

Tool 53: Make a visual Theory of Change

Aim of the tool

Help stakeholders to visualise their Theory of Change.

When to use it?

The commitment stage, when the group needs to come to a common understanding and agreement on which main strategies or pathways of change are needed to arrive at the vision, and where, how and what each actor is expected to contribute.

What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is like forward storytelling. It is in fact a combination of what people hope to see, what people expect to see, and what people assume to see. What people hope for, expect and assume is very personal. Explaining hopes, expectations and assumptions can be very hard and open for multiple interpretations.

Theory of Change as a planning and strategy tool is much more productive and effective when good and stimulating visualisation is used. Visualisations stimulate participants to think creatively as they engage in dialogue with others, and might even motivate them to take action. It is important to make the visualisations easy to 'read' and make them attractive so that people are motivated to engage in the process, thus ensuring that your Theory of Change will not be just a product on paper.

Using visualisation in the process helps to quickly and effectively understand the nuances of the often complex issues at hand. Visualisation also helps to understand the current situation and as well as the future vision of the group. Finally to be able to 'see' and comprehend the challenges ahead, and to understand the 'bigger picture', it often helps to actually draw it.



How to facilitate the visualisation of a Theory of Change?

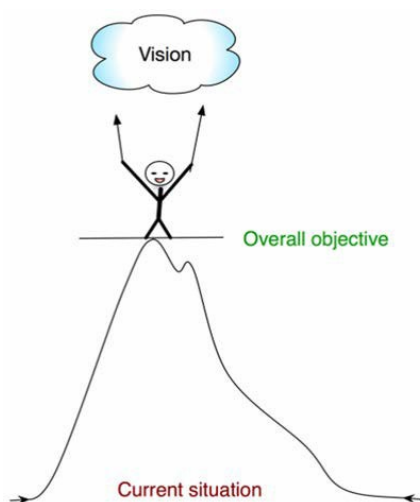
The power of visualization is in physically drawing attention to those issues which need awareness and discussion by the group. What message do you wish to deliver, which story do you want to tell? Regarding the use of visualisation in Theory of Change processes there are a few important points:

- 1 We can all visualise!
- 2 The way we visualise is personal
- 3 The way we perceive is personal
- 4 Visualisations need to be clear, simple and attractive (not an easy combination!)
- 5 Theory of Change visualisation goes hand-in-hand with the narrative, together they make the theory complete.

For the visualisation of the elements of the emerging Theory of Change you can use metaphors or add simple shapes and motifs to written narratives. Theory of Change visualisations can include metaphors, like gear wheels showing that the movement is being transferred or spirals to stress that the road from the current situation towards a future vision is never or hardly ever a linear straight one.



In facilitating Theory of Change processes, we often find the following visuals useful to develop our Theory of Change from the current situation towards our vision.



There are many different roads or pathways possible towards the vision (the desired change) and to the top of the mountain (you can even think of different means of transport if helpful). Sometimes you will need to follow another route if your road gets blocked. Sometimes you need to go back down, think, observe again, analyse, reflect, try to understand initial assumptions and look again at the current situation (visualise it!) and move forward to the top again. Thinking of your Theory of Change as a pathway up to the top of the mountain is just one example of a possible visualisation of a Theory of Change process.

It is important to note that visualising Theory of Change processes need a time perspective. People need milestones or reasons for celebration.

When deciding on how to visualise your Theory of Change it is important to think about the target audience, about the context and about the objective of your visualisation. It is important to keep in mind that your visualisation should help the user to understand what you want to communicate.

Learn more

Brouwers, Jan & Simone van Vugt (2013): ToC Reflection Notes 2: How to facilitate a ToC process and help to develop ToC capacities?

Koopmanschap, Esther & Mirjam Schaap (2013): ToC Reflection Notes 4: Visualising your theory of change: a must?

(Both above papers are available at https://content.changeroo.com/wp-content/uploads/Academy/2017/07/toc_notes_4_visualising_your_toc.pdf)

Overall Theory of Change guidance, tools, studies and cases can be found at: <https://changeroo.com/toc-academy>