Outcome mapping and social frameworks: tools for designing, delivering and monitoring policy via distributed partnerships

Delta Partnership working paper No 1

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Partnership working is becoming increasingly important in the policymaking process: no more so than in the UK with the coalition government's 'Big Society' agenda. But the issue is not limited to the UK: the international search for hybrid forms of governance takes on a new urgency as we move towards an era of light touch regulation, small government and localism. This paper describes two tools which will help policymakers take a rigorous approach to designing, delivering and monitoring policymaking in the face of these complex issues.

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This is the first in a planned series of working papers describing some of the techniques Delta uses in its work. The working papers are designed to be short, readable and informative: referencing is deliberately kept to a minimum but we are keen to ensure that due acknowledgement is given to those on whose work we have built. Please contact the corresponding author if you feel we have not done so.

Introduction: big society, messy partnerships

The environment for policy development and delivery is changing. Combined with the devolution of responsibility implied by 'Big Society', the squeeze on public sector budgets is forcing government departments to develop different ways of working via partnerships of various types (government and non-government) and at various levels (national, regional, local). Although still a relatively fuzzy concept, 'big society' seems to be evolving into an approach to policymaking where Ministers focus on a small number of core activities, or outputs, rather than being accountable for delivering the final outcomes that solve or ameliorate societal problems. The full implications of this will be played out over years, but it is clear that organisations outside government will be playing an increasingly important part.

The challenge, then, is to engage all partners fully in delivering public policy whilst recognising that each organisation has a different mandate and different objectives which will align to different degrees with the policy's stated goals. The more distributed the network of partner organisations, the more likely it is that there will be multiple perspectives on how to achieve the goals and the greater the challenges are, therefore, to efficient delivery. In addition, behaviour change is increasingly seen as an important part of the policy process but while customer segmentation and 'nudge'-based approaches are current, these are mainly about changing individual behaviour. If policy is to be delivered through partnerships, consideration also needs to be given to how to change organisational behaviour systematically.

Planning for delivery demands a degree of certainty about what can be achieved by identified actors using specific resources in particular ways. This can be done where lines of accountability are hierarchical and limited to a small number of organisations, but as responsibility for policy delivery is increasingly distributed through different types of organisation we are more likely to see 'messy partnerships' (Guijt[1]) in which different partners hold different degrees of allegiance to the partnership, and the partnership as a whole '...cannot be assumed to have some stable identity that can be held to account externally for the totality of its actions' (*ibid).* Messy partnerships are fluid: new organisations or coalitions may emerge and their visions for change need to be integrated with other partners' understandings of the policy goals and how to achieve them. Their power dynamics are therefore important, particularly if policy goals are redistributive in nature.

Big society seems to contain a couple of inherent tensions: first, between responsibility and accountability, and second between Government's focus on a limited number of core activities and the need for widespread behaviour change:

- On the one hand we will need to construct partnerships for policy delivery which devolve responsibility away from central government: more devolution is likely to result in increasingly messy partnerships. On the other hand we still need to demonstrate accountability for public expenditure, in terms of government discharging its responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

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[1] Guijt, I, 2008 *Seeking surprise: rethinking monitoring for collective learning in rural resource management*. PhD thesis, Wageningen University. ISBN 978-09-8504-860-2.

- Focusing on core activities or outputs does not mean abrogating responsibility for thinking about long-term outcomes, though it may be more difficult to define outcomes if achieving them relies on behaviour change across a wide network of actors and social relationships.

Two techniques have recently emerged from international development, which may help reconcile these tensions. **Outcome mapping** and **social frameworks** complement existing approaches to policymaking based on programme and project management (PPM) techniques[2] which, on their own, can find it difficult to cope with messy partnerships. This is not to say that the logic underlying the PPM approach – that a results chain links intention to action and output to impact – is not strong: it helps to identify causal relationships, to drive efficiencies through a system, to identify risks to delivery and to model possible alternative impacts and outcomes. PPM methods work best when driven by a single clear goal to which all partners subscribe and where change can be directed to fill the deficit between intended impacts and what is currently being achieved. But embedding sustainable behaviour change within a network of organisations requires ways of managing partnerships which are based more on organisational learning and institutional transformation than on a sort of 'deficit-reduction' approach to policy delivery. Outcome mapping and social frameworks are better able to help partnerships describe, and then monitor, what needs to be done to deliver the outcomes. The three techniques fit together as below:
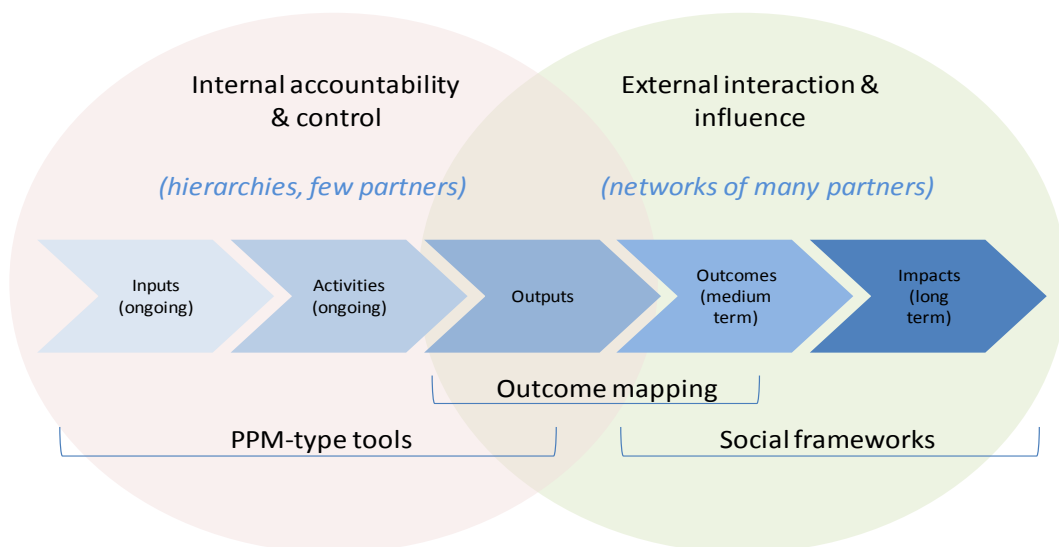

Fig 1: Complementary tools for delivering policy through messy partnerships

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[2] PPM is used here as shorthand for tools based on the principles of Cartesian logic and prediction, as often used in the ROAMEF-based policy cycle and implemented via a programme & project management approach.

Outcome mapping

Outcome mapping (OM) emerged in the late 1990's, building on dissatisfaction with traditional methods of monitoring and evaluating the impacts of international development projects and programmes. It is based on several design principles[3]:

Design principle	Resonance with the UK policy environment
Outcomes are changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, policies and practices of actors (individuals, groups, communities, organisations or institutions)	Behaviour change is a core goal of many UK policies; particularly those aimed at wicked issues such as obesity and responses to climate change...
Any intervention is partial in relation to the wider system in which it operates: the sub-system in which it attempts to exert influence is always defined, to some extent, arbitrarily.	...but in the main, policy interventions can only deal with a subset of problems within the wider issues; either because the problem is inherently so complex (obesity) or because it cuts across traditional departmental boundaries (adaptation to climate change)...
Inputs, activities and outputs are *controlled* by the agent of social change, but outcomes can only be *influenced*; usually partially, often indirectly and sometimes unintentionally *(note: this is not necessarily true of large organisations, where complex internal structures and processes may mean make it difficult to 'control' activities and outputs)*	...so as government reins back its limited resources to focus on core activities and outputs, the question arises of what structures and processes government should put in place to allow society to make its own decisions about behaviour change whilst maintaining sufficient influence to encourage that change in specific directions...
Change does not stop with the achievement of intended outcomes. Sustainable change empowers those who will live with the outcomes to assess and respond to needs and conditions that continue to emerge	...however it is not yet clear whether sustainable change comes from big society actually delivering those outcomes, or whether big society decides on what outcomes it needs and government's role is to deliver them...
Multiple perspectives are inevitable and valid, even if contradictory: sustainable relationships are able to manage any conflicts that may arise	...either way, there needs to be a stronger focus on how to build robust partnerships which can cope with this messiness and likely contradictions, and deliver outcomes that are socially desirable.

The key design principle of outcome mapping is this: if social change results from people's activities, organisations and their relationships then behaviour change is the right focus for analysis and intervention. But if big society is formed by messy partnerships this raises two complications. First, allegiance to the overarching goal ('the change') is not necessarily shared to the same extent by all actors. Second, the partnerships are fluid; actors may emerge and drop out of partnerships with unforeseen consequences.

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[3] This section draws from (and in some instances quotes) a recent discussion between Ricardo Wilson-Grau, Rick Davies, Terry Smutylo, Irene Guijt and others on the Outcome Mapping online learning forum. See www.outcomemapping.ca for background information on outcome mapping, the online discussion forum, and a wealth of other resources.

Outcome mapping attempts to overcome these problems by focusing only on the immediate sphere of influence that each actor has on its 'boundary partners', organisations or individuals with which the core actor has a direct relationship and can thus influence (note that defining the core actor and direct influences is not necessarily an easy process). Once the boundary partners have been identified, outcome mapping graduates levels of behaviour change which may be seen among the partner organisations – known as progress markers – which are grouped according to *expected* behaviours (early positive responses), *desired* behaviours (active engagement) and *hoped-for* behaviours (deep transformation in behaviour). In outcome mapping jargon, these are behaviours we would 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see' – they may be priorities for change or a time sequence of activities, or a mixture of both.

Next, outcome mapping identifies causal, persuasive or supportive strategies for changing boundary partners' behaviour to better deliver the progress markers. Causal strategies will bring about change as a result of some degree of formalised relationship between partners, such as parent/subsidiary or fundholder/recipient. Persuasive strategies are more about influencing than causing change and will rely more on strength of relationship and strength of argument. Supportive strategies will facilitate change, possibly by one partner providing information, capacity or skills to others. How the different strategies are put together will reflect the different types of relationship between partners and may result from internal change (within an organisation) or external change (one organisation facilitating change in another).

There is a subtle difference between outcome mapping's progress markers and the milestones and indicators used in PPM-type approaches, but it is not a case of selecting one over the other. Outcome mapping brings a focus on institutional transformation that is often glossed over by techniques which emphasise delivery of outputs as an indicator of achievement (see comments about PPM, above). This does, however, make it more challenging to define what progress looks like and to find ways of measuring progress which complement more traditional methods.

Outcome mapping is often kicked off in a workshop setting, but this is not strictly necessary. The main considerations are a) that all partners negotiate and agree what types of behaviour change need to be encapsulated in the progress markers, and b) that there are regular opportunities to review progress. A facilitated workshop may help (particularly if a review throws up unexpected issues or if the partnership changes radically) but it should be possible to integrate these new types of progress markers into ongoing management meetings.

While outcome mapping shifts indicators of progress more towards behaviour change, it is only used to effect change between direct partners and thus can only focus on one part of the delivery chain at a time. Relationships beyond the boundary partners are outside the remit of outcome mapping techniques, even though they may be crucial to policy delivery. This makes it difficult to build a strategic overview of the delivery chain, and to deal with complex networks of actors; which is where social frameworks come in.

Social frameworks

Social frameworks combine some of the principles of PPM and outcome mapping[4]. An actor oriented approach, social frameworks draw on social network analysis methods and overlap with a number of outcome mapping practices. They differ from OM in that the delivery chain is traced along a series of actors from the end-user backwards, allowing policymakers to draw a pathway through the actor network to establish the responsibility each one has for realising the policy's intended outcomes. Social frameworks distinguish between different types of relationship in the network and, importantly, include those relationships which extend beyond the boundary partners. In doing this they enable a more nuanced analysis of the nature of the challenges faced by the entire delivery network, and allow a suite of progress markers to be developed which better reflect the path to the desired outcome.

Building a social network map helps us assess the conditions needed to create an enabling policy environment among a diverse array of actors and to think clearly about the theory of change, focusing on the behaviour of actors rather than a disembodied set of outputs. Once a path has been established through a network (see Fig 2 below), it is easier to clarify each actor's responsibility for delivering specific parts of the policy. This then provides a platform to convene and engage the various boundary partners, allowing them to define their own progress markers – again, improving joint ownership of the policy delivery process. The steps to create a social framework are as follows (using an anonymised case study from UK policy)

1. **Create a social network map**
   Social network maps are easy to create with simple (free) software programmes[5]. For this case study, conversations with the policymaker and reading the relevant documents helped us identify a network of 17 actors and the relationships between them.

2. **Differentiate between the types of relationship**
   This is done to create a line of sight that can be monitored. In this case study three different relationships were identified and are set out in the network diagram overleaf:
   - Accountability (part of the delivery chain) – solid black line
   - Voice (influencing but no responsibility for delivery) – dashed line
   - Service provision (provision of information) – dotted line

   A first iteration of the map can be confusingly complicated. But because it is the structure that is important rather than the distance between actors or the fact that lines overlap, the map can be manipulated to make it easier to read and to begin to establish a change pathway. In Fig 2 the accountability relationship has been highlighted, and the voice and service provision relationships were pulled out to either side.

   [Fig 2 is a simple description of the current state based only on discussion with the policymaker and reading relevant documents. A more sophisticated analysis would engage with all the actors, asking each to identify the different types of relationship and the

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[4] Developed in 2008 by the independent M&E consultant Rick Davies: see
http://mande.co.uk/2008/uncategorized/the-social-framework-as-an-alternative-to-the-logical-framework/
[5] In this case study, NodeXL was used. yEd is a more visual alternative: both have complementary strengths.

priorities they assign to each one. Following this set of priorities would help establish a social network map and a pathway which all actors would recognise.]
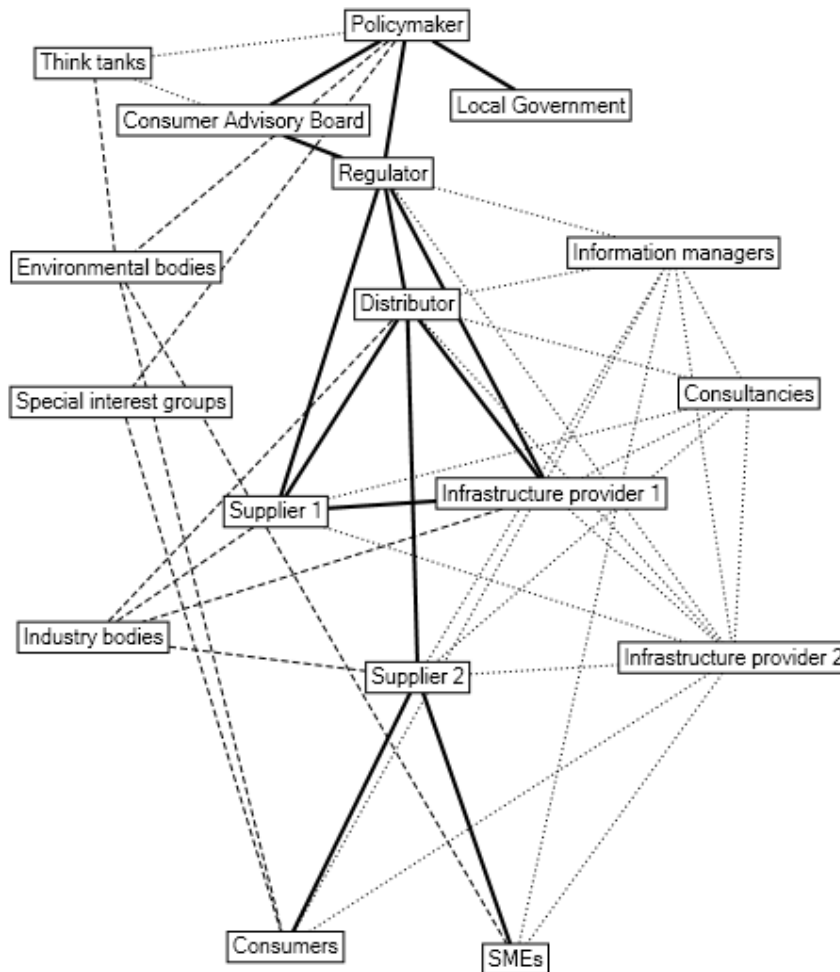

Fig 2: Map of the current network of actors, showing different types of relationship. Solid line = accountability, dashed line = voice, dotted line = service provision

3. **Establish the (actor-oriented) causal chain**
   The map needs to be translated map into something a bit easier to read which can be used as the basis for describing and monitoring progress. This is a crucial step, as it clarifies the theory of change and sets the framing for who will be involved, how the network will be monitored and how the progress markers will be defined. It is when the difficult questions need to be asked, as the network relationships need to be disentangled in order to produce something more manageable. In the example above, we could ask:
   - What is the role of local government – is this an accurate description of its role in the network? If not, why not?
   - Are Supplier 1 and Infrastructure Provider 1 really part of the core chain, or is it the Policymaker-Regulator-Distributor-Supplier2 relationship that is key?

- How can those with a 'voice' relationship be given a real say in the process? How do the service provision relationships support the main accountability relationship?
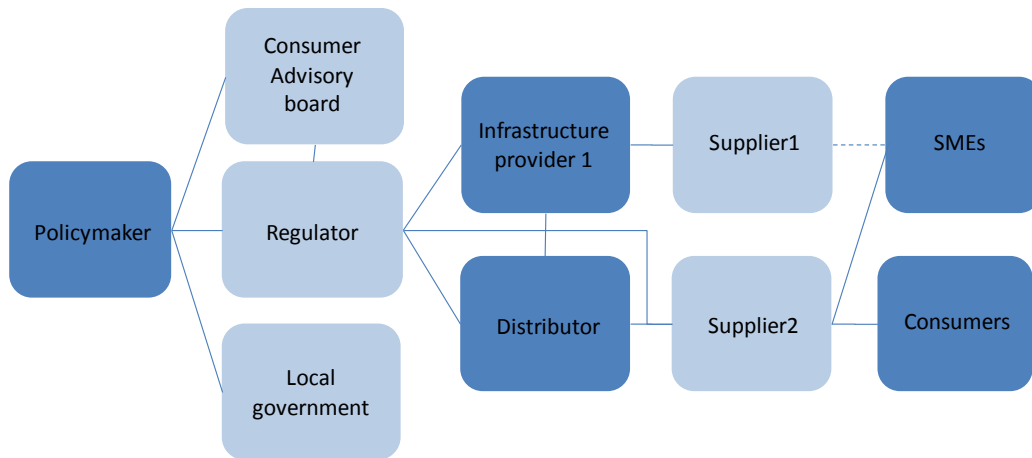

Fig 4: Skeleton causal chain, translated from the network map (accountability relationship only).

Figure 4 turns the accountability relationship in the network map into a more familiar visual form, providing a bridge between the network map and the social framework itself (note that this was done as a demonstration of the technique rather than as a basis for detailed analysis). In a live situation it would be possible to create the causal chain for segments of the network map, or of the different types of relationship, or mixtures of the two.

It is important to take care not to confuse the actual state with the desired state, particularly if the map is complicated. What is more important is to clarify the theory of change and use that to consider the overall picture of the current network to see how it may need to change to better support delivery of the outcomes.

4. **Use this causal chain to develop the social framework**
Outcome mapping-type progress markers are then used to describe the changes we would want to see along the main relationship pathway. Because we traditionally read a logic model from the top down, the actors at the end of the causal chain (in this case consumers and SMEs) are put at the top of the framework and the line of argument about how their behaviour is influenced is filled out underneath, as in the framework in Fig 5, overleaf.

The left hand column describes the challenges actors with an accountability relationship face in delivering the outcome (in this case, behaviour change by consumers and SMEs). The middle columns use outcome mapping techniques to identify the progress markers. The right hand column unpacks the 'if...then' logic, exploring how the voice and service provision relationships and other issues may affect how behaviour change is brought about along the causal chain.

Outcome challenges by actor	Progress markers	Means of verification	Assumptions and risks
Consumers and SMEs will change their behaviours but only…			…if these things happen…
…*and if* suppliers act in a certain way…		etc	
Which means infrastructure provider 1 *will have to*…			
…and at the same time the distributor *will need to*…		Look for indicators of behaviour change at each level: identify the evidence that needs to be collected to monitor progress along the causal chain	How do the service provision and voice relationships affect behaviour change along the chain?
So the consumer advisory board *must ensure* that..			
Which means the regulator *must*…			What are the external risks to delivering the outcome?
And so the policymaker *will have to*…			

Fig 5: an outline social framework

The whole framework shows how the behaviour of intermediary actors contributes to achieving the policy goals, and also:

- Clarifies how responsibilities for achieving outcomes are distributed
- Weaves in the actors who contribute to but are not accountable for behaviour change and examines the risks of not involving them appropriately
- Scopes the evidence base for behaviour change aspects of the issue: it falls out of the two central columns of the framework
- Allows actors to monitor their own progress against jointly agreed objectives
- Allows monitoring evidence to directly inform organisational decision-making, at all levels and by all actors (i.e. does not encourage the collection of redundant evidence)
- Enables collective oversight of the whole causal chain

The simple case study in this paper was done as a proof-of-concept only: it was drawn up by the authors after talking to the policymaker and reading the relevant documentation. More sophisticated methods of generating the social network would be more inclusive of all actors in the chain; and in a live situation more emphasis would need to be given to jointly negotiating progress markers and developing a common understanding of what behaviour change really means.

Implementing outcome mapping and social frameworks

There are four steps to implementing **outcome mapping**:

OM1.   Convene the boundary partners
OM2.   Identify progress markers: expected, desired and hoped-for changes
OM3.   Identify the causal, persuasive and supportive strategies needed to achieve the progress markers
OM4.   Fit these strategies into existing decision-making and review processes (don't invent excuses to collect evidence unless strictly necessary)

A **social framework** could be constructed for a specific policy issue, or to engage a family of organisations at a more strategic level:

SF1.   Clarify the first cut of the theory of behaviour change for the issue
SF2.   Use this to propose the first set of actors in the network and the different types of relationship
SF3.   Contact the first set of actors and ask
    a.   Who else do you work with on this issue?
    b.   What sort of relationship do you have with them?
    c.   Which are your priority relationships for this issue and why?
SF4.   Use this information to revise the actor set, construct the social network (Fig 3), pull out the priority pathway, and review the theory of change against the emerging network picture
SF5.   Decide how much of the social network to work on (a segment of the whole, a particular relationship, or a mix of the two)
SF6.   Translate this into a causal chain (Fig 4)
SF7.   Use outcome mapping techniques to fill in the social framework (Fig 5) based on that causal chain: steps OM1-OM4 above

It may be tempting to produce the social framework from existing knowledge, but the thrust of these two techniques is that behaviour change comes about through interaction, not just analysis.

Summary

It may not be completely clear yet what Big Society means for policy and delivery, but any devolution of responsibility is likely to give rise to 'messy' partnerships. However reduced their role, departments will still need to discharge their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Current tools based on logic and prediction will fail to deal with the complexity of partnership working: outcome mapping and social frameworks are likely to be better able to address the need to foster, deliver and monitor sustainable behaviour change in organisations and individuals. They can also help in the search for new, hybrid forms of governance in this era of small government, lighter touch regulation and localism.