
GOLDILOCKS DEEP DIVE

Guiding Your Program to Build a Theory of Change



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Guiding Your Program to Build a Theory of Change

Theory of change is the foundation of a right-fit monitoring and evaluation strategy. A theory of change provides a road map that outlines how a program will work to change outcomes and deliver impact. It identifies the key assumptions of the program and risks to successful implementation, and helps organizations pinpoint the data they need to collect. When done well, a theory of change should also enjoy widespread buy-in from staff throughout the organization. This helps to focus data collection activities on the most important questions about implementation and impact.

Building a theory of change with solid theoretical foundations and widespread buy-in requires organizations to invest time and resources into a process with multiple steps and participation at all levels of the program.

Chapter 3 of The Goldilocks Problem outlines the key elements that make up a theory of

change and walks through several examples. In this article we outline some of the preparatory work needed to guide a team through the process of building a theory of change and what to expect at each stage. These include the importance of consensus, when to develop a theory of change, the literature review, linking program activities to outputs and outcomes, the importance of considering assumptions and risks, and how to use the theory of change for CART data collection. The principles and processes we describe can be applied both at the organizational level and at the program or project level.

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