



Logic models: a systems tool for performance management

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Logic models have been around in one form or another for many years (Wholey, 1979, 1983; Wholey, Hatry & Newcomer, 1994). Planning a course of action, such as managing a program or charting a course of policy, generally implies some sort of logic model. As efforts to improve management have proliferated, these implicit structures have increasingly been made explicit for discussion and challenge. Gantt charts and Critical Paths have graphically depicted action plans based on logic models that chart progress from start to finish of a project.

For the last 20 years, logic models have been used largely in program evaluations to chart out what should have happened and what did or did not occur as intended. These logic models start with the inputs of the program being evaluated and work their way through the processes to end with the desired end state, whether output or outcome. These modeling efforts are usually undertaken by evaluation specialists with some input from policy/planning staff and program managers (Mohr, 1988).

Recent efforts to re-engineer and re-invent programs and agencies have resulted in organizational and program logic models being developed in an effort to identify “critical” or “core” processes that drive the train. These efforts are generally carried out by headquarters staff with some line manager involvement.

The national and international drive towards accountability, fueled by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and related initiatives, has intensified this focus on examining the “black box” between inputs and outcomes as agencies scramble to justify their strategies for achieving identified end results.

The increased emphasis on governmental accountability requires program managers and executives to become more aware of how program activities bring about desired outcomes. After all, the legislative and executive mandates for increased accountability are intended, not merely to

account for government expenditures, but to enable improved performance. To this end, it becomes imperative for managers to ask, not only what the desired end states or outcomes are, but also how “best” to get there. To do this, one needs logic models.

Little exists in the literature that tells managers how to develop and use logic models for management purposes. With few exceptions (Hatry et al., 1996; Hatry, 2000), the material is abstract or buried in evaluation literature. This paper seeks to provide managers with specific guidance on developing and using logic models. It is based largely but not wholly on the experience of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the White House office responsible for coordinating drug control agencies in order to fulfill its mission of reducing drug use, availability, and consequences.

1. Understanding logic models

Logic models are word or pictorial depictions of real-life events/processes that depict graphically the underlying assumptions or bases upon which the undertaking of one activity is expected to lead to the occurrence of another activity or event. It involves “modeling or simulating” real-life in such a way that the fundamental “logic” becomes apparent. Logic models show causal relationships as they relate to one another—a systems approach to portraying the path towards a desired reality.

Although various types of logic models exist, we are interested in those that relate to government programs and their desired end results. We examine logic models from the perspective of government managers seeking to intervene in real-life to bring about desired events such as full employment or prevent undesirable events such as drug use. In other words, we discuss these models within the context of social engineering as manifested by government programs.

From this perspective, logic models consist of causal chains that seek to explain the occurrence or non-occurrence

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