capacity development activities towards the boundary partners. It is a simple framework that helps to avoid a lot of confusion about whose capacity is being developed and who is the external organisation that supports this process. Figure 11 below illustrates a generalised outcome mapping framework for the relationship of a Dutch NGO towards its Southern Organisational Partner and for the relationship of the Southern Organisational Partner to its partners.

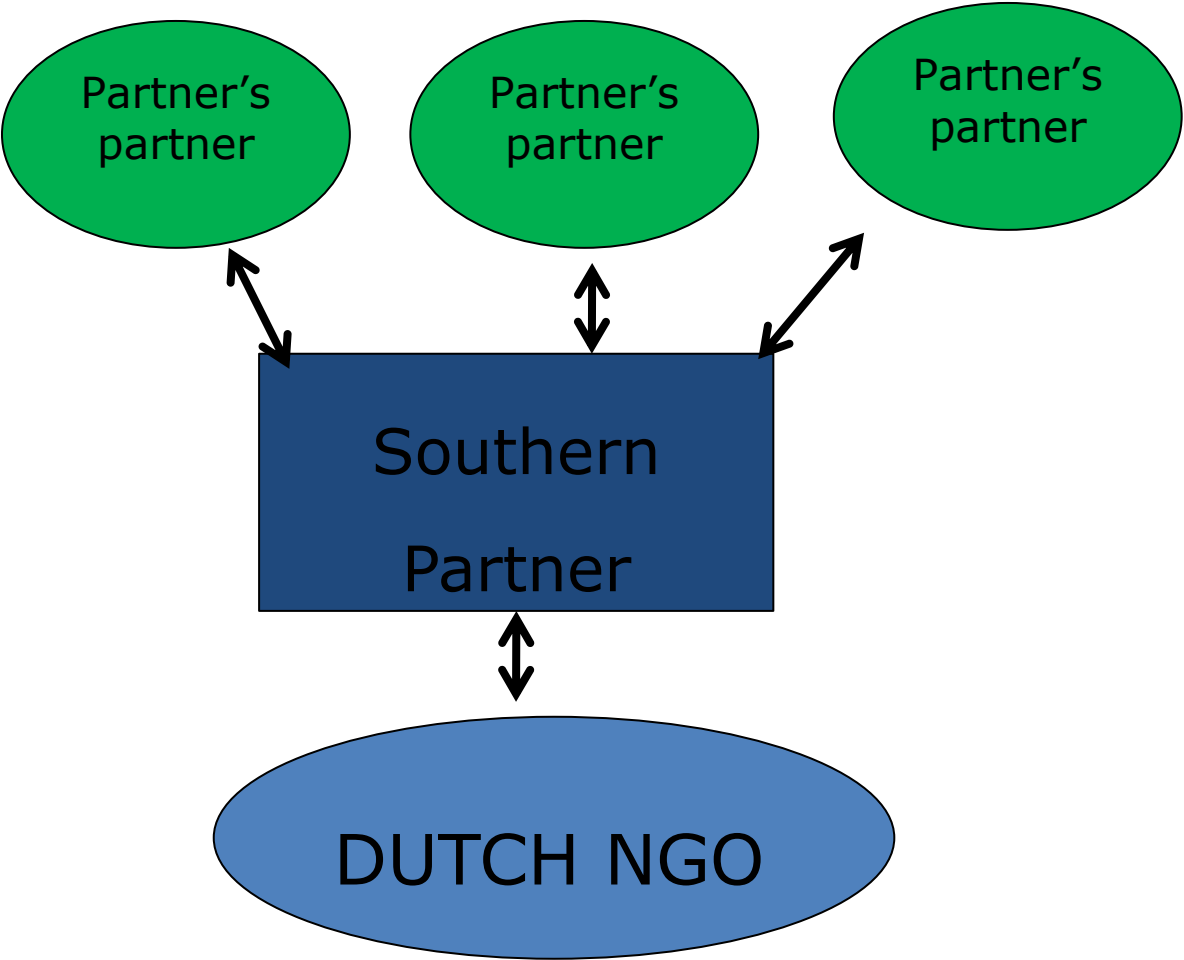


Figure 11: illustration of an outcome mapping framework for capacity development

In this set up, the Dutch organisation will implement activities to strengthen its Southern Partner Organisation and the Southern Partner Organisation will implement activities to strengthen its own partners. Whether this outcome mapping framework will contribute to the adaptive capacity of the various actors in the framework will depend on how the framework is implemented. There is a danger that the achievement of development results will be taken as a measure of an organisation’s internal capacity. The ability of delivering development results does not guarantee that an organisation has the internal capacity to maintain this ability or to be able to adapt to new situations. Organisational practices, the last step of the outcome mapping intentional design, provides a practical tool to monitor and plan towards strengthening adaptive capacity of an organisation at any level in the aid chain. The organisational practices that can be followed up in outcome mapping are illustrated in the text box below.

Step 7 of outcome mapping: Organisational practices to monitor own adaptive capacity:

1. Prospecting for new ideas, opportunities, and resources
2. Seeking feedback from key informants
3. Obtaining the support of your next highest power
4. Assessing and (re)designing products, services, systems, and procedures
5. Checking up on those already served to add value
6. Sharing your best wisdom with the world

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA)

'No more logical frameworks!' (from promotion pamphlet for alternative PCM approach, 2005)

A brief overview of the logical framework approach

When the consultancy team headed by Leon Rosenberg developed the LFA (logframe) in the early 1970s for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Gasper, 2001), its members probably did not realise that, thirty years later, their tool would become the dominant project management tool in the development sector. At the same time, the logframe has also become the symbol of heated debates about the very nature of development.

The central tool in the logframe approach is a **4 x 4 matrix** (Figure 12) which provides an overview of the project logic, the ways to follow up progress, and an analysis of the project risks/assumptions. This is translated into four columns that respectively frame i) the project logic narrative; ii) the indicators to judge success; iii) the information sources for the indicators; and iv) the critical assumptions to move upwards in the matrix from one level to the next. Horizontally the lowest row displays the activities, grouped per outcome. The second row shows the different outcomes, the third row summarises the project objective, and the fourth row describes the overall aim to which the project wants to contribute.

Most RBM and logframe-based approaches involve a joint planning phase (identification and formulation), in which the logframe matrix is completed in one or more participatory workshops with local project stakeholders.

	Intervention logic	Indicators	Source of Verification	Assumptions
Goal / Development Obj				
Project Objective / Purpose				
Results / Outcomes				
Activities				

Figure 12: 4x4 matrix of logframe



Reviewers comment: "Sometimes too much focus is given to the logframe matrix, while the approach is much broader and includes stakeholder analysis, problem tree, strategy decision, etc.... The debate should also deal with how LFA is used, not only how it was designed. As many donors do not fund the pre-phase of a project, NGOs quickly grasp

How does the logical framework approach help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

Does the logical framework approach help to clarify an actor centred theory of change?

While the logframe forces people to think through their theory of change (Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005), very often it will result in a theory of change that is **not** actor-focused

In an environmental education project in Zimbabwe one of the outcomes/results formulated in the original Logframe was the establishment and implementation of a college based policy on environmental education. The local actors that were responsible for working towards this policy were not well defined and as a result it was the project implementing team who ended up working towards this outcome (VVOB-St2eep, 2003).

(Crawford et al., 2005). In fact, the logframe has a tendency to break complex problems down into their component parts after which a linear plan of action is developed which is characterised by a logical path from activities to outputs to outcomes and further to objectives and the overall goal. This is very helpful for project design but the problem is that it has a

tendency to abstract the human actors who are responsible for the outcomes or impact described. This often results in confusing situations:

- As development and social change take place within the lives of human actors, it is essential for M&E to inquire about the perspective of these actors. This is of course a challenge if the actors are not properly defined.
- If the responsibilities of the local actors for achieving specific outcomes are unclear, you can rest assured that any project team will face problems in developing a shared understanding among project stakeholders about their roles in the project. This in turn

will result in a serious ownership challenge. How many times do local actors refer to 'their' (i.e. the donor) project instead of 'our' (i.e. local actor) project?

- Without a clear focus on the local actors there is also the danger of an alienation and limited understanding of the local context. This is not a good basis for developing partnerships and learning.

On which type of results does the logical framework focus?

The logical framework focuses on results at the various levels of the result chain, i.e. outputs, outcomes, intermediate result level, specific objective. For each level, SMART indicators are formulated and sources of verification identified to measure success and adjust actions accordingly.

Using the definitions of OECD (2006), we will now specify the meaning of output, outcome and impact:

- ***Output:*** The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention and which may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.
- ***Outcome:*** The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. Outcomes are the observable behavioural, institutional and societal changes that take place over 3 to 10 years, usually as the result of coordinated short-term investments in individual and organisational capacity building for key development stakeholders (such as national governments, civil society, and the private sector).
- ***Impact:*** Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly and intended or unintended.

One of the advantages of the logical framework that is often referred to is that it imposes a uniform way of thinking and demands a formalised way of representing an intervention that everyone who knows the logical framework will understand (Hummelbrunner, 2010). In reality though, even with the common terminology (as illustrated above) of the logical framework, we often come across a lot of different interpretations of outputs, outcomes, purpose, results etc. within different logframes and a lot of terminology discussions in workshops. Ricardo Wilson-Grau (2008) has developed a useful tool to deal with this terminology confusion. He uses this tool before starting any PME planning process because 'a big mistake planners, monitors and evaluators alike make is to assume everyone agrees on the meanings of these different types of results and not define one's terms right from the beginning' (ibid).

How does the logical framework approach contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

For which context is the logframe approach suitable?

The logical framework is a practical planning tool that is well suited for dealing with complicated problems and situations. A few examples:

- It can be used to solve complicated technical problems. Using thorough and systematic analysis the cause of the problem can be identified and analysed and a concrete plan of

action can be established to solve the problem. We might need to call in the experts because the analysis might be difficult but, at the end of the day, if we plan well, we can be quite sure of the result. A linear way of thinking is quite useful here because the relationship between cause and effect can be predicted. Moreover, once the problem has been solved, all experts will agree that this is the case.

- The logical framework can also be useful in processes of social change where the conditions are quite stable and where there is some possibility to predict the outcome of certain activities. The example of the ECDPM study of how the ‘machine-like’ structure, procedures and outcomes of the Rwanda Revenue Authority lent itself to control-oriented management (Baser and Morgan, 2008) could serve as an example.

There are strong indications that the logical framework is less suitable in complex contexts in which the relationship between cause and effect cannot be predicted and can only be traced in retrospect. This is also the most commonly mentioned disadvantage of the logical framework, especially if the logframe is used in a rigid way.

‘The LFA requires us to reach consensus on the overall plan for the project – the goal, objectives, outputs and activities. This is where we are pushed into a linear mode of thinking. If we try to force everyone into agreeing one long logical path from activities to goals, not only do we expend a huge amount of effort, we also have to work within one theory of change which is captured in the logical framework. Inevitably, it is usually the theory that is most acceptable to donors which will dominate.’ (Bakewell and Garbut, 2005: 20).

The reaction to this problem is that the logframe itself is not the problem but the way it is implemented. Instead of using it in a rigid way, it should provide an instrument that can help us to learn together with stakeholders from our progress and, if necessary, make adjustments to the original plan. This sounds like a very good solution. The problem though is that the set-up of the logframe and accountability requirements make it very difficult to learn collaboratively in order to facilitate this flexibility. This is discussed in more detail below.

How does the logical framework approach stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

Many will agree that logframes should be used flexibly. In order to do that you at least need to know what progress you are making within the framework of the original plan, interpret it properly and use the acquired insights to adjust your plan. You cannot do that alone as project managers or field staff. Various stakeholders need to be involved in this learning process. In other words the ability to learn is essential for a proper and flexible use of the logframe. The problem is that the logframe is not very conducive to learning for a number of reasons:

- *A lack of actor centeredness.* As a result of this the logframe underrates the importance of relationships and human dynamics in development programmes. It leads to *under-socialised* interpretations of causality (Uusikyla, Valorvirta, 2004, in Davies, 2005: 3), which will result in unrealistic programming. This problem is also highlighted by Fukuyama (2004) when he argues that the direct provision of services by donor agencies

almost always undermines the local governments' capacity to provide those services once the programme terminates. In our own experience, reflection meetings at which discussions are based on the logframe are not the most inspiring ones and are often characterised by participants talking about the roles and expectations of others, instead of reflecting together on their own roles and responsibilities and the changes at their level.

- Culture, context, power. 'There is a growing awareness amongst development professionals that the logframe and similar tools squeeze out data related to local culture and context, and therefore do not provide space for an analysis of informal interactions and external influences that can be the lifeblood of a successful development intervention' (Earle, 2002: 5). The dominant focus on RBM and logframe-based approaches takes place at the expense of the 'intuitive analysis of qualitative approaches', which are needed to guide social processes. In the context of capacity development programmes, Morgan (2005) argues that many conventional logframe-based approaches remain a-historical, a-political, and a-cultural.
- Donor accountability requirements. In view of their accountability requirements, donor agencies want to avoid a situation in which project designs are continuously changed by stakeholders and thereby deviate from the agreed objectives. Therefore, more often than not, higher level changes to the framework need approval by people at a wide variety of layers in aid bureaucracy (Huyse, 2006). This is perceived by the field as rather cumbersome and as hindering the learning and flexibility in the project cycle. Upward accountability is the most common form, characterised by M&E officers filling the boxes for the end of year donor reports.
- Assumptions neglected. The assumptions column in the logframe matrix should play a key role in the incorporation of contextual issues into the planning and implementation process. However, a variety of evaluations by development agencies (e.g. Kothari, 2000; Earle, 2003; Crawford, 2004) have revealed that this column is quite often marginalised.

"I didn't even know we had to follow-up assumptions during the implementation stage." (VVOB survey, 2005)

What are the implications of implementing the logical framework approach towards strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity?

Besides the considerable learning challenges discussed above, any organisation seeking to use the logical framework as PME approach for strengthening their internal adaptive capacity will also have to consider some other limitations. The linear planning logic that underpins the logical framework often underestimates the inter-connectedness of units within organisational systems and consequently also underestimates how difficult it is to attribute impact to discrete capacity development interventions and to predict their probable effects (Morgan, 2005). Also the often strong focus on 'measurement of' (instead of dialogue on) progress on the basis of predefined objectives, can detract attention from vital, though unexpected effects or insights and as such obstruct learning (ibid).

Another challenge concerns the typical needs analysis process associated with the logical framework approach. This often involves assessing the ‘gap’ between what an organisation needs to be able to do, and what it is doing now (Watson, 2006). The results of such needs analysis are often misleading because they usually exclude an insight in the “existing capacities, and what they say about ‘what works’ or ‘the way things work’ in the environment in question; they also often (wrongly) assume that the organisation acknowledges any identified gap and is committed to filling it (ibid). There is of course nothing wrong with setting a few specific measurable indicators to track progress around some internally defined objectives related to internal capacity. But instead of targets that need to be measured, such indicators may be more useful as milestones that can promote dialogue and feedback.

Most Significant Change (MSC)

A brief overview of the Most Significant Change Approach



Essentially the process involves the collection of significant change stories emanating from the field level and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. This way the designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved in ‘searching’ for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various

people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. Once the technique has been implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact, learning occurs through discussion and areas for improvement can be identified (Davies and Dart, 2005).

‘Most Significant Change (MSC) is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because it involves numerous project stakeholders, both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it can occur throughout the programme cycle and provides information which helps people manage the programme. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the programme as a whole.’ (ibid).

How does Most Significant Change help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

Does Most Significant Change help to clarify an actor-centered theory of change?

MSC does not help you directly in developing an actor-centered theory of change during a planning process. Instead, MSC provides an approach for regularly discussing what is being achieved and how this is valued by stakeholders. These discussions can contribute to a more shared vision between those involved in MSC (e.g. the people who collect, select and receive feedback about the stories). In this way, MSC helps groups of people to make sense of the

myriad effects that their interventions cause, and to define what it is that they want to achieve. This can then indirectly contribute to a much more refined understanding of the change processes that are taking place and how these are experienced by the stakeholders involved. These insights can, in turn, contribute to refining theories of change and inform future planning.

On which type of results does Most Significant Change focus?

'The recognition that changes take place distinct from those anticipated as indicators in the project logframe seems important. In the particular example of BADSP, it is highly unlikely that many of the indicators will be met, and yet the project has seen considerable change occurring in the districts in which it operates...' (Johnston, 2002:11, in Davies and Dart, 2005)

The authors of the MSC approach often stress that MSC is a PME approach that can complement existing PME systems. In other words MSC is an approach that can help you to fill the gaps. 'A key gap that MSC fills within a PME framework is that it helps us to monitor the 'messy' impacts of our work – including the unexpected results, the intangible and the indirect consequences of our work. By getting this information on a regular basis, and taking time to reflect on what this

means, groups of people can alter their direction of effort so that they achieve more of the outcomes they value' (Davies and Dart, 2005).

MSC therefore focuses on two types of results:

- If MSC is applied at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries it may give us insights into the ultimate impact (but only, of course, if beneficiaries refer to programmes as having contributed to this impact).
- Applied at any actor level, MSC will give information about unexpected effects.

In the Quality Education and Vulnerability Programme in Zimbabwe, programme staff came to the realisation that their PME system which was based on outcome mapping and logical framework did not give them information about the ideas or experiences of their ultimate beneficiaries who were the students and the college lecturers. For some time the responses were defensive when this insight was discussed, e.g. "we don't have any contact with our ultimate beneficiaries so it's impossible to monitor at that level"; "they are outside our sphere of influence", "we don't have to means to monitor at that level". After one of the team members had participated in an MSC workshop the MSC process was introduced to the team and many became interested. A student who was on a work placement was asked to collect a few stories whenever she met people who were the so-called ultimate beneficiaries. Programme staff then selected the most significant stories and feedback was organised with the donor head office and back to the story tellers. It was only then that people realised that MSC could also be light and fun and useful. And now we can claim to be monitoring at impact level. (VVOB, Zimbabwe)

How does Most Significant Change contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

For which context is Most Significant Change suitable?

MSC is especially useful in complex programmes during which we want to learn from changes at the level of those actors with whom we do not directly work or interact with. This

is usually the case with our ultimate beneficiaries who are often far removed from the programme team. In such cases MSC can be very relevant. MSC would not be very useful in a relatively simple programme context with easily defined outcomes. In such cases quantitative monitoring may be sufficient and would certainly take up less time than MSC.

MSC could also be of benefit to large-scale programmes that involve numerous organisational layers or programmes that provide highly customised services to a small number of beneficiaries (such as family counselling) (Davies and Dart, 2005).

How does Most Significant Change stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

‘In our experience, MSC is suited for monitoring that focuses on **learning** rather than just accountability. It is also an appropriate tool when you are interested in the effect of the intervention on people’s lives and keen to include the words of non-professionals. In addition, MSC can help staff to improve their capabilities in capturing and analysing the impact of their work.’ (Davies and Dart, 2005).

The above quote goes to the heart of MSC in that it is really about learning. If your first concern is accountability then there is no way that you should consider MSC because, in that case, the whole process of collecting stories and selection of stories and feedback would be felt to take too much time. The stories are also not really suitable to account for pre-determined indicators or milestones. They are mainly useful for people who want to learn more about the people they are working with or working for and about the expected and unexpected effects of what they are doing. For this you need to be prepared to invest time and space. If not then it will be no more than a one-off activity that may be enjoyable but that you are glad to get over and done with. Many questions about the approach actually stem from this focus on accountability that many of us still have, e.g. Are we going to be able to draw conclusions from just a few stories? How can we be assured that people tell the truth? It is important to consider this dilemma before engaging with MSC. All too often we are too impatient to introduce the approach without deeper analysis of our motivation or reasons for doing it.

MSC prioritises learning in a number of ways (Davies and Dart, 2005):

- MSC encourages and makes constructive use of a diversity of views.
- MSC actively encourages participants to exercise their own judgment in identifying stories and selecting stories collected by others.
- MSC makes use of what has been called ‘thick description’: detailed accounts of events placed in their local context, where people and their views of events are visible.
- MSC means information is not stored or processed centrally, but is distributed throughout the organisation and processed locally. Staff not only collect information about events, they also evaluate that information according to their own local perspective.
- MSC leads to the contents of the monitoring system being potentially far more dynamic and adaptive, in contrast to pre-determined indicators that often remain the same in each monitoring cycle.

How does Most Significant Change contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

While not designed to support learning in capacity development programmes (Simister & Smith, 2010), MSC is one of the alternative approaches that are being piloted and adapted to monitor and evaluate processes of internal capacity development. In this case significant change stories are collected around specific areas or domains related to internal adaptive capacity. The stories can be vehicles for sense making about what is happening and with what effects. As such they can provide a framework for reflection on practical experience in order to decide what works, what doesn't and why and use these insights for further decision making.

Being less concerned with predetermined indicators or outcomes, MSC is better placed to deal with the often unpredictable character of internal capacity development processes. Instead MSC can help to create consensus as to what represents qualitative improvements or 'contributions' towards achievement of broad objectives of capacity development (Watson, 2006). One of the participating organisations in the thematic learning programme on alternative PME approaches will pilot MSC in order to strengthen gender mainstreaming initiatives within partner organisations.

Advantages and disadvantages of LFA, OM and MSC

While the Logical Framework is still the dominant PME approach in most development programmes, OM and MSC are more and more being explored as complementary or alternative approaches. Table 7 summarises some of the advantages and disadvantages that are often referred to in relation to these three approaches.

	Advantages	Weaknesses
LFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Widespread use. ▪ Simple overview of project logic. ▪ Shared understanding of terminology. ▪ Proven track record in ‘hard science’ problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk for over-simplification and linear logic. ▪ Focus on impact/reporting, rather than learning. ▪ Unexpected results? ▪ Not actor-centered: who is the programme? ▪ Limited influence on planning and decision making.
OM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suitable for capacity development projects. ▪ Planning in OM happens with participation of partners and therefore enhances ownership. ▪ Learning process of the partners is central in the monitoring. OM promotes ‘mutual accountability’ since boundary partners are involved in the monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Little research-based evidence about the advantages of OM. ▪ Limited definition of outcomes as changes in behaviour are compared to the OESO-DAC definition. ▪ Little focus to changes at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries. ▪ Self assessment in OM-based monitoring contributes to learning but is less suitable for accountability to the donor.
MSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inductive – unexpected outcomes are captured. ▪ Involves different actors in the monitoring process (field staff, beneficiaries) – different views. ▪ Strong focus on context. ▪ About learning and improvement. ▪ Outer edges of experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of the stories and aggregation of lessons learned can be a challenge. ▪ Quality of stories can not always be assured. ▪ Collection and selection of stories can be time consuming. ▪ Meaningful feedback may not be forthcoming ▪ Sometimes difficult to link the insights from the MSC process with future planning

Table 7: Advantages and disadvantages of LFA, OM and MSC

The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) – PME in the context of influencing policy

A brief overview of the ROMA approach

ROMA stands for the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach. It was developed in 2008 by the ‘Research and Policy in Development Programme’ (RAPID) of ODI. The ROMA approach grew out of the realisation that development research supported by donors often gathers dust on shelves instead of being used to substantiate policies or practice. ROMA is based on six key principles that emerged from ODI’s work in the field of research and policy. The approach also provides a six-step approach for ‘policy entrepreneurs wishing to maximise the impact of research on policy’ (Young and Mendizabal, 2009).

Key principles (Drawn from ODI annual report, 2009):

1. *Policy processes are complex and rarely linear or logical.* Simply presenting information to policymakers or practitioners and expecting them to act on it does not work.
2. *Evidence plays a small role in policy processes.* Policymakers are influenced by their own values, habits and judgement, by lobbyists and marketers and by resource constraints.

3. Research-based evidence contributes to policies that change lives. DFID's research strategy cites a 43% fall in deaths among HIV positive children in Ghana through the use of simple antibiotics.
4. Policy and social entrepreneurs need to grasp the big picture. ODI's framework examines four key areas: external influences; the political context; the evidence itself; and linkages (i.e. actors and mechanisms that affect how the evidence gets into the policy process).
5. Policy and social entrepreneurs need to be more than good researchers. They need to be political fixers, storytellers, networkers and engineers to build the right programmes.
6. Policy and social entrepreneurs must want change. Turning a researcher into an expert on policy influence takes dedication, time and money. Effective influencing may require organisations to change the way they work (e.g. building multidisciplinary teams, working more in partnerships and networks, spending more on communication).

The six ROMA steps and associated tools:

The six steps of the ROMA approach are shown in Figure 13. Each step seeks to provide the 'policy entrepreneur' with more information about the context so that he or she can make better strategic choices and be better placed to take advantage of unexpected opportunities of change. Not all steps may be needed all the time. The context will determine which steps may be more useful. During the lifetime of a policy influencing programme, the various steps can be repeated following the PME rhythm of the programme. As such they provide practical monitoring tools for tracking change.

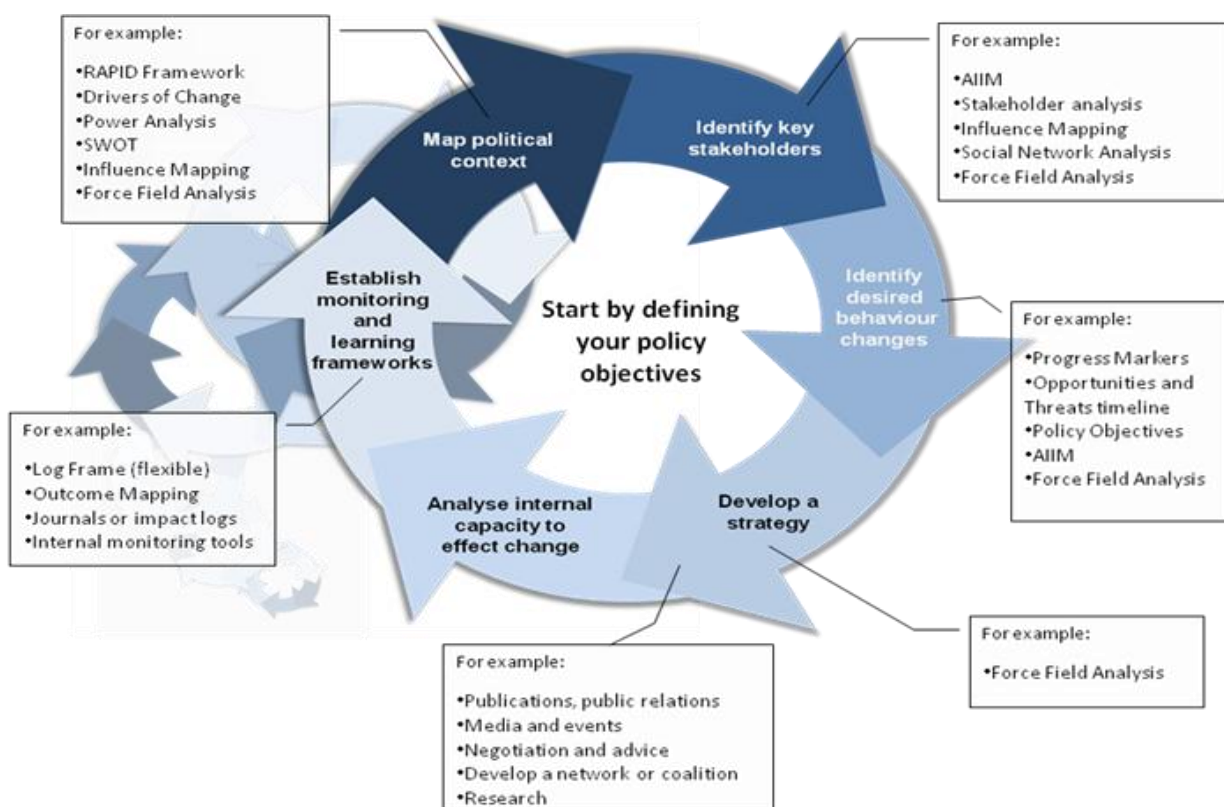


Figure 13: The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)

- **Step 1: Map political context.** The first step is to define a clear policy objective whereby various forms of policy change can be aimed for beyond the normal written policy, i.e. changes in language usage, changes in how something is done, changes in perception of key stakeholders and behavioural changes. Thereafter the policy context is mapped using various tools as indicated in Figure 13.
- **Step 2: Identify key influential stakeholders.** Rapid provides the Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) tool for this step (see Figure 14). This tool can be used to map actors along three dimensions: i) the degree of alignment (i.e. agreement) with the proposed policy (on the x-axis), ii) their level of interest in the issue (on the y-axis), and iii) their ability to exert influence on the policy process (on the z-axis). Actors that are both aligned and interested are allies. Those that are aligned but not interested can be motivated to develop more interest and as such increase the chance of success. Actors that are not aligned but interested are potential obstacles. The two options in this case are to try to bring them into alignment or to prevent them from being an obstacle.

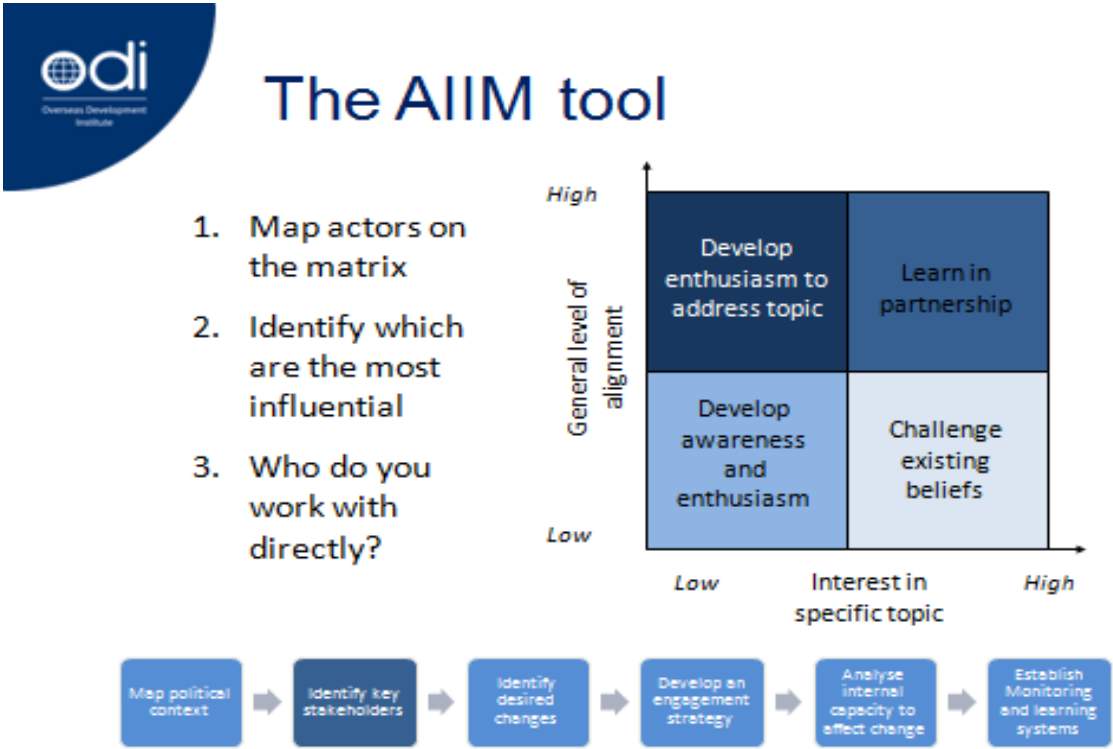


Figure 14: Two-dimensional form of the Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix (AIIM)

- **Step 3: Identify desirable behavioural changes.** This step draws strongly on the OM approach. It helps the programme to develop its theory of change. The current behaviour and the behaviour that is needed to contribute to the policy objective are described for each policy actor identified (i.e. outcome challenge). Short-term and medium-term step changes (i.e. progress markers) are also described so that the programme can monitor whether the selected policy actors are moving in the right direction and are responding to the programme efforts. The major difference with OM is that the policy actors do not necessarily agree to be programme boundary partners. The programme may try to

influence them without them being aware of it. As such the policy actors are more like ‘boundary actors’ (Wilson Grau, 2010) rather than boundary partners.

- ***Step 4: Develop a strategy to achieve the policy changes.*** All kinds of strategic planning tools can be used for this. Force field analysis is one of the proposed tools because it is conducive to an understanding of the forces that support and oppose the desired policy change and suggest concrete responses. Figure 15 shows an example of force field analysis relating to the problem of deforestations. Sometimes it is impossible to influence actors directly, and it is necessary to target others who can influence them. This could then result in a reprioritising of the boundary actors.

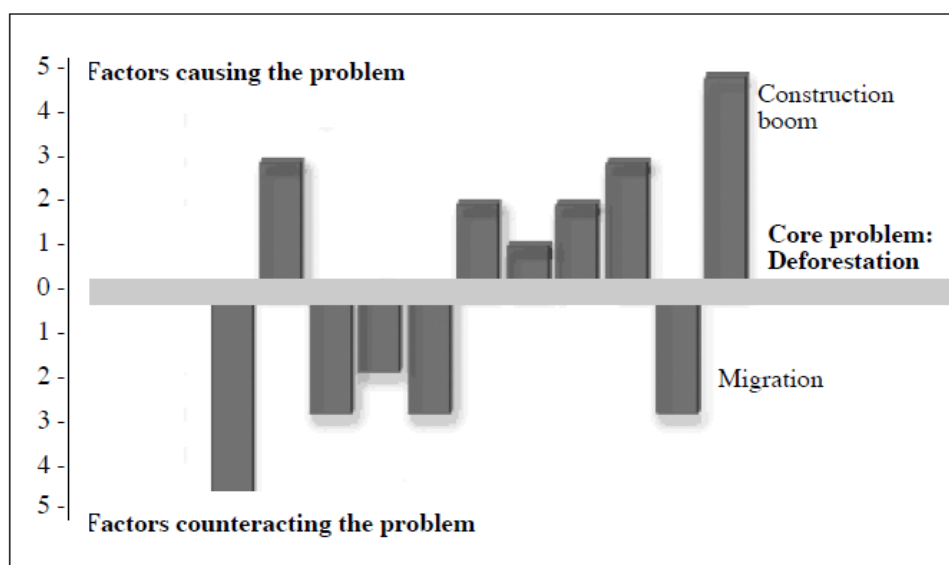


Figure 15: Example of force field analysis relating to the problem of deforestations.
(Adopted from Social Analysis Systems, SAS², 2008)

- ***Step 5: Ensure the engagement team has the competencies required to operationalise the strategy.*** This step involves a set of systems, processes and skills that enables actors to make the right decisions and act accordingly. Various tools, such as the policy entrepreneur questionnaire¹⁰ or SWOT analysis, can be used for this step (see figure 16 below for sample questions that can be asked during a SWOT analysis).

¹⁰ The policy entrepreneur questionnaire can be found at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/tools/Questionnaire.html>



SWOT Analysis

- What type of policy influencing skills and capacities do we have?
- In what areas have our staff used them more effectively?
- Who are our strongest allies?
- When have they worked with us?
- Are there any windows of opportunity?
- What can affect our ability to influence policy?

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats



Figure 16: SWOT analysis as a monitoring tool as regards the capacity of programme team (adopted from ODI presentation, Simon Hearn (2010))

- Step 6: Develop a monitoring and learning system. The ROMA approach asserts that ‘simply recording the results of using the various planning steps, noting the attainment of progress markers and achievement of improved competency level, and simple logs of unexpected events should allow the team to produce and use knowledge about policy content, context, the strategy and activities, outcomes (behaviour changes), the skills, competencies and systems necessary. As such the monitoring system is not only about tracking progress and making necessary adjustments but also about learning lessons for the future.’

How does ROMA help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

Does ROMA help to clarify an actor-centred theory of change?

ROMA helps policy influencing programmes to identify the key influential stakeholders that can be influenced. As a result the actors are central in the programme planning and implementation process. In addition ROMA uses elements of the OM approach to describe the current behaviour and the behaviour that is needed (i.e. outcome challenge) of these influential stakeholders if they are to contribute to the desired policy objective. Short- and medium-term step changes (or progress markers) are also developed to allow programmes to monitor changes in the behaviour of the stakeholders that are influenced or supported. The ROMA process therefore results in a clearly actor centred theory of change that offers a flexible programme planning that can be adjusted according to the lessons learned during the implementation of the programme.

On which types of results does ROMA focus?

ROMA focuses on the factors that contribute towards evidence-based policymaking. The following main areas of results can be identified via the ROMA steps:

- The changes at the level of influential stakeholders whom the programme seeks to influence. Changes related to policy change can come in various ways:
 - i. Discursive changes, i.e. changes in the narratives of policy actors;
 - ii. Procedural changes in the way certain policy processes are implemented;
 - iii. Content changes in the content of policies;
 - iv. Attitudinal changes, i.e. changes in the way policy actors think;
 - v. Behavioural changes, i.e. changes in the way policy actors act or relate to others.
- The development of the necessary systems, processes and skills of the programme influencing team.

How does ROMA contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

For which context is ROMA suitable?

The six key principles on which ROMA is based (see above) clearly relate to a complex context. ROMA recognises the complex character of policy processes for which causal links between cause and effect cannot easily be predicted in advance because of the multitude of factors and actors that cannot all be known in advance and which can contribute to specific expected and unexpected effects. In such a context it is important to find out as quickly as possible whether your programme activities contribute to the desired policy objective and make adjustments when necessary and draw lessons for the future. Therefore, the actor focused approach and the focus on behaviour and actions of policy actors make ROMA a suitable PME approach as regards planning, implementing and learning within a complex context.

The eight steps of the ROMA approach help the programme team to gain a greater insight into the context they are working in. Learning about the context is also important when working in complex situations because it allows the team to be better placed to take advantage of unexpected policy windows and opportunities for change, allowing the team to make better strategic choices.

How does ROMA stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

The various tools used in the planning steps of the ROMA approach can be applied during each monitoring cycle and, as such, provide a practical way to monitor progress, to adjust programme activities if necessary and to draw lessons for the future. The fact that the various ROMA steps are clearly actor-focused and provide information about the context in which the policy actors operate, give it a potential basis for learning. In other words, ROMA provides a way of getting into the 'black box' that often exists between outputs of programme activities and changed policy. The approach provides information about how this change came about through contributions by the programme but also through other actors and factors.

The expected changes, such as the outcome challenge and progress markers, are not necessarily designed in dialogue with the boundary actors or influential policy actors whom the programme seeks to support. This is because these actors are not necessarily aware or willing to be part of the policy influencing programme. There is a chance that the learning is mainly restricted to the programme implementing team. As with any approach, this will depend on how the PME and learning processes are organised and implemented. However, the ROMA approach does not necessarily imply multiple accountabilities as with other approaches like the OM approach.

How does ROMA contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity of the programme, partner organisations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

Being adaptive and being able to adjust rapidly in case of a changing policy environment will be essential for any organisations that seeks to influence policy. The last step in the ROMA approach is specifically designed for developing a monitoring and learning system. Various tools are suggested in this step, ranging from flexible logframes, elements of outcome mapping, journals and impact logs and internal monitoring tools. It is explicitly stated that “the monitoring system is not only about tracking progress and making necessary adjustments but also about learning lessons for the future”. The diverse toolbox will assist organisations to choose appropriate tools that fit their specific context.

Five Core Capabilities Model – ECDPM

A large study on ‘Capacity, Change and Performance’ (ECDPM, 2004–2008), which focused on how capacity develops endogenously within an organisation or a system, identified five core capabilities¹¹ that organisations require to function effectively. These are the capabilities i) to commit and engage, ii) to carry out functions or tasks, iii) to relate and attract resources and support, iv) to adapt and self-renew, and finally, v) to balance coherence and diversity. The study showed that the existence of these capabilities, their effectiveness and interrelationships between them were key in all organisations or systems that were involved in the research. Figure 17 illustrates the various capabilities and how they relate to capacity.

¹¹ **capability** – the skills of a system to carry out a particular function or process. It is what enables an organisation to do things and sustain itself.

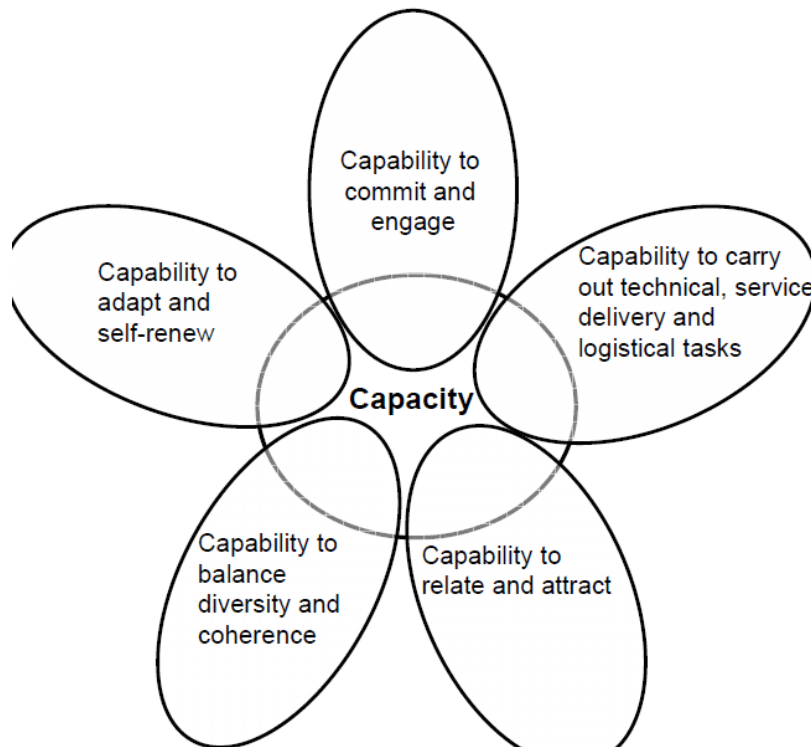


Figure 17: Elements of capacity (Baser and Morgan, 2008).

The five core capabilities can provide a basis for assessing a situation at a given point and then tracking it over time. The capabilities become criteria for monitoring changes in capacity and performance (Engel et al., 2007).

Baser and Morgan (2008: 103) advise organisations ‘to start with rudimentary approaches for PME of capacity and move on to more complex monitoring systems as the interest and capabilities of the organisation develop’. Organisations could, for example, start by making rough judgments about the state of each of the five core capabilities and qualify these judgments on a scale of 1 to 5. Issues to consider when making such judgment would entail considering the complexity or depth of each capability and the significance of a particular capability to the capacity and performance of the organisation or system.

Figure 18 below provides a framework of basic questions that can help organisations to monitor change in the five core capabilities that affect capacity and performance. The framework also shows the interrelationships between the core capabilities.

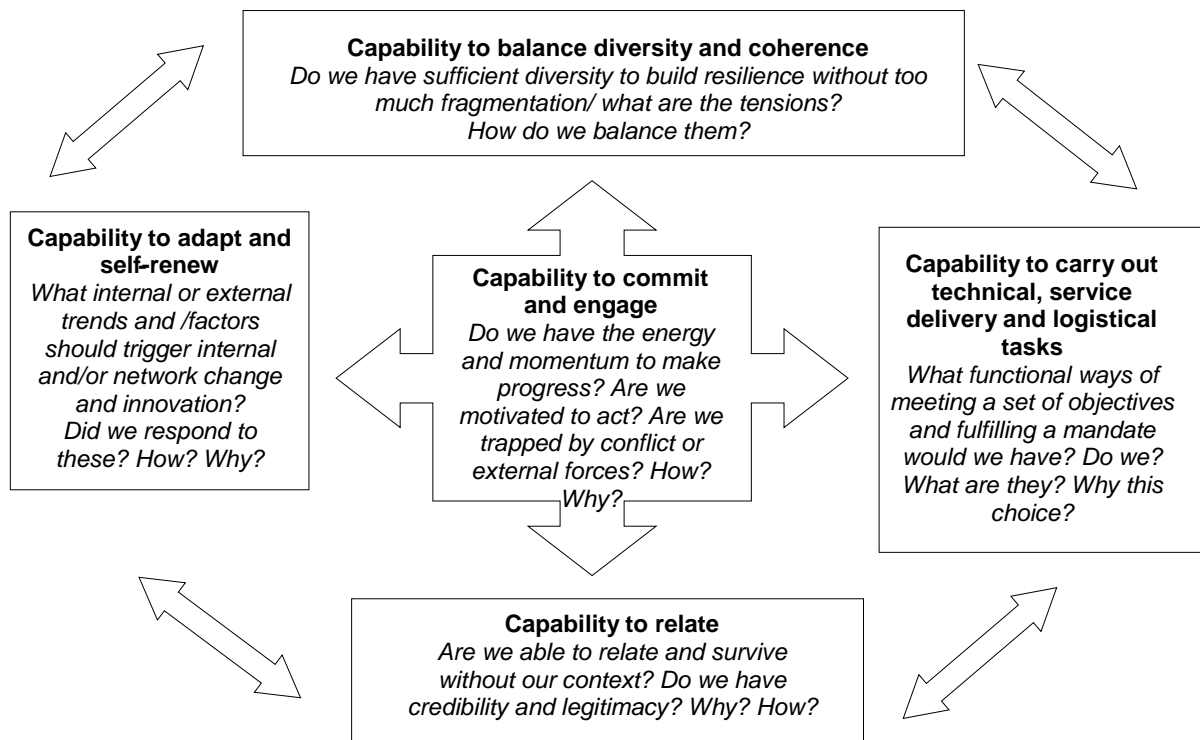


Figure 18: Five capability monitoring framework (Baser and Morgan, 2008)

Each core capability can be broken down into more specific capabilities (or pointers) reflecting the context and the actors involved (Baser, 2009). These pointers can then help stakeholders to reflect on the core capabilities. They need to be seen as guides for reflection and not as targets to be achieved. They will also need to be adjusted depending on the specific context.

Engel et al. (2007) also propose a five step model for engaging stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating change in capacity and performance:

- **Step 1: Situational reconnaissance and stakeholder analysis.** Explore the situation and the purpose of the assessment; identify relevant stakeholders and decide how they can be involved in the assessment process.
- **Step 2: Calibration of the framework.** Together with key stakeholders, decide how different stakeholder perspectives affect the choice, interpretation and use of the proposed pointers.
- **Step 3: Implementation of the framework.** Gather evidence, views and opinions from stakeholders that assess the capacity of the system under scrutiny by scoring its performance on all pointers in the assessment framework.
- **Step 4: Distribution of the consolidated draft results to key stakeholders.** Initiate a debate which leads to stakeholders reaching a judgment on whether the consolidated results paint a fair picture of what they experience in practice. The final draft may include proposals for changes in the assessment framework and/or approach.
- **Step 5: Distribute the final draft of the report among all stakeholders.**

How does the five core capabilities model help to clarify relationships, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?

Does the five core capability model help to clarify an actor-centred theory of change?

The five core capability model helps organisations to unpack and develop an analysis of their own capacity according to the five capabilities. It provides a tool that can help organisations to think about their state of affairs in terms of capacity and plan and implement strategies to strengthen their capacity if necessary. The model is developed on the basis of a strong realisation that capacity development is an endogenous process whereby any organisation needs to be in charge of its own capacity development process. Therefore, the roles and responsibilities for any capacity development intervention need to be predominantly centred on the actors within the organisation taking charge of the process.

By itself, the five capability model does not necessarily help you develop an actor-centered theory of change. The analysis of capabilities does not always help you to decide how to address those needs. It could help you to write good ‘outcome challenges’ and progress markers’, if combined with OM for example. However, by itself, the five capability model does not help you to define which actors (internally or externally) can intervene and how they can intervene. The model will therefore have to be used in conjunction with other PME approaches.

On which types of results does the five core capability model focus?

The five core capability model seeks to find a balance between a focus on development results and a focus on capacity as a result in itself. The ECDPM study clearly showed that too strong a focus on development results could lead indirectly to the instrumentalisation of organisations. This process might in turn lead to declining capacity because of participating stakeholders not having the time or the resources to make the investments that capacity development required. On the other hand, an excessively exclusive focus on building capacity could also lead to participants ‘losing track of the need to deliver, or starting to prove the value of a certain capacity theory as opposed to tailoring it to the needs of performance’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 90). It is therefore important to use the five core capabilities as an integrated model and not view certain core capabilities in isolation. The hope is that this will facilitate a virtuous cycle in which capacity development and results reinforce each other. Improved capacity will improve performance which, in turn, feeds back and energises participants to further improve their capacity.

How does five core capability model contribute to learning about the progress towards the development objectives (of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, Northern NGOs) and satisfy downward and upward accountability needs?

For which context is the five core capability model suitable?

The conclusions stated in the ECDPM study help us to explain why the model is especially suited for complex contexts of capacity development (Baser and Morgan, 2008):

- The model has emerged from the complexity and the paradoxes of many context-actor relationships in the cases that were explored during the ECDPM study. These did not conform to a linear cause and effect pattern of effects. The context-actor relationships

instead interacted among themselves to produce pressures and opportunities, many of which could not be understood in advance. The five core capability model therefore emerged from a realisation that the planning and control models that are commonly applied to development cooperation had limited utility in this complex context.

- The authors of the model draw on complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory in order to understand and craft capacity development interventions involving many actors. As such the model helps us recognise the deeper patterns of behaviour and relationships that lie beneath individual events and actions.
- The five capability model is better suited to monitor second-order capacity development which involves altering mindsets, patterns of behaviour and the relationship between the visible formal and the invisible underlying assumptions and tacit mental models.
- *Capacity development is about altering power, authority and access to resources.* Rebalancing power creates winners and losers. Loser groups have to be dealt with in a way that will reduce their influence. The five capability model may be better suited to monitor such complex unpredictable processes than traditional linear PME models.

How does the five capability model stimulate action oriented learning among stakeholders?

The five capability model provides a framework for organisations to go beyond the monitoring and learning about the achievement of results and to learn about the organisation's internal capacity in terms of the five capabilities as well. It is up to the organisations and the actors within the organisations to keep the model alive by developing specific pointers or target capacities under each capability that they find important to pursue and then learn about their state of affairs or progress in terms of these capacities. It will be up to the organisations to determine how learning and multiple accountabilities will be prioritised and implemented. The model will only provide a guiding framework and will not provide any guarantee that any significant learning will take place nor contribute to multiple accountabilities (i.e. downward towards their beneficiaries, upward towards the higher powers or horizontal within the organisation or with other partner organisations).

At present the ECDPM framework has not (yet) been translated into an overall PME framework, which means that it does not support a theory on how to go about monitoring and evaluating processes. One of the dangers of the five capability model is that it evolves into another organisational assessment framework that is used in a mechanistic way, with participants being expected to fill in the blank spaces in a table during regular monitoring cycles. In addition, organisations will need to guard against the model being used to impose the viewpoints of external capacity development facilitators and against the exclusion of the particular needs of staff at the middle and lower levels of the organisation or system where most of the actual work on capacity development takes place (Baser and Morgan, 2006). One way to address these challenges will be to provide space for the involvement of the specific actors within an organisation in the learning process relating to the capacities that they prioritise under the various capabilities.

How does the five core capabilities model contribute to strengthening the own internal adaptive capacity of the programme, partner organizations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?

As we discussed above, the five core capability model can help organisations to develop a more holistic and broader understanding of capacity development. Too often the development of the internal adaptive capacity is neglected in favour of the capacity to obtain development results. The model helps to avoid this mistake.

Towards a PME approach decider: choosing the right PME approach for your context

Based on the information in this paper we make a first step in designing a PME approach decider (See figure 19) that may help organisations to choose the PME approach or combination of PME approaches that suit their specific context. The circular tool draws strongly on the 'Hard/Soft typology' of Crawford and the Cynefin framework of Snowden. It has to be used from the centre outwards. The tool will then guide the user through three steps in selecting a specific PME approach or a combination of PME approaches. The first circle will help you to analyse the level of complexity of the context in which you are working. The tool will help to differentiate between a simple, complicated, complex or chaotic context. The second circle will help you to analyse the management options that correspond to your level of complexity. This will then give you the basis to select the most appropriate PME approach from the third or outer circle within your complexity level quadrant.

We are fully aware that this tool is not yet fully developed. We only started to develop the tool for the complex and complicated domains and only a limited number of PME approaches have been included. This tool has also not yet been assessed or field tested. This should therefore be regarded as a work in progress appropriate to the character of this working paper. It is hoped that the tool may initiate discussion and critique that may help to further develop the tool.

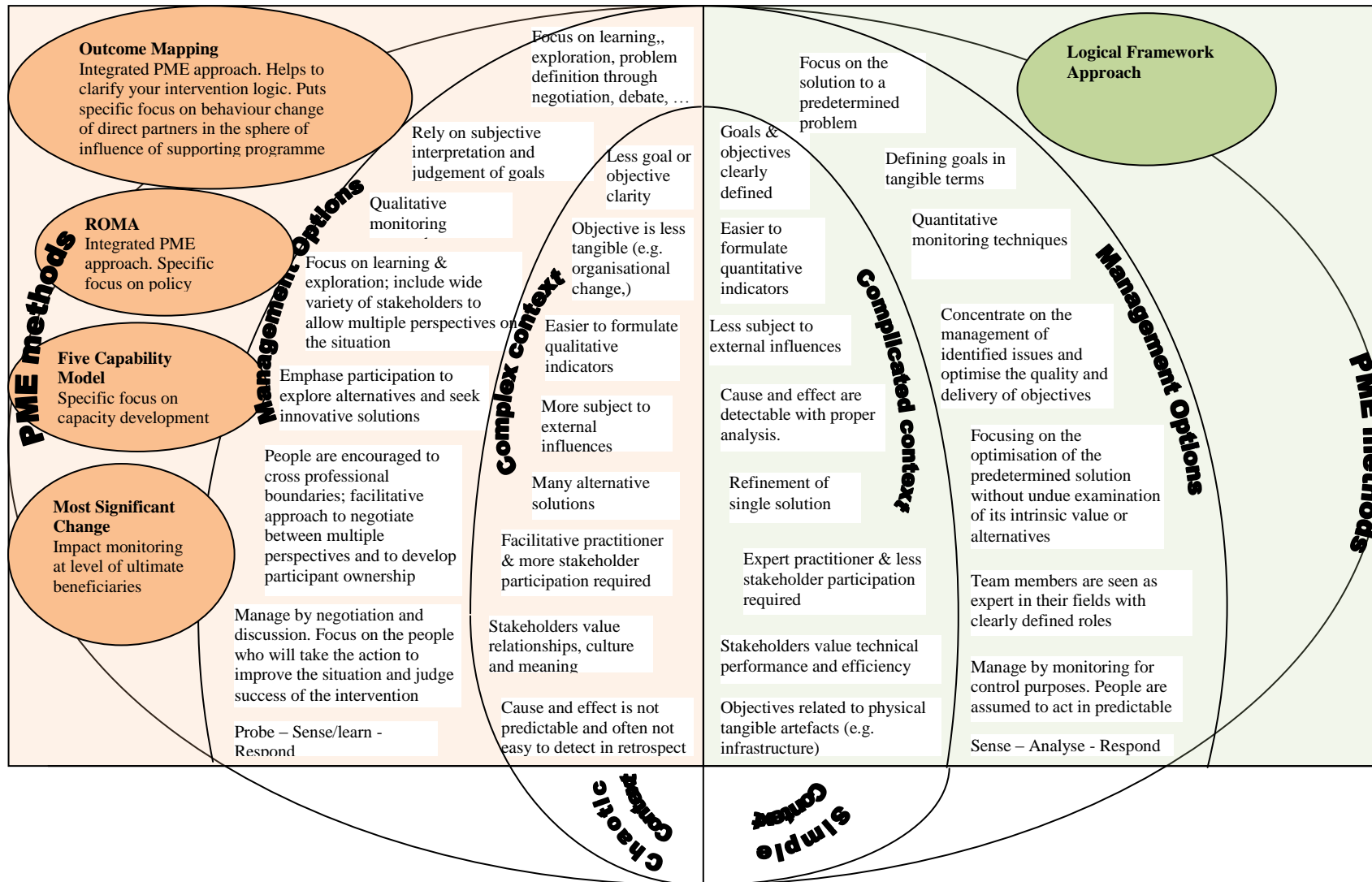


Figure 19: PME approach decider tool (drawing from the Hard/Soft typology from Crawford *et al.*, 2004) and the Cynefin framework (from Kurtz and Snowden, 2003)

Conclusion and recommendations

Demystifying PME

Part one of this paper tried to demystify PME by looking at it from the angle of very tangible and practical challenges that many practitioners face within their work, and not just the PME specialist. Most of us come across these challenges in our daily work at various levels, from the field up to the head office. Drawing a little from the appreciative inquiry approach, we do not see these challenges as problems to be solved but rather as opportunities for improving our PME systems. We say this because they can give us clear guidance when we are confronted with the often difficult task of selecting the most suitable PME approach for a specific context. The PME approach that can assist us in the best possible way to address our specific PME challenges will also be the best suited PME approach for our specific context. Believing that PME comes down to choosing or developing the right indicators would simply be a naïve conclusion.

Three important considerations for PME

Based on the information in this paper, we would like to present a few essential steps or considerations that one needs to make when facing the task of developing a PME system.

1. Clarifying the intervention logic or theory of change from an actor perspective

We have seen that the concept of ‘results based management’ is a loaded term that can be understood differently by different people. This is because ‘results’ can mean different things and they can be found at various levels in the results chain. What is more, different actors can have different expectations and views about the roles and responsibilities towards these results. In addition, different actors have different information needs about different types of results. If we fail to clarify this complex ‘results mystery’ at the start of a programme we will face serious problems in the subsequent PME during programme implementation. It is therefore crucial to clarify the intervention logic at the start in such a way that the expectations, roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in the programme are clarified, not so that these can then be written in stone, but to make sure that there is some kind of shared understanding about them.

Our analysis shows that, through its intentional design process, OM provides a possible approach to clarify this intervention logic because it clearly places the actors at the centre of the planning. As such it helps a programme to establish the borders of the system it will work in by clearly specifying the actors it will work with and those it seeks to influence directly or indirectly. The OM intentional design process also usually results in visual representations of the intervention logic which can help stakeholders to discuss and adjust the intervention logic and develop a shared understanding about it.

2. Strengthening learning in order to become more accountable

Different levels of complexity require different PME approaches. Linear PME approaches, such as the LFA, that are based on a belief in causal and predictable relationships between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact can be very suitable for simple and complicated contexts. This is because they assure proper analysis of the problem that can then be solved with the necessary technical expertise. Such PME approaches might be less relevant for complex contexts. Complex contexts require PME approaches that can deal with the

unpredictability and often undetectability of such causal relationships. Complex contexts are better served by more learning-oriented PME systems that help a programme to establish its contribution to the effects (both expected and unexpected) that are being observed and adjust the original planning based on lessons learned about what is working and what is not.

Fortunately we now have more such complexity oriented PME approaches at our disposal. In this paper we have only reviewed a few and each of these has its specific advantages that will be useful for specific contexts: i) MSC allows impact monitoring at beneficiary level, ii) OM is an integrated PME approach that focuses the monitoring on the changes in behaviour and relationships of the boundary partners, iii) ROMA is an integrated PME approach with a particular focus on policy influencing and iv) the five capability model has a specific focus on processes of endogenous capacity development.

In this paper we identified four common key principles that apply both to learning and accountability. These are: i) participation, ii) reflection, iii) transparency, and iv) feedback. We argue that, if an organisation or programme is able to strengthen its learning processes by implementing a PME system that is based on these key principles, it will also become better at different forms of accountability, i.e. upward accountability to the donors, downward accountability to the beneficiaries and horizontal accountability within the organisation and with collaborating partners.

For that to happen we need to be pulled out of our 'comfort zones'. This means our M&E processes or learning processes should be about issues that are of importance or affect the lives (professional, personal or social) of the stakeholders that participate in these processes. Such processes need to result in specific lessons learned that are followed up or that inform future planning and, if that does not happen, the people involved in the process should be taken to account. To help us achieve such a learning-centred approach in our PME we highlighted the importance of investing in the space for joint reflection both formally and informally. We also elaborated on the importance of genuine participation in the PME process so that learning is about things that matter to people. Open communication and feedback are two crucial processes that can promote such participation.

In our review of PME approaches we have seen that OM provides a monitoring framework that facilitates programmes to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders (i.e. the boundary partners) about the progress of the programme. Since the progress largely focuses on the changes in the boundary partners themselves and the support given by the programme this means that issues discussed during the PME are especially relevant for the stakeholders involved, and hence promote learning and accountability. In fact, the actor-centeredness of PME approaches such as OM, MSC, ROMA and the five capability model give them all considerable potential for stimulating learning and therefore also accountability within a programme.

3. Strengthening internal adaptive capacity

In certain cases the local partners may be seen (often implicitly) by the funding organisation as being instrumental for achieving positive sustainable change at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries. In that case, there is a possibility that more effort will be invested in strengthening the PME system of the local partner so that they are better able to monitor and

learn from their development results and become better at achieving these results. There is an underlying assumption there that the achievement of results by the local partner is a good measure of their capacity. We have seen in this paper that this is not necessarily the case.

If a funding organisation instead regards its relationship with the local partner as a partnership that seeks to support the internal capacity development process of the partner, it will be essential that some effort goes towards investing in the development of a PME system that relates to this partnership and that is able to strengthen the internal adaptive capacity of the partners within such partnership. Such PME system will help the funding organisation and its local partners to draw lessons about their own capacity development process and the effectiveness of any support activities towards these capacity development processes.

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